

The Problem of Nonviolence: Women's Protest in the United States, Post-Civil War to
Post-9/11

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by

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my late brother, Seth Joseph Mitcho, and my late mother-in-law, Anita Rose Balint, neither of whom are here to see this project completed but both of whom would have been infinitely proud of the accomplishment.

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ABSTRACT

THE PROBLEM OF NONVIOLENCE: WOMEN'S PROTEST IN THE UNITED STATES, POST-CIVIL WAR TO POST-9/11

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Scholars, activists, and observers rely on a violent/nonviolent dichotomy to make ethical judgments about protest. This categorical distinction raises difficult analytical questions. Are tactics like hunger strikes violent or nonviolent? Can we untangle these categories from false assumptions about gender, race, and other social categories? In addition to producing the analytical difficulties posed by questions like these, the conceptual construction of the violent/nonviolent ethical paradigm fails to treat as 'violent' sources of structural violence that 'nonviolent' protestors often ignore, perpetuate, and rely upon. This project proposes an alternative to this flawed ethical approach not by endorsing violence, but by shifting our focus to the ontological claims protestors advance. To demonstrate the utility of an ethical model that acknowledges our fundamental ambiguity, vulnerability, and relationality amid uneven power relations rather than prescribing or proscribing violence, I examine women's protest activity in the United States from the

post-Civil War era to the post-9/11 era, from women's suffragists and temperance activists to CODEPINK and "mama grizzlies." In doing so, I critique notions many of these protestors rely upon—women's categorical vulnerability, the unambiguous relationship between political agency and nonviolence, and women's enhanced aptitude for relationality—and highlight useful models in protest movements that have historically been dismissed. My four-part model, I suggest, can not only be used in analyzing activist activity, but also in planning future movements.

INTRODUCTION: (NON)VIOLENT PROTEST: TOWARD A NEW ETHICAL APPROACH

“New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg in a late Thursday afternoon news conference said the protesters ‘so far have caused minimal disruptions to our city.’ But added, ‘unfortunately, some protesters today have deliberately pursued violence.’”

-- *Jessica Firger, et al., “Hundreds Arrested in Occupy Protests,” Wall Street Journal Online, November 17, 2011*

“[I]t was the NYPD that employed violent methods on Thursday, dressed in riot gear, batons drawn, using teargas and ‘sonic cannon’ crowd control weaponry to attack peaceful protesters and ride roughshod over the rights of free speech and assembly.”

-- *Kate Randall, “Police Repression Escalates Against Occupy Protests,” World Socialist Web Site, November 19, 2011*

“People ask us why the Tea Party has had such resonance and staying power and tremendous electoral results over the past nearly three years, while Occupy Wall Street has descended into madness and violence in just two months. It is because the core principles of the Tea Party Patriots [. . .] are America's core principles. The core beliefs of the Occupy Wall Street movement are as alien to the American idea as their violent actions and anarchy are to shocked and horrified American citizens.”

-- *Mark Meckler and Jenny Beth Martin, cofounders and national coordinators of Tea Party Patriots, “Tea Party Leaders: Why ‘Occupy Wall Street’ Doesn’t Compare,” U.S. News & World Report, December 5, 2011*

“The imagery of violence is also popular on the radical right [. . .] The Tea Party gets its name from the act that sparked the American Revolution. Its foundation story is about the virtues of violent rebellion against an oppressive government - and that strain of thinking runs through much of its rhetoric [. . .] [T]here are some who flirt with the idea that violence against the government could be justified today.”

-- *Gideon Rachman, “Paranoia Disfigures the Tea Party,” Financial Times, January 11, 2011*

“To the people of the world,” announced their declaration, “We, the New York City General Assembly occupying Wall Street in Liberty Square, urge you to assert your power” (NYC General Assembly, “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City”). Released in late September, 2011, about two weeks after activists participating in the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement had begun pouring into the Financial District in New York City, this document represented an attempt to collectively articulate the

occupiers' demands. It expressed the protestors' passionate opposition to the "mass injustice" perpetrated by "the corporate forces of the world" and listed numerous ways these forces had harmed what activist and anthropology professor at the London School of Economics David Graeber and others dubbed "the 99 percent"—those not among the very small number of individuals in the U.S. who control the vast majority of the wealth. Early website messages, blog posts, and posts on social media urged activists to join the movement to assemble at the epicenter of the economic system organizers and sympathizers found repulsively oppressive and set up camp since, after all, protestors "do not need a permit to occupy or peaceably assemble on public sidewalks" (Schmitt, Taylor, and Creif 2). Their "Principles of Solidarity," released a few days earlier, identified Occupy activists as "autonomous political beings engaged in non-violent civil disobedience" (NYC General Assembly, "Principles of Solidarity") and their declaration announced, "We have peaceably assembled here, as is our right," and called for other activists to "Exercise your right to peaceably assemble; occupy public space."

The Occupy movement quickly spread as protestors in dozens of major and smaller cities across the U.S. as well as numerous cities in countries throughout the world staged their own Occupy protests. Early published accounts revealed protestors' efforts to connect their movement to a long history of protesters—the Clamshell Alliance of 1976 (Kauffman 47), the Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico, and the U.S.'s Direct Action Network (Sitrin 9) among others. The Occupy movement certainly wasn't the first protest effort in the U.S. to symbolically occupy a space of power to effect change; the Bonus Army of 1932 is but one similar instance. However, despite the protestors' adoption of historical

tactics and philosophies, including anarchism, and their institutional targets (capitalist markets and corporations), the uniqueness of the era—the ubiquity of social media and the wide reach of structures of transnational globalization combined with economic fragility and the protestors’ deep commitment to institutions like leaderless participatory democracy—did make for a sense of excitement that there was something new about this emerging movement. Real time images and statements from protestors both at the occupied locations and those watching from home penetrated both traditional and social media and amplified the physical presence of the occupiers “assembling in public, . . . coming together as bodies in alliance, in the street and in the square,” as Judith Butler described them in her remarks at Zuccotti Park on October 23, 2011 (“Bodies in Public” 193).

But for all of the innovation and charisma of the movement, the way we talked—and continue to talk—about the Occupy protests is, in many ways, very familiar. Discourse about the protests among activists and observers alike has been preoccupied with the (non)violence of the protestors’ tactics and the state response. In their accounts, many protestors sing the praises of nonviolent tactics and eschew the suggestion made by other activists that ‘violent’ tactics be considered (see, for example, Solnit). Veteran activists who support the movement like James Lawson, founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and Naomi Klein, journalist and participant in the 1999 anti-globalization protests in Seattle, underscored the need for Occupy to maintain a nonviolent ethic (Davis et al. 81) and celebrated the movement for remaining committed to it (Klein). A few protestors critiqued this ethic of nonviolence

(CrimethInc.) while nonviolent champions in the Occupy movement dismissed such ideas and critiqued the depiction of Occupy protestors as violent (Solnit). They pointed instead to the often ignored police brutality and repressive violence used against the peaceful protestors (Taylor 144). Sympathetic academics followed suit, including Jeff Shantz, whose 2012 edited collection *Protest and Punishment* includes some nuanced discussion of violence in a protest context, but who himself returns to well-established narratives when discussing Occupy, depicting the movement's activists as peaceful protestors mischaracterized as violent and subjected to harsh state violence (Shantz). Likewise, W. J. T. Mitchell opened a collection of three articles addressing Occupy in the Autumn 2012 issue of *Critical Inquiry* with a preface in which he explained that the spectacles of violence perpetrated against the nonviolent occupiers in violation of their First Amendment right to "peaceable assembly" "were . . . an essential part of the performative utterances of Occupy" (Mitchell, "Preface to 'Occupy: Three Inquiries in Disobedience'" 5). In his article, Mitchell argues that among the most important enduring images of the Occupy movement and the effort to "occupy" space in the Arab Spring uprisings that preceded Occupy by a few months "will be the journalistic photos and videos capturing the outrageous violence against nonviolent demonstrators: the cavalry assault on Tahrir Square, the pepperspraying of nonviolent protestors in Oakland, Berkeley, and Zuccotti Park" (Mitchell, "Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation" 15). The pepperspraying of Occupy protestors at UC Davis by campus police has already received a great deal of attention, as video footage of the event circulated online and in various

news media and provoked further outrage and public sympathy as it raised questions about the limits of freedom of speech (Knickerbocker).

Outside of academic venues, in the news media and in casual conversations among observers of the Occupy movement, old adages were recycled. Reporters and curious members of civil society pointed to the protest's nonviolent nature as a reason for considering the activists' claims (Schneider; Lewis). Others, including members and supporters of the Tea Party movement, a contemporary conservative grassroots movement particularly active in the 2010 midterm elections and endlessly described as the other side of the Occupy coin, pointed to reported acts of violence as marking the Occupy movement as potentially or definitively dangerous and providing evidence for why protestors should be cautioned, disciplined, or dismissed altogether (Meckler and Martin; Brownfield; Beck). Some Tea Party supporters found hypocrisy in the presence of violence in some Occupy actions (namely, property destruction and violent rhetoric) and Occupiers' simultaneous accusations that Tea Partiers encourage violence with weapon-related rhetoric and the open carrying of firearms at protests when these activists had not actually engaged in violence. These critics argued that Occupiers are actually more violent and more dangerous than the Tea Party activists they disavow (Meckler and Martin; Beck).

Meanwhile, groups like CODEPINK, "a women-initiated grassroots peace and social justice movement" (CODEPINK, "About Us"), were quickly attracted to Occupy and became deeply invested in the movement, seeing ties between economic inequality, the vast quantities of money invested in war making in the U.S., and the dispossession of

“women and people of color,” whose “participation in decision-making” might curb economic inequality and “armed conflict.” “[T]he mission and vision of the occupy movement,” CODEPINK organizers explained, “is in alignment with the change we have been working for during the past eight years – to redirect our country’s precious resources away from war, occupation and corporate greed and into health care, education, green jobs and other life-affirming activities” (“Why Is CODEPINK Part of the Occupy Movement?”). CODEPINK not only replicated Occupiers’ preoccupation with a violent/nonviolent dichotomy and the privileging of a nonviolent protest ethic, but also reproduced the historical gendering of this dichotomy. The organization’s embrace of the color pink as well as other symbols and institutions associated with Western femininity, namely women’s lingerie and, recently, large vagina costumes, has been described as ironic and even fun, a tactic of “traditional femininity, with a wink” (Goss and Heaney 37) that has provided the organization’s members with a way in, a vehicle through which they can make more substantive—and controversial—claims. The group’s embrace of peace as a women’s issue is quite serious, however, as is its commitment to nonviolent protest tactics, and while the organization considers itself inclusive of men, its organizers and participants embrace a decidedly clear connection between womanhood and peace, an association its organizers see as dictating both its tactics—nonviolent protest—and its politics: pacifism.

This prevalent gendered cultural understanding of violence in protest is often subtle, but sometimes very explicitly identified, as in the cases explored by W.J.T. Mitchell in his 2012 *Critical Inquiry* article. Mitchell points to the Adbusters image of a

female dancer poised on top of a bull (representing Wall Street) created as the very first official invitation to participate in the Occupy movement as well as an Arab Spring photograph of a female Egyptian protestor in a blue bra being dragged by police as “emblematic of the fundamental polarities of the Occupy movement: its positive aim of taking back public space for the people and its negative aim of exposing the systematic violence that has been concealed under the veil of ‘public safety,’ ‘stability,’ and ‘security.’” Both nonviolent activism and victimization at the hands of a violent state are feminized in these images. “The fact that both of these iconic images are centrally focused on women is no accident,” Mitchell explains,

for the whole tactic of nonviolence has an inherently feminine and feminist connotation, a striking contrast to the macho violence it elicits. (This is a tradition that goes back to Lysistrata and the restraint of male violence by women.) The Ballerina does not try to kill the bull; she turns him into a support for her performance. The Woman in the Blue Brassiere does not fight back but compels the police to play their part in the tableau of active nonviolence. (Mitchell, “Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation” 15–16)

Mitchell is encouraged in his analysis by the way later female protestors in Tahrir Square reproduced the image of the woman in the blue bra and displayed it in an act of solidarity as they themselves protested in the square (“Image, Space, Revolution: The Arts of Occupation” 16–17). He would likely feel further vindicated by the subsequent formation of a contingent of American women involved in the Occupy movement (who dubbed

themselves the “Blue Bra Brigade” and launched the initiative “Blue Bras Against Violence”) (Blue Bra Brigade) who published an open letter of support for the women of Egypt and outrage over “the unacceptable violent assault of women protesters by the military” (Occupy Wall Street, “A Solidarity Statement from the Women Occupying Wall Street to Our Egyptian Sisters”). Mitchell’s celebration of women’s inherent nonviolence and U.S. women’s move to rally around an image of a victimized female Egyptian protestor in the spirit of universal sisterhood underscore the utility of further unpacking not just the violent/nonviolent dichotomy as an ethical measure of protest, but the use of this dichotomy as it is employed so frequently, to map (non)violence onto gender categories.

In fact, it is likely that our conception of the ethics of (non)violence in protest is so tied up in gender and other social categories that to ungender violence (or displace it from associations around race, ethnicity, class, or global context) would be to also begin to unravel the dichotomy of violence and nonviolence. Even when gender and other social categories aren’t explicitly identified as factors in discussions of violent and nonviolent protest, they often sit just under the surface. For example, in her discussion of why the Occupy movement must be nonviolent in one of the first published collections of reflections on the movement, participant and commentator Rebecca Solnit acknowledges that “property damage is not necessarily violence.” She cites the case of the firefighter who must break down a door to free the occupants of a burning building. But in other cases, property destruction *is* violence, like “the husband” who “breaks the dishes to demonstrate to his wife that he can and may also break her.” In this case, argues Solnit,

violence is “displaced onto the inanimate as a threat to the animate.” Turning to public protest, Solnit argues, “Breaking windows during a big demonstration is more like the husband” (148). Solnit’s aim is presumably not to comment on domestic violence per se, but to contend that smashing windows during a protest action constitutes an untenable threat of further violence rather than necessary action to preserve freedom or protect human life or a symbolic act of dissent. However, her analogy speaks to the pervasive gendering of violence in which smashing windows in a protest, an act of resistance against capitalism in general or corporate power in particular, can be equated to the threat of domestic violence waged by men against female victims.

Of course, historical and enduring sexism ensures that the confluence of women’s supposed predisposition to nonviolence and peace politics and the cultural privileging of nonviolent protest do not necessarily lead to a celebration of women in protest; quite the contrary has been historically true, making the story of (non)violent protest in the U.S. much more complicated. The ethos of violent and nonviolent protest also have similarly complicated relationships with the political spectrum. A naïve and radical or admirable devotion to nonviolence is often attributed to the Left and a misguided and dangerous or pragmatic acknowledgment of the necessity of violence is attributed to the Right, but this simple view is made more complex by the fact that despite such associations, both sides often lay claim to the civility and restraint of nonviolent protest and point the finger at activists on the opposite side of the political spectrum as the cause of dangerous violence and disorder. Smaller, often marginalized, factions of both similarly share a historical relationship with the use of violence or violent rhetoric in a protest context to claim

political agency. While nonviolence is often associated with womanhood, the conversation among and about women regarding the use of violence or violent rhetoric in U.S. protest is complicated by the fact that not all women share a commitment to pacifism. Just as the Left has a history of smaller contingents of women who support violent rhetoric and tactics, among Tea Party activists today are women, some of whom have embraced the label “mama grizzly,”¹ who have adopted a rugged ethic of womanhood generally and motherhood specifically, an ethic that connects womanhood indelibly with the potential and often necessary use of protectionist violence and with the right to bear arms. Various and often overlapping contingents of women inspired by Sarah Palin and other mama grizzlies are active on social media, some of whom participated in the Grizzly Fest Online Summit in late October of 2011, amidst the emergence of an involved and growing Occupy movement. “Join your friends in the Palin Movement to renew, reload and re-organize!” the group’s website declared, “Because ... we’ve STILL got our GRRR on!!!” (“The Grizzly Fest Line-Up”). One group that was created in 2008 but has thrived amid a network of mama grizzlies is Smart Girl Politics Action (SGPA), an organization that, like CODEPINK, embraces cliché trappings of Western femininity and sexuality, including the color pink, high heels, and roses, but also, in a decided deviation from CODEPINK’s ethos, a Charlie’s Angels-like silhouette of a curvy woman with handgun cocked (Smart Girl Politics Action).

¹ This term was used by Sarah Palin to describe female conservative political candidates in the 2010 midterm election, but the term has been also adopted by some women to refer to themselves more generally as women aligned with Palin’s political stance or with the conservative movement in general.

Interestingly, claims by mama grizzlies and other groups more explicitly organized around the right to bear arms, like the Second Amendment Sisters, bear a striking resemblance to those made by women in organizations like the Black Panther Party in the 1960s and 1970s and women on the Left in more recent history who argue that women should carry firearms and train in self-defense to defend themselves against the threat of sexual assault and violence, but the comparison would likely be unthinkable to most participants in both movements. Indeed, these complex associations around social and cultural categories when it comes to (non)violent protest make discussions about tactics more complicated than meets the eye. This complexity is often obscured, however, by the cultural acceptance of a particular gendered paradigm of violence and nonviolence, as well as the privileging of an ethic of nonviolence over violence (a privileging that is maintained even by Tea Party activists and mama grizzlies who, despite their avid support of gun rights and their rhetoric about the sometime necessity of violent action, still advocate ‘peaceful’ protest). It is also obscured by a discourse of (non)violent protest that presumes that the meaning of ‘violence’ and ‘nonviolence’ is always already evident, that these discrete choices are available to all activists like items in a vending machine, and that each is easy to define and achieve, a presumption I’d like to challenge. Similarly problematic is the notion that the presence of ‘violent’ or ‘nonviolent’ tactics make protests easy to sort and evaluate ethically.

When casually discussing current protest movements and following news stories about them, we often express our concern with their violence and nonviolence as a simple desire to discern precisely what happened (an idea that is affirmed when one tunes into a

news report about a recent protest and hears—first and foremost—that the protest was “peaceful”). But our perpetual concern with sorting out ‘what happened’ is never so innocent as a desire to play the objective detective. Buried in our seemingly commonsense observations are ethical judgments whose implications are immense. In the context of a cultural privileging of ‘nonviolent’ protest, the subtext of the seemingly objective observation “The protest was peaceful” is that said protest was *legitimate*, that, regardless of one’s opinion of the claims at stake, it was *ethical* due to its lack of apparent violence and violent rhetoric. Among those who support a protest movement, accounts of state and corporate violence in the face of ‘nonviolent’ protestors only serves to underscore the legitimacy of their claims. Likewise, ‘violent’ protest acts (including property destruction) are dismissed due to overwhelming support for the notion that such actions are illegitimate, and this dismissal delegitimizes the larger social movement and its claims.

In the U.S. context, the preference for tactics widely accepted as nonviolent is not only culturally pervasive, it is also legally codified in the First Amendment protection of “peaceable assembly.” This legal measure, created before the development of the modern day ethos of nonviolence I’ve described, has been deployed in the modern context as protecting a newer conception of ‘nonviolent’ protest. This concretization further justifies and naturalizes the conflation of a particular cultural understanding of nonviolence with legitimate protest and can stymie efforts to examine the association. State authorities, critics, and protestors themselves all embrace this language in the U.S. context, as evidenced strikingly by Occupy protestors’ preoccupation with their right to “peaceably

assemble.” As a protestor, the reasons for focusing one’s claims on legal rights are perhaps obvious, among them the desire to center the conversation around a shared discourse and an agreed upon set of terms and to make measurable gains within a known legal framework. But the extension of the legal legitimization of citizens’ “peaceable assembly” to a cultural fetishization of nonviolence as well as the conflation of a certain cultural understanding of nonviolence with legitimacy and the acceptance of this framework into both civic and scholarly circles is problematic. The fact that we cannot—and should not attempt to—extricate our discussion of violence from the social and cultural context of power relations in which it is embedded, as I’ve discussed above, makes unexamined application of this framework even more deeply problematic.

This project begins, therefore, with an effort to critically reflect upon the process by which we—as activists, observers, and scholars—embrace the violent/nonviolent paradigm, recognize a protest movement or particular tactic as violent or nonviolent, translate this recognition into a judgment of relative appropriateness and legitimacy, and accept or reject the claims now rendered “legitimate” or “illegitimate.” I wish to examine the assumptions made on the path from observation and (mis)recognition to ethical judgment, ultimately suggesting that such an unexamined process limits conversations about the ethics of protest movements and ethics in general and prevents us from examining the ways in which violence is tied up in social and historical power relations. Before I can fully critique the unexamined *application* of a violent/nonviolent (illegitimate/legitimate) framework or seek out an alternative, however, I must first

examine the framework itself, beginning at the most basic level, namely the assumption that ‘violence’ and ‘nonviolence’ are discrete, recognizable categories.

The Violent-Nonviolent Dichotomy

The failure to critique the trend of equating nonviolence or its rhetoric with legitimacy and violence or rhetoric that endorses violence with illegitimacy leaves us not only with a simplistic method of evaluating protest, but one that relies on a false distinction. Contrary to the popular conviction that violent and nonviolent protest are distinct categories, the boundary between them is murky. So-called nonviolent protests in the U.S., for example, are often launched by protestors who claim the label ‘nonviolent’ while ignoring the systematic structural violence that underpins the country’s political economy and simultaneously allows for such ‘peaceful’ demonstrations. An anti-war march in Chicago in May of 2012 during NATO’s meeting there might be considered an example of this phenomenon. The action featured veterans of recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan symbolically returning their medals to protest the U.S. military presence in the Middle East (Nicas), a “die-in” that critiqued Obama’s use of killer drones, and the participation of numerous members of CODEPINK, one of whom announced during the demonstration through a megaphone, “We are representing the 99 percent, the people in the United States who believe violence is not a way to protect the world” (Ruthhart). The protest made news when a faction of anarchist protestors employing a black bloc clashed with police. Much was made of the fact that the anarchist protestors disturbed what was otherwise a “peaceful” protest, but there seemed no conflict in the minds of those reporting on the event or many of those participating in it between the characterization of

the protest as “peaceful” and the fact that “Hundreds of police flanked both sides of the march and led the way” (Nicas). One report on the protest made before the black bloc action occurred described a protestor’s helpful efforts to guide five police officers back to the protest route when they accidentally strayed off course. A founder of CODEPINK, Medea Benjamin, explained, “We really wanted [the protest] to be peaceful, because we wanted to represent what we want in the world, which is non-violence and peace . . . We didn't want any confrontations. The police have been great” (Ruthhart). Here, ‘nonviolent’ protestors critiqued the use of state violence abroad in the form of war but saw no connection between this violence and the participation of the police who helped orchestrate their public action and ‘protect’ it from interference, state authorities whose very professions are justified by the need to protect and preserve state power with the threat and sometime use of violence.² These protestors replicated a simplistic view where activists and state actors can escape the structural violence built into the very foundation of our liberal democratic and capitalist state by simply choosing nonviolence in their discrete actions.

The embeddedness of violence in the definition of the modern state and, therefore, its citizens, has been famously articulated by Max Weber and Walter Benjamin, two scholars in different fields and schools of thought who did not collaborate, but who both articulated a similar attribute of the state at the same historical moment. In the post WWI period when the modern state was taking shape, these theorists each illustrated how violence is inherent to state institutions and, by extension, those dealing with the state

² Such ‘protection’ is particularly significant in the case of CODEPINK given the historical belief in white women’s need for protection in the U.S. historical context.

(despite these actors' apparent 'nonviolent' methods). In 1918, Weber famously defined the modern state as having a "monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a given territory." Weber was describing a trend away from the unchecked use of force by various institutions to a more centralized state in which the government has the power to decide what violence is acceptable. He argued that "at the present time, the right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the 'right' to use violence" (Weber 91–92). Thus, protestors' 'choice' not to use violence is a constrained one 'protected' by the state's use or threat of violence in dealing with its citizens and with other states.

Three years after Weber's famous words were published, in 1921, Walter Benjamin argued in his essay "Critique of Violence" that modern states have drawn a clear distinction between state sanctioned violence and unsanctioned violence, and that all violence committed by individuals is ultimately condemned by the state, not just violence "directed to illegal ends"(280). The state is not concerned that unsanctioned violence will be used to pursue bad ends, but simply that it exists (281).³ While allowing that "nonviolent resolution to conflict" is possible (289), Benjamin noted that "a totally nonviolent resolution of conflicts can never lead to a legal contract"; a legal contract always leaves the door open for one of the parties to resort to violence should the agreement be broken (288). Even if violence as possible recourse isn't explicitly written

³ Many governments do, of course, legally allow violence in the case of self-defense and, in some cases, to protect others. These laws vary by country and locality but do offer an exception to the total prohibition of violence. It should be noted as well, however, that these allowances and the manner in which they are codified in law and applied are at the discretion of the very governments that aim to protect their monopoly of legitimate violence.

into the contract, the contract is guaranteed by a state (“power”) that is “of violent origin” (288). Benjamin cites Unger’s *Politik und Metaphysik* and the theorist’s argument that all parties enter into compromises feeling that “It would be better otherwise”; in other words, the parties are motivated by the threat of violence rather than a feeling that they are getting a good deal (288). Benjamin thus described the growing centralization of state power under which protestors were increasingly reluctant to use violent tactics and many felt themselves powerless against violent police brutality. As the U.S. political economy has evolved, the structural violence that typifies the modern state remains. The uncomplicated celebration of ‘nonviolence’ and peaceful tactics under this paradigm is naive at best and dishonest at worst and underscores the inability to simplify discussions about things like the Second Amendment into polarized Right/Left debates.

While, as Weber and Benjamin both demonstrate, in this context, non-state violence is always already illegitimate and the presence or threat of state violence is imbued in the definition of the modern state, in a liberal democratic context, there also exists an indelible connection between the ability to fight in war on behalf one’s state and citizenship. Historically, a belief that women lack such an ability has effectively precluded them from political personhood, a fact that Carole Pateman, among other feminist theorists, has discussed (11). Grappling with this link exposes the requirement of violence built into the U.S. definition of political personhood.

In his 1965 essay “Repressive Tolerance,” written more than four decades after Weber and Benjamin explored the structural violence of the modern state, Herbert Marcuse tackled the slippery concept of (non)violence in protest from the skeptical

perspective that a protest ethic of nonviolence actually benefits the state, even when the state is what is being critiqued or appealed to. Marcuse argued that the liberal ideal of “tolerance” is contradicted in practice by the economic and political reality that said “tolerance” involves tolerating violence by ruling parties and squelching violence by the dispossessed. Marcuse explains,

the exercise of political rights (such as voting, letter-writing to the press, to Senators, etc., *protest-demonstrations with a priori renunciation of counterviolence*) in a society of total administration serves to strengthen this administration by testifying to the existence of democratic liberties which, in reality, have changed their content and lost their effectiveness. In such a case, freedom (of opinion, of assembly, of speech) becomes an instrument for absolving servitude. (84, emphasis added)

Marcuse explains that the most ‘civilized’ societies today are still rife with violence: “it is practiced by the police, in the prisons and mental institutions, in the fight against racial minorities; it is carried, by the defenders of metropolitan freedom, into the backward countries. This violence indeed breeds violence” (102). But rather than simply condemn this violence, and, with it, all violence, Marcuse takes a different tact:

to refrain from violence in the face of vastly superior violence is one thing, to renounce a priori violence against violence, on ethical or psychological grounds (because it may antagonize sympathizers) is another. Non-violence is normally not only preached to but exacted from the weak—it is

a necessity rather than a virtue, and normally it does not seriously harm the case of the strong.⁴ (102)

The presence of violence in the process of colonization and decolonization further complicates efforts at a simplistic view of (non)violence in protest. In his famous text *The Wretched of the Earth*, influential in contemporary U.S. protests movements when it was first published in English in 1963 and the subject of much scholarship since then, Frantz Fanon unapologetically declares that, just as the process of colonization is irrefutably and disgustingly violent, “decolonization is always a violent phenomenon” (35). Addressing the colonized of Algeria, Fanon argues that colonized people have no hope of reversing their situation without violence, despite appeals to nonviolence by colonizers. Some U.S. observers acknowledge this reality and see anti-colonial violence as sometimes necessary to combat the violent structures of colonization, but only outside of the U.S. context. Hence many pacifists’ and anarchists’ devotion to ‘nonviolent’ protest in the U.S. despite a romanticization of and support for groups like the Zapatistas in Mexico. This approach to colonial and anti-colonial violence is especially interesting in the U.S. context since colonization—and violence waged to preserve and combat it—is very much rooted in our domestic history and not simply something happening ‘over there’ in the Global South where violence is sometimes necessary. Indeed, the actions of American colonists, including the Boston Tea Party (from which current Tea Partiers derive their name) and the resulting Revolutionary War are obviously very rooted in anti-colonial violence. It is

⁴ Marcuse complicates his argument by considering the use of passive resistance in India as a possible exception to this argument. He argues that in India, “passive resistance was carried through on a massive scale, which disrupted, or threatened to disrupt, the economic life of the country. Quantity turns into quality: on such a scale, passive resistance is no longer passive—it ceases to be non-violent. The same holds true for the General Strike” (103).

a trope of U.S. social movements, in fact, to borrow the language of the Declaration of Independence and to liken one's cause to that of oppressed U.S. colonists, whose liberation eventually required a violent revolution to separate from colonial power. Interestingly, the *spirit* of the American Revolution is often borrowed to the exclusion of its violent history and sometimes, to the contrary, alongside a pledge to nonviolent action. Likewise, because the source of the structural violence spurred by the U.S.'s own colonial, imperial, and capitalist project is often obscured, we do not always perceive our connection to those victimized by it.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his famous introduction to Fanon's book, attempts to describe Fanon's position to an audience of colonizers, explaining to the French,

if violence began this very evening and if exploitation and oppression had never existed on the earth, perhaps the slogans of non-violence might end the quarrel. But if the whole regime, even your non-violent ideas, are conditioned by a thousand-year-old oppression, your passivity serves only to place you in the ranks of the oppressors. (25)

As Judith Butler explains, riffing on Sartre's argument and rearticulating it for a contemporary audience, "while the liberal opposes violence and considers colonial violence to be part of what happens elsewhere, the liberal also endorses a version of the state that marshals violence in the name of preserving that liberalism against a putative barbarism" ("Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon" 216). Thus, some U.S. activists endorse nonviolence but remain complicit in a model of the state that wages violence against what it sees as dangerous Others.

In her analysis of Sartre's preface, Butler also reminds us that, when acknowledging structural violence, we must view it broadly, not just as the use of obvious physical force in the maintenance of power relations. Butler explains that, in his preface, Sartre "openly worries about a liberal humanism that is blind to the political conditions of morally objectionable suffering, since one could oppose the suffering on moral grounds and leave unchanged the political conditions that regenerate it again and again" (Butler, "Violence, Nonviolence: Sartre on Fanon" 217). Here Butler (and Sartre) acknowledge the effect certain political practices can have in perpetuating suffering even in the absence of the use of military or police force. As theorists like Iadicola and Shupe have demonstrated, structural violence includes but is also more expansive than the use of police and the military, comprising political, economic, and corporate policies that result in great discrepancies in rates of disease and death as well as poverty and national debt on a global scale (315–366).

Upendra Baxi echoes and particularizes this idea in his treatment of contemporary thinking on human rights when he describes how "the very logic of rights in a liberal capitalist framework of the state and the law, while allowing for emancipatory struggles for the oppressed and impoverished, creates potential for the egoistical exercise of freedom of lawfully harming others" (195) since such a framework allows, for example, "a capitalist farmer in a 'green revolution' area" to "hire migrant labour at low wages" and "use any amount of pesticides, fertilizers, herbicides, and defoliants," both of which ultimately have toxic effects (193). He critiques complicity with a system that seeks to help those affected by calamitous natural events like earthquakes and floods—and

understands failing to act in these cases as a kind of violence—but fails to see arrests for theft of food due to poverty or systemic lack of access to health care as similarly violent (Baxi 197). Sociologist John Dale explores a similar phenomenon in our current neoliberal politico-economic climate amid the dominance of the transnational corporation in his analysis of the Free Burma movement. He argues that “groups suffering under authoritarian rule may be repressed not only by the domestic policies of authoritarian states, but also by the domestic policies of the democratic states [including the U.S.] that facilitate the undemocratic practices of the transnational corporations that they charter and which collaborate with authoritarian states in repressing for profit groups that live there” (206). Dale’s analysis suggests that working to support the liberation of others must include understanding our own role as citizens of a state and participants in a political economy that effectively dispossesses those our democratic policies are hailed to protect.

In his recent work *Violence*, Slavoj Žižek has attempted to continue the conversation about (non)violence in the modern state by describing the structures of violence present in the U.S. today and explaining the implications of such structures on political activists. Žižek describes the systemic violence ignored by the so-called nonviolent approach of contemporary activists he calls “liberal communists.” “While they fight subjective violence,” Žižek argues, “liberal communists are the very agents of the structural violence which creates the conditions for the explosions of subjective violence” (36–37). In other words, these activists, in their lives and actions as participants in the political economy, actually perpetuate the very institutions that rely on structural

violence to sustain themselves while ostensibly fighting subjective violence, the visible, tactile violence they witness in their everyday lives, without acknowledging the causal relationship between the two, rendering them accidental hypocrites.

The pattern of reliance on or submission to the threat of state violence to maintain a climate of ‘nonviolence,’ our compliance with the constant (and often invisible) presence of structural violence, and the histories and enduring presence of colonial and anti-colonial violence are just some examples of how seemingly nonviolent methods and movements are often not so easily categorized as such upon closer investigation. Let me also suggest that we rethink the ways in which we’ve categorized discrete protest actions as violent or nonviolent. Tactics that involve self-inflicted violence, for example, like the famous hunger strikes of U.S. women’s suffrage activists as well as, more recently, Guantanamo Bay prisoners, the decision by protestors like that of black civil rights advocates in the 1960s to knowingly expose themselves to the threat of dragging, beating, and the harsh spray of fire hoses, and the similar submission of some Occupy protestors to pepper spray and other forceful law enforcement methods are no less violent than those that involve violence directed at others.⁵ The fact that such tactics of self-inflicted or passively accepted violence (the proverbial turning of one’s cheek)—celebrated by quintessentially ‘nonviolent’ protest leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi—have long been considered peaceful underscores the glorification of suffering and martyrdom on the part of the protestor as signifying the moral purity of one’s

⁵ Certainly, we can make distinctions among these tactics. Engaging in a hunger strike to gain attention or rights is a different action, for example, than engaging in an activity that one feels is a human right even though it will mean facing a violent reaction. However, both might be considered violent in the sense that the protestors engaging in these actions are aware of the violence that may be done to them and take the actions anyway.

intentions. The characterization of these actions as nonviolent also runs the risk of caricaturing protestors as peaceful, innocent victims of unfeeling police and military officers rather than drawing attention to the larger and more complex relations of power at play. Our desire to preserve the label “nonviolent” for these actions speaks more to the pervasive conflation of legitimacy and nonviolence (as well as that of illegitimacy and violence) rather than their actual violent content. Admitting their violence need not mean dismissing them as unethical. Indeed, the notion that we may simultaneously consider an act violent and ethical is so contrary to our current paradigmatic approach that it seems almost impossible to imagine. But such imaginings, I argue, are necessary.

Just as we must rethink the tactics we consider to be ‘nonviolent,’ we must also reconsider the fact that property destruction, a common tactic in so-called ‘violent’ American protest, especially in actions against symbols of capitalism, as well as talk about or threats of violence have both historically been read as gravely violent by state and corporate authorities even though they are often symbolic and not aimed at physically harming others. Some ‘nonviolent’ protestors have joined in the chorus by disavowing these ‘violent’ actions by their fellow activists. The state has historically responded in these cases with physical force, as in the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 and the Pullman Strike of 1894, and the Weatherman’s inaugural protest in Chicago in 1969. More recently, the state and other observers have considered acts of property destruction by groups like the Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front and anarchist black blocs (most notably at the World Trade Organization protests in Seattle in 1999), as well as window smashing and other property destruction at some Occupy events violent

despite their lack of living targets. The explicit argument or tacit acceptance of the idea that property destruction be considered violent speaks to state and corporate interest in protecting property in a capitalist context. As Christian Garland argues, “That some protestors . . . should seek to defend the windows and entrances to the temples of consumption and denounce those prepared to violate them as ‘mindless vandals’ highlights the reversal of perspective that such a standpoint offers” (38). Privileging and protecting state and corporate violence—which put real bodies at risk—over the ‘violent’ actions of the oppressed—which sometimes consist exclusively of property destruction—and labeling the former as not really violent and the latter as gravely violent is, as Garland puts it, “to have entered into the perverse ethical universe of capitalism itself” (38).

To make the distinction between violent and nonviolent protest even foggier, movements that project a nonviolent ethic and engage in ‘nonviolent’ protest often contain obviously violent elements, like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the American Federation of Labor (AFL), the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and various environmentalist and anti-globalization groups today. The pervasive drive to categorize entire social movements as violent or nonviolent is used tactically as a method of enjoying the dismissal of unfavored ‘illegitimate’ movements or the approving nod of legitimacy. This drive can often be observed in efforts by activists and supporters to preserve a movement’s legitimacy by characterizing discrete violent acts in a protest event as perpetrated by one bad apple or by a foreign party not truly connected to the larger movement. Justin Elliott made such a claim about the Occupy Wall Street

movement in a piece for Salon.com on October 17, 2011. In the fallout of a few incidents of property destruction during the OWS protests in November of 2011, even comedian Jon Stewart joined in the conversation. Stewart had jokingly warned the day before the destruction was reported, “If this thing turns into throwing trashcans into Starbucks windows, no one’s going to be down with that.” On his show the following day, after showing clips of media coverage of the property destruction, Stewart joked that perhaps he needed to clarify his position: “No Men’s Warehouse vandalism, no bowling ball into a Trader Joe’s. Do we have to get this specific?” In a moment of sincerity, Stewart warned, “I know it’s not all of you, it’s a small percentage, a small number of you, but you will always be judged by your worst elements” (“Daily Show: Parks and Demonstration - Business Vandalism”). Here Stewart participated in the pervasive move to weed out ‘violent’ elements from otherwise legitimate protests. He and others are no doubt motivated in part by the opposing efforts of skeptics to characterize ‘illegitimate’ actions as typical of the group as a whole. Regardless of the ‘true’ violent content of a protest, however, the degree to which such content *matters*—to protestors, onlookers, and state and corporate authorities—speaks to the pervasiveness of the violent/nonviolent (illegitimate/legitimate) dichotomy and its discursive power.

From a semiotic perspective, the complex nature of the label “violence” has been noted by many scholars, not the least of which is Raymond Williams, who explored no fewer than seven definitions of the word in his famous *Keywords*, first published in 1976. In addition to the traditional definition of physical assault, Williams notes that violence carried out using technologies (weapons) that allow some distance between the violent

person and his or her target represents a second meaning of the term (329), but he also complicates both of these simple definitions by acknowledging that the term “violence” is usually reserved as a descriptor of “unauthorized” uses of force, whereas state authorized violence is known as force, defense, restoring order, or, at the very least, “*police* violence” (emphasis added). These definitions are complicated by the use of “violence” to mean a threat (but not, perhaps, actual physical harm) as well as violence as “unruly behavior.” These definitions are often conflated, Williams explains, since the use of the term “violence” to mean a threat “is clear when the threat is of physical violence, but it is often used when the real threat, or the real practice, is unruly behavior” and not actual physical harm (330). Part of the ambiguity of the term violence, dating at least back to the 17th century, is due to the routine slippage “between violence and *violation*” (330). Ironically, Williams acknowledges, one of the many meanings of “violence” is “to be wrenched from its meaning or significance” and, indeed, given the slippage and conflation of multiple definitions, the term “violence” is often subjected to great violence. It is for this and other reasons explored above a slippery foundation on which to build an ethical theory of protest.

This exploration into the violent/nonviolent dichotomy so often used to characterize protest and what, on further examination, appears to be the unraveling of these categories and a tangled mess of social and cultural associations opens up a great many questions. If we cannot easily define protest actions or movements as violent or nonviolent, and, more to the point, if violence or the lack thereof cannot be so easily labeled along ethical lines, as a shorthand for illegitimacy or legitimacy, what alternative

paradigm can inform our study of public protest? Before I venture an answer to this question, I need to step back and clarify my premise. I must be clear that I am not suggesting that one can never escape violence and we must therefore simply accept it or that the violent or nonviolent content of a protest simply *does not matter*. Similarly, I am not valuing violent protest as a superior method to nonviolent action. Instead, I am suggesting that we abandon the violent/nonviolent ethical paradigm altogether and refrain from making ethical claims about protest within this paradigm, including the claim that violent protest should be embraced instead of nonviolent protest. I am suggesting, in sum, that this flawed paradigm might be replaced with another that does not share the same preoccupation with (non)violence while still allowing for the evaluation of protests we have traditionally labeled as “violent” or “nonviolent.” My goal for the remainder of this project is to propose and test such an alternative.

Setting aside the violent/nonviolent dichotomy, then, I might proceed to a new paradigm by asking the following: just what is the nature of public protests such that we can examine their ethics? At root, it seems, they provide venues in which protestors can hyperbolize and perform their beliefs and demands—and on a grand stage. Protestors argue, in effect, that they or those they speak for have not been recognized through other channels, and they use public performances to express their desire that specific fundamental needs be filled. They are not only making ethical claims, but these claims concern elemental necessities and they are made loudly and dramatically, often in symbolic fashion. Even though discourse used by protestors—and observers and analysts—is often preoccupied with tactical and pragmatic questions as well as specific

and discrete proposals for change, their claims and the means through which they are made, which are claims themselves, presume, at root, that they and the people they represent are subjects deserving recognition, that they are persons. And they often claim that they, as persons, fit into a particular category—political subjects, citizens, vulnerable bodies—that require us to act accordingly. They engage, in other words, with the logic and discourse of *ontology*. While an individual protest might be preoccupied with a specific, narrow goal, protestors’ ontological claims are reproduced in later protests and affect the larger narratives of the social movements they are a part of. I therefore aim to begin my search for an alternative ethical measure of public political protest with a focus on ontology. Might the approach, I wonder, of beginning at the beginning, of assessing the ontological assumptions, the framework on which protestors’ ethical positions are built, allow for a better method of evaluating (non)violent⁶ protests? What new insights might be garnered from such an exercise?

Exploring the ontological basis for protestors’ claims seems, in and of itself, a fresh approach. Simply taking care to parse out these claims would prove to be interesting and insightful. But for a full ethical analysis, simply identifying protestors’ ontological claims and assumptions is not sufficient. These claims need to be measured

⁶ Because one of my goals in this project is to problematize the violent/nonviolent dichotomy, I sometimes refer to both so-called “violent” and “nonviolent” protest as “(non)violent,” a placeholder that calls into question the uncomplicated sorting of protests into one category or the other while simultaneously arguing for the necessity of giving violent protest and protest that employs rhetorical or performative violence as well as efforts to avoid violent tactics and rhetoric analytical attention. It acknowledges the need to theorize violence while simultaneously calling attention to the difficulty of easily applying the labels “violent” and “nonviolent.” I do not mean to suggest, however, by (tentatively) grouping nonviolent and violent protest together that no distinction exists between violence and nonviolence.

against a model. I have endeavored, therefore, to begin to develop such a model, one I'll briefly describe here before testing it in the chapters that follow.

Ambiguity, Vulnerability, and Relationality amid Uneven Power

Activists engaged in public protests advance ontological claims, as I've explained above, but they do so, importantly, with an eye toward the future, as they imagine a changed world that recognizes the needs of those for whom they speak. In imagining this future, protestors often hold up lofty ideals, ideals they see as bigger—more momentous—than all of the particular individuals involved in the social change they wish to see, often privileging that goal over the specific means required to achieve it. This gazing into the future with a utopian aim in mind is an imperfect endeavor, however, given the ambiguity of the human condition, the first of four components of my model. Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir's ethics of ambiguity (*The Ethics of Ambiguity*), I suggest that we exist as both embodied beings and meaningful subjects. We are in a constant struggle to assert ourselves as meaningful, to assign meaning to ourselves and the world around us, including others. But we are also embodied. Our ideas about the meaning of our lives and our imagined future sometimes conflicts with our own embodied experience and with the ideas of others. In addition, not only do we hold differing ideas about the world and who we and others are as subjects, but when we attempt to put our ideas into action, we affect not just the world of ideas, but actual embodied beings. Our ambiguity means, therefore, that we must live amid this conflict and understand failure as part and parcel of our condition.

Our ambiguity—the simultaneous existence of our desire to impose meaning on ourselves and our world and our existence as embodied beings rather than ideas—means we do not have the power to simply privilege “mind over matter” or exercise complete control over our lives by imbuing it with meaning unencumbered by the material world. Our ambiguity, therefore, renders untenable ethical frameworks where the end justifies the means or a particular end must be achieved “by any means necessary” as, quite simply, we cannot control the future. Nor, however, can we justify ahistorical prescriptions and proscriptions for ethical behavior or ethical frameworks that hold ideals higher than particular embodied individuals. Such frameworks run the risk of privileging an idealized conception of humankind over particular people and rendering subjects into objects. Taking human ambiguity seriously, therefore, renders the work of ethical protest a sticky process, one that does not presume, among other things, that political action is always already violent or always already nonviolent. This project wonders openly how one might balance these needs, to stage protests that work toward a new future and hold activists accountable to the legacy movements that follow them while accounting for the particular embodied persons affected by current actions.

One especially important facet of the embodied aspect of our existence that protestors must account for is our vulnerability, a reality that begins to explain why we tend to be so preoccupied with violence in our ethical analyses of protest and the second component of my model. Weakness and vulnerability are not synonyms, nor are strength and invulnerability, but these terms are often conflated, making human vulnerability an obscure idea. When I invoke vulnerability, borrowing from theorists like Judith Butler

and Debra Bergoffen,⁷ I am referring quite simply to the fact that we are mortal and susceptible to illness, that we can be hurt or even killed by others or by nonhuman forces and—importantly—that the same vulnerability that accounts for our fragility is also precisely what renders us capable of intimate and deep connections with others.⁸ And while we are, as individuals, *differently* vulnerable, I reject the notion that certain entire social groups (e.g., women, the elderly, children) are *categorically* more vulnerable than others. Acknowledging this can be difficult as many social movements are predicated on the notion that we must rally around particularly vulnerable populations. Likewise, some female activists have unethically exploited the notion that they are categorically vulnerable (vis-à-vis invulnerable men) or more vulnerable than men for the purpose of securing a stage on which to present their claims. I maintain, however, that we are all mortal and susceptible to injury, harm, and death, and we are likewise all open to the deep connections only possible through our vulnerability. Rejecting protest actions that suggest otherwise both allows for movements based on a more robust notion of ontology and avoids the suggestion that those in power can somehow escape their own vulnerability.

⁷ Rosalyn Diprose's *Corporeal Generosity* and Kelly Oliver's *Women as Weapons of War* might also be included among recent works that have engaged with the concept of vulnerability. Ann V. Murphy's article "'Violence is Not an Evil': Ambiguity and Violence in Simone de Beauvoir's Early Philosophical Writings" notes these recent engagements with vulnerability and sees "Beauvoir's early conception of ambiguity as the philosophical predecessor to contemporary deconstructive accounts of corporeal vulnerability" (29). Murphy's engagement with Beauvoir's work and the connections she draws between this work and that of recent scholars of vulnerability are useful and compelling. I, however, theorize ambiguity and vulnerability as compatible but distinct concepts.

⁸ My point here is an ontological one rather than a commentary on empathy or compassion. Just as one need not do anything to be open to injury or harm, one need not do anything to be open to close and intimate connections with others. Our vulnerability renders these relationships possible. Of course, one must take action to actually develop these relationships.

Our ambiguity and vulnerability lack consequence without the third component of my model: relationality. As many theorists situated in various fields have proposed, humans are relational and interdependent. Born from other bodies and very obviously dependent on others for survival during infancy and in old age, I contend that we remain interdependent our entire lives and, indeed, that interdependency is a constant reality of the human condition. Total autonomous subjectivity is, therefore, a fiction. Similar to our vulnerability, we cannot conceive of relationality as especially strong in certain categories of humankind. We must avoid building movements on the concept, for example, that women are more relational or more capable of relational thinking than men (even when such a belief is rooted in historical lived experiences rather than a notion of innate biological predisposition). While certain historically oppressed populations have been reminded more acutely of their dependency on others and some have had to rely on others more obviously to gain agency, we are all relational and interdependent, and entire categories of people do not have an especially acute ontological relational capacity. Indeed, the most powerful among us often only appear autonomous and independently successful because of uneven power relations that allow them to render those whose labor and care work on which their success depends invisible. In a protest context, this means we must acknowledge our universal relationality rather than relying on discourses of total autonomy while also being careful not to lay claim to an *especially acute* ability to connect with others, know their needs, or speak for them. We must likewise not understand relationality as a universalizing, romantic notion of connectedness or as being especially tied to one's family and friends, but instead acknowledge that we are tied to all

those with whom we share power relationships, even if we are divided by distance, culture, and social group, and even if we detect what we perceive as evil or offensive in the Other with whom we are relation.

We exist as ambiguous, vulnerable, and relational subjects amid uneven power relations. Just as total autonomy is a fiction, so is the idea that individuals in relation possess equal power. By including this facet of the human experience in a model that includes ontological claims, I do not mean to suggest that certain populations are destined to oppression or that others are destined to power. Our varying levels of power in our relations with others are not attached to our person, but to the histories, experiences, and social categories that are invoked in particular relationships, nor are these static power positions, but flexible ones. One implication of the flexibility and unevenness of our relationships is that in accounting for the ‘now’ of our experience (since the ambiguity of our condition as both subjects and material objects renders our future uncertain), we must acknowledge that none of us is more or less vulnerable or relational, but we do possess uneven power. Therefore, we cannot abide by ethical frameworks premised on the notion that we all possess the same amount of power. However, we also cannot accept ethical prescriptions that have the effect of preserving the historical status quo or concretizing certain historical uneven relationships. We must be careful to avoid characterizing particular power relationships that are based in long histories of oppression as ahistorical. Indeed, as most protest movements aim to change power relations (and, in doing so, recognize that they can be changed), we must be especially skeptical of approaches to

protest that effectively treat certain uneven power relations as ahistorical ontological realities while simultaneously working to change them.

A quick review of these assertions—particularly that we are fundamentally vulnerable and relational—might lead to the hasty conclusion that I endorse a nonviolent ethic, but am simply seeking to justify it with a better ontological model. Many have skillfully theorized vulnerability and relationality and arrived precisely at the ethical proscription of violence.⁹ However, I contend that an ethics that contains the elements I have described here does not mandate nonviolence. On the contrary, it forces us to grapple with the conditions under which violence might be ethical and to be suspicious of paradigms that preclude violence in all cases. One can easily imagine a response to one’s vulnerability, for example, that employs violent action precisely as a protective measure against that very vulnerability. Similarly, while relationality makes doing harm to others a difficult choice since we are interdependent, it does not preclude violence entirely as we may resort to violent action when one is exploiting our relationality precisely because of how intricately we are all tied to one another. As I’ve demonstrated above, in the modern context, conflict is an unavoidable reality. It is ubiquitous in the U.S. context in part because of long histories of oppression and institutionalized violence in our political economy. But conflict is also the result of human ambiguity. As we each strive to impose our meaning on the world, to exercise our freedom, and to create a future, we come up

⁹ Judith Butler is perhaps the best example of a theorist who theorizes vulnerability and relationality together and arrives at an ethics of nonviolence (*Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*; *Undoing Gender*; “The Claim of Non-Violence”). Kelly Oliver associates vulnerability with ambiguity and sees potential in using recognition of our shared vulnerability to avoid violence (“Innocence, Vulnerability, and Violence”). Feminist scholars associated with care ethics connect relationality with nonviolence, as I discuss in Chapter 3.

against our embodied selves and embodied others that envision a different world and assign different meanings to its inhabitants and we must sometimes act in violence when another person's striving puts our embodied freedom in danger. Importantly, acts of violence that result from these conflicts are rarely, but sometimes, necessary. However, they are always tragic and particular as no embodied life can ethically be reduced from subject to brute object or from embodied being to idea. In other words, we cannot be reduced entirely to our embodied selves or to our meaningful or meaning-making selves and we must not lose sight of that, even in those moments when violence is necessary.

Our ambiguous existence as both subject and object requires constant negotiation of ethical practice. Importantly, however, it does not suggest an ethics 'free' from ethical tenets and guiding principles. On the contrary, because the human condition is typified by a need to imbue our world with meaning, to make ourselves into meaningful subjects, as well as the reality of embodiment that renders us both vulnerable to hurt and death and capable of deep and pleasurable connection and because we are interdependent and situated amid relations of uneven power, we must consider unethical any action that strives to dehumanize another subject by precluding their freedom to make meaning and exist as a subject and reducing them to a brute material object or by condensing their existence to the world of ideas and denying their embodied lives. But we also cannot abide inaction in the face of unethical actions by others that threaten another's freedom or embodied self. Ethical action is therefore constrained to these parameters and not simply to whatever seems appropriate at the moment. If anything, engaging in ethical practice is

more difficult under this paradigm rather than more flexible as one cannot simply rely on simple proscriptions like that to never engage in violence.

Because of this constant negotiation, this perpetual accounting for the present even when looking ahead to the uncertain future, making viable claims in a protest context can be very difficult. Further complicating this process is the fact that activists make claims in particular politico-economic contexts amid particular uneven power relations with specific ambiguous, vulnerable, and relational subjects. Protestors are compelled to make claims consistent with the ontology suggested by their politico-economic contexts so their claims are intelligible to their audience and, from a pragmatic perspective, so they can gain rights or power. In the context of the liberal democratic state, as in the U.S., these rights are assigned to us as if we are totally autonomous individuals who possess equal power, a completely false premise but one we must critique even as we simultaneously fight for rights to be extended to marginalized populations. As Judith Butler so poignantly explains, “we had better be able to use that language [of rights] to secure legal protections and entitlements. But perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about” (*Undoing Gender* 20). Because these legal frameworks define us and our rights, the ontological fictions they perpetuate that are incompatible with the model I have outlined above lead to numerous contradictions. Protestors, like any actors, while constrained, do possess agency and must ultimately be held accountable for their actions. However, the purpose of this study is not to indict protestors for their approaches. Indeed, in many cases, they have been caught in a bind of balancing pragmatic needs against

problems in the internal logic of their political economy and cultural and social context. Rather than berating certain protestors for their failures and heralding others for their successes, my aim instead is to trace these contradictions and to illustrate the insights that can be gained by paying heed to ontology rather than relying on a preoccupation with a violent/nonviolent dichotomy as the ethical measure of protests and the measure of which actions deserve our attention. I posit that such a preoccupation prevents us from seeing valuable and problematic ontological claims across both 'violent' and 'nonviolent' protests and questioning troublesome ontologies suggested by particular politico-economic and cultural contexts. While my end game is not a final tally of which protestors have succeeded and failed, I do hope to use the insights gained by using this approach to suggest a way forward, a new way of envisioning protest.

My Project: An Outline

I endeavor to test my working theory using case studies of women's¹⁰ protest activity during three periods in U.S. history. Focusing on these protests allows for the examination not only of our deeply ingrained cultural fetishization of nonviolence but also the deeply ingrained historical and cultural associations between gender and violence, including the presumption that the most important connection to be examined between women and violence is women's victimization at the hands of men. Other common associations include the cultural assumption that womanhood—often through motherhood or the capacity for mothering—is ontologically incompatible with violence and the assumption that women are not only historical victims of violence but that there

¹⁰ I define “women” as subjects who define themselves and are read as such and occupy this identity either in spite of or because of their biology.

is something about the nature of women—a kind of inherent victimhood or heightened vulnerability—that predisposes them to be victimized by violence. I can also explore the assumption that women have an enhanced sense of relationality and are therefore more sensitive to their ties to others, making them predisposed to peace politics. Paying particular attention to gender will allow for analysis of how the realities of particular cultural and historical conditions of oppression and categorization can sometimes lead to the conflation of historically lived experience with ahistorical ontological truth, including claims to one social group's categorical vulnerability or relationality. This will be an important phenomenon to explore as I attempt a historicized ethical approach that still allows for broad application.

In this study, I examine three clusters of protest in American history to explore the ontological arguments (implicit and explicit) made by the protestors involved in the movements as well as their implications. I compare these claims to my own model, outlined above. I have selected protests from three periods that encompass important changes in the political, economic, and cultural landscape: the post-Civil War period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the explosion of social movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and the post-9/11 period to the present. My survey of these three periods will allow me to account for similarities and differences in the beliefs and tactics at work during different phases of similar movements (for example, women's suffrage movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, liberal and radical feminist movements and Far Left feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s, and twenty-first century feminist movements). The three periods have been selected for the way in which

they highlight moments in U.S. history when questions around the use of violence in protest have been central concerns in public discourse. This periodization also allows me to account for different phases of America's political economy as it transitioned from an industrial economy when the state was consolidating and centralizing its power, past the age of the New Deal to the end of the welfare state and the very beginnings of neoliberal policies, and finally, to a late capitalist state in a globalized economy fully invested in neoliberal policies.

Unpacking American protests using an ethical model based in ontology, I've discovered how some claims promoted by protestors that have been touted as models of success are in fact problematic and how approaches that many analysts have dismissed as failures are surprisingly useful. Along the way, I've identified contradictions between protestors' actions and espoused ontological beliefs as well as the influence of cultural and socio-political beliefs about ontology, violence, and gender on both protestor tactics and analyses. In addition, I've discovered surprising commonalities among seeming political enemies and inherent contradictions in groups both on the Left and the Right. Most importantly, however, my discoveries have bolstered my confidence that examining protest movements using an ethical framework that pays particular attention to the ontological arguments adopted by protestors rather than remaining preoccupied with unexamined universal prescriptions for nonviolence or violence can help in better understanding and evaluating past protests, in understanding how and why certain ontological arguments are problematic, and in better identifying the way ahead, both in analyzing and in planning future movements.

This dissertation proceeds more or less in chronological order, first considering a group of U.S. protest movements occurring between the end of the Civil War (1865) and the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women's suffrage (1920). This cluster of movements includes temperance activists, including the Woman's Crusade of 1873-1874, women's involvement in the 1909-1910 shirtwaist makers' strike in Chicago and the 1912 textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts, tactics employed by early suffrage activists, and the political performances staged by later suffragists, the National Woman's Party's Silent Sentinels. While the intersection of protest, ethics, and gender have no doubt been present in American history from its genesis, the post-Civil War period offers an apt starting point for this study because of the confluence of the recent dawn of the large-scale social movement,¹¹ the end of the abolition movement, and the transition of many of the women involved in it into other movements, like the fight for women's rights (like suffrage), temperance, and (with the burgeoning industrial economy) labor movements. The hope, skepticism, turmoil, and impatience spurred by the Reconstruction Era combined with the newfound ability to organize on a national scale and (a few decades later) a large influx of European immigrants arguably changed the face of protest in America and influenced a wave of public performances. These

¹¹ In his landmark essay "Britain Creates the Social Movement," social movement theorist Charles Tilly argues that the 1830s marked the beginning of the national social movement in Britain as "parochial and patronized forms gave way to national and autonomous forms" ("Britain Creates the Social Movement" 25). He adds that "[t]he ground-breaking effort of the British became a model for citizens of other countries" ("Britain Creates the Social Movement" 28). This shift in repertoire saw people with grievances who wished to appeal to authorities abandoning local forms of protest and using many of the forms we see today, including "meetings, marches, rallies, demonstrations [and] strikes" to organize on a larger scale ("Britain Creates the Social Movement" 45). While Tilly distinguishes between social movements in general and national social movements, he argues nonetheless that the incidence of both exploded in the nineteenth century, noting the independent growth of the social movement and describing the national social movement as a catalyst that "facilitated the formation of social movements at other levels" ("Social Movements and National Politics" 304).

performances, however, were staged in the context of very dichotomous ideas about gender.

In Chapter 1, I argue that the belief that women are categorically vulnerable fueled both the idea during this time that (white) women have a particular capacity for morality and peace and that they belong in the domestic sphere (as mothers, wives, and sisters) except for temporary public efforts to protect that sphere. I argue that this problematic ontological concept has had (likely unintended) long-term implications—implications present-day female activists have inherited. I also examine one case study from this period—the case of the Silent Sentinels—in which, despite some well-documented problems with their approach, the activists’ actions effectively challenged the myth of women’s categorical vulnerability by exposing some of the contradictions that underpin it.

In Chapter 2, I explore the use and rejection of technologies of violence in U.S. protest, beginning with the questions of whether and how such technologies might alter our notions of women’s ontology. I explore protests during the post-Civil War period and the early 20th century and then transition to the 1960s and 1970s, focusing on the Black Panther Party. I explain that ethically judging protests using the rejection or acceptance of violent technologies is just as flawed as judging them based on their violent content. We should not be tempted to celebrate female protestors’ rejection of technologies of violence, to advocate their wholesale adoption of such technologies as a source of empowerment, or to see the use or rejection of such technologies as uniformly making the same positive and negative ontological claims, although we should pay heed to

implicit connections between political agency and the ability to wield violence on behalf of the state. I conclude that movements that utilize weapons in protest performances to make claims to political personhood sometimes more successfully highlight uneven power relations that result from disarming marginalized populations than those that preclude consideration of violence and articulate alternative ontological models for women, but tactics that suggest political action is always already violent overlook the ambiguity of the human condition as well as the problematic ontological assumptions about political personhood and violence embedded in liberal democracy and in conceptions of the modern state.

In Chapter 3, I direct my attention to the feminist critique of autonomy and some dominant feminist ethical conceptions of relationality that emerged out of a developing body of academic feminist theory and a burgeoning body of feminist interventions in traditional academic discourses. Critiquing one dominant feminist model of relationality that continues to be deployed today, I offer an alternative and challenge the easy dismissal of ‘violent’ movements of the 1960s and 1970s like the Weather Underground Organization, arguing that a coalition of feminist activists within this organization actually successfully advanced a tenable concept of relational ontology, anticipating in some ways postcolonial and womanist feminism and arguably providing a better accounting for relationality than other movements explicitly concerned with the concept. Looking ahead to the post-9/11 era, I apply my model of relationality to women’s activist movements and actions that, in an age of globalization, transnational capitalism, and

neoliberal policies, cannot help but recognize our relationships with the global Other but continue to fall short of accounting fully for the implications of our relationality.

The politics and ethics of motherhood have a long history in feminist theory and activism, from the notion of Republican Motherhood in early America, to the women's suffrage and temperance movements, to protests during WWI and, later, the Cold War, that asserted that inherently pacifist mothers know best the value of life or that mothers' violent acts are justified in domestic contexts, to academic feminist ethical theories of the 1980s (like Sara Ruddick's "maternal ethics" [Ruddick]) and anti-war protests throughout the 1990s that reflect similar thinking, to contemporary movements like the Million Mom March, their critics, the Second Amendment Sisters, mothers protesting our involvement in wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Tea Party's mama grizzlies, and, most recently, Moms Demand Action, who, despite their differing politics, all rely on the conflation of womanhood and motherhood and the contention that motherhood suggests a particular ontology and ethical practice. Chapter 4 explores the historical trajectory of two dominant ethics of motherhood, one that believes motherhood offers the potential to advance an ethic of political peace based on mothers' relational ties with their children and another that imagines motherhood as requiring the violent protection of one's domestic sphere, read either in a traditional, familial sense, or as the 'domestic' nation as a whole, mapping a neoliberal notion of political security onto older models of protectionist motherhood. While ethics of motherhood are diverse and many are importantly more complex than a simple insistence on women's innate capacity for peace and nurturing or their instinct for defensive violence, by applying my model to some of

these movements, I argue nonetheless that such ethics and the protests that advance them risk associating women with deeply troubling ontological claims. Paying this enduring phenomenon more attention might help lead to more productive ontological claims on which to build future movements.

After these exploratory chapters, I return in my conclusion to my model. Looking back at examples from the preceding case studies, I explore and expand on each of its components: ambiguity, vulnerability, and relationality amid uneven power. The insights I present are by no means definitive, but it is my modest hope that they might spark a conversation and perhaps gesture toward an alternative paradigm for evaluating, imagining, and planning protest.

CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM OF CATEGORICAL VULNERABILITY

There is no gift of nature without some drawback. So, to women, this exquisite structure could not exist without its own penalty. More vulnerable, more infirm, more mortal than men, they could not be such excellent artists in this element of fancy if they did not lend and give themselves to it.”

--Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Woman,” a lecture read at the Women’s Rights Convention in Boston, September 1855¹²

The Reconstruction era marked a unique moment in U.S. history. While much of the country was left exhausted and grief-stricken in the wake of the Civil War, social activists were heartened by the abolition of slavery and hopeful for the possibility for major reform. This post-Civil War era brought with it a confluence of overlapping and mutually influential social movements—movements for women’s suffrage, temperance, labor reform, socialism, and anarchism. These movements, however, developed in a society that championed a dichotomous concept of manhood and womanhood. Paradigms like the cult of true womanhood (Welter) predated the Civil War and resulting ideas about concrete differences between women and men, such as those enumerated in Emerson’s speech “Woman” (written, notably, in support of women’s rights), were ubiquitous. So when men and women took to the streets, they organized accordingly. Men of the labor movement, for example, unionizing as men and often represented as possessing rugged physicality and carrying tools of industry (or violently destroying them), evoked an image of manhood that stood in contrast to the public image of women

¹² Emerson: *Political Writings*, page 160.

possessing no formal political power and largely limited to their role as moral center of the domestic sphere. Female temperance activists used religious rhetoric and a cultural belief in their special relationship to morality to fight to restore their drunken and domestically violent husbands' manhood to a sober manhood publically embraced not only by male temperance activists, but by labor unions as well, if only in name.¹³ Upper class women's suffragists argued that morally superior (white) women could best support their families and pacify the nation by deploying their virtue through the vote. Even striking working class women who challenged the cult of true womanhood with their physical labor and perceived strength and endurance attempted to appeal to cultural beliefs in their womanly, and motherly, nature. While socialism provided the rationale for the use of violence in the name of the demise of industrial capitalism and women were among the most active socialist activists, this violence was most often associated with men. Public perception of anarchist men was shaped by the image of immigrants like Johann Most, who advocated the use of a newly available technology of violence—dynamite—to destroy the institutions of the political economy. For the most part, however, anarchist women failed to challenge the public performances and ontological claims about women's relationship to (non)violence offered by others.

At the same time, early social movement theory that saw public protest as chaotic, irrational, and disorderly made the performance of women's capacity for order, superior

¹³ See Paul Michel Taillon's article "'What We Want is Good, Sober Men': Masculinity, Respectability, and Temperance in the Railroad Brotherhoods, c. 1870-1910" for a discussion of the development of a working-class manhood of sobriety during this time and an appeal for scholars to pay more attention to "the extent to which the domestic sphere has influenced male trade unionists [and] the extent to which matters of domesticity influenced workers' discourse of manhood" (Taillon 319). He describes, in particular, the efforts of "railroad brotherhoods and their women's auxiliaries" to advocate "a 'respectable' style of manhood in their efforts to win workers over to a temperate lifestyle" (320).

morality, and domestic calm as well as their vulnerability even more appealing—and more effectual. In 1897, French aristocrat Gustave Le Bon penned *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* in which he described crowd behavior as impulsive and uninhibited and spurred by a collective mind. Emile Durkeim, one of the architects of modern sociology who believed groups were more than simply collectives of individuals, introduced the concept of anomie, or social disorganization and normlessness, in his famous text *On Suicide* published in the same year. In an article published the next year, Gabriel Tarde distinguished between the more socially advanced public and the crowd in an article titled “Le Publique et la Foule” (“The Public and the Crowd”) (qtd. in Park and Burgess 868). He later published *Laws of Imitation* in 1903 in which he argued that individuals tend to imitate one another, leading to a kind of group behavior.

It was in this context—the convergence of an explosion of social movements and skeptical theorists, fostered in a social and cultural context that privileged a dichotomous model of manhood and womanhood—that many female activists emphasized women’s ontological difference to make their claims intelligible to their audience and to gain political ground. This strategy was tactically useful and enjoyed some short-term success in bringing attention to the movements’ causes. But, in addition to largely alienating women of color and working women (who were not believed to possess the same heightened morality, latent capacity for peace, and inherent vulnerability), it also led to political failure by effectively removing women from conversations about war and politics and arguably precluding them from full political personhood, even after they gained the vote in 1920. A closer look at these movements reveals inherent

contradictions, complications, and lack of coherency between the women's actions and beliefs at the time as well as inherent contradictions in the liberal democratic context in which they staged their protests. Some of these problems have been well documented, but they are often viewed as products of the time. I would like to suggest, however, that rather than being awkward relics of our past, the problematic ontological arguments these women made had long term impacts on the movements that grew out of these early actions, particularly their ethical tenability. Echoes of these claims reverberate in social movements active today, in part due to the ontological framework inherent in the liberal and capitalist U.S. context but also due to protestors' tactical embrace of unethical ontological ideas. In addition, I'd like to suggest that two common claims embraced by female protestors during this time and well documented since then—that women embody morality and peacefulness and that the domestic sphere is their rightful domain, are underpinned by a false, but enduring, claim: women, more than men (or perhaps in contrast to invulnerable men), are *categorically vulnerable*. This claim defies what I see as a foundational aspect of our ontology: our universal vulnerability. After exploring the belief in women's categorical vulnerability and its troubling long term implications, I will end with an analysis of a group of women's suffragists dubbed the "Silent Sentinels" who, despite problems in their approach, are a contemporary example of protestors who successfully revealed some cracks in the long-standing myth of women's categorical vulnerability while simultaneously illustrating the universal vulnerability of the human condition.

Women's Inherent Morality, Peacefulness, and Domesticity

Female protestors in various movements during the post-Civil War era made several problematic ontological arguments, both explicit and implicit, and these claims often coincided with prevailing cultural beliefs. Two of those claims were that women, white women in particular, have a particular capacity for embodying and eliciting morality and peace and that women belong in the domestic domain. Both of these claims, and female protestors' complicity with them, are supported by the notion that women are categorically inherently vulnerable. In other words, these ideas are informed by the notion that women are, as a category and by definition, more vulnerable than other embodied persons.

The argument that women are morally superior to men and more inclined to peace politics is, like other similar claims, often inextricably linked to the notion that they are more feeble and fragile and that this fragility—this vulnerability—predisposes them to a moral existence and to the practice of peace. This idea was perhaps most blatantly embodied during this time by the participants of the so-called Woman's Crusade for temperance in 1873 and 1874 during which women publicly prayed in front of saloons in their mostly rural towns and mid-size cities, attempting to shame owners into following local legal prohibitions of alcohol.¹⁴ The movement largely remained in Ohio, but found supporters and followers elsewhere in the country. The Crusaders and their observers were so invested in the inherent connection between women's bodies and pious morality that the mere sight of a group of local Christian women praying in public in front of a

¹⁴ This movement is alternatively known as the Women's Temperance Crusade, the Whisky War, and the Ohio Crusade.

saloon seemed enough to elicit not only complicity (albeit short-lived) on the part of saloon owners to stop serving alcohol, but also tears and dramatic displays of shame. One observer of a protest in Hillsboro, Ohio in January of 1874 noted that “[t]he plaintive, tender, earnest tones of [a particular] pleading wife and mother arose on the blast and were carried to every heart within reach [. . .] The eyes of hardened men filled with tears, and many turned away saying they could not bear to look on such a sight” (qtd. in Stewart 136; qtd. in Thompson et al. 94–95). One male reporter observing a similar action in Washington Courthouse during the same month could not help but wax eloquent about the effect of one particular performance of prayer:

again arose the voice of prayer, so clear, so sweet, so full of pleading tenderness, that it seemed she would, *by the strength of womanly love*, compel the very heavens to open and send down in answer a spark of divine grace that would turn the saloon-keeper from his purpose. (qtd. in Stewart 144, emphasis added)

In Hillsboro, one farmer heard the Crusaders singing a song he knew from childhood and immediately pledged to give up drinking, declaring, “I never felt before what a wrong the cursed habit was to poor women” (Thompson et al. 98–99). Even one of the leaders in the movement, Eliza Daniel “Mother” Stewart, could not help but be affected by these events, despite her prolonged involvement: “there was something about this work so 'solemn, so pathetic, so approaching the funeral procession, that, though I led out, I suppose, hundreds of bands, I could never, even to the last, look upon the sight without

weeping. I either had to be a part of it in the ranks or hasten out of sight.” Given her own reactions, Stewart notes that it is

No wonder that strong men, looking upon it, broke down and wept like very children; and no wonder that the infidel declared, as I heard him, “I am not a Christian. I don't know whether there is a God up yonder, or not. But when I came into the city and saw those women kneeling on the streets before the saloons, and heard their prayers, I said, if there is a God in Heaven He will hear and answer those prayers.” (165–166)

Judge Thompson, husband of Eliza Thompson, one of the movement’s leaders, seemed similarly struck by the pageantry of the first crusade event in Hillsboro, Ohio, when “seventy women in sable black [. . .] moved with solemn steps, as if each woman had been trained for that day’s work from the cradle” (Thompson et al. 64–65) and those who observed their demonstrations, characterized by a mood of “peace,” though borne of “woman’s immolation” “stood around the hearthstones in as much wonder as if a company of celestial beings had on that day come down from the skies” (66). The saloon owners themselves were most notably affected by the women’s performances and such reactions hinged on the fact that it was women, not men, staging these prayerful performances. An article in the *Springfield Republic* described their reactions:

Liquor-sellers say “We don't know what to do. We can't resist these praying women! If the men would approach us we would kick them out,” and they would, too, if their muscle proved equal to their desire. “But, these women pray and sing so beautifully that we cannot resist them! If

they keep coming we will be forced to surrender.” Can any man clothed in his right mind object to such a work as this? (qtd. in Stewart 201)

In many ways, it makes perfect sense that the Woman’s Crusade would depend on the model of the moral, peaceful woman, given its rootedness in narratives of female Christianity rather than legal discourse (although the women sought the application of existing laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol and often relied on the presence of such laws to justify their actions). However, the contemporary women’s suffrage movement, a movement waged with the explicit and sole aim of securing voting rights for women, made use of some of the same associations between women, peace, and morality and its use of this rhetoric is perhaps more surprising in this context. While the suffrage movement was rooted in liberal democratic arguments about universal rights, and supposedly heralded a new archetype of the New Woman rather than the True Woman (Welter 174), under the surface of this public declaration of equality was the contradictory but widely accepted suggestion that women’s vote, due to women’s nature, would have a pacifying effect on the nation, tempering the male drive for destruction, violence, and war.

This suggestion was echoed in speeches like the one women’s suffrage leader Elizabeth Cady Stanton made in 1869, more than twenty years after the Seneca Falls Convention, when she addressed the Women’s Suffrage Convention, characterizing “the male element” as “a destructive force, stern, selfish, aggrandizing, loving war, violence, conquest, acquisition, breeding in the material and moral world alike discord, disorder, disease, and death” (Stanton, “Document 29 (II: 348-55): Elizabeth Cady Stanton,

Address to the National Woman Suffrage Convention, Washington, D.C., January 19, 1869” 252) that crushes the more peaceful—and, importantly, more divine—feminine spirit, as evidenced by history. Female suffrage, she argued, will not make women more masculine, but will instead allow them to influence and pacify the destructive state with their unique morality, “to exalt purity, virtue, morality, true religion, to lift man up into the higher realms of thought and action” since even “now man himself stands appalled at the results of his own excesses, and mourns in bitterness that falsehood, selfishness and violence are the law of life” (Stanton, “Document 29 (II: 348-55): Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Address to the National Woman Suffrage Convention, Washington, D.C., January 19, 1869” 253).¹⁵ “[L]ift[ing] woman to her true position will help usher in a new day of peace and perfection for the race” (253), argued Stanton, since “in the dethronement of woman we have let loose the elements of violence and ruin that she only has the power to curb” (254).

Stanton’s arguments about women’s capacity to pacify the nation often had undertones of racist and classist assumptions of white upper middle class superiority and were bolstered by the idea that educated white women’s influence in particular would offset the violent and destructive influence of immigrants and newly freed slaves. In the same speech referenced above, Stanton asked rhetorically, “Will the foreign element, the dregs of China, Germany, England, Ireland, and Africa supply this needed force [of virtue], or the nobler types of American womanhood who have taught our presidents,

¹⁵ Careful to note that not all men are “hard, selfish, and brutal,” (“Document 29 (II: 348-55): Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Address to the National Woman Suffrage Convention, Washington, D.C., January 19, 1869” 253), Stanton suggested that “woman knows the cost of life better than man does, and not with her consent would one drop of blood ever be shed, one life sacrificed in vain” (254).

senators, and congressmen the rudiments of all they know?" (254). Stanton's views, despite her committed involvement in the abolition movement, had been spurred in part by the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments, which she and Susan B. Anthony viewed as neglectful of women's rights and representative of the abandonment of the women who had fought so hard for abolition.¹⁶ During a contentious time in the movement, Stanton and Anthony famously and controversially enlisted the help of George Francis Train, a known racist who supported white women's suffrage to advance white supremacy (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 93–101), and Stanton openly employed racist rhetoric herself. In a letter to the editor of the *Standard* on December 26, 1865, Stanton opposed the notion that "This is the Negro's Hour." She complained that

Although this may remain a question for politicians to wrangle over for five or ten years, the black man is still, in a political point of view, far above the educated women of the country. The representative women of the nation have done their uttermost for the last thirty years to secure freedom for the negro, and so long as he was the lowest in the scale of being we were willing to press *his* claims; but now, as the celestial gate to civil rights is slowly moving on its hinges, it becomes a serious question as to whether we had better stand aside and see 'Sambo' walk into the

¹⁶ See DuBois's *Feminism and Suffrage* for a discussion of the Fourteenth Amendment's introduction of the word "male" into the Constitution, making an unprecedented sexual distinction and codifying women's disenfranchisement (*Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 60).

kingdom first. (Stanton, “Document 23 (II: 90-97): Congressional Action, 1866” 219)

Stanton suggests women “walk in by his side, and thus make the gap so wide that no privileged class could ever again close it against the humblest citizen of the republic.”

She also advocates for black women’s enfranchisement, but she argues that enfranchising former male slaves but not women is like a new kind of slavery for black women and insists incredibly that “it is better to be the slave of an educated white man, than of a degraded, ignorant black one” (Stanton, “Document 23 (II: 90-97): Congressional Action, 1866” 219).¹⁷ During the proposal and passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, such rhetoric amid growing tension within the movement led to a philosophical, tactical, and organizational split,¹⁸ although suffragists on both sides of the split maintained a

¹⁷ In addition to these examples, Stanton made other similar comments. In a letter to the Democratic vice-presidential candidate, for example, Stanton declared, “In the name of the educated women of this country, I protest against the enfranchisement of another man of any race or clime until the daughters of Jefferson, Hancock, and Adams are crowned with all their rights” (qtd. in DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* 108, note 8).

¹⁸ During the debate over the proposed amendment, Stanton, Anthony, and their supporters still felt ignored if not openly dismissed by Republicans and saw the passage of this amendment as the closing of the window of opportunity to make women’s suffrage a part of Reconstruction (see DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* 171–172). Julia Ward Howe, Lucy Stone, and others felt they should support the amendment and recognize the Reconstruction era as “the negro’s hour” while not giving up on eventual enfranchisement of women. In November of 1868, the latter formed the New England Woman Suffrage Association (which later became the American Woman Suffrage Association). This organization was formed six months before Stanton and Anthony’s National Woman Suffrage Association (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* 168–169). While they were ultimately right about missing a window of opportunity during Reconstruction, Stanton and Anthony continued to resort to racist arguments (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* 174). After the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in March of 1870 and the Republican Party’s failure to take up women’s suffrage except nominally in 1872, differences between the American and National Woman Suffrage Associations faded, but the groups continued their division due to deep-seated animosity before finally uniting in 1890 (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* 199–200).

classist¹⁹ tone and racism endured. Thus, the argument that women are particularly moral and peaceful, problematic by itself, was sometimes bolstered with the accompanying (but often unspoken) idea that white women's special morality and peacefulness sat opposed to the threatening immorality and savageness of uneducated newly freed male slaves and immigrants.²⁰ This move further complicated the belief in women's ontological connection to peace by defining it in contrast to a notion of these men's ontological connection to violence and savagery. This is an association that would endure through history, influencing the ontological claims made in public protest into the 1960s and 1970s, and even today (see Chapter 2).

As they entered the public sphere more and more visibly, women's suffragists performed their peacefulness and morality rather than simply discussing it and making speeches about it. This kind of focus was necessary as the transition from conventions and social events to open air meetings with one or two suffragists speaking on a soap box to large scale parades meant a bolder and much more public claim to women's right to

¹⁹ In a statement in 1869, for example, Stanton warned, "American women of wealth, education, virtue, and refinement, [. . .] if you do not wish the lower orders of Chinese, Africans, Germans and Irish, with their low ideas of womanhood to make laws for you and your daughters, . . . to dictate not only the civil, but moral codes by which you shall be governed, awake to the danger of your present position and demand that woman, too, shall be represented in the government!" (qtd. in DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 178).

²⁰ Two lectures and one article that Carrie Chapman Catt wrote in the late 1800s ("America for Americans," "The American Sovereign," and "A True Story") reveal her xenophobia and her claim that alien immigrants had perverted American culture (Van Voris 15–16). Suffragists continued to cite a contrast between women's pacifying, moral nature and uneducated lower class and immigrant men throughout the history of the women's suffrage movement. Stanton's daughter Harriet Stanton Blatch would have a private meeting with Woodrow Wilson on July 24, 1916 in which she expressed her frustration after a childhood of observing her mother and a lifetime working for women's suffrage, particularly noting her aversion to "appealing to every Tom, Dick and Harry for the right of self-government." Blatch was humiliated by the prospect of begging foreign-born male citizens, some of whom didn't even speak English, for women's voting rights. She would rather lobby Congress, which was composed of men who "understand what we are talking about and can speak to us in our tongue" (qtd. in Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 147).

vote than previously attempted (McGammon 790–791). While the suffragists did not want to appear “festive or frivolous” but rather “serious and dignified” participants in the public political sphere (McGammon 791), they also did not want to push the envelope too far. Even suffragist Doris Stevens, in her 1920 account, explained that the famous 1913 suffrage parade staged in Washington, D.C. one day before Wilson’s inauguration was meant to be a dramatic event that illustrated with “beauty” the desire for women’s vote (Stevens 21). The mere presence of women in suffrage parades and demonstrations, however, was not enough to elicit awe and shame at the reminder of women’s peace and morality as appeared to be the case with the Woman’s Crusade. These women were, after all, insisting on real political rights rather than simply defending their domestic space and their performances in heavily populated urban settings would surely fail if they relied solely on religiosity and the tactic of shaming men with their familiarity and their recognition as moral neighbors and friends. But parading suffragists nonetheless played up their embodiment of virtue and peace, dressing in all white. The image of suffragist Inez Milholland, the epitome of traditional feminine beauty, riding a white horse in the 1913 Washington, D.C. parade exemplifies this tactic.

Class divisions and an upper class preoccupation with suffrage over other rights for women as well as economic reforms led to frequent tensions between women’s suffragists and working class women during this time. But both groups relied on tropes of women’s peacefulness and morality. While working class women may have been viewed as more physically capable than middle and upper class women, and therefore less vulnerable (in some cases due to their non-white bodies), they were usually viewed

nonetheless as more peaceful than their male counterparts, and these women took advantage of this belief, echoing the tactics of suffragists and temperance activists. At a parade held by the Chicago Eight-Hour League in 1879, for example, the Working Women's Union's float, "decked in pink fabric and ribbons" was adorned with a banner that read "WHEN WOMAN IS ADMITTED INTO THE COUNCIL OF NATIONS WAR WILL COME TO AN END, FOR WOMAN MORE THAN MAN, KNOWS THE VALUE OF LIFE"²¹ (Ashbaugh 35–36).

In addition to the notion that women are morally superior to men and inclined to peace politics, protestors were complicit with a second limiting ontological claim tied to the notion of women's categorical vulnerability: women's bodies belong in the domestic sphere as mothers, wives, and sisters, except when they must temporarily leave it to protect and preserve this sphere. Simply entering the public sphere was subversive, therefore, but this transgression was softened by activists' acknowledgment that public protest is temporary and not a natural state for women. Categorically vulnerable, women would need to return to the safe domestic sphere to avoid the dangerous and corrupting public political sphere. In this context, even early female temperance workers' techniques of circulating petitions to ministers, professors, and similar figures was considered taboo. In the context of the more public Woman's Crusade and especially in the larger context of working class, socialist, and anarchist protest and rhetoric of the time, these tactics seem extremely tame, but, as Mother Stewart observed, "no one can understand after

²¹ The notion that this banner represented all Working Women's Union members' devotion to nonviolence in all cases might be complicated by the involvement in the organization of figures like Lucy Parsons (Ashbaugh 33–36), who openly advocated for the use of violence in the labor movement.

these years of effective labor . . . what even these timid efforts to awaken ministers and people cost a woman” (Stewart 26). Many eventual crusaders were slow to join the movement due to fear of their involvement in such public transgressions:

It was to them a strange experience, a new idea. It seemed subversive of all recognized rules of womanly conduct. The thought of going into the low part of the town and entering one of those vile dens which respectable people abhorred at a distance; of kneeling in sawdust and filth, and pleading with bloated and beery saloonkeepers, was overwhelming to their finer sensibilities and shocking to their modesty. They shrank from the task half in doubt and half in fear. (qtd. in Stewart 95)

In some ways, crusaders’ rhetoric of fear seems part of the narrative of their protest and tales that highlight their timidity and fear might have been exaggerated to make their protest actions seem more risky, more courageous—indeed, more befitting the actions of crusaders.²² Despite the rhetorical use of such narratives of fear, however, the entry of women—particularly white, middle and upper class women—into the public sphere did carry with it a certain amount of risk. The mere presence of middle and upper class women parading in public in suffrage parades, for example, while seemingly benign

²² The author of the *Cincinnati Gazette* article that contains the excerpt above, for example, acknowledges these women’s fears to bring attention to their undying devotion to their noble cause: “they thought of the drunkards that were reeling home from the saloon every night perhaps into their families and of the temptations that were lying in wait for their children in the future. Their misgivings left them, and personal considerations no longer had any weight” (qtd. in Stewart 95). This narrative of courage in the face of fear also strengthened a particular religious narrative, as Mother Stewart’s observations reveal: “It had been with many, a fearful struggle to yield up their preconceived ideas of what was a lady’s place, and what the world might think and say. Not a few carried the subject to their closets, and there on their knees fought the battle with self and pride before the Lord, till He gave them strength and they came forth anointed for the war” (Stewart 164).

compared to some of the other protest activity occurring at the time, did not fail to provoke strong reactions from men and other women. Newspaper accounts of these parades, even in major cities like New York and Philadelphia, expressed shock that suffragists would be so bold as to march in public (McGammon 791–794). Some women marching in the 1913 Washington, D.C. parade were even attacked by rowdy observers (Stevens 22), seemingly confirming their fear of public demonstrations.

When protesting women did make public claims, they often justified their presence in the public sphere by making their claims as mothers, wives, and sisters to men and highlighting their relational existence.²³ The Woman’s Crusaders, who provided the spark needed to ignite the creation of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), viewed women as defenders of the home and explicitly described themselves as “the mothers, wives and daughters, representing the moral and religious sentiment of our town, to save the loved members of our households from the strong temptation of drink” (Stewart 87). Soon after the Crusade, due to a confluence of influences, including the results of her prayers²⁴ but also no doubt her understanding of the cultural belief in women’s place at home, Frances Willard of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union who had long endorsed the rhetoric of home protection as applied to the temperance movement adopted the notion of women’s vote as the “home protection ballot” when advocating suffrage to a WCTU audience (Willard 351–352). Suffragist Lucy Stone remarked that this tactic was a stroke of genius as it allowed the WCTU to advocate for

²³ I take up the issue of relationality and a belief in women’s enhanced relationality in more depth in Chapter 3. I explore the belief in mothers’ enhanced relationality in Chapter 4.

²⁴ Willard explains in her autobiography the incident when, “Upon my knees alone . . . there was borne in upon my mind, as I believe, from loftier regions, the declaration, ‘You are to speak for woman’s ballot as a weapon of protection to her home and tempted loved ones from the tyranny of drink’” (351).

women's suffrage and simultaneously squelch the criticism that allowing women to vote would take their attention away from the home (Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* 57–58). Even Carry Nation, a temperance activist who, in the early 20th century, staged “hatchetations” in which she took a hatchet to saloons (explored more thoroughly in Chapter 4) pointed to her deceased husband who had died of alcoholism and other women who suffered from similar familial circumstances when justifying her actions, repeatedly using language about mothers and motherhood in her autobiography (Nation).²⁵

While some suffragists viewed gaining the vote for women as a step in the direction of increased public and political life for women, envisioning a permanent place for them in the public sphere, some female protestors during this time nonetheless couched their presence in this sphere as temporary, often despite their real desire to continue their public activism. Even Woman's Crusaders ultimately found it difficult to abandon their newfound public life, but they presented their public roles as temporary ones. “Cut loose from the quiescence and public timidity that was their prescribed role,” historian Ruth Bordin explains, “the Crusade gave to many American women a new sense of identity, a taste of collective power and an acquaintance with the larger world of the public platform” (“A Baptism of Power and Liberty” 393). They nonetheless enjoyed success due to the way they framed their actions as necessary only to protect their rightful domestic sphere. Despite their initial reticence in becoming involved, explained Stewart,

²⁵ Frances Grace Carver suggests that Nation's autobiographical narratives constitute a retelling of her past to shape herself into a credible temperance crusader (Carver 35), but such narratives, however crafted to service her reinvention, still reflect an understanding of the pervasive cultural belief in the importance of women's place in the home and their relational familial ties.

“Some . . . had their souls bathed in such a flood of ineffable bliss as they had never before conceived” (Stewart 149). However, likely aware of how admitting to a desire to take on a permanent public role might be greeted with reticence from a more general audience, activists like Stewart craftily balanced acknowledgment of the happiness and fulfillment they experienced in their activism with their love of home:

...when I have been speeding over the country as fast as wheels and steam could carry me, or across hill and dale often in very primitive conveyance in sunshine or storm addressing thousands, organizing and leading out bands of my crusade sisters, persuading men to sign the pledge and regain their lost manhood, urging Christian men to do their duty and wipe out the curse at the ballot-box, I have been supremely happy. This I say, not because I have not loves and longings, hopes and ambitions and aspirations, as others have.

How I could enjoy the sweets of home, sweet home, and how I yearn, and grow homesick, often, as I go up and down the land, for that dearest spot on earth, and the loved who are lonely because I am not there! [. . .] But I hoped on bravely that a more auspicious time and more favorable opportunities would come. (Stewart 40–41)

While admitting the joy and sense of purpose she enjoys while on the road, Stewart couches her activism within the confines of acceptable female behavior, pledging that she would love to stay at home, but must do her Christian duty and help men (women’s sons and husbands) regain their manhood and respectability. If it weren’t for this moral

problem, she implies, she would remain there, where she is most needed. Like Stewart, many female temperance activists argued that it was, in fact, their desire to save and protect their domestic sphere that compelled their activism in the first place.

While they fought for long-term reforms, some working women were compelled to carefully avoid claims that they advocated for women's long term public presence in the workforce. This was one reason little effort was often made to organize them: their presence was believed to be a temporary detour on their path to marriage and a domestic life. Elizabeth Gurley Flynn noted that the women working in the mills that she sought to organize in 1912 came home from their jobs only to take on full responsibility for the domestic work in their homes and faced "considerable male opposition" to their attendance at meetings and participation in strikes (122). When violence was waged against working women who did organize and participate in strikes, it was arguably fueled in part by these women's audacity to challenge the image of the domestic woman. In fact, male unionists and others often fought for higher wages for men to enable female workers to return to the domestic sphere. Much of the sympathy for working women stemmed from the belief that these women belonged in the private sphere, supported financially by their fathers and husbands, and should not be forced to leave their families to work in factories (beliefs that also justified these women's low pay and exclusion from formal labor organizations) (Tax 31). And despite the prevailing view that these women were stronger and heartier than their delicate middle class and wealthy counterparts, a view that also helped justify physical violence against them, disdain for their audacity to parade around—and make political claims, no less—in the public streets led to charges in

1909 that striking shirtwaist makers in New York were prostitutes, individuals who served as alarming models at the time of unnaturally public and unclean women (Tax 220–221). In the same strike (sometimes known as the Uprising of the Thirty Thousand), prostitutes and pimps were actually hired to physically beat striking women, a move designed perhaps to remind these women of their place on the social scale earned by their choice to make public claims to fair wages and improved working conditions (Tax 214). It was also a move that demonstrates the fact that working women's bodies were viewed as less vulnerable than their upper class female counterparts but, nonetheless, vulnerable enough to require the protection of the domestic sphere. In popular media, it became common practice to hold up the working woman's life as an example of what was wrong with society, critiquing working women's situation not because of a devotion to women's need for economic independence and right to equal pay and fair working conditions, but because they felt these weak women deserved to be protected and sheltered from the public sphere (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 136–137). Women's suffrage leaders supported working women because they felt they should be able to enter the workforce and that that workforce should be made a more hospitable place for them (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 137), but, due to the belief in women's place in the domestic sphere, when its creation was announced, the media depicted the newly formed Working Women's Association (founded by suffrage supporters) as a welcome return to more ladylike, benevolent, useful goals and a turn from the suffrage movement's (more radical)

feminist agenda (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 138). They celebrated suffragists for assisting these poor women who were so unlucky as to have to leave their homes to work.

Certainly, some women's rights activists resisted the idea that women would successfully fight oppression from the isolation of the domestic sphere. Elizabeth Cady Stanton critiqued the large "amount of sentimental nonsense talked about the isolated home" (qtd. in Parker ix) and believed women should not be confined to the domestic sphere. She focused on the difficulty of organizing women who were so geographically dispersed, arguing that "Women's work can never be properly organized in the isolated home" (Parker viii-x). But the rhetoric of early women's suffragists did little to challenge the idea that women belong in the domestic sphere, a fact that made their claims easier for the public to swallow. In addition, many believed that women, once enfranchised, would vote with their husbands. And, for a time, they did in fact vote in small numbers and not unlike their male counterparts (Walton, "Ups and Downs in the History of American Women's Suffrage"). Suffragists' reliance on the rhetoric of motherhood further connected their movement with the domestic ideal (see Chapter 4).

In the labor movement, labor leader Elizabeth Gurley Flynn advocated organizing wives of striking men since "a secluded home environment has produced a psychological attitude of 'me and mine'" (qtd. in Tax 255). Speaking on behalf of the Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), the rare labor organization that embraced women's participation, she announced that the organization "appeals to women to organize side by side with their men folks" and "points out to the young girl that marriage is no escape

from the labor problem, and to the mother, that the interest of herself and her children are woven in with the interests of the class” (qtd. in Tax 255) so that women who may be tempted to retreat to domestic life or men who may be tempted to demand that their wives stay there might see how the labor cause affects women, even if they are not working in factories and mills themselves. And women did appear in many cases to desire such participation. When explaining women’s participation in one particular strike, Flynn noted, “The I.W.W. has been accused of putting the women in the front. The truth is, the I.W.W. does not keep them in the back, and they go to the front” (qtd. in Tax 256). Women and children were among those at the front lines at the famous textile strike in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912 (Tax 249). But here, as in other cases, women often found themselves torn between their desires and their understanding of their own embodied experiences and the prevailing cultural beliefs about them. Unfortunately, they also often found themselves, at the end of these rare moments of empowerment and agency, in much the same social and political position as when they began.²⁶

Notably, many of the myths protesting women relied on revolved around the notion that women (*true* women) are frail, fragile, and categorically vulnerable, including, importantly, the two beliefs described here. It was a belief in women’s vulnerability that fueled and strengthened the notion that women are more moral, peaceful, and pacifying than men. Women’s perceived peacefulness and morality was seen to result at least in part from their fragility. In many of the anecdotes from the

²⁶ As incredible as women’s involvement in the Lawrence strike was, it was not lasting, as Meredith Tax explains: “As far as we can tell, the women of Lawrence sank back into household obscurity, childbearing, and endless labor in the mills when the strike was over. They had been able to rise when their whole class rose [. . .] But when their class went under in defeat, they were the most submerged” (Tax 275).

Woman's Crusade that I've cited above, a widespread belief in women's frailty and vulnerability seems to have aided in the related belief in women's piety and their embodiment of morality. Such a belief is consistent with the dichotomous concept of gender where men's embodied strength and intellect is complimented by women's enhanced ability to sense and understand the moral pulse of the world. It is as if frailty and morality were so culturally intertwined that revealing these women's embodied experience of strength and endurance might risk stripping them of their cloak of morality. Similarly, a belief in women's categorical vulnerability fueled the belief that they must remain in a safe domestic sphere, a kind of imagined shelter from the public sphere, which, while it may bring the promise of political personhood, also brings the threat of violence and the need to employ it. Interestingly, despite their own embodied experiences that contradicted these notions, female activists often found that embracing the myth of their vulnerability not only made their claims intelligible to their audience, but it also provided them a protected, if circumscribed, stage on which they could voice their demands.

The Tactical Embrace of Categorical Vulnerability

While many female activists during this time adopted, with their male counterparts, the belief that women are categorically vulnerable, it is also likely that many female protestors during the late 19th and early 20th centuries took advantage of this and other myths tactically. Indeed, the tactical dimension of public political protest is often in conflict with or at least should be considered separate from individual or collective beliefs and values protestors hold. Thus, female activists produced movements

that were rife with internal contradictions and inconsistencies. The temperance crusaders of 1873 and 1874, for example, continued their protests despite harsh conditions, but they publically stressed the toll such actions would take on fragile women. One crusade insider from Hillsboro, Ohio reported in a statement quoted in the *Cincinnati Gazette* on January 26, 1874, "Delicate women have for a month past trudged through storm and slush, and knelt in filthy rum-holes, and on cold pavements, offering up their lives and health as a free sacrifice to the good of mankind" (qtd. in Stewart 136). Crusaders therefore walked a fine line between making themselves into martyrs by emphasizing their fragile nature and their devotion to the cause despite the effect their physical tactics would have on their especially vulnerable bodies and proving through their actions and narratives about those actions that they were not as vulnerable as believed. It is probable they complied with the culturally accepted connection between frailty, peacefulness, and womanhood and suggested by their actions a kind of child-like defenselessness to make their message all the more palatable and to escape the risk of transgressing the belief in women's vulnerability. Mother Stewart herself walked this line when she compared her own endurance in the face of exhaustion to that displayed by the housewife out of necessity: "I have said, 'Now, certainly I have gone the very last day I can, I must yield it all up.' But, as the poor, overburdened housewife said, when I would get up and get 'limbered out,' I would go on again through the day, and so, with little variation, have I gone all these years" (Stewart 115). Interestingly, Dr. Dio Lewis, who inspired the Crusade—a movement that relied heavily on the cultural belief of women's enhanced morality and vulnerability—endorsed regular exercise for women to strengthen their

bodies and their souls. Mother Stewart admitted that the Crusades seemed to invigorate the women rather than cause them to fall ill as many thought they would and Dr. Lewis confirmed that this was consistent with his teachings that women's health is strengthened, not harmed, by such physical activity (Stewart 238–239). But this angle was not always emphasized in the rhetoric surrounding the Crusades; instead, the women were celebrated for risking such public action despite their categorical vulnerability.

The manner in which these women were seen as especially moral and capable of compelling men to moral action because of their persistence in the face of heightened vulnerability can be seen in Stewart's account of one protest in 1874 in Hillsboro, Ohio:

The sight of gentle, frail women turning out in the most inclement weather, marching through rain, snow or sleet, entering the vilest of dens, amid the fumes of liquor and tobacco a place they had always been taught they should not seem to see in passing, or even refer to and there kneeling and crying to God to have mercy upon and touch the heart of the seller or, being locked out, kneeling on the pavement or frozen ground and thus continuing their devotions through the whole day, and into days and weeks, was indeed a sight to quicken the sensibilities of any Christian man into wonderful activity. What wonder, when he saw his own wife and daughter among them, if many a man under the impulse of the newly awakened conscience and regard for his wife, felt as though it would be a source of satisfaction to "go in and clean 'em out." (Stewart 138)

While such actions could be tactically useful and compelling, to remain effective, the

women's persistence could not be seen as challenging the myth of their categorical vulnerability. They therefore had to walk the line of highlighting their persistence while simultaneously performing heightened vulnerability and frailty.

Despite this negotiation and these female protestors' direct experience with their own physical strength and endurance, using the pervasive cultural belief in women's enhanced vulnerability to their advantage had great benefits as physically apprehending women or putting them in jail was viewed to be in contradiction with the 'fact' of women's fragility. Although it was most often applied to middle and upper class white women, this belief was also sometimes applied to working class women. Mother Stewart's earliest efforts to support temperance reveal her exploitation of the cult of women's categorical vulnerability and their corresponding untouchability. One law that bolstered the efforts of temperance activists in Ohio, including Stewart, was the Adair law, a state law that limited the distribution of alcohol and allowed family members or employers who were adversely affected by someone who was intoxicated to sue the party who supplied that person alcohol. When Stewart spoke in court on behalf of a woman bringing a case under the Adair law, she observed that the defense attorney and defendant viewed her intervention as unfair. Stewart seemed aware that her action was viewed as akin to the act of sending a woman to confront a violent man knowing that the man would not feel it right to hit a woman. Everyone involved knew that she would be read as an untouchable moral authority (Stewart 38). One of Stewart's first protest actions involved dressing in disguise, ordering a drink at a saloon that was serving drinks on the Sabbath (which was against the law) and walking out of the bar with it. She knew she

could count on the male bartender's hesitance to harm her: "I knew if that had been a woman behind the counter, she would have jumped at me like a cat. But I knew too that that man would have to stop to work out the problem as to what was best to be done in the case, and while he was working out his problem I would be able to put a safe distance between us" (Stewart 73).

The male leaders of the Woman's Crusade counted on this special kind of treatment. The movement began in Fredonia, New York, after a speech by Dr. Dio Lewis on December 14, 1873, in which he described the actions of his mother and her neighbors who had engaged in the tactics of public praying and shaming in the name of temperance and suggested that women take up this tactic en masse. The male temperance supporters present at the talk supported Dr. Lewis's suggestion ("Remarks of indorsement [sic] were made by a number of influential gentlemen and a call was made for the ladies who sympathized with the cause to rise up, and nearly every lady in the house stood up," described an article in the *Fredonian Censor* on December 17, 1873 [qtd. in Stewart 87]). At about 12:30 p.m. on the following day, more than 100 women marched to saloons to petition them to stop serving liquor. The next evening, Dr. Lewis delivered a talk in Jamestown and those women began their own movement; the movement snowballed from there (Stewart 89), all with the encouragement of the male temperance supporters in the communities who knew that the movement must remain a woman-only movement to be effective. The movements in Hillsboro and Washington Courthouse, Ohio, were soon to follow and became the most famous cases of the Crusade. They followed similar patterns of male endorsement but female involvement. In Springfield, the Women's

Temperance Society appointed an “Advisory Committee of gentlemen” but reserved the key public roles for women (Stewart 109). In some cases, as in Hillsboro, the men prayed at church while the women embarked on their public prayer in front of local saloons (Thompson et al.).

Sometimes, men were in the background, ready to offer defense to the women should they need it. While such defense was perhaps sometimes welcomed, it also served an important rhetorical purpose, as did withholding it. When one proprietor asked Mother Stewart to step down from the steps of his establishment, many people from the crowd told her to stay since she had the backing of the community:

Just then Mr. Fleming, chief of police, sprang up the steps and siezed [sic] the man by the arm, thrust him back into his saloon, followed him in and explained to him that the people were in sympathy with and would protect the Crusaders, and that a hand laid on Mother Stewart would be the signal for rasing [sic] his place to the ground. There were also three hundred workmen looking on from the windows of the great Champion Machine Shops just across Market Square, and ready at a move to avenge any violence or insult offered us. (Stewart 175)

In at least one instance, in a rare case in Bucyrus, Ohio when the crusaders there were threatened with violence and subjected to it, their male supporters purposefully stood back to allow onlookers to be appalled at the transgression, further adding credence to their cause and leading to more support for the movement (Stewart 353–356). The crusaders’ spouses and sons were “[s]imply out of sight, or under solemn promise to their

wives and mothers, under whatever circumstances might befall, not to interfere or lift hand or voice in their defence [sic]" (Stewart 353). Crusade leader Eliza Thompson described hearing about crusaders in New Vienna who endured beer being poured on them and other threats of violence while their male supporters "ruled their spirits" and left the battle to "God and the women" (Thompson et al. 96–97).²⁷ The men likely knew their involvement would likely lead to bloody fighting; it would also prevent the women from enjoying the benefits of a belief in their enhanced vulnerability, namely hesitance to physically harm them. In the off chance the women were attacked, attacks that were no doubt minor compared to what the men would endure, the public would be especially appalled at the transgression against women given their categorical vulnerability and the movement would gain more support than it might after a fight among men.

The violence these female protestors actually encountered was generally minor (like the beer bath the women of New Vienna experienced) and the threats of violence they received were generally harsher than the actions they encountered, including saloonist Van Pelt's threat to harm the crusaders with his ax. Van Pelt was famously later converted by the crusaders into a temperance activist and used the same ax to destroy his own whiskey barrels (Stewart 178–180). One saloonkeeper was rumored to have threatened to harm or kill Mother Stewart if she visited his saloon but the threat never amounted to any action and she only heard about it from a man who used the anecdote to pledge his determination to protect her (Stewart 177). In one case, a boy told Stewart that a drunk saloonkeeper sprinkled gun powder on his porch in preparation to blow up

²⁷ Thompson also surmises that the men of her town, Hillsboro, would not have been able to similarly rein in their ire and avoid confrontation with the women's assailants (96–97).

female protestors and threatened to have his dogs attack the women, but Stewart observes that rain must have dampened the gun powder and the man's dogs turned out to be friendly and harmless (189–190). In fact, Dr. Dio Lewis, whose speeches inspired the Crusade, actively advocated that female crusaders remain “unmoved by threats of violence,” not only because such violence might be worth the cause of temperance, but mostly because no one would dare carry out such public violence against women. Likewise, he believed no judge was likely to “dare order the arrest and imprisonment of two hundred praying women” (Eastman and Lewis 158).

The crusaders were not the only female protestors at the time to take advantage of cultural beliefs in their categorical vulnerability despite their contradictory experiences and beliefs. Suffrage activists, too, tactically embraced this cultural belief just as they publically downplayed some of their other more controversial beliefs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, for example, held much more radically progressive views than her rhetoric allowed. In one instance, she addressed a group of religious women who were “somewhat scarified and nervous” after a local reverend had publically criticized women's suffragists by selecting appeals based on what she thought would be effective: “like the good Samaritan, I tried to pour oil and wine on their wounded spirits, by exalting intuition, and with a pitiful and patronizing tone deploring the slowness, the obtuseness, the materialism of most of the sons of Adam. It had its effect” (Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* 372, vol. 2). Similarly, Stanton wished to abolish the institution of marriage but had to temper her arguments given her audience (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in*

America, 1848-1869 184). In the 1890's, after the two major suffrage organizations had finally merged into the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), Stanton actually critiqued the suggestion of her colleague and friend, Susan B. Anthony, that the organization campaign for the vote on the basis of women's virtues of "sobriety," "devoutness," and "maternal concern" (Parker vii). When Anthony wrote Stanton in 1899 asking for help setting the agenda for NAWSA, Stanton suggested a wide range of reforms like communal living, a new government in Hawaii, and opposition to proposals from railroad corporations and the Knights of Labor to turn women out of their jobs (vii–viii). In more public fora, however, and as the U.S. suffrage movement matured, organizers found themselves focusing singularly on suffrage and abandoning hopes of a broader agenda.

Suffragists similarly downplayed their embodied experiences that betrayed the cultural belief in women's categorical vulnerability. Many experienced and persevered through physical exhaustion that betrayed their performance of this vulnerability. Some suffragists' rejection of the violent tactics of their counterparts in the United Kingdom, the Suffragettes, can be seen not just as a philosophical difference based in their actual belief in women's predisposition to peace or their categorical vulnerability, but a tactical one. As A.K. Thompson explains, "Violent action, many suggested, annulled the benefits of mythic feminine status—that gift that 'enabled' women to transcend the dirty politics through ontological purity" (Thompson 34).

While suffragists rarely faced violent reactions to their actions until they employed more radical methods, like picketing the White House during World War I (see

below), when they did face violence, like during their 1913 Washington, D.C. parade, stories of the assaults they faced were used in their favor as a method of shaming those who dare harm them. As suffragist Doris Stevens explains (somewhat melodramatically), “The fact of ten thousand women marching with banners and bands for this idea was startling enough to wake up the government and the country, but not so startling as ten thousand women man-handled by irresponsible crowds because of police indifference” (Stevens 22). While these transgressions may have been shocking, Stevens’ own account of a group of suffragist picketers known as the Silent Sentinels (discussed below) does not suggest that these women were inherently frail and categorically vulnerable. On the contrary, she describes how the women thrived, “intrepid” enough to persist through “biting wind and rain, through sleet and snow as well as sunshine” (65–66). Although their perseverance through harsh jail and workhouse conditions defied cultural conceptions of women’s categorical vulnerability (a phenomenon I explore below), near the end of their suffrage campaign, in the courtroom and on the street, Silent Sentinels nonetheless capitalized on their prison experiences and a cultural belief in women’s vulnerability to gain public sympathy for their cause. In a protest campaign called the “Prison Special” in February of 1919, suffragists who had spent time in jail for their protest actions wore prison clothes (“Mother Hubbards”) and testified publicly about their experiences (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 233), drumming up public support based on disbelief that the (upper class white) women would be subjected to such harsh conditions.

Indeed, there may have been real unspoken (and perhaps unconscious) fear on the part of law enforcement representatives and onlookers that testing women's vulnerability would prove this theory wrong. Admitting women are not especially vulnerable would also open the door to considering them real political threats, a phenomenon I explore in Chapter 2. This hesitation allowed the women considerable space to stage public performances of their demands, so long as they did not significantly challenge the myth of female vulnerability, and such opportunity was alluring. While maintaining a cult of vulnerability allowed the women a venue to voice limited demands within a largely protected public environment, however, declaring and demonstrating that they could wield real political power while simultaneously insisting on our fundamental vulnerability, rather than women's categorical vulnerability, might have allowed them the possibility of much more power in the long term and forced the public and the state to contend with these women as legitimate political subjects. Instead, female protestors, state representatives, and other observers often engaged in a kind of dance that concretized existing boundaries and only occasionally transgressed the cult of women's categorical vulnerability. In addition, remaining complicit with this myth of vulnerability only reified the marginalization of other women believed to lack vulnerability and, thus, womanhood.

Poor Women, Laboring Women, Women of Color, and Categorical Vulnerability

While the cult of true womanhood and a belief in women's categorical vulnerability justified imagining white women of means as especially moral and peaceful and keeping them confined to the domestic sphere, a belief in black women's incredible

strength, endurance, and decreased vulnerability justified the harsh conditions of slavery and such cultural beliefs persisted well after abolition. However, the belief in black women's invulnerability did not lead to the notion that black women, like white men, are therefore privy to all of the rights and privileges of political personhood. On the contrary, newly freed black female slaves were not deemed *true* women, but also, importantly, not allowed the privileges of manhood. Black men, who also experienced systemic dehumanization and dispossession, at least enjoyed legal enfranchisement through the Fifteenth Amendment, rendering them men, at least by law. By contrast, black women were rendered marginally human and genderless and treated as such, despite their new legal status as persons. Working white and immigrant women found themselves in a similar, but perhaps less precarious, situation. They had to choose between claiming womanhood (including categorical vulnerability) for themselves and risking physical harm when such claims were rejected or embracing a unique ontology only to open themselves up to dismissal by virtue of their inability to meet the criteria for womanhood *or* male political personhood.

Working class female activists were the targets of more violence and aggression than their upper and middle class counterparts because their bodies were read differently. The women who participated in the Shirtwaist Strike of 1909-1910, for example, and were bullied by hired thugs and police and unfairly given workhouse sentences, received less attention than wealthy suffragists who suffered more minor abuses. But in the eyes of the public, their labor and their conditions were ultimately threats to their femininity, and violence against them, when it was waged, did serve to elicit public support for their

causes. Some of these women, however, likely because they were seen as less vulnerable and did not always stand to gain from the protection offered ‘true’ vulnerable women, chose to wage violence and accept the consequences. One such incident occurred during the Lawrence strike, half of whose participants were women (Tax 254), when a group of striking Italian women found a policeman alone on a bridge, took his gun, his badge, and his star, and were taking off his pants in preparation to throw him into the river when the cavalry rescued him. Many of these women were arrested and sentenced to jail, scolded by the judge who also held up the policeman’s body as especially sacred (Tax 254). The officer’s body was thus deemed more valuable than the women’s, whose bodies were seen as perhaps stronger than other women’s but most definitely more *unruly*. The district attorney in Lawrence addressing the many female participants in the strike argued, for example, that “one policeman can handle ten men, while it takes ten policemen to handle one woman” (qtd. in Tax 254), an anecdote that certainly reveals some cracks in the myth of women’s categorical vulnerability but likely speaks more to a belief in the women’s inability to be controlled rather than their skillful strength.

Female strikers were able to sometimes make use of the myth of women’s categorical vulnerability, however, especially when this vulnerability was attached to patriotism or some other quality that increased their perceived aptitude for morality. Striker Fred Beal, for example, describes a woman who carried an American flag during the Lawrence strike in the front of a group of strikers and quickly decided when confronted by militia with rifles drawn to wrap the flag around her body. Apparently struck by the gesture, the officers left the group alone and allowed them to pass (Beal 44).

Pregnancy, in addition to literally being cloaked in patriotism, was another condition that could potentially be read as a sign of the enhanced vulnerability of working women or female strikers. But even this association, while culturally pervasive, couldn't be counted on in all cases.²⁸

The Lawrence strike was a particularly interesting case in terms of the precarious position that working women and spouses of striking men occupied. On the one hand, these women were aware that they were not always protected by the myth of women's categorical vulnerability and the treatment they endured confirmed it. At the same time, however, complaints about the prominent role women played in the strike were ubiquitous, as I explored above. Notably, many thought the striking men sent women to do a job they should have been doing (Tax 254). Thus, these women faced the dual-edged problem of lacking complete protection of the myth of categorical vulnerability and being admonished for daring to challenge it. The women were not always considered 'true' women, but they were not permitted to act like men. While not facing the deep dehumanization and exclusion from a clear gendered identity faced by African-American women, they did seem to face a losing battle steeped in contradiction. Importantly, other women's exploitation of the myth of categorical vulnerability only served to enhance and magnify these women's marginal status. Interestingly, this exploitation also served to tie all women's identities to their bodies, apparently confirming the widely held belief that women are especially tied to the body while men are more connected to their capacity for reason. This association was especially problematic given the liberal democratic context

²⁸ See Chapter 4 for a more detailed treatment of this phenomenon.

in which some of these women fought for rights.

Vulnerability, Embodiment, and Liberal Democratic Political Personhood

The discourse of liberal democratic rights relies on a Cartesian concept of the self, a privileging of the capacity for reason over the embodied self. In other words, it represents an attempt to defy the ambiguity of the human condition by privileging mind over matter. In this context, women who are complicit with the myth of women's categorical vulnerability (particularly in comparison to the model of the invulnerable male subject) risk associating themselves with the body in a context where bodies are not supposed to matter, at least for the sake of securing political personhood. It is important to note, however, that these women cannot be held entirely accountable for implicating themselves in this contradiction. In fact, while liberal rights are ostensibly tied to the capacity to reason rather than the body, the contradictory exclusion of women from full political personhood on the basis of embodied sexual difference has actually been present in liberal democratic theory from its origins.

Rousseau, one of the founders of liberal democratic theory, simultaneously argued that the body is unimportant and relegated women to a separate sphere that did not include political personhood because of their innate sexual difference. According to Rousseau, all men are autonomous subjects possessing naturally endowed rights, but they require education to hone their ability to reason and therefore participate in democratic society. Rousseau outlined his vision for how young boys might be educated to become ideal citizens in what he believed to be his most important work, *Emile, or On Education*, in 1762. In this text, readers follow Emile, a fictional boy, as he is tutored from childhood

into adulthood using Rousseau's recommended program. Rousseau addresses women in a chapter titled "Sophie" in which, despite his emphasis on reason as the key component to autonomous subjectivity, he justifies his prescription for a different kind of education for girls by looking to women's bodies. Innate sexual difference, Rousseau explains, stems from both childbearing and "the first assignable difference in the moral relations of the two sexes," men's strength and women's weakness (*Emile, or On Education* 532). To compensate for her weakness, a woman must exert power through charm and beauty: "Her own violence," he argues, "is her charms" (*Emile, or On Education* 532), which allow women to attract men to them.²⁹ Further, men's citizenship is dependent on their marriage to women (and, presumably their obtainment of women's moral support and exploitation of their labor), as Emile must marry Sophie before becoming a true citizen. Women's education must therefore be devoted to shaping them into obedient, entertaining wives and mothers.

In her 1792 rights-based call for women's equal education, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft responds to Rousseau by arguing that women, like men, by virtue of being human, possess the ability to reason and should therefore be similarly educated as liberal democratic subjects. She argues that she simply wishes to "extend . . . to women" (31) political autonomy and moral personhood.³⁰ Her biggest critique of Rousseau's theory is that he failed to apply his own norms to women: "When he should have reasoned he became impassioned," she argues (115). However, even in

²⁹ Rousseau insists that women's ability to charm men with their beauty actually gives them power over men and even goes so far as to argue that educating women (or "rais[ing] them like men") would remove this feminine power and lead to male dominance (*Emile, or On Education* 538).

³⁰ Wollstonecraft craftily declares that women cannot be held accountable for their actions if they have not been properly educated: "Without knowledge there can be no morality!" (81).

critiquing him and in highlighting the way in which women are like men, Wollstonecraft accepts Rousseau's notion that women are physically weaker than men (12, 52). She notes this difference but argues that it is immaterial since autonomous political subjectivity depends on reason, not the body. However, she joins Rousseau in advocating physical exercise for women, celebrating "the woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind" (40), echoing Rousseau's proposition that "[w]omen ought not to be robust *like* men, but they should be robust *for* men, so that the men born from them will be robust, too" (*Emile, or On Education* 541). Wollstonecraft does not depart significantly from this suggestion, arguing that exercise will allow women to bear and nurse their children as they should (173, 182) and noting that women should not strive for manliness by participating in "hunting, shooting, and gaming" but in the "attainment of [manly] talents and virtues" (12). Almost eighty years later, in his 1869 work *The Subjection of Women*, liberal democratic theorist and women's suffrage supporter John Stuart Mill likewise acknowledged that women are weaker than men but argued that they should be educated and enjoy physical exercise.³¹ Rousseau's, Wollstonecraft's, and Mill's consideration of the body and of sexual difference and their efforts to grapple with issues of weakness and strength and to connect a need for bodily sturdiness to maternity despite liberal democratic theory's supposed focus on reason to the exclusion of other material considerations reveals inherent contradictions between the privileging of reason over the body and the importance of women's bodies as well as women's

³¹ Dr. Dio Lewis, who inspired the Woman's Crusade of 1873-1874, arguably echoed these theorists' ideas (although he was working from a moral framework rather than one based in liberal rights) when he argued that women should exercise their bodies.

disenfranchisement on the basis of their embodied weakness and their need for exercise and the development of strength and endurance to be better mothers.

Working from within these contradictions, some female activists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries chose to simply avoid facing questions of women's political personhood. Some temperance activists saw the fight for temperance and women's legal rights as inherently compatible endeavors, but avoided public declarations of these beliefs for fear of alienating potential allies. Mother Stewart, for example, knew better than to make women's suffrage a hallmark of the Woman's Crusade. In her memoir, she explains that suffragists were among the first women to support the temperance movement, but she also admits to the existence of some women who were happy to enjoy the limited rights they were allotted (125-126). While she draws some connections between the temperance movement and women's political rights, Stewart ultimately distinguishes her temperance work from her sympathy for women's rights (128) and vows to recruit any Christian woman willing to support temperance, regardless of her feelings about suffrage. In fact, looking back at the crusade, she sees the inability to set aside differences as one impediment to a successful temperance movement: "I therefore exerted myself as far as possible to enlist all, of whatever name, in our cause, and if we could have entirely laid aside our sectarian prejudices and personal ambitions and jealousies, we would have accomplished much more than we did" (Stewart 129). Frances Willard, by contrast, openly supported women's suffrage, but skillfully connected such support to "home protection." Likewise, temperance activist Carry Nation couched her support for suffrage in the name of women's moral influence on politics rather than a devotion to sexual

equality, her contention that women possess the ability to reason, or a similar cause.

While some women quietly supported women's suffrage while engaging fully in other struggles, like the fight for temperance, and others actively and publically fought for women's suffrage and other political rights for women, all women's suffrage advocates found themselves in a quandary as they angled for equal rights under a liberal democratic system while simultaneously building their movement on the premise of sexual and bodily difference. Choosing to make claims consistent with this odd logic rather than questioning it may have set up these activists for failure in the long run. Women's suffragists argued for the right to vote in the context of liberal democracy and modeled one of their earliest documents, the "Declaration of Sentiments," on the Declaration of Independence³² while simultaneously insisting on sexual difference as a key reason for giving women the vote. The mere adoption of the language of the Declaration of Independence (with the term "women" added strategically to align the oppression of American women with that of early colonists) reveals the influence of Enlightenment ideals on suffragists as they relied on the exposure of the hypocrisy of an ostensibly radically inclusive political document to elicit support. Like liberal democratic feminists Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, the authors of the "Declaration of Sentiments" argue for inclusion in the existing political structure (Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage* 70–73, vol. 1).³³ But even in this document, modeled

³² This tactic of borrowing the language of the Declaration of Independence is common throughout American protest history, aligning oppressed groups with the struggles of the earliest Americans and contrasting the country's ostensibly unwavering devotion to protecting all citizens' rights with one particular population's marginalization.

³³ The sentiments that follow the suffragists' declaration echo their investment in liberal democracy and include critiques of women's lack of legal rights, their lack of representation in government, inequality in

on a core liberal democratic text, hints of the contradiction between an insistence on women's ability to reason and their sexual difference are present. The document does not challenge, for example, men's simultaneous claim of their own "intellectual superiority" and women's "moral superiority," but instead argues that women should, as such, be "encourage[d] . . . to speak and teach . . . in all religious assemblies" (*History of Woman Suffrage* 72, vol. 1). More than thirty years later, suffrage supporter Frederick Douglass similarly argued that citizenship should be based not on "sex nor physical strength" but on "moral intelligence and the ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and the power to choose between them" (574) and that government be based on "intelligence" (575). He simultaneously argued, however, that enfranchising women would mean a less violent state due to sexual difference: "many reasons can be given to show that woman's influence would greatly tend to check and modify [male government's] barbarous and destructive tendency" (576). Replicating this contradiction without challenging it prevented suffragists from critiquing the problems of the private/public distinction. Suffrage scholar Ellen DuDois describes this inherent contradiction as it existed not just in Stanton's rhetoric, but in this early feminist movement at large:

The women's rights belief in the moral irrelevance of sexual spheres ignored the reality of women's domestic confinement, which made them different from and dependent on men, and gave credence to the doctrine of

marriage, taxation of property and labor without governmental recognition, lack of equal access to education, and women's subordination within religious institutions. Interestingly, while the "Declaration" notes the existence of "a different code of morals for men and women" (*History of Woman Suffrage* 71, vol. 1) critiquing it both because it allows women to behave irresponsibly in marriage (70) and also because women are subject to "exclu[sion] from society" for the same "moral delinquencies" that are "deemed of little account in man" (71) in the speech Stanton made twenty years later at the Women's Suffrage Convention, she touts women's moral superiority as a major reason why they should be given the vote.

spheres. Indeed, Garrisonian feminists ignored the question of women's sphere while simultaneously believing in its existence. A women's rights convention in Ohio in 1852 simultaneously resolved: "Since every human being has an individual sphere, and that is the largest he or she can fill, no one has the right to determine the proper sphere of another," and "In demanding for women equality of rights with their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons, we neither deny that distinctive character, nor wish them to avoid any duty, or to lay aside that feminine delicacy which legitimately belongs to them as mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters." (DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* 37)

This problematic contradictory language, based in part on inherent contradictions in liberal democratic literature itself, was only amplified by women's suffragists' failure to challenge them.

As Carole Pateman points out in *The Disorder of Women*, the decision to argue that women are morally superior and pacifist opened suffragists up to counter arguments from anti-suffragists. As Pateman explains,

both the most ardent anti-suffragists and vehement suffragists agreed that women were weaker, but more moral and virtuous, than men. The anti-suffragists argued that, therefore, enfranchisement would fatally weaken the state because women could not bear arms or use force; the suffragists

countered by claiming that women's superior morality and rectitude would transform the state and usher in a reign of peace. (127–128)

While some scholars, like Jean Bethke Elshtain, have seen this strategy by suffragists as an acceptance of “the assumptions of the doctrine of separate spheres” (Pateman 128), a charge that could certainly also be applied to female temperance activists and even some working women who relied on beliefs about their unique ontology as women, others, like Ellen DuBois, argue that suffragists challenged the assumption that they were only fit for the private sphere by vying for voting rights (DuBois, “The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement”). One might argue that the public nature of temperance activists' protests and working women's demand for rights in the public working world similarly challenged the public/private divide, but these groups' dramatic entry into the public sphere was destined to leave a problematic legacy, particularly as it was based on notions of women's ontology that were incompatible with political personhood. While suffragists intended their entry into the public sphere to be permanent, their tactics often effectively pigeonholed women into a circumscribed kind of citizenship that precluded them from full political personhood and required that they make claims as women, mothers, wives, or daughters, and not as full political subjects in their own right. Regardless of their possible intention to break the public-private boundary, the problematic decision suffragists made to argue for women's inclusion in politics on the basis of their peaceful nature allowed suffragists to be pushed aside and ignored when World War I began, with the possible exception of activists like the Silent Sentinels, who I discuss below. Embracing women's difference as a reason to give women the vote opened them to the

counter argument that it is precisely sexual difference that justifies women's inability to enjoy political personhood. Embracing women's categorical vulnerability opened them to the charge that they were unable to fulfill the role required by all full citizens—fighting on behalf of the state—and, more foundationally, that they were unable to participate in discourse about such questions. It also, perhaps obviously, but quite significantly, served to reify a dichotomous concept of gender.

Categorical Vulnerability and the Concretization of Gender

Female protestors' public performances during this time arguably betrayed their own ontological and ethical beliefs and embodied experiences, reinforced beliefs in working women's existence as less than women and black women's existence as inhuman and ungendered, and, in some cases, relied on a framework, liberal democratic theory, that contains an inherently problematic concept of ontology (a problem I address in more detail in Chapter 2). In addition, the logic of women's categorical vulnerability (and the accompanying beliefs of women's moral superiority and proclivity for peace as well as their rightful place in the domestic domain) precluded their entry into discussions of war and politics and let men off the hook in matters of care and peace.

While on the surface a positive assertion about female humanity, the insistence on women's particular morality and peacefulness (undergirded by a belief in women's categorical vulnerability) necessarily limited conceptions of womanhood as well as the concept of male humanity, which became the (sometimes unspoken) foil for female humanity. In this dichotomy, men were (and often still are) imagined as invulnerable, innately violent, and possessing a weaker propensity for morality and piety than women,

thereby removing them as central players in discussions about peace and removing expectations that men be skilled in care work. Stanton's 1869 Women's Suffrage Convention speech provides an exaggerated example of this rhetoric, but hers is not the only example of this dichotomy at work. As late as August of 1914, an article in the *Woman's Journal* appealed to suffragists internationally "to show war-crazed men that between contending armies there stand thousands of women and children who are innocent victims of men's unbridled ambitions; that under the heels of each advancing army are crushed the lives, the hopes, the happiness of countless women whose rights have been ignored" (qtd. in Buhle and Buhle 39). This rhetoric was complicated by 1917 when NAWSA decided to pursue the tactic of patriotically supporting the war, but this strategic step was taken in the hopes that such loyalty would pay off in the long run and that women's eventual enfranchisement would bring more peaceful politics (Buhle and Buhle 39–41). Although she was a pacifist, Carrie Chapman Catt encouraged women to volunteer to help with the war effort (Van Voris 139) because she was counting on the move to be a tactically useful step. NAWSA had built up influence through the proper channels and didn't want to risk losing it by openly opposing the war (140).³⁴ This approach underscores the reality that pinning one's case on women's particular ontological predisposition to peace politics due to their inherent heightened vulnerability contributes to their lack of confident challenges to or participation in discourse about war.

³⁴ Catt criticized organizations like the IWW for their radical tactics of opposing the war and trying to hinder the government's war work while defending the suffrage movement by calling it a "bourgeois movement" with "nothing radical about it" (qtd. in Buhle and Buhle 41).

The same dichotomous gender-based logic characterized the evolving temperance movement at this time as well. As Buhle and Buhle explain,

Far more than their antebellum predecessors, the modern moral reformers placed the blame for social chaos, poverty, exploitation, and unhappiness upon men. Temperance advocates lashed out at men as the drunkards ruining the home and as the brewers and distillers polluting society [. . .] As railroad speculation, urban sprawl, labor rioting, and the growth of ‘new’ immigration from southern and eastern Europe changed the face of America and challenged many existing values, some women reformers drew the conclusion that a society ruled by men was doomed. (Buhle and Buhle 27)

Participants in the Woman’s Crusade often viewed themselves as saving the manhood of their male family members and temperance efforts were often waged in response to very real cases of domestic violence, violence associated with what were seen as urges brought on by alcohol. Thus, crusaders were protecting their homes and saving men (who acted in violence toward their families when drunk) from the negative influence of other men (saloon owners). Because they were complicit with the belief they lacked physical strength and were crippled by their enhanced vulnerability, such an effort required women to shame men into reform.

In her book *Women and War*, Jean Bethke Elshtain explores the socially constructed dichotomy of “beautiful souls” (a term Elshtain borrows from Hegel) and “just warriors,” roles Elshtain describes as “rigid notions of what men and women are in

relation to war” (3) In this invented duality, “[m]en fight as avatars of a nation’s sanctioned violence” and “[w]omen work and weep and sometimes protest within the frame of discursive practices that turn one out, militant mother and pacifist protestor alike, as the collective ‘other’ to the male warrior” (3–4). Instead of reflecting real practices or identities, these categories “function instead to re-create and secure women’s location as noncombatants and men’s as warriors” (4). Although Elshtain is concerned with war here, her critique can be applied to most cases of organized political violence. We risk recapitulating the dichotomy she highlights when we view women’s role as pacifiers and mediators as natural and embodied. The role of the “beautiful soul” is prescribed in part by women’s perceived vulnerability and embodiment of peacefulness and morality and, therefore, their inability to use violence in a modern state that requires it. These dichotomous roles, therefore, preclude full political personhood for women.

In addition to reifying rigidly gendered concepts of peace and the business of war and, with it, political personhood, claims to women’s particular ontology (including their categorical vulnerability) also concretize gender categories altogether. In other words, these claims help to define womanhood and manhood as inflexible and knowable categories despite an increasing understanding of the fluidity and multiplicity of gender. The claims not only offer rigidly defined traits for those identifying as men and women; they also help prevent us from imagining alternative gender categories, precluding the very real desire of so many of us to make ourselves meaningful outside of bounded concepts of gender identity. In other words, they require the denial of our ambiguous position.

Categorical Vulnerability, Human Vulnerability: The Case of the Silent Sentinels

Importantly, refusing women's categorical vulnerability in favor of a concept of universal *invulnerability* has the same effect of denying ambiguity, as does denying the importance of our embodiment altogether. Therefore, we must be careful not to critique the approach of so many female activists during this time by suggesting they should have relied more heavily on arguments highlighting women's comparable capacity for reason as men's or their invulnerability. We must also be careful, however, not to swing the pendulum too far the other way to suggest that suffragists were wrong to fight for women's right to vote or legal rights altogether since voting rights, as all other rights in the U.S., are rooted in a liberal democratic concept of the totally autonomous self, a political fiction. Rather than opting out of the fight for rights based on the flawed concept of ontology implied by liberal democratic discourse or embracing our meaning making impulse over our embodiment (reason over materiality), embracing fundamental human vulnerability rather than women's categorical enhanced vulnerability while simultaneously fighting for rights would have been a more ethical path. While it is, of course, much easier to critique a movement from some distance and without having to do the messy work of actually putting one's suggestions into action, this claim is not simply the product of hindsight after almost a century of history. The work of the Silent Sentinels is a case in point as these activists flirted with the very notion of demonstrating human vulnerability while also challenging women's categorical vulnerability.

Female laborer activists, while sometimes taking advantage of the reactions of horror at the violence waged against them, also knew that their bodies might be read as

less vulnerable than other women's bodies and that they might be victims of violence when their wealthy counterparts were not, making for an unpredictable engagement with protest but also allowing for the exposure of cracks in the culture of true womanhood as well as women's categorical vulnerability. The Silent Sentinels, a contingent of the National Woman's Party, a radical suffrage organization, also represent a potentially transgressive model, despite some problems in their ontological claims. Beginning their actions somewhat benignly and naively, these women ultimately almost invited imprisonment, declaring their political rights on banners, banners they replaced repeatedly after being increasingly physically punished for them. Daring onlookers and law enforcement officials to challenge them, these protestors engaged in increasingly extreme tactics, ultimately staging hunger strikes and enduring violent forced feedings. There is some evidence these protestors exploited images of (white, upper class) women being subjected to harsh prison conditions and forced feedings to gain public sympathy and support for their cause and these women remained fairly narrow-minded about race and class and drew problematic connections between women's participation in politics and political peace. However, they also often demanded their political rights outside of the context of their roles as mothers, wives, and sisters and their identity as *women*, arguably viewing political rights as *human* rights and increasingly inviting others to challenge their supposed categorical vulnerability, revealing the cult of women's vulnerability as a myth. These women did not invert the logic of vulnerability by insisting that women are, like men, invulnerable and naturally violent, however. Instead, by engaging in hunger strikes and calling attention to their treatment in jail, they challenged

the notion of the *categorical* vulnerability of women while preserving the notion of fundamental human vulnerability. Of course, these women did not frame their actions in these terms. But their tactics had the effect of, at the very least, revealing cracks in the myth of women's categorical vulnerability, making their movement one worth exploring.

The Sentinels, led by Alice Paul and others from the National Woman's Party (NWP), began their demonstrations on January 10, 1917. Their trademark tactic was their constant presence at the gates of the White House silently holding banners meant for the president and onlookers alike. The previous October, a group of women from the Woman's Party staged an action similar to the picketing they employed as Silent Sentinels. They were met with mob violence, an indication that, even as white women of means, when taking such actions, they were no longer protected by the myth of women's categorical vulnerability. On the 20th of that month, in 1916, Woodrow Wilson arrived at the Congress Hotel to find 100 members of the NWP "lined up on Michigan Avenue" holding banners that read "PRESIDENT WILSON! WHY DO YOU SEEK VOTES FROM WOMEN WHEN YOU OPPOSE VOTES FOR WOMEN!", "PRESIDENT WILSON! HOW LONG MUST WOMEN WAIT?", and "WHY DID PRESIDENT WILSON OPPOSE WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN CONGRESS, WHERE HE HAD GREAT POWER, AND VOTE FOR IT IN NEW JERSEY, WHERE HE KNEW IT WOULD FAIL!" (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 140). The *Chicago Tribune* reported that the demonstrating women representing the NWP with banners "was bowled over, trampled, tumultuously ripped to shreds . . . by a mob" ("Banners Torn; Hughes Women Lose Battle: Anti-Wilson Demonstration at the

Auditorium Brings Riotous Clash”). When the rioting mob reportedly “surge[d] outward, the thin line of women sashed in the colors of the party crumpled up like a rank of paper dolls.” Using umbrellas and canes, members of the mob ripped the banners and broke the poles holding them, “knocked down and trampled” the women, and hit the women on their knuckles until they released their grip on the signs, but this did not deter the women from staging additional protests. In demanding voting rights for women and so openly addressing Wilson as a political peer, these protestors declared themselves political persons, a role reserved for men. Their perceived false declaration of manhood was met with violence usually reserved for men, and, while Alice Paul attempted to point to men as the main assailants and call them out for their lack of “chivalry” (“Banners Torn; Hughes Women Lose Battle: Anti-Wilson Demonstration at the Auditorium Brings Riotous Clash” 4), the picketers problematized the idea that women are categorically vulnerable by enduring the violence aimed at them and revealing the exclusivity of political personhood by making obvious the belief that to assert political power is to act as a man.

Some of the women who ultimately participated in the White House pickets that began about three months after this incident took part in a meeting with President Wilson just before they initiated their demonstrations and, as Doris Stevens explains, they felt strengthened and emboldened by the experience rather than vulnerable and weak. “It is a wonderful experience to feel strength take possession of your being in a context of ideas,” Stevens explains. She argues, “You are more than invincible. Your mind leaps ahead to the infinite liberty of which yours is only a small part. You feel his strength in

authority, his weakness in vision. He does not follow [. . .] We, on the other hand, feel so superior to him. Our strength to demand is so much greater than his power to withhold.” (55). Here, Stevens’ language comes close to suggesting that the sentinels felt invulnerable rather than simply just as vulnerable as the President. But while the description suffers from hyperbole, it certainly demonstrates a sense of empowerment and strength as opposed to a recognition of women’s fear due to their categorical vulnerability.

World War I created a contentious backdrop for the suffragists’ protests for a number of reasons. There was an ever increasing sentiment among Americans that the suffragists should save their appeals for the vote for peacetime, when the nation could attend to such non-essential issues. The Silent Sentinels persevered, however, finding the war an ideal context for making their claims and seeing the President’s actions and rhetoric during the conflict as the perfect example of hypocrisy given American women’s continued disenfranchisement. As Russian and English women both gained enfranchisement during the war, the suffragists made this the topic of their signs, arguing preemptively that if the U.S. became involved in the war, the government couldn’t argue that it was too busy with the war effort to contend with women’s suffrage (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 160). The Sentinels took this approach as many suffragists chose to support the war in the hopes that their loyalty might be rewarded when it ended. When the U.S. finally joined the war effort, the Sentinels saw wartime as a perfect moment to make their claims rather than a time to step back. Importantly, they refused to make their roles as mothers, sisters, and wives of

soldiers the centerpiece of their campaign against Wilson, insisting instead on women's rights as human rights. On April 2, 1917, when Wilson delivered a message to Congress expressing the need to go to war, in which he made an eloquent argument in favor of securing the rights of oppressed people to have a voice in their governments, the Sentinels seized on its hypocrisy (given Wilson's opposition to women's suffrage in the U.S.) and made a sign to hold up later that month when British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour visited the White House that simply repeated Wilson's own comments about the U.S. entry into the war: "WE SHALL FIGHT FOR THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE ALWAYS HELD NEAREST OUR HEARTS—FOR DEMOCRACY, FOR THE RIGHT OF THOSE WHO SUBMIT TO AUTHORITY TO HAVE A VOICE IN THEIR OWN GOVERNMENTS. —*President Wilson's War Message, 2 April 1917*" (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 160–161). Like the earliest women's suffragists, the Sentinels rooted their claims in the discourse of liberal democracy. But they simultaneously illustrated the contradiction between claims of equality and women's continued political subordination and they did so during WWI, insisting on the need for continued political claims even during wartime and women's right to participate in discourse about the war as full political subjects, not simply those who might exercise a particular moral force on the nation.

The Sentinels were attacked again when they held a banner with a long message for visiting Russian diplomats on June 20, 1917 explaining that Wilson was "DECEIVING RUSSIA" since "AMERICA IS NOT A DEMOCRACY" because women cannot vote and appealing to them to "TELL OUR GOVERNMENT THAT IT MUST

LIBERATE THE PEOPLE BEFORE IT CAN CLAIM FREE RUSSIA AS AN ALLY”

(Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 171-172).

Predictably, they were accused of being traitors who were aiding Germany and onlookers demanded that the police arrest them. “Why don't you take that banner to Berlin?” one female observer reportedly charged, adding, “You are helping Germany” (“Crowd Destroys Suffrage Banner at White House” 1). Two men punched into the banner and ripped it off of the poles and the police collected the pieces as evidence (2). Anna Howard Shaw of NAWSA disavowed the actions, calling them “injurious to the suffrage cause.” The Secretary of State's wife “said the exhibition of such banners was more reprehensible than anything she ever dreamed the advocates of suffrage would be guilty of” and many others, including some suffrage supporters, condemned the tactics (2). The press criticized the suffragists and deemed mob action justified. These women had crossed the line into disloyalty of a President in war time (Walton 172-173). They were attacked again when, undeterred, the protestors brought a new sign with the same message to the White House the next day.³⁵ The following day, after picketing again despite police warnings, two picketers were arrested but eventually released (177).

President Wilson and the courts, both aware of the cult of women's categorical

³⁵ Young boys tore it down and anywhere from 1,000 to 10,000 onlookers gathered at lunchtime expecting another showdown. Four suffrage picketers crossed Lafayette Square and stood two at each gate with new banners. A woman looking on asked some men to follow her so she could spit on the banners. She spat, fought with one of the picketers, ripped off her tri-color, threw it on the ground, and stomped on it. The second suffragist of the pair climbed up and tried to toss her banner over the gate into the White House lawn, but the woman grabbed her and wrestled her to the sidewalk. The suffragist did not resist and the attacker ripped up the banner and threw it into the crowd. She called the suffragists “a bunch of traitors” and she and the crowd seized the second banner and destroyed it as well (Walton 175-176). Later, when two of the suffragists left their headquarters with another banner, the police seized it, but no arrests were made (176).

vulnerability, although, importantly, not naming it or conceiving of it as such, were hesitant to wage any major challenge to these women. While it might be easy to justify imprisoning male protestors, despite the ways in which these women's categorical vulnerability had been challenged already by onlookers, if they were to be detained or imprisoned, these women might still become martyrs, a fact the picketers were likely depending on.

Soon, however, the Silent Sentinels pushed the envelope far enough to warrant what the courts viewed as the necessity for jail time. At first, the picketers were arrested but not sent on to jail; then, they only served short sentences (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 178-181). Finally, the women were sentenced to sixty days in the Occoquan Workhouse (182). They accepted the sentences rather than pay a fine (184), which few expected. As Doris Stevens explains,

It was clear that neither [the judge] nor his conferees had imagined women would accept with equanimity so drastic a sentence [. . .] Here were 'ladies'—that was perfectly clear—'ladies' of unusual distinction. Surely they would not face the humiliation of a workhouse sentence which involved not only imprisonment but penal servitude! The Administration was wrong again." (106)

In jail, the women endured hardships that could be considered harsh insofar as they defied their expectations as wealthy white women: public showers and prison clothes as well as cots next to black women (which some saw as offensive) (Walton 184-185). Wilson pardoned the suffragists after three days (186) perhaps in part due to

“considerable public disapproval” of their decision to imprison the women (Stevens 122). But when they returned to the streets, the women endured more severe violence first from crowds of onlookers and then back in jail.

On August 14, 1917 thousands of onlookers gathered at Cameron House (the National Woman’s Party headquarters), a sailor grabbed the picketers’ banner,³⁶ a picketer who unfurled another was attacked, and two more identical signs were grabbed. Three sailors dragged Lucy Burns to the curb, but undeterred, she ran inside and up to the second floor where she and others unfurled new banners. Three sailors climbed a ladder and ripped them down as well as the American flag. Dramatically, a bullet from a .38 revolver struck a second-floor window, coming very close to one member’s head, and lodged in the ceiling. Perseverant, suffragists hung yet another banner, eggs and tomatoes were thrown at them, and the police finally stepped in to disperse the crowd, but even more banners were destroyed when the women left their headquarters with them (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 188). Picketers were met with even more violence when, the next day, they processed to the White House with banners and were met by a mob who took 50 banners and threw the women to the ground. Alice Paul was knocked down three times and dragged across the sidewalk by a sailor who grabbed at her suffrage sash. A male journalist speaking with a picketer was pelted with newspapers and pushed and shoved. Police eventually intervened, but their aim was to take and destroy the women’s banners—148 of them in all (188-189). In a move that was

³⁶ The banner had been revealed for the first time on August 10, and its contents caused a stir in many of the picketers’ demonstrations: “KAISER WILSON: HAVE YOU FORGOTTEN HOW YOU SYMPATHIZED WITH THE POOR GERMANS BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT SELF-GOVERNED? TWENTY MILLION AMERICAN WOMEN ARE NOT SELF-GOVERNED—TAKE THE BEAM OUT OF YOUR OWN EYE” (Walton 187).

viewed by the women as nonviolent but could be easily read as a dare for the police and other onlookers to continue to challenge the women's vulnerability, the picketers made a new banner that declared "THE GOVERNMENT ORDERS OUR BANNERS DESTROYED BECAUSE THEY TELL THE TRUTH" (189). If the women's aim was to provoke the government to take stronger action, it worked. Six picketers were arrested and sentenced to thirty days in the Occoquan Workhouse. This time, the women would not be pardoned (189).

In the workhouse, the women endured harsher conditions, including repulsive food, some of which contained worms, an open pail with water for prisoners, a weekly bath with a single bar of soap, and labor (painting). The suffragists' mail was destroyed, sheets were not changed between prisoners, and the blankets were washed once a year (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 189-190). Appeals about the picketers' treatment were made by Dudley Field Malone, who appealed to both the President and the District Board of Charities to no avail (190-192). Jeannette Rankin, the only female member of Congress, called for a Congressional investigation of the workhouse (Stevens 147). Letters were written on behalf of the suffragists, including one from Gilson Gardner addressed to Raymond Pullman, Chief of Police in D.C. Gardner remained preoccupied with the role of the police in protecting the female protestors rather than pursuing them. "The truth is, Pullman," argued Gardner, "you were right when you gave these women protection. That is what the police are for" (qtd. in Stevens 134). He argued that the police themselves were uncomfortable with being instructed to allow the women to be harmed. "They did not like the dirty business of permitting a lot of sailors

and street ruffraff to rough the girls,” he argued, “All that went against the grain, but when you let them protect the pickets, as you did March third, when a thousand women marched around and around the White House, the officers were as contented as they were efficient” (qtd. in Stevens 135). Senator J. Hamilton Lewis, who visited the suffragists at the workhouse, was shocked by the treatment given these vulnerable women, “shocked at the appearance of the prisoners, shocked at the tale they told, shocked that ‘ladies’ should be subjected to such indignities.” “He is a gallant gentleman,” surmised suffragist Stevens, “who would be expected to be uncomfortable when he actually saw ladies suffer” (142).³⁷

In the meantime, Alice Paul, not among the women in the workhouse, was arrested on October 6, 1917 holding the banner “THE TIME HAS COME TO CONQUER OR SUBMIT; FOR US THERE CAN BE BUT ONE CHOICE—WE HAVE MADE IT” (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 192). And while her sentence was initially suspended, she was arrested again and sentenced to seven months in the district jail (192). Paul’s declaration that she—and her fellow picketers—were capable of and determined to “conquer” their political opposition was an invitation to additional harsh punishment. The treatment Paul received led to her decision to go on a hunger strike. The suffragists appeared to be in a dance with the public and state authorities. Demanding political rights, they were treated as men, and when such treatment didn’t deter the suffragists, they received even harsher treatment, treatment that

³⁷ Stevens also suggested that “It was more than gallantry in this instance, however, for he spoke in frank condemnation of the whole ‘shame and outrage’ of the thing (142).

relied on a theory of women's ontological categorical vulnerability while simultaneously running the risk of publicly disproving it should the women endure the abuse.

For five months, beginning in June of 1917, Judge Mullooney jailed many suffragists from the National Woman's Party, but it didn't deter them. The suffragists aimed to crowd the jails (in much the same way civil rights activists did in later decades) and they seemed close to their goal when, on November 10, 1917, forty-one women picketed and were arrested, but they were ultimately let go after a six hour trial (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 193-195). Meanwhile, Alice Paul was transferred to the district jail's psychiatric ward and essentially boarded in (193-195). While Mullooney was hesitant to continue to send the female picketers to jail, the activists returned to the pickets the same day they were released where they met another mob that ripped down the banners and they were arrested (196). The picketers and state authorities continued their dance in which the picketers enjoyed a modified, but still present, hesitance to subject them to the harsh punishment poorer women, women of color, and men would have received, but the women, rather than remaining within the prescribed boundaries of true womanhood, almost invited imprisonment. In prison, they had sung a song that underscored their contention that they were not categorically vulnerable persons:

We'll not get out on bail,

Go to jail, go to jail—

We'll not get out on bail,

We prefer to go to jail,

We prefer to go to jail—we're not frail. (Stevens 152)

On November 14, Judge Mallowney imposed sentences on picketers to be served in the district jail where Alice Paul and Rose Winslow were already housed (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 196). However, the sentenced women were brought to the Occoquan workhouse rather than the district jail and, after demanding to be treated as political prisoners and being refused, during their first night, known famously as the "Night of Terror," they were forcibly moved and dragged to the men's prison, where the conditions were repulsive. They received no food or water for the night and couldn't flush the waste-filled toilets; the women were hurt and limp and one was vomiting. When a guard handcuffed Lucy Burns's hands to the bars of the cell above her head, Julia Emory raised her hands in sympathy and held the position for hours until a guard released Lucy's arms. In the morning, Paula Jakobi refused to work and wear prison clothing and was taken to the men's hospital and put in solitary confinement (196-200). The women reacted with hunger strikes, which were met with violent forced feedings. In the D.C. district jail, Alice Paul and other suffragists suffered similarly bad conditions. The cells had no air ventilation and Paul and other suffragists broke windows to allow fresh air in, broke electric lights, and ripped up the bed clothing. Bedbugs, roaches, and rats occupied the jail (205).

As the picketers remained persistent despite multiple threats of jail sentences and several actual sentences, the prison authorities reacted by increasingly treating them like men, sending them to the men's prison and one to the men's hospital, actions presumably designed to demonstrate to the women the harsh realities of claiming a place in the public

political sphere but also ironically confirming that political personhood is reserved for men. Paul's decision to go on a hunger strike and the decision by her many of her counterparts to do so demonstrated the women's physical endurance and reflected the activists' desire to define themselves as political actors (as did their request to be treated as political prisoners). While betraying the cult of women's categorical vulnerability, this decision simultaneously reminded state authorities and the public of humans' fundamental vulnerability, as the purpose of any hunger strike is to elicit action from those who do not wish to be ultimately responsible for the death of the political actors. It was, importantly, not a nonviolent act despite the devotion of the picketers to a nonviolent protest ethic. These women were committing very real violence against their own bodies. The state's forced feedings were similarly physically violent, designed to walk a fine line between punishment and resuscitation.

Public reactions to the sentences and the hunger strikes were mixed. While some support and sympathy for the suffragists grew, other press outlets reacted negatively and some suffragists, including Anna Shaw from the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), were unsympathetic; Shaw complained that the women refused food and then complained about their conditions and she refused to try to help them (Walton 203-204). Some suffragists were refused speaking engagements (204). NAWSA largely decried the Silent Sentinels' tactics. Carrie Chapman Catt and other leaders saw the picketers as "unwise and unprofitable to the cause" (qtd. in Van Voris 145). The organization was happy to rely on the cult of women's categorical vulnerability and the tactic of cultivating amiable relationships with politicians rather than challenging them.

The picketing women's relative strength or weakness—and, by extension, their categorical vulnerability—ultimately became a topic of discussion during a trial on November 23, 1917 in which the women petitioned to be moved from the Occoquan workhouse to the district jail, a trial that exemplifies the way in which these women's actions challenged popular myths about women's weakness and vulnerability and confirmed the presence of human vulnerability but also demonstrates the difficulty that both picketers and court authorities had in negotiating the materiality and meaning of these women's embodied experiences. When the warden explained that picketers Lucy Burns and Dora Lewis were not present at the trial because they were not well enough to appear in court, the women's attorney, Malone, asked about the process these women endured during forced feedings. The warden then admitted that it took four men to hold down Burns to feed her, and Malone argued that she must therefore be strong enough to appear in court, challenging the argument that these women, like all women and especially upper class women, were extremely vulnerable. In the same trial, however, Malone pointed to the women's harsh treatment, particularly the treatment of one of the elder women in the group. Three days after the trial, Judge Mallowney asked the warden whether any of the prisoners were so fragile that further imprisonment might be dangerous to their health, to which he admitted in his reply the following day that all of them were in such a state (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 206–207).

Within the space of a few days, therefore, the warden simultaneously argued that it was quite difficult to manage the forced feedings of the female prisoners, suggesting

that the physical fight these women put up required too much power to combat it, and admitted to their fragility. In the context of this odd negotiation, steeped in contradictory narratives of the women's fragility and strength, the women were released (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 207). These women were perhaps not *categorically* more vulnerable than men as the public and the state imagined. But they were, like all humans, ultimately vulnerable, and continuing to exploit that vulnerability was untenable. In what might be viewed as an acknowledgement of the women's vulnerability but a refusal to rely on a cult of women's categorical enhanced vulnerability, Paul stated publically that she hoped the Sentinels wouldn't need to stage any more demonstrations, but argued that "what we do depends entirely on what the Administration does" (207). Importantly, this court case and the resulting rhetoric illustrate how both the picketers and the state relied on contradictory narratives of fragility and strength. But, importantly, this collection of contradictions also served to expose the shaky theoretical ground on which the myth of women's categorical vulnerability relied.

Paul likely knew that the Administration's continued inaction would compel the women to stage even more pickets. They found themselves back in court on August 15, 1918, bandaged and wounded from additional tussles with the police (which the *Times* explained were necessary since the women resisted so vigorously). This time, the women took their claims a step further, refusing even to recognize the court. One suffragist, Hazel Hunkins, declared, "Women cannot be law breakers until they're law makers" and refused the arresting police captain's gesture of offering his hand to help her from her

seat during a break, calling him a “willful, premeditated, and deliberate liar.” Stunned by this further refusal of the protection women enjoyed when complying with myth of female vulnerability, the police captain resorted to the only recourse he could think of and threatened to arrest her for her behavior (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 221). Twenty-four of the women were sentenced to jail for ten to fifteen days in a new district workhouse (221) where they refused food. Perhaps due to President Wilson’s changing views and the changing views of the public and perhaps due to a desire to prevent the women from becoming martyrs, on August 20, under Wilson’s orders, the women were released and received a permit to demonstrate in Lafayette Square whenever they wanted to (222).

The Silent Sentinels’ final protest techniques involving fire offer additional telling challenges to the myth of women’s vulnerability. Using a torch, the women burned a copy of what they saw as Wilson’s empty promise to the National American Woman Suffrage Association to try to urge the passage of the suffrage amendment with an early vote (a promise they rightly felt had come way too late to make a difference) (Walton 223). In December of 1918, 300 women took turns tossing Wilson’s words about democracy into a cauldron to torch them (Walton 230). Suffragist Doris Stevens celebrated the fact that, in a similar event held on New Year’s Day in January of 1919, these words were burned to “ignominious brown ashes” (305). In February of 1919, after more demonstrations, watchfires, and jail sentences, 100 women marched with flags, tri-colors, banners, an urn, and wood and dropped what was later identified as an “effigy” of Wilson into the flames. The *New York Times* described the effigy as a “huge doll stuffed

with straw,” but the suffragists claimed that it was really “a little paper cartoon from the *Suffragist*” (Walton 233). Despite the picketers’ insistence that the “effigy” was just a small “paper cartoon,” the symbolism of their action was significant and, at most, an act of symbolic political violence, an action that implied the women were claiming the right to and proficiency of (at least rhetorical) state violence. In her 1920 account, Stevens likens the act to that of revolutionaries in the colonial United States who burned a portrait of King George. She quotes the chairman responsible for ordering the burning as declaring, “Compelled by strong necessity thus we destroy even the shadow of that king who refused to reign over a free people” (314, n. 1) As a result of the suffragists’ protest actions, thirty nine women were arrested and twenty five went to jail (Walton 232-233). After the passage of the suffrage amendment failed again (by one vote) (233), the picketers planned to burn Wilson’s words but were stopped by police, who beat them and destroyed their banners, aided by a mob, and eventually arrested them (234). When the amendment eventually passed and was ratified, a total of “2,000 women had picketed, 500 had been arrested, and 168 served jail time” (234).

Descriptions of the Sentinels immediately after the amendment passed are telling. Some newspaper reports attributed the passage of the amendment to the pickets (Walton 211). Alice Paul was showered with letters and public displays of support. Walter Clark, chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court, declared to her, “There were politicians, and a large degree of public sentiment, which could be won only by the methods you adopted” (qtd. in Walton 235). But these public declarations of support were colored by narratives of martyrdom and women’s vulnerability in seeming efforts to

couch the Sentinels' victory in these old (and persistent) myths. Elizabeth Rogers congratulated Paul, proclaiming, "Your unconquerable soul in that frail little body has done it all" (qtd. in Walton 235). Likewise, Howard G. Brownson from Des Moines declared, "Somehow you have grasped, as few have done in this age, the power of suffering, of non-resistance, of meekness" (qtd. in Walton 235-236).

Those reflecting on the suffragists' actions after the fact problematically and inaccurately attempted to rewrite the narrative of the movement as one complicit with the myth of women's vulnerability and, importantly, as nonviolent protest. Admittedly, however, the movement was not without its real problems. Harriot Stanton Blatch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter who shared her classist and racist ideas, was one of the founders of this movement. Indeed, most suffragists during this time shared the same racist and classist leanings. Neither major contingent of the suffrage movement at this time made a significant effort to appeal to potential supporters outside of the upper and middle classes (Buhle and Buhle 20). It is worth asking whether working class women, women of color, or female immigrants would have enjoyed the same results as these white, wealthy activists. The contrast between the privilege enjoyed by upper class white women and lower class working women during this time is well illustrated by those cases when organizations of female socialites intervened on behalf of working women. During the New York shirtwaist makers' strike in 1909, for example, when socialite women from the upper classes volunteered to act as witnesses of police brutality on striking women, Mary Dreier, president of the New York Women's Trade Union League and member of the upper class, was taunted while acting as a witness. After requesting police protection

and being denied, she was arrested. She was later quickly released when her identity was revealed and the judge even apologized in court for mistaking her for a working woman (Tax 215–216). This transgression led to increased media attention and sympathy for the strike and serves as an important reminder that the Silent Sentinels did not simply *happen* to be wealthy white women, but likely enjoyed the success they did because of this status. In addition, it is worth considering whether the women’s hunger strikes enjoyed a cachet that might not have been present if staged by those who had actually experienced real hunger, hunger that is often rendered invisible by an inability to view its everyday victims as full persons.

Also important is the fact that, despite the ways in which their tactics problematized the myth of women’s categorical vulnerability, Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and other leaders in the NWP advocated different tactics than those used by the NAWSA, but shared most of the organization’s beliefs, including their unilateral focus on suffrage, to the exclusion of a broader ethic (Buhle and Buhle 37–38). According to historians Mari Jo and Paul Buhle, “they set out to win, not to bring the public a deep education, and they envisioned as their goal a single act, not a transformation of laws, morals, and manners” (38). Thus, with some exceptions, they saw suffrage as their aim, not necessarily a different worldview. One of the exceptional beliefs that leaders of the NWP *did* associate with their fight for suffrage was the belief that women’s involvement in politics should necessarily lead to more pacifist politics, a notion I’ve critiqued in depth above. Despite her refusal to save her fight for suffrage until after the war, Alice Paul, along with Hazel Hunkins, notably appealed to the first (and, at the time, only) female

Congressperson, Jeannette Rankin, to publically oppose the war when U.S. participation was being contemplated. “[W]omen [are] the peace-loving half of the world,” Paul later recalled telling Rankin, “and . . . by giving power to women, we would diminish the possibilities of war” (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 162–163). Paul sought to prove her contention that women’s participation in the political process would lead to peace politics.³⁸ The Sentinels emphasized their commitment to peace and nonviolent tactics in their actions.³⁹

Despite these very important problems, the Silent Sentinels, arguably those ultimately responsible for achieving the passage of the 19th Amendment, did challenge the logic of women’s categorical vulnerability. While they didn’t completely abandon earlier arguments about women’s morality and propensity for peace, they betrayed the argument that women’s bodies are categorically vulnerable bodies. These women did not flip the traditional narrative and argue that women (like men) are violent and

³⁸ Although most accounts (including Stevens’ own) emphasize the suffragists’ commitment to pacifism, Doris Stevens suggests in her account of the Sentinels’ actions that there was some disagreement among the picketers about the utility of war. “We were united on no other subject [but suffrage],” she explains. “Some would offer passive resistance to the war; others would become devoted followers of a vigorous military policy. Between these, every shade of opinion was represented” (82).

³⁹ Stevens exclaims, for example,

We could not and would not fight with men’s weapons. Compare the methods women adopted to those men use in the pursuit of democracy,—bayonets, machine guns, poison gas, deadly grenades, liquid fire, bombs, armored tanks, pistols, barbed wire entanglements, submarines, mines—every known scientific device with which to annihilate the enemy!

What did we do?

We continued to fight with our simple, peaceful, almost quaint device—a banner. A little more fiery, perhaps; pertinent to the latest political controversy, but still only a banner inscribed with militant truth! (83).

She similarly cites a song the Sentinels sang in jail (“Shout the Revolution of Women”) that contains the following lyrics:

Men’s revolution born in blood,
But ours conceived in peace,
We hold a banner for a sword,
Till all oppression cease. (154)

invulnerable, however; they challenged categorical vulnerability while allowing for the preservation of a notion of fundamental human vulnerability. The female body, these women seemed to argue, is political irrespective of its connection to men or the private sphere. It is certainly vulnerable, but not especially so. Importantly, subjecting oneself to violence through hunger strikes and enduring forced feedings are not inherently ethical actions. But in this case, these actions served to define as ludicrous suggestions that women are especially vulnerable and to reveal the connections often made between sexual difference—namely, women’s vulnerability and men’s supposed invulnerability—and political personhood. At the very least, the Sentinels can be credited with making obvious through their actions the contradictions and impossibilities of these ideas.

Also, rather than arguing for temporary public presence in the name of achieving specific goals, the Silent Sentinels ultimately aimed for a permanent public presence. After winning the vote for women, they immediately turned their attention to the Equal Rights Amendment. Unlike in the case of the Woman’s Crusaders and Carry Nation, the symbolic and real violence enacted by the Silent Sentinels in the form of hunger strikes, destruction of jail property, and the symbolic burning of Wilson’s speeches and, importantly, his likeness, was not enacted in the name of protecting the home, but in the name of the activists’ political personhood. Their continued insistence on such personhood and rejection of the cult of true womanhood led to the justification of violence against these women. Onlookers, judges, and wardens seemed to argue in their actions that because these women were not acting like women, but men, they could be treated accordingly. This argument can be seen most obviously in the decision during the

“Night of Terror” to place the women in the men’s prison and, the next morning, to take one of them to the men’s hospital, symbolically deeming the activists men and demonstrating the harsh physical conditions and violence men must endure by virtue of their invulnerability and their political personhood, ironically calling attention to the fact that these women were fighting for, but still denied, precisely such personhood and simultaneously exposing the notion of women’s categorical vulnerability as a myth. While not a perfect model, the case of the Silent Sentinels points to the importance of considering embodiment alongside reason and meaning making, not embracing liberal democratic theory for its supposed focus on reason and disavowing the body nor insisting on women’s particular embodied ontological position, namely, their categorical vulnerability. Embodiment is not a simple concept, however, particularly given the ubiquitous presence of technology.

Interestingly, most of the ontological arguments I’ve explored here, including those concerned with liberal democratic rights, are rooted in discourses about the body (or the disavowal of the body), its nature, and its proper domain. But protestors during this time and in future decades employed not only their bodies, but other tools, including technologies of violence and rhetoric about such technologies, like tools of industry, hatchets, guns, and even dynamite and bombs. Such tools and talk about using them were employed mainly by men, but their presence and availability could be seen as fundamentally complicating questions of women’s embodiment, their weakness and strength, and their relative vulnerability. The presence of such technologies arguably offers a new way to problematize questions of women’s categorical vulnerability. It also

allows an avenue for exploring questions about human ambiguity in a protest context. Like social institutions, technology has been seen as one avenue to modifying the terms of an ethics of embodiment. In Chapter 2, I analyze the use and rhetoric about technologies of violence and their impact on protestors' ontological claims, particularly claims to political personhood. Drawing from some of the same movements I explore in this chapter, I also look to the infamous explosion of protest in the 1960s and 70s in the U.S., including those actions that considered, materially or rhetorically, the ethics of the use of technologies of violence to make political claims.

CHAPTER TWO: THE HATCHET, THE BOMB, AND THE GUN: PROTEST, TECHNOLOGIES OF VIOLENCE, AND HUMAN AMBIGUITY

In her landmark essay “A Cyborg Manifesto,” first published in 1985, Donna Haraway challenged the trend in feminist theory toward essentializing narratives of a female identity rooted in nature. Using the cyborg as both a metaphor and a material descriptor of postmodern ontology, Haraway reminds us of the ways in which our lives and our bodies are not only influenced by but inextricably tied to technology. Haraway’s historical focus is on the late-twentieth century, a postmodern world typified by what she calls the “informatics of domination” (161) but she also suggests that the phenomenon she describes, her cyborg model, made more visible by the recent blurring of divisions like public/private boundaries, late capitalism, and the growing presence of technology in our lives, has been present in many ways for a long time. Haraway’s cyborg is not a cartoonish half-human half-machine, but an understanding of humanity as inextricably tied to technology and the non-natural world. Viewing technologies of violence as among the tools available to humankind whose presence and availability might impact our very ontology, Haraway’s model appears to have the potential to throw into question assumptions of female weakness rooted in foundational liberal democratic theory and problematize ontological claims to women’s predisposition to peace politics rooted in assumptions of the peaceful nature of women’s bodies and their categorical vulnerability.

This chapter takes this notion, the idea that the availability of technologies of violence and their integration into our daily lives might shift the conversation about weakness, strength, and, importantly, human ambiguity and vulnerability, as its starting point. However, early in my analysis, I argue that while the question of technology complicates the conversation and our conception of (women's) ontology, identifying the presence or absence of technologies of violence in public protest cannot be used as a simple rubric for understanding protests or their ethics. Exploring the use or rejection of such technologies does open up some important questions, however. One of the most significant complicating factors in an exploration of technologies of violence and their impact on human ontology and, by extension, the ethics of protest, is the common connection made between political personhood and the ability to wield violence, a connection inherent to liberal democratic paradigms as well as other models of the modern state and, subsequently, a connection made in the U.S. context. The demonstration of one's ability to use violence as a political subject, to wield state power, in other words, is often associated with the use of technologies of warfare, including guns, bombs, and other implements, and is often believed to be lacking in women, even while employing such technologies does not necessarily require innate physical strength. This belief seems bolstered by the historical rarity of female activists' use of violent technologies. After exploring the use and rejection of technologies of violence by female protestors in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to explore the associations at play in such actions, I turn to the 1960s and 1970s, and the activities of the Black Panther Party in particular as a rare case study of a U.S. organization with female members who

employed violent rhetoric and technologies to make political claims. I explore its members' use of technologies of violence to make claims to political agency, highlighting both what was ethically productive and unethical about their approach. I conclude, ultimately, that the Panthers and similar groups should not be admonished for their use of technologies of violence per se. Panther members understood the connection between political personhood and violence in the modern state, successfully brought to light oppressive power relations related to the effort to disarm—and therefore render politically impotent—black people in the U.S., and complicated prevailing problematic notions of female ontology. More foundationally, the organization's actions should not be deemed unethical due exclusively to their use of technologies of violence since employing such technologies is neither inherently ethical nor unethical. However, the organization—and other similar groups—*can* be critiqued for their insistence on the *inextricable* connection between political action and violence. This insistence amounts to a failure to acknowledge the ambiguity of the human condition, a failure that strikes more accurately at the heart of the ethical questions at stake in these protests than any single-minded focus on the presence or absence of technologies of violence and their supposedly inherent liberatory or oppressive nature.

Technologies of Violence and the U.S. Female Protestor

As I explored in Chapter 1, embedded in early liberal democratic theoretical literature is a contradiction between the theory's insistence on the capacity for reason rather than bodily strength as the measure of political personhood and its justification of excluding women from such personhood because of their physical weakness due to

sexual difference. Both feminist liberal democratic theorists Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill agreed with Rousseau that women's bodies are distinct and that they are physically weaker than the bodies of men. Almost as quickly as they conceded this point, these theorists invoked the liberal democratic notion that such bodily difference *does not matter* as the ability to reason rather than physical strength is at the center of political subjectivity under this model. While these theorists argued for the insignificance of female physical weakness, their acknowledgment of its existence (and their endorsement of things like physical exercise for women) can also be seen as a concession of its significance and of the importance of the body in the political realm. Some feminist theorists since then have challenged the notion of women's weakness. Simone de Beauvoir, arguing from the framework of existentialism rather than liberalism, argues that such a notion depends on the way we define weakness and strength. She cites women's capacity to endure physical pain, their "stoic courage," "calm tenacity," and their superior ability to "deal with crises" (*The Second Sex* 642). Later theorists like Sharon Marcus emphasized the discursive power of a *belief* in women's weakness, arguing that it is often the acceptance of a belief in women's vulnerability to assault and men's relative strength that leads to both women's and men's behaviors of passivity and aggression, rather than actual physical differences. Writing about what she sees as a "social script" of women's susceptibility to rape by men that makes the act more difficult to combat in practice, Marcus claims (controversially) that "[r]apists do not prevail simply because as men they are really, biologically, and unavoidably stronger than women" (392) but because both men and women follow a script that sees women as

categorically vulnerable and men as strong and invulnerable. The use of technologies of violence, or technology in general, for that matter, might be seen as providing an antidote for women's weakness and categorical vulnerability, if one were to accept such concepts as reality, or, at the very least, a means of rendering discussions over such concepts moot. Haraway's concept of the cyborg appears, on the surface, to end the debate about women's bodily strength and their categorical vulnerability once and for all. Whether or not women's 'natural' bodies are weaker or more vulnerable than men's, themselves arguable contentions, we are not simply natural beings. The presence and availability of technology, and technologies of violence in particular—tools, hatchets, dynamite, guns, bombs—seem to render narratives of women's weakness or vulnerability moot as they might enjoy the same physical power and protection enjoyed by men who have access to the same technologies.

Of course, the fact that technologies of violence *could* be used to eradicate the belief in women's relative weakness or vulnerability doesn't mean that women *have* made such use of them, or, crucially, that such a move would be uncomplicated by other factors. The simple fact that the presence of technologies of violence has not yet led to a belief in men's and women's equal aptitude for violence tells us this topic is complex. (Note, for example, continued debates about whether female members of the military should serve on the front lines in war zones.) In the context of protest, male activists appear to have historically made more public use of technologies of violence than their female counterparts. While it is certainly true that not all labor-related protests during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, for example, made use of such tools and tactics (and

overblown descriptions of labor violence sometimes serve to delegitimize laborers' valid grievances), there is certainly a documented history of male laborers' tactical destruction of the technologies associated with their work and with industrialism in general and their use of tools or weapons. The Great Strike of 1877 might be seen as one example.

During this era, the influence of European political and social theory on the U.S. fanned by waves of European immigrants also fostered socialist and anarchist ideas and movements in the country, which sometimes brought with them the rhetoric of weaponry. The arrival of Johann Most, an anarchist German immigrant—or, more accurately, his rhetoric—in 1882 marked the beginning of the age of dynamite, a technology invented in 1866 by Alfred Nobel. While, as historian Beverly Gage points out, Most did not physically bring dynamite into the U.S., nor was he ever caught with it (Gage 41), he did bring with him “the idea that such weapons could be used to strike fatal blows against capitalism and the state” (Gage 41–42). The technology was cheap, easy to use, easy to conceal, and could be used relatively anonymously (Gage 45). As Gage explains, “it provided the working class with firepower to match the armies of the state and to counter the sort of repression that had greeted the Paris Commune” (Gage 45). The working class activists most associated with this “firepower,” however, were men.

Rhetoric about dynamite surrounded a planned meeting of anarchists in Haymarket Square in Chicago in 1886, including a leaflet exclaiming, “Workingmen, Arm Yourselves and Appear in Full Force!” (qtd. in Adamic 72). When a bomb went off that disrupted what was otherwise a fairly lackluster event, the police responded with indiscriminate shooting and some armed workers did the same. Despite the resulting trial

and guilty verdicts for ten male anarchists who both sides agreed did not set off the bomb and only two of whom were actually present at the rally, violence, property destruction, and the use of weapons on the part of both male workers and law enforcement continued during actions like the Homestead Strike in 1892 and the Pullman Strike (also known as Deb's Rebellion) in 1894. Rhetoric and sometime use of violence and violent technologies like dynamite was also carried out by some male "Wobblies" of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and members of the American Federation of Labor (AFL).⁴⁰ Gage notes that, although it is difficult to imagine it today, during this time in the U.S., "newspapers were filled with reports of violent attacks on the symbols of American government and business: bombs mailed to mayors and governors, assassination attempts on presidents and capitalists, dynamite found beneath the railroad tracks or outside the factory door" (Gage 3). While many of these fearful reports were unfounded, incidents where violent technologies were actually used, such as the 1910 bombing of the *LA Times* office, an event initiated by union leaders that killed at least twenty people, only served to heighten the sense of the ubiquity of male working class violence and the threat posed by technologies like dynamite (Gage 88–93; Harrison).

Some women were active in movements like anarchism in which some members advocated the use of violence and its accompanying weaponry. However, one would be hard pressed to find an endorsement of women's use of political violence during this

⁴⁰ In his 1931 work *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*, Louis Adamic argues that "one must find Bill Haywood's and, later, the I.W.W.'s frank advocacy and practice of violence and sabotage immeasurably more sympathetic than the attitude and practices of the A.F. of L. unions. Haywood and the wobblies [sic] honestly and openly recognized violence and sabotage as inherent and necessary phases of the struggle, and openly welcomed them. The A.F. of L. leaders denounced dynamite tactics with holy terror, yet their unions engaged in them and, in so doing, commanded, if not the moral, certainly the material support of the Federation's high leadership" (Adamic 188–189).

time. In Lucy Parsons's infamous article "To Tramps," published in *The Alarm* on October 4, 1884 and used as evidence for the prosecution in the trial of those accused in the Haymarket bombing, she urged the homeless of Chicago to seek violent means to avenge the rich who exploit them. "Learn the use of explosives," she counseled them. But although she advocated the use of violent weapons, she clearly addressed poor men, whose wives she imagined pining away at home. She asked her audience, for example, "Who cared for the bitter tears and heart-pangs of your loving wife and helpless children, when you bid them a loving 'God Bless You' and turned upon the tramp's road to seek employment elsewhere?" Indeed, although she didn't use the word, she seemed to be advising these men on how to regain their manhood, further associating violent technologies with masculinity.

As I've explored in Chapter 1, tactics among women's suffragists during this time were much less connected to violence and violent technologies; indeed, quite the contrary was true as these women often rooted their claims to political subjectivity in related claims to women's peace politics and their potential pacifying influence on American politics. In the later stages of the women's suffrage struggle in the early 20th century, the Silent Sentinels employed more extreme tactics than their predecessors and their contemporaries, tactics I explored in Chapter 1. With the possible exception of the use of watch fires and the symbolic burning of President Wilson's words and an image of the man, however, these protestors did not employ weapons. The fact that suffragists were largely white women of means likely contributed to their commitment to what they considered nonviolent resistance, although even working class female labor protestors

generally avoided violent rhetoric and tactics during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with some notable exceptions (as I explained in Chapter 1).

By the 1960s and 1970s, some U.S. female protestors were employing technologies of violence in explicit claims to political personhood. Women's use of weapons in organizations like the Weather Underground Organization and the Black Panther Party (a group I explore in depth below) were rare even for their times, however. Despite dramatic changes in the political economy, prevailing associations between feminist (or feminine) activism and pacifism continue today and we rarely see U.S. female protestors wielding weapons or using rhetoric about weapons in their performances, with some exceptions.

Uneven access to technologies of violence might be a contributing factor to the unevenness with which protestors have employed them. We must also consider uneven access to training or experience with weapons or, more foundationally, women and men's experiential understanding of gendered embodiment. As Iris Marion Young explains in her article on the genesis of "throwing like a girl," girls do not throw in such a distinctive manner due to biological difference or a "feminine attitude," but due to "the particular *situation* of women as conditioned by their sexist oppression in contemporary society" wherein "girls and women are not given the opportunity to use their full bodily capacities in free and open engagement with the world, nor are they encouraged as much as boys to develop specific bodily skills" (138, 152). Girls also experience an objectified existence rather than simply coming to know themselves as subjects (Young 153–154), which further leads to their reticence to move expansively and, potentially, their lack of

confidence in utilizing technologies of violence. Sharon Marcus, identifying not just an embodied, but a discursive environment that shapes women's passivity, critiques what she perceives as hesitance to encourage women to use weapons to combat sexual assault, arguing,

When police manuals do mention that one can wield impromptu weapons, they tend to cite flimsy and obsolete accessories such as hairpins, rather than suggest that women carry more serviceable objects. These same manuals often neglect to mention male genitalia when they designate the vulnerable points of a potential rapist's body, thus perpetuating the myth of the unassailably powerful penis. These views enact, in effect, a gendered polarization of the grammar of violence in which the male body can wield weapons, can make itself into a weapon, and benefits from an enforced ignorance concerning its own vulnerability; the female body is predicated by this grammar as universally vulnerable, lacking force, and incompetent to supplement its deficiencies with tools which could vanquish the penis's power by dissimulating it. In a culture which relentlessly urges women to make up for our lacks by accessorizing, we are told that we cannot manage bodily accessories if we manipulate them for purposes of self-defense, and that we will be best served by consenting to be accessories to our own violation. (395)

While some feminist theorists have critiqued the ways girls and women become convinced of their inability to wield bodily power and weapons, others use analysis of

girls' developmental process to celebrate the benefits of a process that appears to leave women hesitant to wield technologies of violence. Drawing from care feminist ethical theory (explored in more depth in Chapter 3), theorists like Sara Ruddick argue that the propensity to care fostered by the experience of mothering and having been mothered by women has the potential to lead to a peace politics despite women's access to technologies of violence. While she is very careful to note that "[m]others have no corner on peace" (xix) and women are not inherently peaceful and she theorizes an ambiguous approach to violence not unlike the model I advocate, Ruddick nonetheless points to the practice of mothering by women as creating a fruitful space for developing a peace politics. In writing about militarism and war, Ruddick argues that mothers "and those who live with them on their side of the gun" who are also "custodians of the promise of birth" truly understand the devastating effects of violence (251). Theorists like Ruddick might see women's rejection of technologies of violence as a positive trend toward a nonviolent ethic that is aligned with women's lived experience. In her 2000 article "Women's Movements and Nonviolence," political scientist Anne Costain argues based on her quantitative analysis of news coverage of women's movements from 1950 to 1996 and the investment she observes female activists displaying in refusing to employ violence, including weapons, that we should represent U.S. women's movements as "fundamentally concerned with the advocacy of nonviolence" (175). Noting the phenomenon I explored in Chapter 1 of suffragists making moral claims that women's voting rights might lead to the pacification and moral reform of government, Costain argues that "the argument may have some validity" (176).

Some theorists, conversely, endorse the use of technologies of violence as an equalizer and, specifically, a protection against women's victimization, especially in cases of attempted assault by men. In addition to Sharon Marcus, these include D.A. Clarke who, in her essay "A Woman with a Sword," suggests that "At some point resistance means defending ourselves with physical force" (399) and Mary Zeiss Strange, who argues in a 2004 article titled "No More Raping: When Some Women are Armed, Are All of Us Safer?" that "armed self-defense is a valid and appropriate way to say 'No more raping,' and to mean it" (13). While few, if any, of these theorists directly address women's use of weapons in protest, we might find models of this logic in action in cases like female Black Panther Party members' decision to carry handguns for their protection and to sometimes publically wield guns (a phenomenon I explore below) as well as arguments by more recent groups like the Second Amendment Sisters, who staged a counter protest to the Million Mom March for gun control in 2000, and female Tea Party activists.

But I would contend that the reality is more complex than these arguments—and these examples—would suggest. Theories that celebrate women's allegiance to nonviolence or advocate women's use of technologies of violence, rhetorically or otherwise, as an equalizer in sexual politics or method of overcoming oppression both miss the larger ontological picture. First, the phenomenon of female protestors largely rejecting technologies of violence cannot be easily chalked up to their penchant for peace politics due to their lived experience as women or their acceptance of discursive myths of women's weakness; it must also be viewed tactically. Just as women's tactical embrace

of a belief in women's categorical vulnerability has provided them with a circumscribed space in which to make their claims, as I've argued in Chapter 1, female protestors' tactical decision to reject technologies of violence has also sometimes ironically led to a pseudo-*invulnerability*. Secondly, we must view female protestors not simply making unencumbered tactical choices, but making these choices within a social, cultural, and historical context. In her response to the association Anne Costain notes between U.S. women's movements and nonviolence, Karen Beckwith suggests that decisions to employ particular protest tactics are not based solely on the values or convictions of a particular group of activists but also on this group's embeddedness in the larger social world. Thus, "women's movements' reliance on nonviolent tactics, and the virtual absence of a violent repertoire of contention, is also the result of how violence and nonviolence are gendered in the collective actions of social movements" (75). The negotiation of these gendered associations can be seen, as Beckwith demonstrates, in discussions and strategizing about which tactical strategies will be used and who may use them in movements that involve both men and women. Thirdly, female activists' widespread rejection of technologies of violence cannot be easily attributed to developmental processes or experiences of motherhood or other care-related practices, in part because one can imagine a myriad of reactions to such processes and experiences, including the use of protective violence in the face of a perceived threat. In fact, some protestors identifying as mothers, sisters, and wives have employed violent technologies in the name of defending their families. Finally, the rare uses of technologies of violence by female protestors cannot all be lumped into the same category as they are linked to

different ontological claims. In fact, we might even view male protestors' use of technologies of violence not as a mark of male invulnerability but as their ironic acknowledgement of their own *vulnerability*. We might argue that technologies of violence are often employed precisely *because* humans are vulnerable. While their actions should not necessarily be viewed as *intentional* challenges to prevailing cultural ontologies, male protestors displaying and using weapons do much to confirm the frailty of the human body and the problematic connection between violence and political legitimacy even as they participate in this dialectic.

Importantly, men perhaps turn to these technologies more often because they face a greater threat of violence in response to their political action as they are viewed as full political subjects, and, consequently, capable of political violence. Indeed, beyond the tactical or actual acceptance or rejection of cultural beliefs about women and men's weakness and vulnerability, what is arguably one of the most significant complicating factors in the use or rejection of technologies of violence, particularly in the context of public protest, is the connection between political personhood and the capacity for violence. Technologies of violence like guns and bombs carry not just an ability to do more damage and harm than unarmed physical aggression but, in a protest context, great rhetorical weight. In addition to eliciting, with their impressive visual effect, a sense of fear or awe at the great amount of damage a particular activist group might be capable of, these technologies—and the damage they are capable of creating—are also associated with military and police power. In short, protestors sometimes employ them as accessories or tools in public protest as a gesture of their embodied sovereignty and

capacity to wield state power, and even in the absence of such intentions, male protestors especially are read by others as posing a threat by embodying such claims.

Technologies of Violence and Political Personhood

The association between the ability to wage violence and political personhood has influenced protest behavior in many cases and must be considered as a key part of a discussion about the ethics of public protest. However, it is also important to remember that use of violence, technologies of violence, or violent rhetoric is not *always* a claim to political personhood and the rejection of violence is not always a rejection of the same. Accordingly, some cases of violence by female protestors that do not involve claims to political personhood have been permitted with minor resistance while state authorities and other onlookers have historically identified other protest actions as threats to the state authority and power when those actions have made no use of technologies of violence or, in some cases, any violence at all. Some cases of female protestors' use of technologies of violence during the late 19th and early 20th century, for example, involved the use of (domestic) tools like hatchets. While one might think that such violent symbols and their use would earn the women the same treatment as their male counterparts, they generally avoided being treated like serious threats to the state. I contend that this is because these protestors were more similar to their counterparts who rejected technologies of violence than is immediately apparent. The food rioters of the Civil War era (Chesson)⁴¹ and the

⁴¹Female participants in the Richmond Bread Riot on April 2, 1863, arguably the largest contemporary food riot, which was dominated by women, reacted to food shortages and inflated prices. Few were arrested as a result of the riot. Even one woman who was seen waving a Colt's Navy revolver as she looted a store was ultimately released when her son petitioned her original sentence on the grounds that she had four children at home and a husband in Lee's Confederate Army and her doctor appealed that she had "delicate health" (Chesson 165). Men involved in the riot received harsher punishment than the women (166).

temperance activists of the nineteenth century employed axes and hatchets in their protests and acted as mothers, wives, and daughters (not as political actors in their own right). The latter group saw themselves as defenders of their homes and acted on behalf of their children, husbands, and fathers in a temporary absence from the private sphere. They often did so in a religious context where women were believed to possess a heightened sense of morality and their actions were generally aimed at moral vices or problems that impacted their domestic domain, not framed as larger claims to their political power to control capital, industry, or government. These women were couched as modern day Joan of Arc figures fighting for their families out of moral or religious conviction. Later, in various strikes during the early 20th century, wives and daughters of striking men used rolling pins, brooms, and pokers, domestic tools that, like hatchets, they had easy access to, to fight off scabs (Tax 128). While they may have had some personal motivations for their actions, they acted on behalf of their husbands and fathers, employing technologies of domesticity to earn and preserve the rights of men, not to secure political personhood for themselves. Women's apparent enjoyment of power and relative freedom in violent acts in contexts like these was circumscribed by their lack of political subjectivity and their claims were often framed within a context of female moral superiority and their need to protect the domestic sphere, not women's legal rights.

In her memoir, *Mother Stewart*, a leader in the Woman's Crusade temperance movement of 1873 and 1874, described the events of 1865, almost ten years earlier, when a gunshot from a saloon fight struck a passing young man who was his widowed mother's only support. When the law failed the woman, other women accompanied her

and “proceeded to the saloon and with axes and other weapons knocked in the heads of barrels and casks, and demolished bottles and fixtures” (208). The women were prosecuted (209), but eventually acquitted. Stewart reflected sarcastically on this scene:

No! let no woman presume that she may lift her puny arm to protect her boy from those dens of destruction. She may not exercise even the mother instinct given the dumb brute for the protection of her young; neither shall she have the privilege of helping to make such laws as would close those places! Oh, no! that would be shocking, unwomanly, a thing not to be thought of. But thanks be to the Lord, in our extremity He devised a way.
(209)

Yes, the women’s use of axes was “shocking” and “unwomanly,” but these actions were ultimately justified within the limited sphere of maternity and moral womanhood, not in the name of their own strength and political personhood, despite Stewart’s belief in women’s physical strength and her personal advocacy of women’s political rights. Female temperance activists largely saw themselves as a religious, not political, “army” (Stewart 117) composed of mothers, wives, and sisters, waging a “Holy War” (119) against the culture of alcohol affecting their children, husbands, and brothers. This contributed, I believe, to the relatively benign reaction they received.

While these temperance activists received little to no retaliation for their actions, the group of women’s suffragists called the Silent Sentinels (described in Chapter 1) were physically attacked by male and female onlookers simply because they wielded banners challenging the contradictions between President Wilson’s rhetoric about democracy in

the context of World War I and his policies regarding women in the U.S. Likewise, these women's repeated refusal to discontinue their pickets and to set aside their claims to political personhood led to violence from observers on the street and repeated violent retaliation in the form of harsh workhouse and prison sentences and, eventually, violent forced feedings in response to their hunger strikes. It seems the mere suggestion of women's political subjectivity—in the form of demands for voting rights and challenges to the President's politics during wartime rather than demands for peace as mothers and wives in the name of their sons and husbands at war—was read as a more material threat to the state than the actual use of axes in a more circumscribed, domestic context.⁴² Even suffragist Doris Stevens acknowledged that the Silent Sentinels' treatment for tactics they considered nonviolent sometimes outstripped even that given to the more violent Suffragettes in Britain: "Never was there a sentence like ours for such an offense as ours [seven months in jail for "obstructing traffic"], even in England," she declared. "No woman ever got it over there even for tearing down buildings" (190). It appears in these cases that while violence is connected to political personhood in a liberal democratic context, it is not necessarily violence or nonviolence or the actual adoption or rejection of technologies of violence at the center of these particular acts, but the claim to political personhood and to the right to speak out politically on one's own behalf and not as a wife, mother, or sister that is seen as a true threat and as justification for violent retaliation.

⁴² Interestingly, the Sentinels opposed the war and encouraged the only female member of Congress at the time to officially oppose it. They were read as (violent) political threats because of their claims to political personhood despite their devotion to pacifist politics and what they saw as nonviolent tactics.

However, despite this important caveat that the *presence* of technologies of violence is not synonymous with claims to political personhood, the *association* between political personhood and technologies of violence remains pervasive and important. While some women's suffragists may have been seen as grave threats to the state despite their apparently nonviolent methods, a phenomenon that should complicate facile associations between violence and political action, they nonetheless had to constantly face the widespread belief that women's citizenship would weaken the state given women's inability to fight on behalf of their country. They may not have had to actually take up arms to be seen as claiming the capacity for political violence since they were declaring their political personhood, an identity that carries with it such a claim. The belief in gendered differences in the capacity for political violence influenced suffragists' behavior and has no doubt influenced the behavior of many protestors.

This (gendered) connection between violence and political personhood has influenced male and female protestors' tactics in interesting ways. Knowing they would be read as legitimate political subjects entitled to rights, but, more importantly, capable of violence, male protestors of the late 19th and early 20th century knew they were seen as legitimate threats to state power and, consequently, more likely targets of reactive state violence. The Great Strike of 1877 is but one example during the post-Civil War era of a protest movement where male laborers' use of technologies of violence and property destruction was met with military violence. Simply being associated with movements employing rhetoric about dynamite during this time meant risking imprisonment, deportation, and, in some cases, execution, as in the case of the Haymarket trial. Those

who extolled the merits of dynamite as a tool of resistance saw it as a means to match and combat oppressive state forces. Participants in the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) in the 1960s and 1970s saw similar potential in the bombs they constructed, even as those bombs were set off in empty buildings. Similarly, the armed demonstration at the Sacramento state capitol building in 1967 staged by the WUO's contemporaries in the Black Panther Party was dubbed as an "invasion" by the local *Sacramento Bee* ("Capitol Is Invaded") despite the fact that the rifles the Panthers carried were, according to many accounts, empty.

Most women-centered movements during the post-Civil War period were not treated as the same kinds of threats to state power as those led and carried out by men (or at least perceived to be led by men) although this is not to say that they and their claims were unproblematically embraced. The treatment they received is no doubt at least in part a response to their widespread rejection of technologies of violence. This rejection and the accompanying adoption of strategies that emphasized their identities as peaceful and moral mothers, sisters, and wives served to associate these women with the cultural myths of categorical vulnerability and physical weakness. When these female protestors took advantage of the cultural belief in their vulnerability, their relative weakness, and their lack of political power to avoid technologies of violence, they ironically confirmed the strength they could enjoy without resorting to such technologies as they were generally not viewed as acceptable targets of violence. Women enjoyed a kind of circumscribed power and protection from physical retaliation when adopting such narratives, and they often did so tactically, as I explored in Chapter 1, even when such

actions conflicted with their own political beliefs and their embodied experiences. But women's unarmed strength as well as the protection afforded women using technologies of violence in a circumscribed, domestic context, although real in their immediate effects, were motivated by a cultural myth and the fetishization of a particular image of womanhood. And such power arguably came at the cost of full political personhood, given the connection between the capacity for violence and political power. These women may have known that they were likely to be dismissed, attacked, or viewed with skepticism or disdain if they chose to make real demands for political personhood, but the arguments they settled on often resulted in deeply problematic ontological claims that often did not challenge the definition of political personhood in a liberal democratic context.

Embracing technologies of violence as an equalizer and an avenue to full political personhood is not necessarily the answer, however. Female protestors who have embraced technologies of violence, not as defenders of the domestic sphere but as public political actors, as did women in Far Left organizations of the 1960s and 1970s like the Weather Underground Organization and the Black Panther Party, have complied with the assumption that political agency and violence are inextricably connected in all cases rather than acknowledging the presence of such an assumption while simultaneously questioning its veracity. While they rejected liberal democracy and capitalism, they embraced another politico-economic framework that similarly discounted the ambiguity of the human condition. This ethical error, however, should be considered alongside the organizations' ethical successes. In the case of the Black Panther Party, these include its

challenges to oppressive power relations and dominant paradigms of female ontology. A critique of the organization's association between violence and political power should also be distinguished from an ethical mandate for nonviolence and the disavowal of all violent technology.

Using Technologies of Violence to Make Political Claims: The Black Panther Party

What is unique about the Weather Underground Organization and Black Panther Party, in contrast to many of the earlier movements I've explored thus far, is their explicit use of technologies of violence to make claims to political agency.⁴³ Interestingly, as some female protestors in some Far Left movements engaged in political protests that paired political claims with technologies of violence, others involved in mainstream feminist movements sometimes clung to the essentialized notion of the peaceful woman and the perceived connection between feminism and pacifism. The simultaneous embrace of a nonviolent ethic in many groups affiliated with the radical Women's Liberation movement and the liberal feminist Women's Rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s (following in the footsteps of many female protestors who preceded them) that coincided with the similarly situated Civil Rights movement stood in contrast to movements like those associated with the Black Power movement in which women connected their politics and activism with the struggle against imperialism and capitalism and the use of guns and bombs.

During the Weatherman's Days of Rage in October of 1969 in Chicago, helmet-

⁴³ I in no way intend to argue that this is the first instance of such a move, nor do I intend to discount the existence or significance of protest movements that occurred after 1920 and before the 1960s.

clad protestors carrying “rocks, lead pipes, [and] baseball bats” (Berger 109) bombed the statue memorializing the police officers in the Haymarket bombing of 1886 (108) and carried out several violent demonstrations and acts of property destruction and were met with violent retaliation from police (110–111). After going underground (and becoming the Weather Underground Organization), the organization, led by a woman, Bernadine Dohrn, became known for periodic overnight bombings of (unoccupied) government and other institutional buildings they viewed as symbols of American imperialism intended to carefully avoid casualties but that, with the help of explanatory communiqués released after each action, advanced their revolutionary cause.

The organization provided a different model for female activists as Dohrn assumed its leadership and other women served in prominent roles. Despite sexism within the organization, a faction of women within the group staged some protests of their own, some of which involved the use of weapons, and connected these actions with their feminism. During the 1968 Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) national convention (the organization from which the Weatherman emerged), several women staged a performance designed to critique the organization’s chauvinism in which they imitated the cry of the female revolutionary fighters in the recent film *Battle of Algiers* (Barber 133). Also, a group of women within the Weather Underground Organization called the Women’s Brigade bombed Harvard’s Center for International Affairs in 1970 for its connection to a government program designed to prevent Vietnamese peasants from supporting guerilla fighters (Berger 142–143). In 1974, in honor of International

Women's Day, the Brigade bombed the San Francisco offices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Jacobs 151; Berger 172).

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was another contemporary organization with female participants. The organization ran numerous "survival programs," including free breakfast programs, free health clinics, and many other activities focused on education and the need for basic welfare and housing for black people in the United States. But one of the most public—and most talked about—aspects of the organization's activities was its use of arms. Also critiqued for rampant sexism, the organization's performative use of arms was often associated with its male members. In one of the group's earliest and most famous actions, a faction of Panthers staged an armed protest in front of the capital building in Sacramento, California when the state's Congress was considering a new gun control law, a law the Panthers viewed as targeted at disarming blacks. Media accounts portrayed the rifle carrying protestors as all men, but some former members and scholars note that women were among the armed participants.⁴⁴ It's also possible that some of the female Panthers who were present were armed with concealed weapons.⁴⁵ And while the Panthers sometimes associated the open display of arms with masculinity, many of the organization's female members were attracted to its use of technologies of violence in public protest, and some were already gun owners when they joined the Panthers. Later in

⁴⁴ At least one female Panther's account and one scholar claim that the women who participated in the protest were armed. Regina Jennings recalls, "I saw a marvelous Bobby Seale marching with male and female Panthers with guns at the state capitol in California." (258). Scholar Angela LeBlanc-Ernest cites the firearm instruction female Panthers received and remarks that "Therefore, it was not surprising that on May 2, 1967 women were among the armed Party members who traveled to Sacramento to protest at the California state legislature" (308). All the media coverage I could locate that covered the event, however, features only male Panthers carrying guns.

⁴⁵ A few Panther accounts suggest that some Panther women carried guns, some of which I cite below.

the organization's history, in 1974, when women represented a significant portion of the organization's membership, Elaine Brown became head of the Party when founder Huey Newton was in exile and the focus on employing arms continued.

Ethical Successes: Understanding Political Violence, Challenging Oppression, and Complicating Women's Ontology

Despite deserved critiques of organizational sexism, the Black Panther Party can be celebrated for some important ethical interventions, including their understanding of the link between political personhood and violence in the modern state and their opposition to efforts to concretize oppressive power relations that would prevent black Americans from the means of political action and self-defense. Unlike most U.S. female activists in the late 19th and early 20th century, women involved in organizations like the Black Panther Party and the Weather Underground Organization (WUO) made explicit connections between women's political personhood and their capacity for and use of violence. In other words, they recognized the pervasive ontological connection between political personhood and political violence in the modern state and they recognized that they required access to and facility with technologies of violence to be recognized as political subjects. Like the anarchists of the late 19th century, members of the WUO viewed themselves as waging war with the U.S., matching state power with their bombs, a weapon of war. Similarly, the Panthers' choice to stand outside the Sacramento courthouse holding rifles in military formation was a purposeful gesture of state power, as was their decision to "polic[e] the police" (Singh 205) to protect black citizens against police brutality.

In his book *Black is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*, Nikil Pal Singh argues that the Panthers participated in a kind of “guerilla theater” (203) in which they posed, if not a real threat to the state’s monopoly on the legitimate use of violence, then “its monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence” (204). This dynamic was at play both in the Panthers’ armed police patrols and in the Sacramento protest. Singh argues that the Panthers “sought nothing less than a transvaluation of conventional racist imagery about rampant black crime, turning the police instead into the ‘symbols of uniformed and armed lawlessness’” (201). The Panthers “were a threat to the state not simply because they were violent, but because they abused the state’s own reality principle” (204). The state responded in kind. In an effort to justify their violent (over)reactions to the Panthers’ performance, the state (and the popular press) had to frame the Panthers as a real threat, a sovereign threat, much the same kind of threat posed by a foreign army. This effort can be seen in the news coverage of the Panthers’ Sacramento protest, in which the action was described as a “raid” and an “invasion.” Sacramento’s own *Sacramento Bee* featured a front page story about the protest with a huge headline in large capital letters reading “CAPITOL IS INVADED” and two large photos of some of the armed Panthers inside the capitol building. The subtitle of the *New York Times* article reporting on the event the day after it occurred announced, “30 Black Panthers Invade State Legislature” (“Armed Negroes Protest Gun Bill: 30 Black Panthers Invade Sacramento Legislature” 23). The subtitle of an *LA Times* article published three days after the event called it a “‘Panther’ Invasion” (Gillam 3). The headline of a story published on the same day by the *Chicago Tribune* characterized the protest as a “raid”

and quoted Lieutenant Ernest Holloway (“acting commander of the state police”) as complaining, “We were not staffed to take care of an invasion” (Korman 12). Despite Huey Newton’s arguments that the police themselves are “like a foreign troop” who “occupy our communities” (Seale 65), the government and the media were able to more convincingly define the Panthers as such. The Black Panther Party’s performance of sovereignty eventually caused the government to consider this group a threat to national security (as evidenced by FBI investigations of the Black Panther Party, among other groups) and the director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover, to declare the Panthers “the greatest threat to the internal security of the country” (qtd. in Newton, *War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America* 53).

While the Panthers’ adoption of the notion that political action requires violence is problematic, and not just because of the violence they faced by taking such an approach (as I explore in more depth below), their understanding of the role violence plays in the modern state was insightful. This understanding fueled their desire to combat state power given the uneven power relations they observed and experienced in the U.S. and the ways these oppressive relations were being codified in law. They were keenly aware of efforts to legally disarm blacks, for example, and these efforts were among their many foci. Critiquing such a legal effort would have been more difficult using an approach that presumed the practice of nonviolence as it would have viewed repressive gun laws as immaterial and rendered invisible or inconsequential the connection between political personhood and the capacity for violence.

The legal history of continued efforts to prevent black Americans from carrying or using guns began before the American Revolution. Colonists believed an armed white population was essential to maintaining power over Native American and black populations (Cottrol and Diamond 323–326). Black Americans were largely prohibited from bearing arms in early America, and uneven gun laws continued into the late sixties, when the Panthers staged their famous Sacramento protest (Cottrol and Diamond 331–348). They had a few historically recent models to look to that highlighted the significance of efforts to disarm blacks. In his book, *Negroes with Guns*, for example, Robert Williams, a black leader who encouraged his fellow black community members and protesters to arm themselves in defense against the hostile white community and the Ku Klux Klan in Monroe, North Carolina in the late 1950s through 1961 and who inspired the Panthers a few years later, described the hostile reaction he received from an older white man when he was on his way to a protest and the man discovered that he was armed—and, what’s more, that it was legal for black man to carry a gun.⁴⁶ This reaction

⁴⁶ When Williams and some of his fellow protestors were on their way to a protest site, they were forced into a ditch by another driver. Williams describes the hostile crowd and their chants of “Kill the niggers! Kill the niggers! Pour gasoline on the niggers! Burn the niggers!” (45). According to Williams, the driver who pushed him off the road approached his car with a baseball bat. When the man pulled back his bat, Williams “put an Army .45 up in the window of the car and pointed it right into his face and . . . didn’t say a word” (46). After an altercation with a police officer, “a very old man, an old white man,” began to shout and cry in disbelief that a group of black men would be armed: “God damn, God damn, what is this God damn country coming to that the niggers have guns, the niggers are armed and the police can’t even arrest them!” (46).

Bobby Seale recounts a few instances before the Sacramento protest when he and Black Panther Party co-founder Huey Newton were armed and questioned by police. According to Seale, in one incident that mirrors Williams’s, one officer pulled the men over and approached the car yelling, “What the goddam hell you niggers doing with them goddam guns? Who in the goddam hell you niggers think you are? Get out of that goddam car with them goddam guns.” After being refused and opening the car door himself, the officer grabbed the barrel of Seale’s shotgun to pull it out, and Newton forcefully pushed and kicked the man out of the car. After Newton, Seale, and Bobby Hutton all pointed their guns at the officer, he made his way back to his car and yelled, “They got guns. They got guns.” On his radio, he called for back up: “Niggers down here got guns. Get me some help down here. Niggers got guns, they got guns” (95–96).

reflects the cultural effects of a long American history of racist gun laws and provides a backdrop for the kind of reactions the Panthers faced a few years later.

Both the Mulford Act, which the Panthers protested in their Sacramento demonstration, and a similar law that was adopted in Washington State (due in part to a fear of the Panthers' organization) prohibited openly carrying weapons in public places, with some exceptions⁴⁷ (Cramer; California Penal Code). Although couched as measures that would prevent gun violence in general, these laws targeted specific gun-carrying populations, thus arguably perpetuating the long history of uneven gun laws in America. The Mulford Act was proposed at least in part to prevent the Panthers from carrying out its armed patrols of the California police force. In fact, this bill was dubbed "the Panther Bill" by the media (Public Broadcasting Service (PBS); Newton, *War Against the Panthers: A Study of Repression in America* 33). Although they were interpreted as provoking and instigating violence,⁴⁸ by protesting a law that would prevent them from patrolling the police, the Panthers were acting as victims of violence; they saw a clear connection between this law and their ability to protect their community from police brutality.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Namely, these exceptions included gun club meetings in public buildings and hunters carrying their arms within the grounds surrounding public buildings. After the portion of the California law that prohibited loaded weapons in most public places was passed in July of 1967, Don Mulford felt compelled to inform his constituents that "the new act won't restrict legitimate hunters" ("The State" F5).

⁴⁸ See the September 27, 1966 CBS special hosted by Mike Wallace titled "Black Power—White Backlash" for an example of a contemporary media event that painted the Black Power movement as one that emerged out of a vacuum that white America simply responded to ("Black Power—White Backlash"). See historian Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response* for a historical account that refutes such narratives.

⁴⁹ The presence of such brutality was highlighted five years prior by black civil rights leaders at 1962 hearings held by the California Advisory Committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights and disputed by the police chief (Oberschall 330–331). Although it identifies "a widespread belief among Negroes" of police brutality rather than confirming its indisputable existence, the 1968 Report of the National Advisory

Huey Newton and Bobby Seale likewise saw their early efforts to patrol the police as foundational to their greater mission, as evidenced by Point No. 7 of the ten point program the co-founders outlined in October of 1966: “*We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people*” (Foner 3). The patrols were designed in reaction to the widespread police brutality across the nation, but especially in Oakland, California, where the group began.⁵⁰ The Panthers’ efforts to highlight and critique legal initiatives that would concretize oppressive uneven power relations were ethically productive. Whereas their violence was depicted as inherent to black people, as developing out of thin air, its members in fact shone a light on efforts to harm the bodies of black people while stripping them of their legal rights and simultaneously celebrating a political system that presumes both the connection between political personhood and the capacity for violence and the equal power of all of its citizens, a fiction the Panthers knew to be inaccurate. Efforts to concretize or render ahistorical particular historical uneven relations of power and paradigms that presume the enjoyments of equal power are unethical. The Panthers identified both of these problems at play in efforts to disarm black Americans and prevent the surveillance of police action and they fought to highlight and combat them.

Commission on Civil Disorders also acknowledges that “police actions” led to about half of the twenty-four “disorders” it studied that occurred during the summer of 1967, the summer that immediately followed the Sacramento protest (*Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*).

⁵⁰ The Panthers’ early police patrols coincided with a specific effort to protest and inform the black community and the general American public about the death of Denzil Dowell, a young black man from North Richmond, California, who was shot dead by police amid suspicious circumstances (Foner xxviii). The Panthers held a rally to protest the killing that was attended by hundreds of blacks, many of them armed, and devoted their very first issue of the *Black Panther* to exposing the facts about the incident. The issue—a two-page double-sided photocopy of a hand-drawn layout framing a typed story published in late April, just days before the Sacramento protest—was a primitive forerunner of the widely distributed newspaper that would define the Panthers in years to come (Foner 9-12).

In addition, despite the sexism they faced within the organization, by embracing and influencing the larger mission of the Black Panther Party, the female Panthers were able to highlight an alternative female ontology that did not presuppose women's categorical vulnerability nor their predisposition to nonviolent methods and peace politics. These female members embraced not only the Party's social welfare programs like the free breakfast program, free health clinics, and other efforts to model the socialist welfare state the Panthers espoused and provide the community services the government was failing to deliver as New Deal social programs slowly withered under the force of new neoliberal policies. But these women also embraced the Panthers' adoption of technologies of violence as a means to asserting and embodying political agency in their tactics and rhetoric. Their ability and willingness to endorse this alternative ontological model was due perhaps in part to the liminal space they inhabited as black women and the expectation that they did not meet the criteria for dominant (white) models of femininity, including passivity and vulnerability.

In the U.S. context, black women have historically been ungendered and are not privy to the cult of womanhood available to white women, including associations between pacifism and femininity. One of the reasons this association does not exist for African American women stems from the historical material reality of slavery and its legacy, which affected in important ways black women's experience of embodiment and cultural beliefs about them. The image of the strong black woman was instrumental in justifying slave women's forced labor. Angela Davis argues that this modern stereotype stems more from black women's history of fighting oppression rather than any natural

role (“Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” 82).

Nonetheless, black women have historically not had the identity of the peace-loving, morally superior woman available to them.

Slave women experienced systematic rape by their owners,⁵¹ which occurred while white women continued to enjoy the myth of pure white womanhood; indeed, white men raped black women to both inscribe their domination over them and to avoid destroying this myth (Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” 95). These women could not escape the exploitation of their childbearing capabilities in the name of economic interests. This history continued long after slavery, of course, with women of color finding themselves victims of forced sterilization, which only served to complicate their relationship with birth control and abortion. In addition to these factors, the destruction of familial bonds and the forced coupling of slaves in the name of good breeding (Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” 82–83) further destroyed the easy application of white feminists’ conception of the family to African-American women. Angela Davis argues that African-American women also do not share the same historical experience of relegation to the private sphere, where they repetitively performed boring domestic tasks. Although slave women performed domestic tasks because of their perceived sexual inferiority, Davis argues that these tasks took on a different meaning as they were linked to cultural and physical survival rather than domestic boredom. What’s more, because men did not earn wages from their physical labor in the fields and women often worked alongside them,

⁵¹ The Combahee River Collective cites this as one example of “racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual” (267).

they did not experience the public-private divide white middle class women did (Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” 86–87). As Davis argues, “This was one of the supreme ironies of slavery: in order to approach its strategic goal—to extract the greatest possible surplus from the labor of the slaves—the black woman had to be released from the chains of the myth of femininity” (87). Female slaves working in the fields were sometimes punished for being slowed down by pregnancy and kept away from their nursing children as this aspect of their femininity was denied (Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” 88). Davis sees this experience as situating black women in a role conducive to waging resistance: “Stripped of the palliative feminine veneer which might have encouraged a passive performance of domestic tasks, she was now uniquely capable of weaving into the warp and woof of domestic life a profound consciousness of resistance [. . .] Her routine oppression had to assume an unconcealed dimension of outright counter-insurgency” (89). Of course, even after slavery, black women continued to enter the public sphere to earn money for their families and continued to live lives incompatible with the vision of womanhood postulated by many theorists working within a model of white womanhood.

Black women’s historical experiences of physical labor, rape, subjugation to vigilante violence and police brutality, forced sterilization, and other systemic violence as well as their unique experience outside of the domestic sphere does not predispose these women to support insurrectionary violence, but arguably makes sense of their support of violent tactics when it has occurred. Such support is more often implicit rather

than explicit, as in the case of the name selected by the Combahee River Collective, a contingent of black feminists in Boston that formed in 1974. While this organization did not explicitly endorse the use of revolutionary violence, its name is derived from “the guerilla action conceptualized and led by Harriet Tubman” to free hundreds of slaves in “the only military campaign in American history planned and led by a woman” (Combahee River Collective 264). These women responded, therefore, to their particular history as black women and to their experience as black Americans in a manner very unlike their white contemporaries involved in second wave feminism.⁵²

Female Panthers, like their male counterparts, embraced the connection between violence and political subjectivity and often fought the stereotype of the supportive but nonviolent woman in important ways. Kathleen Cleaver, for example, places Panther women amid a “longer tradition of fighting women” (qtd. in Lumsden 902). These women may have struggled against institutional sexism in the organization, but they remained in it because of their devotion to its causes, including the understanding that the capacity for political violence is essential to political personhood, for men as well as women. This important ontological insight is sometimes obscured by a failure to acknowledge their efforts to fashion themselves into active agents who were not afraid or incapable of engaging in self-defensive violence. In her dissertation, “Gender, Race, and Political Violence in U.S. Social Movements: 1965-1975,” Tamara Ann Waggener notes that women’s increased participation in the Black Panther Party and the rethinking of the

⁵² This is not to suggest that all black feminists endorse violence, only that their relationship with violence is unique. See, for example, hooks’ repudiation of violence as a revolutionary tactic (*Ain’t I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* 105).

Panther's gender politics coincided with the increased prominence of the group's community programs and the decreased emphasis on arms and violent rhetoric (Waggener 151–157). Waggener also acknowledges the female Panthers who insisted on the continued endorsement of armed resistance and notes that female Panthers helped upset “the exclusive linking of violence with masculinity” (161). We should be careful, therefore, not to read the historical confluence of women's increased participation in the organization and the rethinking of armed tactics and gender politics as an indication that women's role was to pacify the organization.

Another potentially problematic move is to try to resurrect an appreciation of the ‘nonviolent’ work performed in the Black Panther Party and ignore or downplay the group's militancy. Ashley Chaifetz argues in her 2005 Master's thesis, “Introducing the American Dream: The Black Panther Survival Programs, 1966-1982” that “The survival programs *are* the Black Panther Party [. . .] The purpose of the BPP was not to be armed . . . but to improve the community. Although the militancy lives on in most memories, it was just the fuel used to drive the programs” (49). Although she acknowledges women's full participation in the Panthers' armed tactics, and, importantly, notes that “The unabashed militancy and open carrying of arms by the Party in the late 1960s made the success of the programs possible” (5), Chaifetz argues that the Panthers' survival programs (indeed, hugely important and central to their mission) are the most important aspect of their organizational history. Efforts like these to rectify the lack of attention paid to such programs, while important, however, risk overlooking the Panthers'

engagement with discussions of violence and political personhood and preempting discussion about the implications of armed female protestors.

While the Panthers' survival programs were central to their mission and while there may indeed be some connection between women's involvement, feminism, historical change, and changes in the Panthers' tactics,⁵³ we must be careful about how we present these narratives to avoid reifying the image of the inherently peaceful (and pacifying) woman. In reality, the Panthers' tactics included survival programs throughout the organization's history and, from its early days, the party included women who were attracted by the group's violent rhetoric. The evolution of the Panthers' tactics is better attributed to a complicated confluence of variables, a confluence Tracye Matthews recounts in her essay "No One Ever Asks, What a Man's Place in the Revolution Is": *Gender and the Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971*: "The increased presence of women, the shift from a paramilitary to a community service focus, the incarceration, assassination, and exile of key male leaders, and the increasing pressures of state-sponsored repression, all affected the internal dialogue about gender roles" (Matthews 277). Matthews recognizes all of the factors at play and is careful to cite women's

⁵³ Indeed, it is almost undeniable that without the presence of increasingly pervasive, organized, and influential feminist and gay liberation movements, Huey Newton might have never made such a clear and public declaration of solidarity with these groups as he did when he wrote and distributed a statement titled "The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements" in August of 1970, which included a call for the Panthers to unite their movement with these movements: "we should try to unite with [homosexuals and women] in a revolutionary fashion [. . .] there is nothing to say that a homosexual cannot also be a revolutionary [. . .] Quite the contrary, maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary [. . .] We should be careful about using those terms that might turn our friends off. The terms 'faggot' and 'punk' should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people, such as Nixon or Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people. We should try to form a working coalition with the gay liberation and women's liberation groups" (Newton, "The Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements: August 15, 1970" 152-155).

presence as one factor that influenced dialogue about gender roles without suggesting that these women necessarily pacified the group. While it is important to recognize that the politics endorsed by the Panthers as the organization grew were often more progressive than contemporary alternative Black Power and civil rights organizations and that the development of a feminism distinct from that promulgated by most of the white middle class female leaders of the mainstream feminist movement played a large role in forcing the Panthers to reevaluate the regressive elements of their politics, we must avoid making a similar connection between women's presence in the party and nonviolent action than the one we can perhaps more successfully make between feminism and dialogue about gender roles.

The narrative of pacification, and the imaginary connection between women (or feminism) and pacifism, are further problematized by the numerous accounts of female Panthers who were attracted by the organization's rhetoric, and use, of arms. In some cases, the women who joined the party were already practiced at arming themselves. In the book *Seize the Time*, co-founder Bobby Seale describes an event that occurred just a few months before the Sacramento protest. The Panthers were serving as armed escorts for Malcolm X's widow, Betty Shabazz, and some female Panthers were present. Two male Panthers insisted the group "get the sisters outa here," suggesting the situation was unsafe and the male Panthers would have to protect these women. Seale responded that the group was armed and that one female Panther had a gun in her purse and "she isn't

worried” (122).⁵⁴ This story suggests that although some male Panthers felt a responsibility to protect their categorically vulnerable female members, during the time leading up to the Sacramento protest, at least one female Panther was carrying a gun by her own initiative and at least one of its leaders acknowledged this and rejected claims that the women needed to be protected by men. Although this story confirms the Panthers’ reliance on tactics that publicly showcased men’s use of arms rather than women’s, it also complicates an analysis of the movement that privileges an unexamined feminist devotion to nonviolent tactics.

This story is not an anomaly. In her essay “Why I Joined the Party: An Africana Womanist Reflection,” Regina Jennings critiques the organization’s “double standard for women” and the fact that some of its leaders “were sexist” but also explains that her impetus to join was directly related to the Panthers’ radical (and performatively violent) approach: “Their mystique—the black pants, leather jackets, berets, guns, and their talk—aggressive and direct—attracted me and thousands more across America” (257). Jennings notes that when she joined the Panthers, “I already knew how to handle weapons [. . .] I pistol-packed for work” (258). She was inspired by the images she saw at the Sacramento protest: “I saw a marvelous Bobby Seale marching with male and female Panthers with guns at the state capitol in California. I thought I had finally found my

⁵⁴ Ironically, Seale learned later that his male companions were concerned in part because the weapons they carried openly were not loaded (122). If the weapon their female companion carried—though concealed and not part of her overt performance of security—was, she was ironically more able than the worried male Panthers to protect the group with her weapon despite her lack of participation in a public display of armed power.

calling” (258).⁵⁵ When Jennings first showed up at a Panther office and was asked why she wanted to join the organization, Jennings responded, “I wanna kill all the White people; that’s why” (259), a move that even Jennings acknowledges as over-the-top and that received some skepticism from the Panthers who followed her and checked her credentials to ensure she was not from the FBI before allowing her to join as her rhetoric seemed “too honest, too loud, and too ridiculous to be serious” (259). When critiquing the sexism prevalent in the organization, Jennings draws a distinction between her desire to participate in the Panthers’ armed politics (“All I wanted was to be a soldier” (262)) and her desire to be able to freely refuse romantic relationships with other Panthers. She makes no connection between her problems with the party’s sexism and the Panthers’ use of arms.

In her essay “Black Nationalism: The Sixties and the Nineties,” Angela Davis recounts her initial reaction to a photograph of the Panthers’ Sacramento protest, one she viewed while abroad in Europe: “...the image of the leather-jacketed, black bereted warriors standing with guns at the entrance to the California legislature . . . That image, which would eventually become so problematic for me, called me home” (“Black Nationalism: The Sixties and the Nineties” 290). Davis’s statement (written decades after the Sacramento protest) simultaneously hints at the limitations of the Panthers’ tactics while illustrating their draw. It suggests that an easy reading of the Panthers wherein pacifist women were duped or otherwise coerced into participating in the patriarchal performance of violence and were eventually able to wield their pacifying influence on

⁵⁵ As I mentioned above, most accounts of the Sacramento protests do not mention openly armed female participants, although some do.

the organization when they achieved a critical mass of participation is far too simplistic and ultimately inaccurate.

Davis articulated her position with regard to the use of violence as a protest tactic in a 1972 interview she conducted while in jail for owning guns that were used in an armed effort to free several convicts from a San Rafael courthouse. Explaining first that violence is not the goal of a revolution, but given the structural violence surrounding black people in America, you have to expect some violence will occur, she then shifts the conversation to the premise of the question of whether violence is a justifiable tactic:

You ask me, you know, whether I approve of violence. I mean, that just doesn't make any sense at all, whether I approve of guns. I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. Some very very good friends of mine were killed by bombs, bombs that were planted by racists. I remember from the time I was very small, I remember the sounds of bombs exploding across the street, our house shaking. I remember my father having to have guns at his disposal at all times because, at any moment, we might expect to be attacked. (Olsson)

After outlining her personal connections to the four young girls who were killed in the infamous bombing at a Birmingham church in 1963, Davis explains that,

after that, in my neighborhood, all the men organized themselves into an armed patrol. They had to take their guns and patrol our community every night because they did not want that to happen again. I mean, that's why, when someone asks me about violence, I just, I just find it incredible

because what it means is that the person who is asking that question has absolutely no idea what black people have gone through, what black people have experienced in this country from the time the first black person was kidnapped from the shores of Africa. (Olsson)

Other women involved with the Black Panthers likely understood the very structural violence Davis describes and viewed their participation in the use of arms as a necessary response to it to prevent further injury and death in the black community. While Davis refers to her father and the other men in her community who armed themselves in self-defense, black women participated in armed patrols that preceded the existence of the Black Panther Party, like the female members of the Deacons for Self-Defense and Justice in Louisiana (LeBlanc-Ernest 306–307). The first woman to join the Panthers, Tarika Lewis, participated in firearms training and, when faced with sexism within the organization in the form of men who refused to take orders from her, she invited them to the weapons range where “I could outshoot ‘em” (LeBlanc-Ernest 307–308). Bobby Seale estimated in 1968 that women constituted approximately sixty percent of the organization’s membership (qtd. in LeBlanc-Ernest 309); these women participated in, among other activities, a shoot-out with the Los Angeles Police Department in 1969, an event that, along with women’s experience with mistreatment by police that rivaled that the male Panthers experienced, compelled many skeptical male Panthers to consider the female members deserving of the status of revolutionaries (LeBlanc-Ernest 314–315, 317). These women were just as tied up in the structural violence in their communities and just as apt to desire participation in efforts to defend against it.

One image that helps to further complicate depictions of the Black Panthers' violent rhetoric as exclusively problematic and exclusively performed by men is one that was taken in August of 1968 that features a female Panther carrying a large rifle. The woman holds the weapon as someone who knows how to use it and is prepared to do so. She is not featured—nor is the gun—as a flashy, sexualized object. Instead, she is dressed in plain clothes and stands casually but not aloofly and holds the gun comfortably as if it may be used for some practical purpose rather than as a prop in a public exhibition. This image was featured in a photo exhibit and eventually published in 1970—while the party was still very active—in a book collection titled *The Vanguard: A Photographic Essay on the Black Panthers* (Baruch and Jones). According to the volume's authors, the collection was vetted through Kathleen and Eldridge Cleaver, leaders within the party, who approved, and even celebrated, the collection. This approval might be read as a kind of a party endorsement of this image, an image in a collection of photos that further challenge dominant gender roles on some of the pages that follow this one by featuring two photos of a male Panther at a free breakfast program wearing an apron and emerging from the kitchen with a plate of food, which he serves to a little girl seated at the table.

Journalism scholar Linda Lumsden analyzes similar images that appeared in the organization's newspaper, the *Black Panther*. She highlights the organization's efforts to reframe prevailing images of black women by featuring depictions of its female members as embodying an alternative, empowering notion of black womanhood and an organizational commitment to combating sexual oppression, even calling the paper “profoundly feminist” (900). Scholarship that critiques the *Black Panther's* sexism

focuses on the paper's coverage of women in its earliest issues which, Lumsden admits, contained "blatantly sexist" (902) depictions of women. However, some early issues also depicted celebratory images of black women wielding guns and knives like Emory Douglas's March 1968 back cover spread. Starting in 1969, the paper published numerous calls to its readers to take women's liberation seriously, including Huey Newton's famous call in August of 1970 for members to recognize and embrace both women's liberation and gay liberation movements. Alongside proclamations of a need to fight women's oppression (even as cases of sexual oppression within the organization continued) were numerous depictions of women with guns, celebrating black revolutionary womanhood, depictions that continued throughout the organization's history.

In 1972, chairman Bobby Seale ran for mayor of Oakland and Elaine Brown ran for a City Council seat. Brown recounts that "great public debate arose about the new Panthers, about whether we had decided that power grew out of a ballot box rather than the barrel of a gun." She clarifies that the Panthers' agenda "was to overthrow the United States government. It was to defend the humanity of our people with armed force. It was to institute socialist revolution" (323). Brown became head of the organization in 1974 when Huey Newton was in exile and declared to an audience of Panthers, "I have all the guns and all the money" (3). She later emphasized this point: "I repeat, I have control over all the guns and all the money of this party" (5). Brown's comments serve to demonstrate that even in the midst of change within the party, the emphasis on arms remained, as well as women's participation in this rhetoric and its accompanying tactics.

The image of (black) womanhood that she and other Panther women embodied challenged, throughout the history of the organization, prevailing associations between womanhood, nonviolence, and peace politics and highlighted one possible response to black women's historical position amid uneven power relations in the United States.

Ethical Failing: The Unambiguous Subject

While many of the examples above highlight some of the female Panthers' interest in and experience with arms and the use of technologies of violence to perform their agency, political and otherwise—which presents an alternative ontology of womanhood—some of them also highlight ethically problematic claims. One such claim is the notion, routinely borrowed by the Panthers from Mao Tse-Tung, that “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun.” Part of what renders this notion problematic is its suggestion that violence is the only source of political power, an idea I explore in depth below. But part of what muddied the waters in the Panthers' case was the manner in which this political idea—which in many ways simply echoes Weber's notion that modern states are defined by their monopoly of the legitimate use of violence—became conflated for white audiences with the cultural myth of the black savage. What made this association even easier for such audiences to make was the manner in which the Panthers often embraced this myth to their tactical advantage.

At first glance, the members of the Black Panther Party appear to be positioned almost exactly opposite the white female activists I explored in Chapter 1, especially given how many of these women relied on the cultural myth of the black savage to justify their endorsement of enfranchising peaceful, moral white women to offset the immigrant

and black male vote (see Chapter 1). However, in some ways, their situation was quite similar. While the white female suffragists and temperance activists of the 19th and early 20th centuries found themselves tactically embracing the myth of the categorically vulnerable woman, so did black Panthers find themselves tactically embracing the myth of the black savage. This myth is rooted in histories of colonialism and imperialism. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, a text that, among others, influenced the Panthers' ideas about violent resistance, Frantz Fanon describes the view colonizers hold of natives (a relationship the Panthers may have seen as exemplifying the ways in which the American government—an imperial power—viewed black Americans):

the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil . . . The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality. (41)

While this description relates to the colonization of native populations, the U.S. exploitation of African slaves operated in much the same way as the colonization of Africans in Africa, with an imperial power justifying its systemic dehumanization and enslavement of African people with a similar belief in the morally vacant and dangerous bodies of people of color. Aware of this stereotype and its etymology, the Panthers anticipated the media's efforts to paint them in such a light and the media did not disappoint. Coverage of the Panthers' famous Sacramento protest embraced the

stereotype, with one article's tone suggesting the word "Negro" be read a synonym for "savage" when it argued that "The need for effective, comprehensive weapons control laws was never better illustrated than when a band of *Negroes* armed with loaded shotguns, pistols and rifles forced its way into the Assembly chamber at Sacramento" ("Stronger Gun Laws Needed" B4, emphasis added). In the Sacramento protest and other protests to come, the Panthers endeavored to adopt and subvert the American stereotype of the black savage to use it to their advantage. This decision sometimes undermined their efforts to flip the script and portray the police as recklessly violent rather than black citizens. As Bobby Seale explains, party co-founder Huey Newton

understood a revolutionary culture, and Huey understood how arms and guns become a part of the culture of a people in the revolutionary struggle. And he knew that the best way to do it was to go forth, and those hungry newspaper reporters, who are shocked, who are going to be shook up, are going to be blasting that news faster than they could be stopped. (149)

Seale and Newton embraced an armed revolutionary ethic, but they also wished to capitalize on the image of the black thug, not just the revolutionary, as it could bring the Panthers attention without alienating possible recruits:

[Newton] said, now, the papers gon call us thugs and hoodlums. A lot of people ain't gon know what's happening. But the brothers on the block, who the man's been calling thugs and hoodlums for four hundred years, gon say, 'Them some out of sight thugs and hoodlums up there!' The brothers on the block gon say, 'Who *is* these thugs and hoodlums?' In

other words, when the man calls us ‘nigger’ for four hundred years with all its derogatory connotations, Huey was smart enough to know that black people were going to say, ‘Well, they’ve been calling us niggers, thugs, and hoodlums for four hundred years, that ain’t gon hurt *me*, I’m going to check out what these brothers is doing!’ (qtd. in Marine 66)

Newton believed that embracing, rather than fruitlessly refuting, the ethos of the black thug might garner his movement attention, but also, as black cultural studies scholar Nikil Pal Singh explains, “guns, Newton believed, would give the Panthers street credibility and allow them to capture the imagination of their primary audience: black youth in the ghettos of Oakland and Richmond” (194). Singh argues that the Panthers’ approach “revalued blackness positively, while at the same time drawing on its threatening powers within the dominant U.S. racial imagination” (203). In other words, knowing that they would be read as dangerous, the Panthers hoped to direct the vector of that threat so that they would be read as threats to white privilege and, importantly, to the political economic structure of the U.S. However, as tactically useful this method was in the short term, in addition to offering an impoverished model of ontology, it was extremely damaging and sometimes fatal in the long run. When the Panthers’ performative force came head-to-head with the state’s real force, the result was sometimes deadly. As Singh explains, “the police often found their only recourse was to show that their own power was backed by more than words and empty guns” (203–204).

Nevertheless, despite the severity of the outcome, we should not be tempted to value the Panthers’ actions as ethically *worse* than the decision by white suffragists and

temperance activists to embrace the myth of the inherently pacifist and categorically vulnerable woman. While it may be easy to imagine the myth of the peaceful and vulnerable woman, while false, as benign simply because of its emphasis on nonviolence, both paradigms are ethically problematic. The violent response of the police in the case of the Panthers must be seen as more related to how the state viewed the Panthers rather than how they portrayed themselves and to the state's efforts to preserve its monopoly on violence. Both the myth of the peaceful and vulnerable woman and the myth of the black savage are designed to—and succeed in—effectively stripping populations of their full personhood. As the myth of the especially peaceful and categorically vulnerable woman justifies precluding women from enjoying political power in a society that requires violence in a dangerous political sphere, the myth of the savage black fuels a fear of blacks and justifies both legally disarming them and unleashing brutal violence against them. Importantly, both fail to account for ambiguity. This—the Panthers' failure to account for our fundamental ambiguity—I see as their major failing from an ethical perspective.

To say that we are ambiguous means simply that we define ourselves and others in the abstract world of ideas, as subjects, but we are also embodied, material beings. Negotiating these two dimensions of humanity ethically means we are in a constant struggle to preserve both aspects of the human condition and that we must reject any action that would mean reducing others or ourselves to pure materiality or to abstract ideas. It is this ambiguity that makes it impossible to predict the future and, therefore, important to focus on preserving the drive for humans to define their own subjectivity

and to resist acting upon bodies as if they are only representations of ideas. Accepting the idea, therefore, that political action necessarily *requires* violence means deciding that violence is necessary before understanding the context, as if such action will determine the future. Embracing violence at this level also usually means rendering would be victims of violence as representations only rather than particular embodied beings. The Panthers, of course, understood deeply the particularity of being victims of such violence, of being rendered alternately into brute objects and mere ideas: the savage other, the immoral threat, the ungendered black body. Their mistake was to respond to this experience by embracing the idea that violence is necessary for political personhood, for accepting the current terms dictated by the political economic context. As Kimberly Hutchings explains in her analysis of Beauvoir's ethics, to adopt the argument that violence is necessary for making political progress, to "accept the 'doctrine of necessity,' people must be persuaded that they cannot think or make mistakes, a denial of subjectivity that may not physically kill the subject, but which nevertheless effectively reduces him or her to the status of a thing" ("Simone de Beauvoir and the Ambiguous Ethics of Political Violence" 120). In other words, such a move requires the denial not just of others' but also of one's own ambiguity. As Beauvoir herself argues, "Since we can conquer our enemies only by acting upon their facticity, by reducing them to things, we have to make ourselves things" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 99). Justifying an unambiguous connection between political progress and violence based in utility rather than necessity is similarly problematic because we cannot control the future: "we cannot know that [the] aim will be achieved" (Hutchings, "Simone de Beauvoir and the

Ambiguous Ethics of Political Violence” 120). This is not, of course, to say that violence is not sometimes necessary. But to insist that it is *always already* part and parcel of political action is a mistake. In the context of gender, the female Panthers may have actually come closer to a kind of acknowledgement of ambiguity. The Panthers’ notion of self-defense (a concept embraced by the entire organization, hence the original organizational name Black Panther Party for Self-Defense) was perhaps embodied best by the women who carried handguns but did not display them in public protests, acknowledging violence as something they may need to carry out if attacked, but not a foregone conclusion. Despite their varied tactics, however, all Panthers embraced the concept that political personhood requires violence. From an ethical perspective, it is this denial of ambiguity rather than the presence of technologies of violence that we should view as problematic.

Importantly, the socialist model the Panthers adopted was not unique in its insistence that political personhood requires violence; in some ways, it mirrored this very idea contained in the U.S. liberal democratic notion of the political subject (as well as its notion of sexual difference). Other Far Left groups like the Weather Underground Organization repeated this mistake. As I’ve mentioned above, the notion that “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun” simply echoed the inherent connection between violence and political action in the modern state. However, the Panthers must be held accountable for their embrace of this notion, not because they originated the idea or because it is uniquely associated with their organization. The Panthers should be

critiqued for embracing this idea because it replicates a dominant ontological notion that the human condition is unambiguous.

It should also be noted that despite the important work they did in highlighting the repressive power relations between the state and black citizens and the attention they brought to the stereotype of the black savage, the ethos of the strong black man the Panthers emulated was often tied to an uneven, and oppressive, relationship with black women, a fact with which the female members of the Black Panther Party struggled. One example that might be read as simultaneously hinting at the organization's institutional sexism and its modeling of an alternative, potentially empowering womanhood is a series of campaign posters published in a 1968 issue of the Panther Party newspaper for Panther leaders running for local office (*The Black Panther: Black Community News Service*). Kathleen Cleaver, the only woman pictured, is also the only one holding a gun, a rifle. Her gun is presented as a marker of her potential political power as it is paired with a proclamation of her status as political candidate. However, the differences between Cleaver's ad and that of the three male candidates also featured in the paper are noteworthy. She appears in a full body shot wearing a leather jacket, a skirt, tall boots, and sunglasses, whereas her male companions are depicted in head shots, in two cases behind podiums where they have all the ethos of powerful political figures. In this context, Cleaver's body and her gun might even be read as sexualized. This depiction calls to mind other possible problems within the Party, including reported expectations that its female members take on subordinate supportive roles.

Similarly, while they rejected capitalism and liberal democracy, the Panthers embraced a Marxist politico-economic revolutionary model that, despite its usefulness, nonetheless replicated the liberal democratic insistence on the importance of sexual difference. While Marxism is in no way inherently sexist, the particular theoretical history with which the Panthers aligned themselves replicated a problematic model of gender. Thus, black women, under this rubric, are sometimes seen, like their white counterparts, as victims in need of protection, and male Panthers sometimes saw themselves as regaining their manhood by protecting the women in their communities. In addition to emphasizing police brutality and other violence visited on black communities rather than the systematic rape of black women, which began in slavery and continued long after its abolition and, as Patricia Hill Collins points out in *Black Sexual Politics*, the presence of public brutality and other forms of state violence of which black men are victims often “operate as consensus issues within African American politics” whereas “the sexual violence visited upon African American women” doesn’t receive such attention (217), the Panthers may have also sometimes gotten caught up in what bell hooks describes as “sexist stereotypes that suggest men are violent, women are not; men are abusers, women are victims” (*Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* 118). This is true even while black women are often viewed outside of the black community as ‘strong black women,’ capable of violence and aggression and even as many of the women in the organization employed technologies of violence as means of political agency and as men in the organization supported these efforts.

Technology and Ambiguity and Other Conclusions

Returning to the question that opened this chapter, then, what is the role of technologies of violence in the ethics of public protest, particularly for women? In contemplating this question, we must remember that the role of such technologies is no doubt significant, but these tools are limited in their power. Specifically, while technology may alter our ontology, it does not erase our humanity, namely the fact that we remain embodied. We, as cyborgs, are still mortal. With Bryan Turner (38), I believe that this is a defining characteristic of the human experience. Without it, in other words, we are no longer human. Technology also does not render obsolete relationships, desire, and connection, or the fact that the way in which we define ourselves is sometimes in conflict with others' definitions and with our own embodied experience, however influenced by technology. Its presence, in other words, does not change the fact that we cannot completely control our fate. The ubiquity of technology, therefore, problematizes paradigms that rely on the concept of a 'pure' or 'ideal' natural self, but it does not alter the fact that we are ambiguous, embodied and vulnerable, nor that we are interdependent and relational. Despite their power in altering our experience of life, technologies similarly may impact but do not erase the uneven nature of human relationships.

Technologies do affect relationships, but not in any predetermined or systemic predictable way, in part because technologies are not inherently good or bad. As Haraway herself argues, the cyborg occupies an ambiguous position: it is both enmeshed in militarization and allows for potentially subversive positionalities. It is simultaneously at the center of the "informatics of domination" (161) and imbued with liberatory potential. The ubiquity of technology, in other words, does not presuppose a particular politics, nor

does its rejection or deployment in public protests. Instead, the use or rejection of technologies of violence should be scrutinized for the implications such decisions have on ontology in the context in which they are being used. In the case of the Black Panther Party, I have argued that its members should not be admonished for employing technologies of violence per se, but they should be critiqued for their suggestion that the human political subject is unambiguously violent or that to assert political agency is necessarily to employ violence.

Importantly, my argument that technologies are neither inherently liberatory nor evil should not be read as a claim to the inherent *neutrality* of technology. I stated in the introduction that violence and nonviolence must not be viewed simply as tools protestors have at their disposal to choose among, uninfluenced by culture, power, and the political economy. Similarly, we do not simply choose to use technologies of violence or to reject them, unencumbered by the forces of history, power, culture, and politics. In the same way I am insisting on an ethics of ambiguity rather than an ethics of absurdity, I contend that technologies are not inherently liberatory or evil while refraining from the suggestion that they are neutral. In addition to the need to consider cultural and social forces that remove the possibility for neutrality, we should also recognize that technologies are evolving. Haraway wrote her manifesto in the mid-1980s, before the mainstreaming of the Internet and well before the development of thinking technologies that rely on metadata and other tools to remove the labor of decision-making from the user. These technologies are, of course, designed and created by people and are in that sense not inherently neutral; they are also influenced by the culture, social world, history, and

power relations at play in the designers' world. But more than that, these technologies make increasingly invisible the influences and bias built in to the tools themselves (many of which are not independent tools, but are part and parcel of our very being) such that it is increasingly more difficult to parse out the power, culture, and political and economic forces at play when using a technology or acting as a cyborg. They are perhaps not even evident to us as we leave much of the thinking labor to the technologies themselves. These influences are certainly more invisible than when a contingent of protestors contemplates whether to employ rifles in their public protest. Nonetheless, while we cannot say that technologies of violence are neutral, we can still insist on not taking for granted their inherent liberatory or oppressive nature. We can also insist on the need to account for the ambiguity of the human condition when considering their use. We must insist that our cyborg status has not, as yet, even with increasingly sophisticated technology, removed our vulnerability or our mortality and we therefore can still consider our cyborg selves to be both ambiguous and vulnerable.

While we all remain fundamentally ambiguous and vulnerable, however, the case of the female Black Panthers offers perhaps a unique critique of associations between womanhood and technologies of violence given the historical experience of the American black woman. As I've argued above, one factor that plays a huge role in our understanding of violence and technologies of violence in public protest and their effect on human ontology is the connection often made between the modern state and violence, and, therefore, political personhood and a capacity for violence. Women have a particularly tough line to tow in this regard as we are not believed to possess adequate

capacity to enact the violence that would earn us full political personhood, regardless of the fact that technologies of violence are just as easily deployed by women as they are by men. Black women are in an especially marginalized position with regard to the use of violent technologies as they are sometimes simultaneously believed to be (unlike white women) rugged and strong, but also potentially savage rather than embodying the required capacity for wielding state violence and undeserving of political personhood. Despite the unique problems faced by women in various social categories, however, I believe female activists should resist embracing technologies of violence as a uniformly liberatory gesture to combat sexism. Indeed, technologies of any kind do not contain in them the inherent power to equalize long standing historical relationships of oppression and uneven power. Such technologies should not be rejected by women, however, because we are *women*.

While her focus is on male and female ontologies with respect to war and not technologies of violence in a protest context, Jean Bethke Elshtain's early work is relevant here. In it, she critiques contemporary cultural representations of the problematic male/female dichotomy that paints women as natural pacifists *and* representations that suggest the simple solution is for women to also become "just warriors." She argues that this solution and the presence of what she calls "the Ferocious Few"—"women who reversed cultural expectations by donning warrior's garb and doing battle"—"seems not to have put much of a dent in the overall edifice of the way war figures in the structure of

male and female experience and reactions” (8).⁵⁶ It also hasn’t done much to take the focus away from (non)violence and redirect it to more consequential and foundational topics, like human ontology. Elshtain argues for dismantling the entire paradigm, including both the construct of the ideal beautiful soul *and* the ideal just warrior. Agreeing with Elshtain on this point and applying her critique of how women and men are expected to behave in war to situations involving violence and technologies of violence in protest, I would suggest that myths like these must be replaced with something, and that something, I would argue, is an ethics that accounts for human ambiguity, vulnerability and relationality amid uneven power relations, a model that requires a constant negotiation of when violence may or may not be necessary and does not look to technology as an eternal vice or a panacea.

Focusing on questions of whether and how protestors can use technologies of violence to change the nature of human ontology or change the nature of power relations is a misguided approach for all of the reasons I’ve explored above. This is not to say, however, that there is no ethically tenable situation in which women can make use of technologies of violence, nor am I suggesting that women cannot ethically launch critiques of war, armament, gun laws, and the like. We might imagine an approach wherein activists recognize the need to be prepared to use violence, but simultaneously recognize the use of violence as always tragic. Such an approach must not presume women’s nonviolent approach or their use of violent technologies. Certainly, activists

⁵⁶ Indeed, in some cases, even female revolutionaries or terrorists are expected to maintain their roles as mothers and caretakers. This can be seen in the commonly replicated image of the female revolutionary with a gun in one hand and a baby in the other (Gonsalves 42).

must resist ontologies such as those promulgated in situations of modern warfare where soldier fighters are imagined as autonomous individuals—would be martyrs—who represent our ideals and face objectified evil enemies who represent the absence of morality or ethics. Similarly, we must critique violence waged against women and other marginalized populations without suggesting a particular ontology that attaches to women (or people of color, poor people, the elderly, etc.) as a category.

In addition, the mere fact that political personhood and the ability to use force in the name of the state—more specifically, to sacrifice one's life in war—are indelibly connected in a liberal democratic context does not mean that we need to embrace this model to make claims within American society. Quite the contrary, I believe this model needs to be critiqued, but we should critique it by challenging the problematic ontological model it suggests, not by placing our focus on the use or rejection of violence and technologies of violence. Responding to this problem by simply rejecting or embracing violence or technologies of violence as always already moral or immoral betrays the complex relationships between violence and ontology.

Likewise, while acknowledging the important association in the modern state between the use of violence and political personhood, it is also important to imagine the protest context as larger than the state-protestor dialectic. This is particularly vital as we turn our attention toward protest movements occurring after the Panthers' actions, as neoliberal policies rapidly replaced liberal ones and transnational corporations and other private and civil social institutions complicated a simplistic model wherein citizen protestors appeal to the state. Political process theory, advanced by Charles Tilly and

others to explain protestors' actions as responses to oppressive state action and not simply the product of anomie or collective behavior, has done much to help us see protestors as reasonable citizens simply reacting to the violence and oppression of the state rather than violent and impassioned individuals swept up in the moment. This dialectical understanding can help us better understand the genesis of protest decisions. However, protestor use of or reaction to violence is increasingly not directed toward the state, as in so many protests against third parties, corporations, neighbors, and others. Smashing windows of corporate storefronts to protest capitalism and the uneven distribution of wealth, petitioning nonprofit organizations to change their policies, or staging public performances to shift cultural ideals or fight against assault that results from uneven social relations cannot be explained using a model that only recognizes the relationship between the state and its citizens. Certainly the state and political structures are important, and I reject ethical models of nonviolence that render invisible structural state violence (as I've explored in detail in the introduction), but I'd also like to suggest that a focus on ontology allows for a consideration of the state while also opening up consideration of culture and social structures.

The complicated nature of protest and the task of staging a sometime need to fight back rather than the permanent acceptance or rejection of violence—and technologies of violence—makes the practice of ethical protest tricky, but such a process is nonetheless important. For so long we have remained preoccupied with the presence or absence of violence in the form of weapons, tools, and other technologies that these objects and historical images of their actual and rhetorical use in protest have taken on a life of their

own, standing in for our distain for violence and disorder and our desire for nonviolent solutions. A deeper look at what violence means in the modern state and its presence in the very structure of the political economic system and in the definition of political personhood itself in this context helps complicate our sometimes unexamined rejection of violence and our (understandably) visceral reaction to the wielding of guns, tools, and bombs. This analysis is meant to serve as a reminder that what should form the foundation of our ethical analyses of these cases is not a focus on (non)violence itself or these technologies, but the ontological arguments being made by activists, and, what's more, their claims about what it means to possess political subjectivity, rather than the wielding or rejection of these objects. A focus on ontology, I contend, can lead to far better determinations of the ethics of protest.

I've explored in this chapter the problem that members of some radical Far Left organizations accepted the notion that political subjectivity *requires* the use or capacity for using political violence, thereby endorsing an ontology of the unambiguous subject. Despite this problem, women in some radical Far Left organizations of the 1960s and 1970s complicated tired notions of ontology. In fact, women in the Weather Underground Organization, a group I explore in more detail in the next chapter, offered rare ontological insights that reflected a global awareness that included an acknowledgement of the oppression of colonization and imperialism. Contrary to common narratives that critique them for being misguided and either blind to or tolerant of the deep institutional sexism in the organizations they were a part of, rather than abandoning their commitment to feminism for a commitment to anti-imperialism, these women strove to connect their

protest tactics involving technologies of violence with their feminism; they did not simply mimic displays of masculine, misogynist violence. More importantly, this effort resulted in a concept of human ontology that accounted for the particularity of individuals' lives and relational subjectivity in a global context that often stood in contrast to the Eurocentric ethic marked by an unexamined commitment to nonviolence and an implied or stated association between feminism and pacifism endorsed by some of their feminist contemporaries.

Chapter 3 explores the protest actions of the women of the Weather Underground Organization as well as the ontological claims made by female American protestors as globalization expanded and, ultimately, the attacks of 9/11 triggered a problematic discursive turn related to terrorism, violent dissent, and gender, resulting in new problems in taking relationality with the Other seriously and a renewed commitment to a (Eurocentric) feminist discourse of peace. Turning from a focus on ambiguity to relationality, I use this historical analysis to explore what might be required in an approach to protest that takes seriously what human relationality means on a global scale.

CHAPTER THREE: RETHINKING RELATIONALITY

Around the same time the Black Panthers were staging their famous Sacramento protest, investment in developing an interdisciplinary academic field of women's studies was growing within U.S. universities, culminating in growing numbers of formal courses and programs. This process of institutionalization and women's increasing presence in the academy led to the development of various bodies of feminist theory, including many challenges to traditional disciplinary knowledge. Thus, feminist thought began to be generated both in academic institutions as well as activist movements. One major target of feminist scholars was the concept of autonomy, which, over the years, feminists have critiqued from numerous angles (Mackenzie and Stoljar). Of course, feminist scholars weren't the only ones critiquing this concept at the time as similar critiques were simultaneously being waged from other disciplines. More recent feminist postmodernist scholars critique the notion that a subject can be imagined as "self-transparent" and "psychically unified," that there is a "true self," ideas promulgated during the Enlightenment period and formalized by theorists like Kant and Descartes (Mackenzie and Stoljar 10–11). Those, like Kimberlé Crenshaw, working from a framework of intersectionality, have charged that individuals have not just one, but multiple identities and experience multiple, intersecting forms of oppression which they must navigate simultaneously.

While both of these related challenges to autonomy are important and valid, I am mostly concerned here with those early feminist theorists who challenged the concept of autonomy by pointing out not just the inability of each subject to exist as a unitary self, but also the fact that agents are interdependent, that they are not only affected by their social relations, but that their very material existence is dependent on others (Mackenzie and Stoljar 7–10). This was an important intervention and distinctly feminist as women have historically performed much of the care work that is rendered invisible by the notion of autonomy. Historically, therefore, men have more readily conceived of themselves as acting independently, of their own volition, and as being solely responsible for the results of such actions. Women, historically responsible for birthing and caring for children and tending to family members and the home, work on which others are dependent and which enables others to participate as ‘autonomous’ individuals in the public sphere, are well-positioned to understand the many ways in which we are actually interdependent rather than atomistically autonomous.

While the articulation of this material reality and its ontological implications was a necessary and powerful critique of autonomy and usefully replaced the dominant model of the autonomous subject with that of the relational subject, I take issue with four aspects of the version of relationality that, after many years of theorizing, continues to be deployed in feminist activist contexts. First, while most feminist scholars accept that all people are relational, women are often seen as either having an enhanced inherent capacity for relationality or at least an enhanced aptitude for acting on relational ties due to their material experience. Also, the concept of relationality is often applied to a

circumscribed, domestic context of familial relations, very often referring to a mother's particular connections with her children, a model that fails to fully account for relationality amid a myriad of structures of power and domination. Finally, the concept of relationality has become coupled with nonviolence, especially among feminists who assume that a relational ontology necessarily prescribes a nonviolent approach.

I endorse an analytical framework that acknowledges relationality as a fundamental ontological reality rather than the special provenance of women. This model accounts for our dependency even on those who may not be physically proximate but are nonetheless connected to us by particular relations of power. It does not presuppose that relationality prescribes nonviolence. When approaching relationality from this perspective, one begins to see it modeled usefully in protest in unexpected places. In this chapter, I highlight the women of the Weather Underground Organization as one such model. Likewise, I demonstrate how applying my model to recent activist movements, including those that followed 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, allows for productive ethical analysis. My critique of models based on the notion of women's relationality does not, however, mandate the eradication of gender altogether, an issue I take up in the chapter's conclusion.

Care Feminist Critiques of Autonomy

One of the earliest groups of feminist scholars who critiqued autonomy based on the material reality of women's historical roles as caretakers eventually came to be known as care feminists. I focus on care feminism here neither because it is the only critique of autonomy nor because it is the best. Care feminism, however, despite its

problems, represents the body of theory most associated with the label “feminist ethics”; in other words, it is believed to represent the most dominant attempt at articulating an ethical outlook that is uniquely feminist.⁵⁷ As philosopher Allison Jaggar explains, since the 1980s, “[f]or some . . . feminist ethics became and remained synonymous with an ethics of care” (“Feminist Ethics” 529). The continuing dominance of care ethics among feminist ethical theories is evidenced in a 2000 article by international relations theorist Kimberly Hutchings in which she labels care ethics “feminist ethics” and describes two other feminist approaches to ethics as “the justice critique” and “the difference critique” of care ethics, approaches she eventually recognizes in a 2007 essay as ethical traditions in their own right (enlightenment feminism and postcolonial feminism) (Hutchings, “Towards a Feminist International Ethics”; Hutchings, “Feminist Perspectives on a Planetary Ethic”).⁵⁸ Works associated with care ethics are commonly assigned in feminist theory courses and anthologized and excerpted in feminist theory collections. Also important for my purposes in this project is the way in which the ideas advanced by early care feminists resemble in many ways the ontological claims made in current similarly problematic women-centered U.S. protest movements.

Nancy Chodorow’s book *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*, published in 1978, was arguably the genesis of care ethics.

Chodorow was concerned with the perpetuation, from a psychoanalytic perspective, of

⁵⁷ See, for example, Allison Jaggar’s description of feminist ethics in the 2001 edition of the *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, cited in the next sentence. Jaggar’s description can be seen as dominant as she has built a reputation as an expert in feminist ethics, writing numerous publications devoted to describing the field (“Feminist Ethics: Some Issues for the Nineties”; “Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects”; *Living with Contradictions: Controversies in Feminist Social Ethics*; Jaggar and Young; “Feminist Ethics”).

⁵⁸ Similarly, the most recent entry on “Feminist Ethics” in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* also maintains a heavy focus on care ethics (Tong and Williams).

women's monopoly on child care in a nuclear familial structure in the absence of biological determinism or explicit training or indoctrination. Chodorow's text follows boys and girls through the Oedipus complex and concludes that what results from girls' prolonged preoedipal stage and their prolonged oedipal attachments to both mother and father are women who see themselves as "continuous with others," which prepares them for motherhood, and men who see themselves as "more separate and distinct" (169), which prepares them for the public, political sphere. Psychologist Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, published in 1982, relied on Chodorow's framework as well as her own experience studying the moral development of young girls and boys to suggest that the family arrangement Chodorow explores and its psychoanalytic implications lead to a gendered ethics, with boys—and later, men—tied to a justice framework that values autonomous individuals following universal guidelines for moral behavior, and girls and women—seeing themselves in their mothers—skilled at relational thinking and emphasizing the importance of particular human relationships. Sara Ruddick's *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1989) built on these ideas to suggest that what she calls "maternal thinking," the kind of relational thinking that is exercised in the practice of mothering, might lead to a peace politics when applied to the public sphere.⁵⁹

Care feminists' theorizing of the relational subject was useful. But while the claim that we are relational is an important revelation, as is an attempt to explain the etymology

⁵⁹ Other early care feminist works include Nel Noddings' *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984), and the anthologies *Women's Caring* (1991) (Baines, Evans, and Neysmith) and *An Ethic of Care* (1993) (Larrabee).

of relational thinking in girls and women, care feminist literature emphasizes women's development of relational thinking rather than the ontological concept that all humans are relational. It makes a distinction, in other words, between relational ontology and care, a practice these theorists associate with the ability to think relationally, and concerns itself predominantly with this practice rather than ontology. What's more, this theory arguably presents a flawed concept of relationality (even when it is applied to both women and men) because it is often modeled on the relationship of an adult parent with young children. This relationship is, by nature, one of uneven power and development rather than one of reciprocity and mutual recognition, hardly a model of mutual adult human relationships. While Chodorow's work, and by extension, the trajectory of care ethics is implicitly modeled on the mother-child relationship, theorist Jennifer Nedelsky, not explicitly associated with care ethics but cited by care theorists as providing a useful model for care,⁶⁰ explicitly suggests that autonomy should be reconceptualized in relational terms and modeled on the parent-child relationship. She acknowledges that this relationship is uneven and based in dependency, but argues that all relationships hold the potential for undermining autonomy rather than encouraging it (Nedelsky, "Reconceiving Autonomy" 21, note 31; Nedelsky, *Law's Relations* 4). While I agree with Nedelsky's conception that we are embedded in relations of uneven power, I contend that the parent-child relationship, particularly when the child is still in the care of the parent(s), not only holds the potential for oppression, but is defined by its unevenness. In other words, the

⁶⁰ Nedelsky has been read as basing her conception of relational autonomy on the mother-child relationship (Mackenzie and Stoljar 9; Slotte 64) when, in fact, she references childrearing and parenting but not mothers per se. This slippage speaks, perhaps, to our readiness to map motherhood onto care.

potential for mutual recognition and reciprocity is not present until the child reaches adulthood. It is a relational model based on mothers' relationships with their children, in fact, that has arguably led to the problematic endorsement of protests wherein knowing mother protestors shame observers with their particular knowledge of morality and human relationships, a dynamic I explore in Chapters 1 and 4.

I should point out that some theorists connected with care ethics, while associating women with care and men with justice, have also articulated an understanding of relational ontology that is not expressly gendered. Annette Baier, for example, while endorsing Gilligan's concept that women and men have different approaches to morality, also theorized a model of human ontology (based on a reinterpretation of Decartes' work) on the concept of "second persons" in her essay "Cartesian Persons." Rather than realizing ourselves in the first person ("I," "me") or in the third person ("they," "he," "she"), she argued, we become self-conscious by being addressed or recognized by another in the second person ("you") (89–90). Baier used this model to argue that all human subjects depend on recognition from others, even though some of her other work reflects a preoccupation with women's particular moral outlook as opposed to men's. Some later care feminists⁶¹ have also attempted to apply relationality more broadly, characterizing it as an ideal paradigm not just for understanding women's relationships with their friends and family, but for fields like international relations, as it allows for the understanding of global connectedness and the simultaneous accounting for the

⁶¹ In addition to works by Tronto, Held, and Robinson (mentioned below), Eva Feder Kittay's *Love's Labor* (1999) and Kittay and Ellen K. Feder's *The Subject of Care* (2003), among others, might be considered among those making similar contributions.

particularity of each situated context, each particular relationship (Held; Robinson). In a 1987 article (“Beyond Gender Difference to a Theory of Care”) and her 1993 book *Moral Boundaries*, care feminist Joan Tronto explicitly argues against the association between women and care, saying, “we need to stop talking about ‘women’s morality’ and start talking instead about a care ethic that includes the values traditionally associated with women” (*Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* 3). These theorists, however, maintain an association between relationality (or, more precisely, care ethics) and nonviolence. Some also problematically suggest that a capacity for the practice of care is not ontological, but must be learned and developed (Held), leaving the door open for the suggestion that some (women) are better than others (men) at being relational.⁶²

The (Unromantic) Work of Accounting for Relationality

While care feminists and others have articulated useful critiques of autonomy, I take issue with the suggestion that women have an enhanced capacity for relationality or at least an enhanced aptitude for it based on their material experience. I also critique the application of relationality to circumscribed, domestic and friendship contexts, the failure when accounting for relational ties to recognize all important structures of power and domination, and the suggestion that relationality necessitates nonviolence. At its root, the notion of relationality means that we are interdependent. Accounting for our relationality

⁶² Held argues, “It should not be taken for granted that we know *how* to care for others; care ethics involves learning how to listen and be attentive and responsive to the needs and suffering of others” (Held 30). Held sees care as a *practice* that involves intention and work. She also suggests that the person being cared for must have a real need for this care (31) and that the carer must not only care, but care well (51), suggesting that carers should be “proficient at meeting the needs of the vulnerable” (57). Caring, then, is something we should work towards, even if we do not currently care (49).

therefore requires recognizing the interconnectedness of humanity. While this sounds like a very romantic notion and might call to mind for some images of a mother's connectedness with her children or a comforting pathos of global connection, accounting for our relationality can be quite unsettling and difficult in practice. When we recognize something in another that is different, uncomfortable, or even evil, acknowledging our relationality means recognizing that that person is connected to us, depends on us, and that we, in turn, depend on them, however indirectly. It may even be the case that we are responsible for whatever caused the evil we detect in another. Our relationality is not restricted to our intimate and close ties, either, but also pertains to our ties with those we may not see or ever come into direct contact with, but who are nonetheless tied to us through relations of power. Importantly, while care or practices based on the reality of our relationality require action, we need not *do* anything to be tied to others; these ties, in other words, are ontological.

Judith Butler conceptualizes relationality with vulnerability, arguing that our openness to others is tied to our interdependency.⁶³ Borrowing Butler's commentary about vulnerability, I argue that our relationality, too, "precedes the formation of 'I'" (*Precarious Life* 31). In other words, we are interdependent before we even conceive of ourselves as subjects. In Chapter IV of his famous *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel argues that we cannot make the transition to full self-conscious subjects until we are

⁶³ Importantly, Butler does not embrace the term "relationality" even though she theorizes the concept of being bound to one another. She argues, "It does not suffice to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one, or trying to redescribe autonomy in terms of relationality. The term 'relationality' sutures the rupture in the relation we seek to describe, a rupture that is constitutive of identity itself" (*Undoing Gender* 19). I am borrowing Butler's conception of being ontologically bound to one another to inform my concept of relationality rather than claiming that Butler adopts such a label.

recognized: “A *self-consciousness exists for a self-consciousness*,” he argues; “Only in this way is it self-consciousness indeed—for only in this way does it become aware of the unity of itself in its otherness” (Hegel 19, italics in original). Hegel points to the mutual recognition of two subjects as not simply important but as defining each subject’s very existence as a self-conscious being: “Self-consciousness exists *in and for itself* by virtue of the fact that it is in and for itself for another. That is, it exists only in being recognized” (20, italics in original). Hegel provides a vision of what happens when this recognition isn’t mutual in his famous exploration of the master-slave relationship. Thus, we are materially dependent on the care and labor of other subjects even before we know ourselves as subjects and are further dependent on recognition by another to become subjects. This arrangement, where failure of recognition typifies relationships of uneven power and domination, is particularly important to remember in this context of globalization with the U.S. situated as a late capitalist global power. Our relational ties require mutual recognition between subjects separated by space, language, culture, and power, ties that are only visible when one accounts for the structures of power and domination enabled by the political-economic context.

Julia Kristeva, herself situated in this context of globalization, is concerned in her 1991 work *Strangers to Ourselves*, with our need to acknowledge our relationality with others who may not be physically proximate, but are connected to us by power relations. Specifically, she is concerned with the ways in which we view foreigners and how nations develop a sense of nationality that others these people. Kristeva argues with Freud that we each possess both a conscious and an unconscious and by recognizing the

stranger within ourselves (the unconscious), we can better empathize with (strange) others:

With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*. Henceforth the foreigner is neither a face nor a nation. The foreigner is neither glorified as a secret *Volksgeist* nor banished as disruptive of rationalist urbanity. Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided. (181)

Kristeva warns that “the uncanny strangeness” within ourselves can be ignored, but this would “lead to an elimination of the psyche, leaving, at the cost of mental impoverishment, the way open to acting out, including paranoia and murder. From another point of view, there is no uncanny strangeness for the person enjoying an acknowledged power and a resplendent image” (190). In other words, although they risk “mental impoverishment,” those in power are most able to ignore the stranger within themselves and more successfully ‘other’ foreigners without acknowledging foreign strangeness as being an integral aspect of subjectivity itself. Kristeva’s approach is decidedly psychoanalytic, while mine is not, but her understanding of our connections to strange others through our own self-understanding echoes in some ways Beauvoir’s contention that the powerful are connected to powerless others because of the reality that, given our relational ties amid uneven power relations and human ambiguity, we all have

the capacity to be oppressed and to oppress. Thus, the strangeness within ourselves may be read as an acknowledgment that we, too, may be rendered “Other.”

Beauvoir contends that “no existence can be validly fulfilled if it is limited to itself. It appeals to the existence of others” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 67). We must accept this even though “[t]he idea of such a dependence is frightening, and the separation and multiplicity of existants raises highly disturbing problems” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 67). Rather than suggesting that we are influenced by our social relations, Beauvoir echoes Hegel, Kristeva, and Butler’s contention that interdependency is tied to our very existence, arguing “Man [sic] can find a justification of his own existence only in the existence of other men” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 72). Combining Hegel’s concern with relationships of uneven power with the question of what it means to recognize one’s connectedness with a stranger, Beauvoir acknowledges a difference between the “arbitrary” act of “charity” where one intervenes from the outside, acting according to one’s own whim while remaining unconnected to the Other and the effort to free another in order to simultaneously free oneself. In the latter scenario, we acknowledge the need to work for freedom as not particularly concerning the oppressed Other, but as also preventing our own tyranny over others (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 86–87). Thus, our very existence and the prevention of our own tyranny is dependent on our understanding and prevention of another’s oppression.

As Hegel, Beauvoir, Kristeva, and Butler suggest, we are all relational. Thus, the idea that women have a corner on relationality or relational thinking is actually quite dangerous. This is true even though women may be culturally associated with the ability

to make connections with others and are historically responsible for the majority of care work. Relationality is experienced amid uneven power relations, however, which is perhaps why women have historically been more aware of the ways in which others depend on their invisible labor while disavowing its very existence or productive value. Advancing a flawed notion of relationality, however, where some populations are somehow *more* relational and our simultaneous failure to account for some others' lived experiences in our own self-concept has gotten us in trouble in protest. Importantly, recognizing that we are connected to the Other does not necessarily mean seeing an approach like revolutionary violence elsewhere and adopting it as a natural or necessary condition or embracing violence as a clear source of agency and power. But it also requires us to take account of cases where our assumptions of the necessity of nonviolence are misguided. It also means recognizing our participation in others' oppression. Interestingly, given these parameters, the women of the Weather Underground Organization, often dismissed because of their 'violent' tactics, provide a useful model of relationality.

Weatherwomen: A Model of Relationality

In 1968, U.S. radical feminists staged their famous protest at the Miss America Pageant, calling attention to impossible beauty standards U.S. women are held to as well as the focus on female bodily beauty altogether, focusing their critique on cultural oppressions U.S. women face (Greenfieldboyce). The same year, the National Organization for Women (NOW) protested at facilities that only admitted men and staged a five-day demonstration at the Colgate-Palmolive New York City headquarters in

objection to their exclusion of women from certain jobs, exemplifying the second wave focus on the politics of inclusion, namely the inclusion of women in the existing U.S. political economy (National Organization for Women). Also in 1968, however, women who would eventually become associated with the Weatherman organization were engaging with feminist thought and attempting to connect their feminism with their opposition to imperialism and capitalism, critiquing the current political economy as a source of problems rather than angling for women's inclusion in it and extending their attention outside of U.S. national borders to places affected by what they saw as the U.S. imperialist project. Then Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) members Bernadine Dohrn and Naomi Jaffe published an article titled "The Look is You" in *New Left Notes* on March 18, 1968 pointing to imperialism ("which drains the resources of the Third World" [356]), the resultant market economy, and its focus on women as consumers as repressive forces that contribute to women's oppression, suggesting that fighting for "equal jobs (exploitation)," "a larger share of power," "equally reified sexual roles," and "equal aggressive leadership in the Movement" overlooks overarching structural problems (358). An acknowledgment of U.S. women's role in the market economy and its ties to oppression abroad represented an insightful understanding of relationality amid uneven power relations and a useful critique of a politics of inclusion in an oppressive political economy. Their solutions are vague, however ("meaningful creative activity for all," "the abolition of commodity tyranny," "an end to sexual objectification and exploitation," and "a new style of non-dominating leadership") (358).

It's important to note that the Weatherwomen⁶⁴ were by no means the only socialist feminists active during this time. Other women critiqued capitalism and liberalism and linked them to women's oppression. But I've focused on the Weatherwomen and the ways that their critiques differed from those of some of their contemporary feminists in part because of the fact that their productive ontological claims are often ignored because of their 'violent' tactics. These useful claims, rooted in part in socialism, their focus on women's ontological potential for violence, their role in our public memory of protest, and the way they have been summarily dismissed provide a useful starting point, I believe, for a broader discussion about the heavy influence of the violent/nonviolent dichotomy on protest analysis and the way it prevents deeper scrutiny of protestors' ontological claims.

In addition to Dohrn and Jaffe's brief reference to the Third World and imperialism in their 1968 *New Left Notes* article, there were other early signs that women in SDS were beginning to make connections (albeit fumbling ones) between the Global South and their own feminist struggles. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, during the 1968 SDS national convention, several women staged a performance designed to critique the organization's chauvinism in which they imitated the cry of female Algerian revolutionary guerilla fighters in the recent film *Battle of Algiers* (Barber 133). The 1966 film famously depicts France's victory in the Battle of Algiers, with a coda that explains that Algerians ultimately won their struggle for independence. It was embraced by leftist

⁶⁴ The term "Weatherwomen" is one I use as shorthand for the particular contingent of feminist women in the Weather Underground I address in this paper. Dan Berger and others also use this term to refer to female members of the organization. As far as I know, the women did not refer to themselves in this way.

activists in the Western world as a model of successful revolutionary resistance to Western imperialism and colonialism. Women in the SDS may have seen themselves in the film's depiction of women playing an active role in violent acts of revolution. The timing of the film's release made it perfectly suited as a favorite of revolutionary activists on the Left and it has continued to serve as a cautionary tale for military strategists contending with guerilla fighters. As recently as 2003, the Pentagon screened the film as an educational tool for a military engaged in a battle with guerilla fighters in Iraq and contemplating the strategic use of torture. In a flyer advertising the event, the screeners liken what they see as the chaos of Iraq with the NLF depicted in the film: "Children shoot soldiers at point-blank range. Women plant bombs in cafés. Soon the entire Arab population builds to a mad fervor. Sound familiar?" (Kaufman 3). Feminists in the SDS who would later be active in the Weatherman organization would likely take issue with such a characterization of female fighters as emblematic of the world turned upside down and a pervasive lack of ethical behavior. They rejected the mainstream feminist movement's embrace of a nonviolent ethic that seemed wholly compatible with such a notion, just as postcolonial feminists of the 21st century might take issue with many Global Northern feminists' dismissal of Global Southern women's involvement in acts of political violence. While acts that aim to kill or harm civilians should certainly be condemned, they should be condemned on the basis of the immorality of precluding the freedom and lives of others when such action is not necessary for immediately protecting one's freedom, for rendering people into symbols of an ill rather than embodied subjects and assuming that political personhood necessitates the use of violence. They should not,

however, be singled out because they involve female participants. Likewise, our critiques should not presume that vulnerability or relationality—often embraced among feminists as important characteristics—presume nonviolence in all cases. The SDS women’s improvisation of female guerilla fighters, while perhaps problematically driven by a romanticized notion of female revolutionaries, brings these important issues to light.

On March 8, 1969, a few months before the official birth of Weatherman, *New Left Notes* released an issue devoted to International Women’s Day featuring images of revolutionary Third World women and articles on revolutionary women in the U.S., China, and Palestine. In an article in that issue by Bernadine Dohrn titled “Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Movement,”⁶⁵ she asserts that mainstream feminism in the U.S. is an “often separatist” strand “based on an unstated white middle class consciousness and perspective.” She notes further that “[m]ost of the women’s groups are bourgeois, unconscious or unconcerned with class struggle and the exploitation of working class women, and chauvinists concerning the oppression of black and brown women.” She goes on to critique the “middle class single issue movement . . . at a time when the black liberation movement is polarizing the country, when national wars of liberation are waging the most advanced assaults on U.S. imperialism” (“Toward a Revolutionary Women’s Movement”). Indeed, second wave feminism is often marked as beginning with the publication of Betty Freidan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, a text based on interviews with fellow female graduates of Smith College “[i]n the privacy of their

⁶⁵ Interestingly, this article is not anthologized in any secondary source I could find, perhaps indicating that historians do not find it to be central to understanding the SDS or the Weatherman organization. I was able to find a copy of the original *New Left Notes* issue in which it appeared archived online.

suburban homes” (Rosen 4), which exposed the dissatisfaction that plagued so many American housewives who ostensibly had everything to be happy about.⁶⁶ The population Friedan focused on in her book—middle class white heterosexual married women—in large part became the focus and the main participants of the Women’s Rights movement.

The issues that would emerge from this movement included the plight of housewives, including the discrimination and dissatisfaction they faced at home as well as the struggles they encountered when they left the domestic sphere to enter educational institutions or the workforce. Radical feminists targeted institutional and cultural patriarchy and the resulting cultural norms of womanhood, but focused their attention mainly on the U.S. context. In addition to coalition building—including the founding of women’s organizations, like Friedan’s National Organization for Women (NOW)—and efforts to enact new legislation supporting equal rights for women, a common tactic of organizing among the women’s movements of the 1960s and 1970s was the use of “consciousness-raising” groups, wherein women would gather, often in each other’s homes, to discuss their personal stories, aiming to increase awareness of their own and all women’s oppression (Rosen 196).

In her 1969 article, anticipating postcolonial and womanist feminists, Dohrn critiques mainstream feminism’s focus on middle-class white women and its failure to connect feminism with resistance against other forms of oppression, including liberation movements with female participants in the Global South. She implores middle class

⁶⁶ Ruth Rosen surmises that Friedan considered addressing issues that affected female workers, as did Communist women in the 1930s, but she ultimately settled on a focus that these women would never have imagined, in part because of her fears stemming from the country’s recent emergence from McCarthyism and what can only be described as hatred towards anything resembling Communism (5).

white feminists to “be conscious of our perspective and the class interests which our demands represent.” In arguing for the need to account for uneven power relations and the ways in which one group’s lack of power is inextricably linked to the privilege enjoyed by others, Dohrn appeals to other feminists to recognize the material conditions of others—and not just those most proximate to them—to understand their own position, invoking an ontology of relationality.

Dohrn’s article proposes “guerilla theatre actions” as a tactic for New Left feminists. Similarly, Cathy Wilkerson endorsed the formation of women’s militias in a July 1969 essay in which she critiqued “[t]he inability of the Weatherman proposal [which had just been published] to include an organic analysis of male supremacy” (91). And indeed, in the early years of the Weatherman organization, women in the group broke off to stage their own actions, carrying out a “jailbreak” action at a Pittsburgh high school in September of 1969 (“Women’s Militia”; Jacobs 50) where they shouted anti-war slogans through the halls, interrupted a history class to tell the students they were being fed misinformation, and advertised their upcoming Days of Rage action. During the Days of Rage in October of that year, an all-female fighting group of Weatherwomen dubbed the “Proud Eagle Tribe” (later the “Women’s Brigade”) staged a failed effort to attack a local recruiting center (Jacobs 60–61). Wilkerson’s endorsement of women’s militias includes a call to relationality in which she cites both the need for “white women workers” to comprehend “the relationship between their oppression and the oppression of Third World people” and the need to bring these women into a movement that “is, in practice, fighting male supremacy” (96). However, it also focused on issues that plagued

white women in particular “within the home and family” (92) and white middle class high school women, like “the restriction and surveillance of parents” (95). Despite a seeming preoccupation with problems that have historically especially concerned the white middle class, the challenge she poses to the prevailing model of white feminism by calling for the recognition of relationality with oppressed others is notable.

In March of 1970, an accidental townhouse bombing killed three Weatherman members and forced the organization to rethink its philosophy and tactics. The group continued to bomb unoccupied buildings they saw as symbolic targets, carefully avoiding injury or death to anyone and focusing exclusively on property destruction, but their tactics continued to be viewed as dangerously violent. In October of that year, Weatherwomen targeted Harvard’s Center for International Affairs for its connection to the government’s “strategic hamlet program,” begun in 1962, wherein Vietnamese peasants were placed in “armed stockades” to prevent them from supporting guerilla fighters (Berger 142–143). The Women’s Brigade bombed this center to send a message to women involved in women’s rights and liberation movements. As Dan Berger explains, “The Weatherwomen chose an institution tied to the war in Vietnam as their target in order to counter the notion current among some feminists that Vietnam was not a women’s issue” (143). Many feminists at the time were, of course, connecting Vietnam and feminism, but many viewed women’s role as opposing the war as they might oppose any war (and its violence and militancy) rather than recognizing the Vietnamese people—and their struggles—as inextricably connected to their own lives. Two years earlier, in 1968, for example, thousands of women participated in the Jeannette Rankin Brigade in

Washington, D.C., led by Rankin herself, a women's suffrage activist and the first female member of Congress, to demonstrate their opposition to the war in Vietnam (Wilson 52). Rankin's presence and the manner in which the entire action was built around her name represented a physical reminder of the argument made by early suffragists and voiced by politicians like Rankin that women have a particular role to play in ending violent conflict given their heightened understanding of the results of warfare and their relationships with those (U.S. soldiers) impacted by its immediate effects.⁶⁷

In addition to their critique of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War that focused on the ways it impacted the lives of resistant Vietnamese people rather a spirit of universal feminist pacifism, there is some evidence that the Weatherwomen's 1970 action may have also been an effort to express solidarity with Angela Davis, a black female radical activist and friend of the Black Panther Party who had recently been arrested.⁶⁸ Their action therefore represented an effort to widen the traditional definition of feminist issues to include those issues confronting people of color at home and abroad. The Weatherwomen's engagement with U.S. international affairs was significant, although their tactic of symbolically bombing buildings represented their acceptance of the terms of political personhood in the modern state which imagined an unambiguously violent

⁶⁷ While it involved thousands of participants, the Jeannette Rankin Brigade was not unilaterally endorsed by contemporary feminists. Some radical feminists, who saw these women as reifying old gender roles, held a counter protest. Shulamith Firestone published an article in *The New York Radical Women* where she explained their opposition: "the Brigade was playing upon the traditional female role in the classic manner. They came as wives, mothers and mourners; that is, tearful and passive reactors to the actions of men rather than organizing as women to change that definition of femininity to something other than a synonym for weakness, political impotence, and tears" (Firestone).

⁶⁸ The fact that the Weatherwomen noted Davis's arrest and their support of her in a handwritten note at the bottom of the typed communiqué (Berger 143) indicates that this connection may have been made after the bombing.

political subject (a problem I explored at length in Chapter 2). Importantly, their tactic of bombing can be seen as symbolically tied to this concept of political subjectivity despite the fact that it avoided any actual harm to others. It should, however, be examined alongside the protestors' efforts to recognize global Others in an endorsement of relationality.

The words and actions of the Weatherwomen, combined with the growing influence of feminist activism in general arguably began to influence the Weatherman organization as a whole. The group's December 6, 1970 communiqué "New Morning, Changing Weather" announced its formal transition to a completely underground organization and identified the group for the first time as "The Weather Underground," arguably a sign of the organization's transition to a less sexist identity (see, for example, Berger 153).⁶⁹ The new name was not the only sign of this transition, however. In addition to renouncing their previous belief that "armed struggle is the only real revolutionary struggle" (Dohrn, "New Morning--Changing Weather" 162), a mistake they dub "the military error" ("New Morning--Changing Weather" 164), they embrace other possibilities for advancing the cultural revolution, citing among other things the fact that "Men who are chauvinists can change and become revolutionaries who no longer embrace any part of the culture that stands in the way of the freedom of women" ("New Morning--Changing Weather" 164–165). Significantly, the group also mentions by name

⁶⁹ In an aside, Dan Berger characterizes the Weather Underground that emerged in 1970 as "less sexist, more serious" than Weatherman, although he offers little in the way of evidence (153).

specific Vietnamese feminists.⁷⁰ They provide a laundry list of female revolutionary fighters, explaining, “It’s up to us to tell women in Amerika about” these women.⁷¹ They also mention several revolutionary women in the U.S. by name, thereby particularizing their celebration of revolutionary women rather than relying on previous more general descriptions. Here they attempt to use specific cases in Vietnam to reframe the women’s rights and liberation movements at home (modeling a kind of global relationality) while at the same time complicating their earlier notion that political action always necessitates violence (“the military error”).

A document written by the Weatherwomen in January of 1973 titled “Mountain Moving Day” that was circulated among its members is said to have further articulated their desire to address the sexism within their own organization. As Berger explains, this document “is a fascinating and timely document that attempts to untangle the organization’s inconsistent politics regarding women’s liberation and to determine a new direction in light of the January 1973 cease-fire between the United States and Vietnam” (170).⁷² This document, which resulted in an intensive women-only study group, also reflects the Weatherwomen’s continuing efforts to connect anti-imperialism with feminism without conflating them, arguing that “anti-imperialism, anti-racism, anti-sexism all intermingle but are not all the same” (qtd. in Berger 170). Despite other

⁷⁰ They remark that “Women’s lib groups can find in Nguyen Thi Binh a sister for whom there is love and support here” and mention “Than Tra, an organizer in the mass women’s organization” (Dohrn, “New Morning--Changing Weather” 166).

⁷¹ These women include “Pham Thi Quyen, fighter in the Saigon underground,” “Mme. Nguyen Thi Dinh, leader of the first South Vietnamese People’s Liberation Armed Forces unit uprising in Ben Tre in 1961,” and “Celia Sanchez and Heidi Santamaria who fought at Moncada and in the Havana underground” (Dohrn, “New Morning--Changing Weather” 168).

⁷² Berger obtained the document through his personal contact with Naomi Jaffe.

criticisms, even Berger, otherwise skeptical of the Weather Underground's intra-organizational efforts to overcome sexism, acknowledges that the women's efforts "to grapple with the correlations between race, class, and gender" reflect a move "to respond to what sociologists and feminists have since called 'the intersections of oppression'" (171). The Weatherwomen's understanding of intersectionality, a concept now widely accepted among feminist and gender scholars, can be seen as informing and complicating their model of relationality as one in which we are not only interdependent, but in which we are multi-dimensional beings, individuals grappling with an arrayed set of oppressions and privileges. Unfortunately, the complex nature of oppression and privilege was sometimes overlooked by feminist contemporaries who were devoted solely and entirely to fighting women's oppression as if it were experienced uniformly by all women.

In May of 1973, Jane Alpert, a former member of an armed underground revolutionary group, sometime acquaintance of Weather Underground members, and a recent convert to radical feminism, published an open letter to the Weatherwomen titled "Mother Right: A New Feminist Theory" in the journal *off our backs* and, later, *Ms.* magazine (Berger 172–173). While Alpert's letter reflects a view of women that would have been rejected by some feminists of the time, it also reflects the singular focus on women's oppression that was echoed by other mainstream feminists, albeit using less extreme rhetoric. In her open letter, Alpert overtly dismisses the differences among both women and men of various nationalities, races, and socio-economic backgrounds, arguing that men are uniformly oppressors and women are uniformly linked by the fact that "[m]en oppress us" (22).

The Weatherwomen issued their reply on July 24, 1973 in a statement titled simply “A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement.” While triggered by a need to respond to Alpert, the Weatherwomen addressed the women’s movement as a whole. This statement reflects a new effort by the activists to engage in a deliberate way with other women involved in the women’s movement and to “bridge the gap between us” (“A Collective Letter to the Women’s Movement” 199). But it also reflects an effort to critique this movement. The Weatherwomen “acknowledge [their] debt to the women’s movement” and concede that they previously “denied the legitimacy of white women’s demands” (200). They maintain, however, that the women’s movement was founded by women who had abandoned previous anti-war and anti-racist efforts. They “turned their attention to the herstory of their own oppression,” the Weatherwomen argue (200). Thus, while this movement succeeded in achieving “consciousness raising, analysis of sexism and the roots of male power, abortion reform, control of our bodies, [and] affirmative action around equal rights” one cannot ignore the fact that simultaneously, as the Weatherwomen put it, “Third World women were opening up similar questions in their own terms” (201). Here we see the Weatherwomen’s rhetoric at its most diplomatic and poignant, and, arguably its most proto-postcolonial feminist. While acknowledging the gains of the women’s movement, they insist on acknowledging the ethnocentrism of this movement by pointing out that women from other parts of the world have different feminist goals and struggle in different contexts. Importantly, while they acknowledge that female activists in the Global South face problems unique to their own political, cultural, and economic context, they also acknowledge that defining the terms of their

own feminism requires acknowledgment of their connectedness to women who struggle differently in other parts of the world. In other words, they acknowledge the effect relationality must have on movements that are seemingly autonomous, and the demands it places on any universal model of ontology. Similarly, they acknowledge the presence of uneven power relations and the effect the uneven distribution of power and wealth has on any marginalized group's efforts to assert political agency. The Weatherwomen express their frustration with what they see as a choice they faced to define themselves as either "anti-sexist" or "anti-racist" (201). They recall a similar dilemma that black women faced during the first wave of feminism when some white feminists were angry that these women supported the black male suffrage that was gained before women's suffrage, a problem bell hooks would later highlight in her book *Ain't I A Woman: Black Women and Feminism* in 1981 (3, 127). Arguing that "[w]e cannot liberate ourselves in some vacuum of our own self-conception," the Weatherwomen explain that "that is why our future is tied to the liberation of the Third World" ("A Collective Letter to the Women's Movement" 202).

Without repudiating their insistence that "armed struggle is an essential dimension in a movement which is facing a cruel and murderous government" ("A Collective Letter to the Women's Movement" 205), calling attention to the visible and invisible structural violence of the state, they temper their trope of a female revolutionary fighter for which Vietnamese women "were our model" by acknowledging that "We had a single minded conception of a woman guerilla as fighter only" (204) and that "our purely military conception of women revolutionaries was too narrow" (205). "Women resist and are

brave in the most ordinary-seeming situations,” they argue, “on the welfare line . . . on a street late at night . . . as a mother demanding that the hospital stop experimenting with sterilization on her daughters” (205). Thus, the Weatherwomen cite examples that they see as primarily affecting women of color who are affected by oppressive state institutions in particular ways while simultaneously widening their definition of resistance and refusing to reject violent tactics while disavowing their narrow romanticization of violent revolution. Here they show some signs of acknowledging ambiguity and the fact that political personhood is not necessarily connected to violence in all cases. Importantly, the notion of ontology they advanced in their actions is certainly not without its problems, most specifically their general acceptance of a model of political personhood that imagines an unambiguous connection between political subjectivity and embodied violence. The way in which the Weatherwomen considered relationality, however, as well as uneven power relations, remains important, particularly in the context of the way in which these activists are generally written off for their violent rhetoric.

The Weatherwomen’s open letter previewed their engagement with issues of basic care and welfare in a manner that differed dramatically from the approach taken by mainstream feminists. The communiqué released to explain the Women’s Brigade’s next action continued their efforts to connect feminism and a broader definition of womanhood. In March of 1974, in honor of International Women’s Day, the Weather Underground’s Women’s Brigade bombed the San Francisco offices of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (Jacobs 151; Berger 172). The bombing caused little

damage (Jacobs 151), but was a symbolic attack on what the group saw as “an enemy of women” (“Health Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women” 214) and was carried out “in solidarity with the rising resistance of women” (215). In their communiqué, the Weatherwomen critiqued federal food programs and sterilization programs, failed policies they argued disproportionately affect women. This kind of critique and target (federal food and health programs) echoed the approach of mainstream feminists, for whom “bread-and-butter issues” were important (Jacobs 151). But it presented an alternative approach to the need for care. While other women-centered protests have connected caring work, the domestic sphere, and demands for basic health and welfare with womanhood, motherhood, and nonviolence, in this action Weatherwomen paired a recognized need for basic care (and what they saw as the government’s failure to provide it) as well as the exploitative use of what Foucault would later call “biopower,” in the form of forced sterilization and other forms of medical violence under the guise of health care, with a violent response. Unlike the violent tool-clad food rioters of the Civil War or hatchet-bearing temperance activists, however, these women were not protecting their domestic sphere, but making a statement as political subjects in the public sphere. They were not fighting for their legal enfranchisement as women or acting on behalf of children or others to whom they saw themselves tied, but demonstrating political power they acknowledged as their own in the form of what they saw as an act of war.

In addition to employing violent tactics not endorsed by mainstream women’s movements, the Weatherwomen focused on the effects of what they viewed as failed welfare policies on women of color in the U.S. and throughout the Third World, arguing

that “[u]nder imperialism, reforms are turned into weapons against us, especially against Black and Third World women” (“Health Education and Welfare: An Enemy of Women” 217). Here the Weatherwomen attempted to illustrate both the particularity of the struggle of black women at the same time they linked the struggle among women in the U.S. and abroad. By critiquing the welfare state, the Weatherwomen were questioning the state’s interest in caring for its people and calling attention to the ways that women in particular rely on state welfare. But their critique of the existing welfare state does not necessarily associate women ontologically with their particular aptitude for care work or with the domestic sphere, even as it calls attention to the ways in which women are no longer—if they ever were—particularly powerful within that sphere. It also suggests that one way women might react to this lack of care is with political violence rather than nonviolent appeals. Their activism acknowledged vulnerability and relationality amid uneven relations of power while not precluding the possibility of necessary violent action.

While some of the literature I’ve explored above suggests that the Weatherwomen acknowledged that political action does not always involve violence, their chosen tactic of bombing buildings (albeit unoccupied) suggests otherwise. It is important to recognize that the Weatherwomen’s approach is not a tactic of self-defense or the preservation of freedom, but decidedly a tactic of war. This approach is in conflict with the tenet of ambiguity I propose (as I discussed in Chapter 2). Interestingly, much of the rhetoric the Weatherwomen used in their communiqués and other writing was in conflict with their approach of symbolic bombing. But their idea that women may need to employ violence—not systematically or as an always necessary mode of political personhood, but

as a possibility—is an important intervention. In taking this approach, they complicated the ontological picture being drawn up by mainstream feminists at the time, arguably in productive ways. Likewise, they brought into question whether property destruction might be considered violence or be understood differently given the power relations at play. Most importantly, they modeled a useful conception of relationality, in which they felt compelled by their ethics to account for their ties to others through uneven relations of power and believed the situation of those others must impact their own self-conception and their understanding of their role in tyrannical pursuits.

The International Women’s Day bombing would be the Women’s Brigade’s final action, although the now much less active Weather Underground Organization would linger for years. In retrospect, it would be a stretch to say that the Weatherwomen were postcolonial feminists undeniably defining a clear feminist agenda well ahead of their time. In fact, one can imagine reasons postcolonial feminists did not embrace them as a model. Although they allow for consideration of female revolutionaries in the Global South and arguably set the stage for a productive conversation about (non)violence in protest, postcolonial feminists certainly are not eager to embrace the tactics of groups like the Weather Underground. In addition to embracing the idea that political personhood is necessarily connected to violence, the organization, including the women, sometimes ran the risk (especially in the group’s early history) of universalizing and romanticizing women of the Global South as strong, armed revolutionary fighters, simply replacing the trope of the categorically vulnerable victimized woman with a different one. The Weather Underground membership also failed to fully address the organization’s institutional

sexism, a problem many committed members of the New Left found so oppressive that they left the movement altogether. Histories of the New Left and the Weather Underground acknowledge the frustration felt by women who remained in such organizations,⁷³ even as they crafted statements like the ones I've explored above, that they were unable to ever articulate the comprehensive feminist agenda they believed in.

Despite these problems, however, the Weatherwomen undeniably experimented with ideas that would later characterize postcolonial feminism. And while the ethnocentrism and classism of second wavers is well-documented and intersectionality has since been widely endorsed beginning, arguably, with works by theorists like Chandra Mohanty, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and contemporaries working in womanist studies and feminist theory in the mid-1980s, I would add that second wavers' narrow focus, along with a devotion to nonviolence, negatively impacted their ability to produce a productive ontology and prevented activists from seeing their nonviolent ethic as dependent on a kind of privilege and on the state's structural violence, including policies that did harm to those the Weatherwomen sought to consider, as well as legal and social efforts to disarm particular populations (see Chapter 2 for an example). In other words, this might be seen as an example of white women failing to see their own privilege, *including* the privilege to be nonviolent. As Naomi Jaffe and other former Weather Underground members explained in a 2002 documentary about the organization, its members were frustrated by what they saw as white Americans' failure to recognize their

⁷³ Dan Berger in particular, however, relies heavily on his personal correspondence with one former Weatherwoman, Naomi Jaffe, to make broad statements about the feelings of women within the organization.

complicity in the violence in Vietnam and the violence being done to black Americans at home. Jaffe argued,

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

Just as I think we might understand some white second wave feminists as failing, in some ways, to recognize their own privilege, I am also suggesting that our predisposition to nonviolence and the connections we have historically made between a nonviolent ethic and relationality have obscured the Weatherwomen's useful ontological claims. More specifically, I am suggesting that it is *precisely* these activists' consideration of relationality amid uneven power relations that make their claims so useful.

The Weatherwomen's claims were made before the dawn of postcolonial feminism, but, as I've argued, they anticipated some of its ideas. Postcolonial feminism gained popularity in the 1980s and 1990s and has been typified by a critique of Western women's ethnocentrism in ignoring and then ultimately viewing 'Third World women' as a monolith. Importantly, it is also a body of theory that is philosophically open to the possibility of violence in the context of revolution or anti-colonial struggles, an idea that challenges the notion that vulnerability and relationality are incompatible with violence,

which makes this body of theory interesting for the purpose of this study.

Postcolonial feminism, which includes arguments made by so-called Third World⁷⁴ feminists and is sometimes considered to include various Western feminist scholars of color, represents a critique of some of the failings of the dominant form of feminism that emerged in the U.S. in the 1960s and continued in both feminist activism and scholarship for the next few decades.⁷⁵ These feminists critiqued Western feminism for being Eurocentric, for assuming the women's movement was universal (or universally Western),⁷⁶ for discursively colonizing Third World women when these women were discussed by essentializing them as victims, for ignoring the race and class privilege enjoyed by most white Western feminists, and, importantly, for being ignorant of some Third World feminists' voluntary involvement in armed liberation and anti-colonization movements whose goals included fighting imperialism. These were not women likely to participate in suburban consciousness raising meetings, nor to see them as useful tactics.

Although similar arguments were made before this time, Chandra Mohanty's 1986 essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" is often cited as the genesis of postcolonial feminism.⁷⁷ In it, Mohanty is most concerned

⁷⁴ I say "so-called Third World" because this term has largely gone out of vogue among scholars who prefer less demeaning terms like "the Global South." I have preserved the use of the term "Third World" throughout parts of my project, however, since this is the language used by the individuals and groups being discussed here.

⁷⁵ Although women of color around the world had been active in their own feminist actions, this and other critiques of Western feminism from women of color that became widely acknowledged in the mid- to late 1980s and early 1990s coincided with the birth of third wave feminism.

⁷⁶ As international relations scholar Kimberly Hutchings explains, postcolonial feminists "reject the notion either that there are 'human' universals, or that there is a commonality across the category of 'women' or 'gender,' that is capable of grounding feminism as a unitary project" ("Feminist Ethics and Political Violence" 93).

⁷⁷ "In a later essay, "Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," Mohanty explains, "'Under Western Eyes' has enjoyed a remarkable life, being reprinted almost every year

with Western feminist scholars who write about Third World women, but she also makes broader arguments. She declares that “the assumptions of privilege and ethnocentric universality on the one hand and inadequate self-consciousness about the effect of Western scholarship on the ‘third world’ in the context of a world system dominated by the West on the other characterize a sizable extent of Western feminist work on women in the third world” (“Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” 335). She argues that some Western feminists perpetuate the concept of a monolithic “Third World woman” that does not recognize the differences among a vast group of women, in effect colonizing feminist discourse. She likewise critiques “[t]he assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions,” which “implies a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy. . . which can be applied universally and cross-culturally” (“Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” 336–337). Mohanty also critiques Western feminists for naturalizing Third World women as perpetual victims, outlining five types⁷⁸ of imagined victimhood, the first of which is their role as “victims of male violence” (“Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” 338). Mohanty argues that “defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves,’ men into ‘subjects-who-perpetuate-violence,’ and (every) society into

since 1986 when it first appeared . . . The essay has been translated into German, Dutch, Chinese, Russian, Italian, Swedish, French, and Spanish [. . .] It has been widely cited” (“Under Western Eyes’ Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles” 499, note 1).

⁷⁸ In a revised version of this essay in her book *Feminism without Borders*, Mohanty lists six ways in which Third World women are imagined as victims (*Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*).

powerless (read: women) and powerful (read: men) groups of people” (“Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” 339). A contemporary of Mohanty, radical feminist Robin Morgan, who published her anthology *Sisterhood is Global* in 1984, might be seen as reproducing some of the problematic concepts Mohanty critiqued, concepts Mohanty took up in her later work, *Feminism Without Borders* (*Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*). Morgan’s anthology compiled works by a number of feminist scholars invested in forging an international women’s movement. In her explanation of what she calls “planetary ethics” in her introductory chapter, Morgan suggests women across the globe are united in a universal, global feminist ethic by ideas like their shared opposition to war, for example, and commitment to combating violence against women. Despite her interest in looking beyond U.S. and European borders, her suggestion that all women share one feminist ethic falls prey to the essentializing move scholars like Mohanty warn against and also represents a move to forge global connections while failing to provide a thorough accounting of relationality.

Indeed, the project of postcolonial feminism clearly still has a long way to go as even Ruth Rosen’s famous narrative *The World Split Open*, published in 2000, reifies a white and Western-dominated view of feminism that does not even discuss the “awakening consciousness of minority women” who apparently became interested in feminism long after white women had begun the movement (277) until she discusses the “postfeminism” of the 1980s. Likewise, in a section late in her book on “Global Feminism,” Rosen describes the belated enlightenment of so-called Third World women

“[a]s ideas from the Western women’s movement traveled across the Atlantic” (340), presumably greeting “the information newly available to them” (341) with surprise as they lie in wait for white Western women to educate and rescue them.

It would be inaccurate to say that all postcolonial feminists endorse or celebrate revolutionary violence by feminists. “Not all postcolonial feminists are revolutionaries,” international relations scholar Kimberly Hutchings acknowledges. But this strand of feminist theory is “conceptually linked to the possibility of legitimating revolutionary violence or wars of liberation against colonial regimes” (“Feminist Ethics and Political Violence” 95). This conceptual link leads Mohanty to pair her critique of Frantz Fanon, a postcolonial theorist who famously endorses anti-colonial revolutionary violence in his book *Wretched of the Earth*, for outlining a “formulization of resistance” that is “profoundly gendered” with a celebration of his “framework of decolonization” for being “useful in formulating a feminist decolonization project” (*Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* 8). In statements like this, Mohanty, like other postcolonial feminists, challenges the natural relationship between feminism and pacifism without endorsing violence outright. Mohanty acknowledges that Fanon’s model of resistance “is marked by violence,” but she doesn’t linger on this point or place a value on it and she buries it in a list of the attributes of his model she celebrates. While Mohanty doesn’t explicitly support this violence, she certainly seems to acknowledge that it is present in struggles against colonial power, some of them feminist. While Mohanty comes close to suggesting the potential for the use of violence in feminist revolutionary movements, she certainly doesn’t overtly endorse it. I would argue that, while one might

view this fact as a frustratingly vague aspect of Mohanty's argument, it is the scholar's simultaneous acknowledgment of the possibility of feminist revolutionary violence and her reticence to endorse it that provides a useful nuanced opening for a consideration of (non)violence in a context of ambiguity and relationality. Indeed, like the women of the Weather Underground Organization, we might view the diverse body of postcolonial feminist theory as offering useful conceptions of relationality, even as this body of work is not traditionally associated with such a concept. My main goal, after all, as I've stated, is not to embrace violence as a feminist tactic, source of female agency, or a legitimate tactic of social movements in general but instead to dispute the blanket rejection of 'violence' and talk about violence in protest and the unexamined use of a violent/nonviolent dichotomy to make ethical judgments about protests. It is useful to note, however, that in a study of women's participation in American protest, the ontological landscape as it pertains to the use of violence becomes more complex as relationality amid uneven power relations is considered. Recognition of such complexity might allow us to rethink our blanket rejection of activists like the women of the Weather Underground due to their 'violent' tactics, not just so we can appreciate their accounting for relationality *despite* their tactics, but also because we might understand their attraction to these tactics as tied to this very understanding of relationality.

Unfortunately, decades after the genesis of postcolonial feminist theory, in the U.S. context, the discursive turn following the events of September 11, 2001 worked to reinscribe and make rigid old ideas about the relationship between violence, vulnerability, and relationality and obscure uneven power relations with the endorsement

of notions of universally peaceful sisterhood and the Othering of the Global Southern female subject. This new context found former Weather Underground member Brian Flanagan comparing, in a 2002 documentary (Green and Siegel), the organization's past actions with the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York on 9/11.

Flanagan was the only interviewee who took this position, but the other former WUO members have likely found themselves, at one time or another, contending with the question of whether their actions constituted terrorism, a concept that is now attached to a particular event perceived by many to be the ultimate act of evil by a foreign Other.

9/11 and the Discursive Turn (Back)

Liberal feminists working within a rights-based paradigm by definition are more partial to a model of autonomy rather than relationality, but, as I've argued, other feminist thinkers, including early care feminists, similarly provided weak accounts of global relationality.⁷⁹ Early care feminism celebrated relationality but focused on the particular relationships between mothers and their children or at least assumed that relationality can be modeled on the Global Northern experience in a nuclear family and presumed that it mandates nonviolence. Second wave feminist activism remained largely Eurocentric. Robin Morgan's planetary feminism similarly remained preoccupied with mapping an essentialized womanhood onto women across the world. Late capitalism, neoliberalism, and the advent of the transnational corporation in combination with theoretical paradigms like postcolonialism, however, have made our ever-present ties between people across the globe clearer and a more nuanced understanding of

⁷⁹ As I explained earlier, some later care ethicists complicated earlier models of care.

relationality possible. The increased visibility of interdependency has not necessarily resulted in a better accounting for relationality, however. This was especially true in the aftermath of 9/11. As Judith Butler noted in *Precarious Life*, rather than leading to an acknowledgement of our shared vulnerability and relationality, the U.S. used its national grief following 9/11 to renew and concretize old notions of the foreign Other and to justify acts of retaliatory aggression. Butler imagines a world where “the dislocation from First World privilege” (Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* xii) such as that which occurred on 9/11 can lead to acknowledgment of our interdependency and to a “global political community” (Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* xiii). Butler assumes that universal vulnerability and interdependency necessitates an ethic of nonviolence, a position I reject. However, she very poignantly describes how universal vulnerability and relationality work on a global landscape:

One insight that injury affords is that there are others out there on whom my life depends, people I do not know and may never know. This fundamental dependency on anonymous others is not a condition that I can will away. No security measure will foreclose this dependency; no violent act of sovereignty will rid the world of this fact. What this means, concretely, will vary across the globe. There are ways of distributing vulnerability,⁸⁰ differential forms of allocation that make some

⁸⁰ I take issue with uses like this of the term “vulnerability” that suggest that some might be more or less vulnerable, a notion I believe even Butler might dispute. I agree, however, with the notion that uneven

populations more subject to arbitrary violence than others. [. . .] To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways. (Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* xii)

Rather than assuming that universal vulnerability (a concept she strongly endorses) means evenly experienced harm, Butler accounts for relationality amid an uneven distribution of power and individual, cultural, and historical particularity. Butler's logical leap from universal vulnerability and relationality to a prescription of nonviolence is where I take issue with her ethical framework, but her careful examination of relationality amid the uneven distribution of power and the potential for an acknowledgement of such to lead to ethical political and economic practice is extremely useful.

Unfortunately, the dramatic shift of discourse that resulted from the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the way we spoke about the new "post-9/11 world," veered drastically from Butler's suggested path. This discursive turn, while contributing to a shift in how Americans (and others) spoke about the world, and about ontology, also reignited long-held beliefs about the dangerous foreign Other and justification of the use of violence in response. It concretized the long-standing contradictory concept of the woman of the Global South as duped, a perpetual victim and, occasionally, but much less frequently, as an inhuman violent actor. Women's studied and willing participation in

relations of power result in certain populations experiencing more "arbitrary violence" than others. See my conclusion for more commentary on this topic.

terrorist movements is unthinkable under this discursive paradigm, particularly in the shadow of care feminism and other feminist frameworks that privilege women's particular capacity for relationality, even though according to some estimates, up to 30 percent of suicide attackers are women (qtd. in Sternadori 15). When women have acted as terrorists in the Global South, their actions have been explained away as they—like the Weatherwomen—challenge the dominant cultural belief that women embody and elicit peace.

In 2002, a U.S. Senate resolution concerning violence in the Middle East stated that “The involvement of women in carrying out suicide bombings is contrary to the important role women must play in conflict prevention and resolution” (qtd. in Sternadori 14). Here, women's involvement in suicide bombings is called out as especially egregious given the peacemaking roles women are meant to play. When women's role as terrorists has been discussed directly, it is often explained away with the use of stereotypes. These stereotypes include the “black widow,” “a suicide bomber who is driven to terrorism after the deaths of the men in her life” (Stack-O'Connor 96) and the “Terrible Mother,” an archetype Miglena Mantcheva Sternadori highlights in her study of media coverage of female terrorists. In both cases, belief in women's categorical vulnerability combined with a warped interpretation of these women's interconnectedness with others—a distorted concept of women's relationality wherein they are completely dependent upon their relationships with family members—fuels an indictment of their circumstances. They are seen as victims of their own heightened relationality by virtue of their womanhood and unable to act based on their own

assessments of the world.⁸¹ When their actions cannot be explained away in this fashion, they are instead stripped of agency and imagined as brainwashed “zombies” despite the fact that many women involved in terrorist activity actively seek out participation and must sometimes convince organizational leaders to allow them to participate.⁸²

Feminist scholar Andrea Dworkin replicates both the stereotype of the woman driven into terrorist participation because of familial pressures and that of the “zombie”

⁸¹ Alisa Stack-O’Connor explains that “[m]edia coverage of a female terrorist tends to focus on the woman’s nonpolitical motivations (for example, the death of a male family member), her vulnerability to recruitment because of her personal life (for example, promiscuity), and her basically peaceful and nurturing character” (97). Mantcheva Sternadori cites a study that found that “female terrorists were more likely to be described in terms of age, appearance, ‘familial or relational context’ and stereotypical traits, i.e., propensity to deception and incompetence” (15).

⁸² The “zombie” archetype is sometimes invoked to describe a female terrorist or revolutionary who “is forced or tricked into terrorism by . . . men” (Stack-O’Connor 96). O’Connor highlights the ways in which the “zombie” narrative is used to benefit both the terrorist group and its state enemy. In the case of Chechnya, “Zombie stories . . . are attention-grabbing, benefiting Chechen objectives, and explain away women’s violence, benefiting the Russian government” (96). This propaganda allows the enemy state (in this case, Russia) to increase resistance to (Chechnya’s) independence by increasing sympathy for the supposed duped female participants in (Chechen) resistance movements. As Stack-O’Connor explains, “84 percent of Russians surveyed believed female suicide bombers were controlled by someone else (zombies); only 3 percent believed the women acted independently” (96). Sternadori cites a study done by Struckman in 2006 in which he discovered that “the female rebels in a documentary about the Moscow theatre siege were often presented as brainwashed victims and gentle women forced into a distasteful farce; by contrast, the actions of the male terrorists were seen as ‘natural’” (15).

One major problem with depictions of women as being either obligated by familial obligation or grief or as being duped or forced into participating in political violence is that many of these women have actively sought out the movements and requested permission to participate. Terri Toles Patkin, for example, notes that

Women who join terrorist groups tend to be older and better educated than their male counterparts. And yet, perceptions of women’s motivations for terrorism continue to be colored by the notion that women are emotional and irrational, perhaps even driven by hormonal imbalances; rarely have their actions been interpreted as intelligent, rational decisions [. . .] But when one asks women themselves about their terrorist activity, they do not perceive their involvement as passive; they regard themselves as empowered political actors, not as auxiliaries to their more self-aware male counterparts. (82)

While we must be careful to note that all so-called ‘free’ choices are constricted by social conditions, we can also say with some certainty that many women have actually had to convince these organizations’ leaders to let them participate. Stack-O’Connor, writing exclusively about female terrorists, calls this “fighting to fight”: “females have to demonstrate great determination in gaining access to terrorist groups. In the Palestinian, Chechen, and Tamil cases, they have asked for active roles in political violence before groups invite them to take part” (97). She explains further that “women have to remind terrorist leaders of their tactical usefulness” (97). Patkin, citing other terrorist organizations, echoes this sentiment: “Hamas and Islamic Jihad do not accept all the volunteers for martyrdom who approach them; in fact, leaders call fending off the crowds insisting on retaliatory human bombing missions their biggest problem lately” (80).

in a 2002 article about Palestinian female suicide bombers (“The Women Suicide Bombers”). She cites the rape and sexual abuse many of these women endure and points to martyrdom as their only perceived alternative. She also acknowledges the “best and brightest” who “are motivated to stand up for their families: their beaten fathers, their destroyed homes, their angry mothers, and the brothers who are civilly superior to them.” Instead of acknowledging the possibility that these women may be motivated by forces beyond their victimhood or familial bonds, Dworkin suggests that they are denying the sisterhood they should be building between themselves and Israeli women: “Both Israeli and Palestinian men,” she argues, “push women into an anti-sisterhood camouflaged as nationalist liberation.” While the Weatherwomen so frequently implored their contemporary U.S. feminists to consider the Vietnam War a women’s issue, to consider the agency of revolutionary Vietnamese women and allow their presence to complicate prevailing ontological models, current U.S. feminists require much less pressure to pay heed to the realities of women abroad as, in this age of globalization, their lives seems much more obviously entwined with ours. However, in responding to a need to consider the experiences of those outside of a U.S. or Global Northern context, many activists have still problematically imagined all women as ontologically distinct from other humans (in part due to their unique relationality) but also universally situated as (nonviolent) women despite fundamental differences among the lived experiences of those in the Global North and South. It is certainly true that women, due to the global reach of sexual oppression, share commonalities that link them as women. And we certainly should not disavow all efforts to organize as such. But the failure of Other

women to meet our expectations (built on a model that problematically categorically associates relationality, peace, and vulnerability with women) can lead to our failure to legitimize alternative models of womanhood.

One major risk among many in allowing or perpetuating the reproduction of prevailing stereotypes about female terrorists or revolutionary women of the Global South is that of essentializing these women as victims without agency. An equally troubling risk is that of reversing common arguments about universal nonviolent womanhood and marking so-called Third World women inherently *more* violent than women of the Global North (and, in turn, less vulnerable). Sternadori explains that some news reports contradict more prevalent stereotypes of female terrorists by painting them “as tougher, scarier and more dangerous than their male counterparts” (19). One example of this phenomenon was cited in an article on the female members of Shining Path that explains that female leaders of armed groups “are often said to be more ruthless than men” (“Women Prominent Among Members of ‘Shining Path’ Guerilla Group in Peru” 4). The problem with all of these stereotypes about (non)violent women in the Global South is an ontological one, as they presume either that all women are ontologically predisposed to peace or that women in the Global South are, due to a fundamental Otherness, ontologically predisposed to violence.⁸³ By insisting on an unexamined commitment to nonviolence, we allow this approach to women’s participation in violent resistance movements to seem plausible; in other words, if we accept that there is an indelible connection between women (or feminism) and nonviolence, these women who

⁸³ Kelly Oliver argues persuasively that women are also sometimes imagined as dangerous weapons themselves (Oliver, “Women: The Secret Weapon of Modern Warfare?”).

engage in violent acts will seem just as crazy to us as they do in sensationalized narratives about them. This is but one ill effect of a popular and seemingly benign or even empowering rhetoric of feminist nonviolence that is tied up in similarly problematic ideas about relationality.

In an introduction to the chapter titled “Feminist Movements for Nonviolence and Peace” in their 2007 book *Transformations: Feminist Pathways to Global Change*, the editors draw global connections between feminism and pacifism. They begin the chapter with the following declaration: “Men, of course, are responsible for most of the violence in the world” (Dickinson and Schaeffer 224). In one of the essays in this chapter, Shelley Anderson cites several pacifist women’s social movements around the globe, including the Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC), the Liberian Women’s Initiative (LWI), and the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR) Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) and argues that “Women’s political marginalization paradoxically often provides them a wider space for peace-building [. . .] Because of their previous marginalized position, women may be perceived as outside the influence of a conflict’s major stakeholders. This means that women’s peace-building initiatives may be trusted more by a community than those of peace-makers coming from the political elite” (259). This attitude echoes the approach taken by female activists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who attempted to embrace their political nonexistence—and belief in their categorical vulnerability—as an asset (see Chapter 1). Now, as then, this attitude is problematic, not because there is something inherently problematic in using marginalization to one’s advantage, but because this approach requires the activists to

claim a false ontology. In this case, Anderson suggests women claim a kind of political weakness or even ignorance as well as an ontological connection between womanhood and nonviolence, which, as I've argued elsewhere, is simply fallacious. Nonetheless, several women's movements that take on various causes, including fighting for women's rights and opposing war and globalization, have made a connection between pacifism and feminism. Importantly, unlike some of the cases I've explored above of Global Northern women mapping a particular ontological model onto women in the Global South, some of these organizations involve participants from all over the globe, including the Women in Black movements (in Israel, Mexico, Serbia, and other locations) who protest "any manifestation of violence, militarism or war" by "wearing black, standing in a public place in silent, non-violent vigils at regular times and intervals, carrying placards and handing out leaflets" (Women in Black International Network). As the Women in Black website explains, "Wearing black in some cultures signifies mourning, and feminist actions dressed in black convert women's traditional passive mourning for the dead in war into a powerful refusal of the logic of war" (Women in Black International Network). While no doubt subversive, militant, and even courageous, this group exploits an accepted role for women as the most effective one through which they might wield political power. Such groups argue, in effect, that to make political claims as a woman is to act as an especially relational subject, a witness or observer, of an injustice done to another, a nonpolitical spectator of the harm done to a valid political subject. This version of relationality so obscures or even precludes the protestors' political personhood that it becomes problematic. It is problematic, however, not simply because the activists

embrace traditional roles for women that are culturally and tactically problematic, but because of the ontology their actions suggest. In many cases, a model of women's supposed especially relational subjectivity eclipses the notion that we are all relational. Uneven relations of power are acknowledged by these women but one particular uneven gendered power relationship is concretized and fetishized as the ontological position from which women should make claims.

In the U.S. today, these ontologies can be seen advanced in the activism of anti-war groups like CODEPINK. This organization was formed in direct reaction to 9/11 and the wars that followed. The organization's name is emblematic of the embrace of pink as simultaneously feminine and a source of empowerment (similar to various breast cancer awareness and research campaigns) where pink almost always denotes a group's focus on women and a sense that the claims being made and the manner in which they are made are non-threatening and even fun. In CODEPINK's case, the use of the color pink is also designed to mock the Bush Administration's color-coded alert system. Since its birth in 2002, CODEPINK has staged anti-war protests that embrace symbols and institutions associated with Western femininity. Goss and Heaney attribute the organization's success to its hybridity (combining "feminine-expressive," "equality," and "maternal" "frames"). They see the organization's tactics as a kind of ironic embrace of Western femininity. They acknowledge, however, that the organization does not want to seem "unpatriotic, disloyal or dangerous" and wants to "mock the system in a playful, non-threatening way" (37) suggesting that CODEPINK is participating in parody, but is also hoping its audience will attribute stereotypically feminine (passive) traits to the organization and its

members so as to make it seem unthreatening while craftily persuading others to support its cause.

Activists in the organization have worn pink lingerie (“pink slips”) and dropped an oversized pink slip from the balcony of the Hart Senate Office Building as a pun to propose that Bush and Cheney be fired, an action both politically driven and calling attention to the activists’ identities as sexual and forward, but unthreatening. While not as overtly entwined in rhetoric about motherhood as movements like the Million Mom March, members of the organization “call on mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and daughters” as well as other women to join them, hold events on Mother’s Day highlighting women’s roles as caretakers, and have partnered with figures like Cindy Sheehan as mothers grieving for their veteran children (Goss and Heaney 38). But CODEPINK’s rhetoric is meant to be more fun than mournful. One DC organizer explained that events like the 2008 Valentine’s Day “Kiss In” in front of a military recruiting station “makes activism fun” (qtd. in Goss and Heaney 39).

When CODEPINK began associating with the Occupy movement in the fall of 2011, activists were encouraged by the organization’s leadership to bake “Occu-pies” for their local protestors using recipes from the *Peace Never Tasted So Sweet* cookbook (CODEPINK, “October 12, 2011”), emphasizing women’s roles as leaders in the domestic sphere and suggesting that such roles can be ironically powerful. The book has a subtle global focus: “This cookbook has sweet, savory, classic, raw & vegan pies submitted from women around the world who work for peace, harmony and justice in

their communities” reads the teaser on their website (CODEPINK, “Peace Never Tasted So Sweet”).

Co-founder Medea Benjamin makes claims to what she sees as an inextricable connection between womanhood and peace: “We really think that war is a women’s issue, and that women’s organizations in the U.S. and around the world should be at the forefront of opposing war” (qtd. in Goss and Heaney 38). Benjamin’s statement here and the rhetoric used throughout the organization’s literature reflect a sense of globality. Unlike some of their historical predecessors, CODEPINK activists feel compelled to identify themselves as part of a global movement, to make connections between their needs and the needs of women around the world. The organization’s website declares, “The peace movement is global: CODEPINK has strengthened our international ties through peacemaking delegations to Iran, Pakistan, Syria, Beirut, Iraq, Italy, the war tribunal in Turkey, Britain's Stop the War assembly, a gathering in Thailand of women worldwide, and our participation in the World Social Forum in Brazil and Venezuela” (CODEPINK, “About Us”). In addition to these delegations, CODEPINK is engaged in a campaign called “Stolen Beauty,” an effort to boycott Ahava beauty products sold in big box stores in the U.S. because they are manufactured in the occupied areas of the West Bank and billed as Israeli products but make use of stolen Palestinian resources. The group makes reference to Western beauty standards (suggesting that it is okay to endorse them, so long as you do so as an informed consumer) with their ads for the organization’s “Occupation Isn’t Pretty” t-shirts, connecting their movement with an international

critique of the economic effects of transnational globalization (CODEPINK, “Stolen Beauty”).

But the attention CODEPINK pays to the connectedness of women throughout the world is akin to the U.S. Senate’s 2002 statement that women have a duty to play a role in global peace-making efforts. Their rhetoric and actions reflect the fact that it is no longer possible—if it ever was—to advance political claims without accounting in some way for transnational connectedness. But they also endorse a flawed ontology that imagines women as universally concerned with beauty and peace and universally able and willing to stage nonviolent protests and men as armed aggressors. (“Should Syria’s Future Be Decided by Men with Guns?” asks one recent article by CODEPINK co-founder Medea Benjamin.) Where differentiations are made between U.S. women and others in the Global North and women in the Global South, the latter are sometimes imagined as victims and women in the United States are imagined as those who might save them (M. Benjamin; Kricorian; Cunningham). Staging ‘nonviolent’ protests and celebrating the help given by police ‘protecting’ the protest space without recognizing them as emblematic of larger structures of violence (see the Introduction), embracing rhetoric that suggests that women have a specific role to play in combating war that depends on their enhanced ability to understand its devastating impacts, suggesting with symbolic actions (however ironic) employing giant lingerie and vagina costumes that such an ability is tied up in sexual difference, and imagining Global Southern women as victims that need rescuing all point to an insolvent model of relationality. While representative of a pervasive discourse among protestors, especially those on the Left,

however, CODEPINK's claims are not universal. In some cases, there appears to be a healthy tension among protestors about tactics that challenge some of these more dominant ontological claims and this tension is fueled in part by knowledge of alternative feminist movements occurring abroad.

In her article on activists at the 2004 World Social Forum (WSF) titled "'Skeleton Women': Feminism and the Antiglobalization Movement," for example, Catherine Eschle notes the presence of a parallel meeting held by a group of individuals who identify themselves as the Mumbai Resistance. The Mumbai Resistance objected to the WSF's tactics—namely its simultaneous "reject[ion of] more militant forms of struggle" and its failure to "explain how it could fight one of the most insidious and violent forces of history—the war-mongering US imperialism, or even the less aggressive, but also dangerous European and other imperialisms" (International League of People's Struggle). Eschle explains,

We [Eschle and her colleagues] were . . . surprised by our encounter with a small but highly articulate core of feminist activists in the Mumbai Resistance, a Marxist-Leninist alternative to the forum, who drew our attention to the exclusions generated by an emphasis on nonviolent direct action in the Indian context. The context-specific reasons for the strong presence of feminists in antiglobalization activism in India clearly need more investigation, as do the divisions of ideology and strategy among them. (1762)

Eschle's comments are tangential to her larger claims and despite her note (made in 2005) that she and two of her colleagues were working on an investigation into this kind of resistance, they do appear to have published any additional work on the topic. This brief mention, however, does reveal a crack in the veneer of nonviolent women-centered activism based in a limited concept of relationality that appears to be further shattered by a growing body of postcolonial feminist scholarship that has brought our attention to women's studied involvement in political violence across the world (see, for example, Hasso; Hamilton) as well as female black bloc activists and others in the United States advocating property destruction based on their understanding of political and corporate structures of power.

I would argue that this crack might be encouraged with further emphasis on the idea that our relationships with those to whom we are tied by relations of power must change not just our concept of what might be appropriate elsewhere, but also what constitutes ethical ontological claims in the U.S. Our failure to acknowledge these connections can lead to the simultaneous celebration of armed movements abroad and harsh critiques of our own activists' relationships with violence. Mary Zeiss Strange was right in 2004, for example, to critique *Ms. Magazine* for "publish[ing] a cover article castigating gun-owning women as dupes of the National Rifle Association while in the same issue applauding the courage of female Zapatista guerillas" (13). Certainly, we must recognize the particularity of each protest context, and the activities of female members of the NRA are certainly not the *same* as the activities of Zapatistas, but we should not be quick to disregard the connection between our lived experience and the conditions in

places like India (home of the Mumbai Resistance) or Mexico (home of the Zapatistas) where violence may seem more ethically defensible. We are not unconnected to those in the Global South nor are we outside of a space of colonial power, capital, and structural violence.

We must also be careful to both acknowledge the ways that state military violence (in which the U.S. is most certainly engaged) is different from revolutionary violence and terrorist violence while also drawing connections when necessary. For example, as Stack-O'Connor explains, "Israel has . . . taken advantage of women's particular propaganda value for counterterrorism. The Foreign Ministry has published reports on female suicide bombers, emphasizing the terrorists groups' desire to exploit vulnerable women" (99). In the meantime, Israel's military depends on mandatory service from both men and women. It is certainly materially different to be a woman in a state sponsored military force than a woman in a revolutionary army, but we should be clear about the ways in which it is not, as well as the ways in which the embodied reality of Israeli female soldiers complicates the notion of the categorically vulnerable and especially relational female suicide bomber. Likewise, if we are to critique militarism, we should be inclusive in this critique, especially as the image of the dark, vulnerable Third World woman—or, conversely, the strong, romanticized, revolutionary female fighter—is being co-opted to draw problematic distinctions between state force and revolutionary force.

Most importantly, we should be expansive in our understanding of relationality, seeing it as a full accounting for the ways in which we are tied in particular ways with others, where we depend on them and they depend on us. Each particular tie is different

and must be contextualized but, importantly, each tie must lead to reflexivity and reevaluation of our self-recognition. We must be careful to apply relationality widely and not to claim any ontological predisposition for women, thoughtfully acknowledging the difference between historical conditions and ontological claims.

Does the Rejection of Gendered Ontologies Mean the End of Gender?

Despite my critique of problematic accounts of relationality in some cases of women's U.S. protest activity and in some feminist ethical paradigms, I do not mean to suggest that recent protest history or feminist scholarship have lacked nuanced debate around ontology and gender. In fact, on the contrary, feminist and gender theorists have in recent years been arguably preoccupied with the performative nature and plurality of gender, and while many protest movements continue to endorse more traditional gender categories and make conventional associations around those categories, some protestors have engaged in debates about expanding our performance of gender in protest. This has included discussions and actions that challenge the notion of women's ontological predisposition to nonviolence, but it has also pushed the boundaries to include discussion about the eradication of gender altogether. Some of this discussion has revolved around new protest tactics, including those that allow for anonymous acts of dissent.

The anti-globalization protests in Seattle, Washington in 1999 during the scheduled meeting of the World Trade Organization are often hailed as extremely significant in the history of U.S. protest because of the size of the protests, their impact on the meeting, and, for some, the prominence of black blocs and participants' acts of property destruction. The protest was seen by many activists as a harbinger of the success

to come in future actions against globalization and its effects. After these monumental protests but just before 9/11, in July of 2001, a protestor demonstrating at the G8 meetings in Italy died when he was shot by a police officer and run over by the police vehicle (Hari; Nordland and Dickey). Both the Seattle protests and the protestor's death in Italy led to questions about the role of violence in protest, including women's role in carrying it out, and questions of whether gender should matter in such actions at all. In July of 2001, on the heels of the death of the G8 protestor, a female activist with the pen name "Mary Black" advocated women's participation in anonymous black bloc actions involving property destruction. Activists seemed poised for an interesting tactical discussion. However, just a few weeks later, the events of 9/11 and the discourse that followed virtually shut down all such discussion about tactics largely considered violent that wasn't now entangled with the discourse of terror.

Some discussion did continue, however. A first-hand account of a "women's action" during a protest at the meeting of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Cancun, Mexico in September of 2003 is one piece of evidence that suggests that despite the very public presence of movements like CODEPINK, discussion has continued among U.S. protestors (like that of the women involved in the Mumbai Resistance in India) that reveals sensitivity about the ontological claims women's protest actions advance, implicitly or explicitly. The author of the account, Kanga, describes discussion over every aspect of the protest action she became involved with as well as the hesitation she and some of the other protestors felt over the decision to identify the event as a "women's action" since "gender is not as cut and dried as 'male' and 'female' and by

limiting it to this we were further ostracizing people in our community” (kanga 12). While kanga and her cohorts ultimately agreed to create a “women’s-only space,” they also felt that “having the activist men ‘police’ the action” as planned “was problematic” (12). Ultimately, using “wire and bolt cutters, crowbars, and hammers” (12), the women successfully disassembled a section of fencing designed to keep protestors out of the space surrounding the hotel where the WTO meeting was taking place.

The protest action was not without its problems, however. Despite some of the women’s misgivings, men did ultimately “police” the “women’s-only space” (12). While acknowledging the presence of a history that fuels women’s desire to establish their own protest spaces, kanga also struggles with the idea that women should stage their own protests and despite her anarchist rhetoric, she appears to fall back on poetic liberal discourse of inclusion. For example, she muses that “The metal that cut into our fingers showed that even though we were many colors, nations, religions, and ideologies, we all bled the same color” (13). Similarly, she laments the fact that the protest space was never “opened up to everyone” since “after separating along differences, we could have come back to work together based on how we are similar” (13).

kanga longs for a more inclusionary space where women and those with non-normative genders can also have a role to play at the same time that she seems to fantasize about a universal, genderless space, exemplifying some of the tensions at play in contemporary feminist activism. In a 2008 article “You Can’t Do Gender in a Riot: Violence and Post-Representational Politics” in the *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, A.K. Thompson suggests we abandon the politics of inclusion and instead embrace anonymous

protest tactics that might actually eradicate gender altogether. Indeed, my critiques of protests that rely on notions of women's categorical vulnerability and relationality suggest that I, too, might be open to eradicating gender in favor of a new post-representational protest ethic. This, however, is not my position, as my model is based simultaneously in our need for meaning making, which in many cases requires the use of gender categories, and in our embodiment, including real embodied differences, many of which are taken up and assigned meanings and which, therefore, become sources of contention and oppression. Thompson suggests that anonymous protest tactics, particularly rioting, might lead to fruitful gender eradication. However, while the theorist's article offers a useful critique of the limits of the politics of inclusion, it also simultaneously demonstrates the continued necessity for gender categories despite the problematic ways in which those categories have sometimes been deployed. It also importantly demonstrates the need to acknowledge our embodied differences even as we act carefully to avoid viewing the social and cultural values we apply to those differences as inherent in the differences themselves.

Pointing to black bloc actions, Thompson argues that "the violence of the anti-globalization riots [at the beginning of the 21st century] revealed the possibility of a post-representational politics and a coherent vector for the project of gender abolition" (Thompson 24). He traces a history of female rioting, from the storming of the Bastille to the Paris Commune, to those preoccupied with consumption issues in 19th century England, to British Suffragettes, to the present (Thompson 32–36). Striving for acknowledgement that women have historically participated in violent protest action,

Thompson sees the most recent manifestation of such engagement—black blocs—as, quoting Judy Rebick, “a great equalizer” (qtd. in Thompson 37). He surmises, “if the riot is a ‘great equalizer’ because of the exigencies of commitment, it is worth considering how it might also stand as the inaugural moment of a post-representational politics” (37). As I argued in more depth in Chapter 2, I see the notion that violence or the use of technologies of violence is an ‘equalizer’ or inherent source of liberation as advancing a problematically unambiguous notion of the subject. Thompson here takes this argument in a new direction, suggesting that the violence of the riot might liberate us from gender categories altogether. The theorist asks hopefully, noting the momentary sense of genderlessness felt by female black bloc participants and female rioters throughout history, “Can we enter the space opened up by the riot and never leave it?” (37). Rereading “tools” in Audre Lorde’s famous quotation “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” to mean not physical violence or arms but “the constellation of established normative meanings that reaffirm the premises of the status quo,” Thompson argues that representational politics, which reify normative gender categories, are doing the real damage to already dispossessed populations. Such normative tools, he argues, can never lead us to victory over oppression and dispossession. However, when endeavoring to explain how acts of gender eradication would function in protest, Thompson reveals such a process to be a very tricky endeavor without the very gender categories he hopes to annihilate.

The author cites the ACME Collective’s 2001 communiqué about its black bloc action in Seattle as well as Mary Black’s advocacy of women’s participation in black

bloc actions to dispel the myth that black bloc rioters are simply “a bunch of angry adolescent boys” (qtd. in Thompson 26).⁸⁴ Black observes that despite the fact that both men and women participate in black blocs, “When I’m dressed from head to toe in baggy black clothes, and my face is covered up, most people think I’m a man too. The behavior of Black Bloc protesters is not associated with women, so reporters often assume we are all guys” (Black). Black’s observation, while shared by Thompson to dispel the myth that women do not participate in property destruction, actually reveals that black bloc actions do not eradicate gender, even if participants experience a sense of momentary freedom in their anonymity, since the protestors continue to be read as male by their observers. Also, while, as Thompson argues, women’s participation in these actions destabilizes prevailing gender categories by demonstrating that women, too, participate in violent action, such destabilization is dependent on at least an initial recognition of these participants *as women*.

Thompson argues that gender eradication is necessary to avoid the pitfalls of representational politics: “the deconstitution of intelligible categories of political being allows for the transposition from a moment in which politics is a mode of representation (where constituted power always has the final say) to one in which politics is a mode of production” (Thompson 25). His point is well taken that “‘inclusion’ has posed real difficulties for radical politics” because, as the theorist puts it, “it traces the movement of entities from the space of exteriority into that of a predetermined and normative inside”

⁸⁴ Thompson seeks to dispel not only the myth that black bloc protestors are uniformly male, but also the myth that they are otherwise homogenous. One primary source Thompson relies on even suggests that the black bloc participants at an April 2000 protest in Washington, D.C. against the IMF and World Bank may have actually been more diverse than the makeup of the protest as a whole (Thompson 27).

(37). Indeed, a politics of inclusion often presupposes that the normative subjectivity dictated by the structure into which one is seeking inclusion is a true representation of ontology; when seeking inclusion, one must also usually adopt this unitary model of an essentialized subject as a politics of inclusion does not typically allow for a plurality of subjectivities. Likewise, building one's movement on the premise that womanhood can be translated into a particular ahistorical ontology is similarly problematic and eradicating gender amid these problems is tempting.

However, setting aside the utility of gender categories in organizing around shared lived experiences (which is, arguably, in itself a viable argument for preserving gender), we also need to remember that gender is not only pertinent in our acts of self-recognition, but in others' recognition of us. As Judith Butler noted in *Undoing Gender* when revisiting the case of the drag performer that she highlighted in *Gender Trouble* as a model of the performative nature of gender, such performers face real violence based not on their incredible performance of womanhood, but on others' recognition of them as not 'true' women (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 213–214). These performers, trans individuals, and all those with non-normative genders, while they cannot be conflated as facing the same subjugation, need to use gender categories to name the source of their oppressions. Importantly, they (and we) must also talk about the body and the ways in which embodied differences are read as threats or as signs of weakness. A useful analogue to the case of the drag performer that Butler describes is the case of Thomas(ine) Hall, a colonist in Virginia in early America whose 'true' gender identity was questioned and who was subjected to numerous physical inspections of his/her

genitalia (K. M. Brown 75–80). Here, the reading of Hall’s gender identity by others was very materially tied up in a physical examination of his/her body, illustrating by example the importance of considering embodiment in discussions of gender. Women need the category of “woman” to name our gendered oppression, oppression that is based on social and cultural beliefs about the gender category, but also on social and cultural ideas about what particular embodied differences mean. Further, it is ironically quite difficult to complicate our understanding of conventional gender categories without those very categories, as Thompson demonstrates in his article. With Mary Black and myself, Thompson argues that “one of the most cherished gender norms applied to women—a norm applied with stunning regularity in both mainstream and feminist thought—is that they are ontologically *anti-violent*.” Like Thompson, I reject this popular notion. However, the theorist fails to see his own reliance on the category of woman in his proposed solution. “To recognize women in the riot would mean destabilizing the intelligibility of the category ‘woman’ itself” (39), he argues, perhaps not realizing that even this solution requires first recognizing the rioters *as women* in order to complicate this very category.

Further, while acknowledging and celebrating ambiguity with regard to gender, Thompson, perhaps inadvertently, advocates an unambiguously violent political subject by arguing “by appropriating means of powerful political assertion to which historically they’ve been denied recourse—women tell the lie of the normative masculine

identification with power” (Thompson 43).⁸⁵ In this statement, Thompson identifies violent political action as always already powerful—replicating the mistake made by the Black Panthers and members of the Weather Underground of denying ambiguity (a mistake I explore in Chapter 2). He also reveals the irony that it is only by identifying as women when engaging in violence that political actors will be able to “tell the lie” of normative gender categories, a lie that, incidentally, relies on a concept of women’s embodied weakness, necessitating, in my opinion, that we address embodiment in our visions of future political action.

In short, while I appreciate the critique of ontologies that suggest women are categorically vulnerable, relational, and prone to peace politics that arguments like Thompson’s represent, I am quite hesitant to do away with the category of “woman” altogether, both due to its power to describe historical, cultural, and social oppressions but also in its ability to help us define the relationships between those oppressions and real embodied differences. The category of “woman” as a gender category need not be relied on as an unchanging ahistorical bedrock on which to build a movement, however. In an ethical world, we recognize others’ need to define themselves in a meaningful way. This meaning making is no doubt influenced by historical lived experience and the desire to make oneself intelligible to others, which—due to our ambiguity—requires a negotiation of felt identity, embodiment, and the use of available categories. We must

⁸⁵ Looking to Fanon and Sartre to bolster his argument that the work of violence is the work of history making, Thompson argues that Algerians seeking independence through anti-colonial violence used such violence to both become political and to “*becom[e] historical*,” arguing that to use violence is to be recognized historically (44, emphasis in original).

acknowledge such meaning making activity as a process, a process grounded in embodiment but that requires an ability to define ourselves and name our oppressions and the nature of our relationships without falling back on ontologies based in one particular lived experience.

Relationality, Womanhood, and Motherhood

While I tried in this chapter to evaluate various protest movements, my goal is not to adjudicate the tenability of each and every case of women's participation in American protest history. I have argued that some women of the Weather Underground as well as some current feminist activists appear to be making useful corrections to dominant ontological models used among other protestors. These activists have been largely dismissed due to their 'violent' tactics and rhetoric, but they have presented ontological claims that counter more widely accepted models whose nonviolence often stems from blindness to a larger global context of uneven power relations and a weak accounting of relationality. Many conversations that explore these ontological issues ironically appear to be occurring among the most alienated activist groups. More mainstream groups of activist women include those who not only replicate problematic notions of women's ontology, some of which I've explored here, but also conflate womanhood with motherhood, or the potential to mother, which presents yet another problematic ontological model and new entanglements around relationality, womanhood, and motherhood that invite further scrutiny. I take up this topic—the multiple ethics of motherhood and their deployment in public protest—in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: “IF THE MOTHERS RULED THE WORLD”: PEACEFUL MOURNERS AND MAMA GRIZZLIES

“Persons have often remarked, ‘How did you feel, when you went in these places[?]’ Imagine a burning house, a frantic mother, for her heart treasures, her babes, are in that building. She hears their cries, she sees their little arms, waving behind the closed window, amid the smoke that soon will be a flame. She seizes an axe or hatchet near at hand, with which she breaks open door or window to let her darlings escape. Is there a mother in all the land that would not act thus?”

--*Carry Nation on her temperance “hatchetations,”* The Use and Need of the Life of Carry A. Nation, 1905⁸⁶

“I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier
I brought him up to be my pride and joy,
Who dares to put a musket on his shoulder,
To shoot some other mother’s darling boy?
Let nations arbitrate their future troubles,
It’s time to lay the sword and gun away,
There’d be no war today,
If mothers all would say,
I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier.”

--*World War I song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier.”*⁸⁷

“If the mothers ruled the world, there would be no goddamn wars in the first place.”

-- *Sally Field’s acceptance speech, Emmy Award Ceremony, September 2007*⁸⁸

“Here in Alaska I always think of the mama grizzly bears that rise up on their hind legs when somebody’s coming to attack their cubs, to do something adverse toward their cubs. You thought pitbulls were tough; well, you don’t wanna mess with the mama grizzlies. And that’s what we’re seeing with all these women who are banning together, rising up, saying, ‘No, this isn’t right for our kids and for our grandkids, and we’re gonna do something about this.’”

--*Sarah Palin, SarahPAC video, July 2010*⁸⁹

To say that motherhood is a historically and theoretically pervasive theme in U.S. protest is a colossal understatement. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, temperance

⁸⁶ Page 113.

⁸⁷ The song, popular in 1915, was written by Alfred Bryan and the music was composed by Al Piantadosi (“‘I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier’: Singing Against the War”).

⁸⁸ Field’s comments have been noted in several sources. See the AlterNet article by Jodie Evans as an example (Evans).

⁸⁹ This video was created by SarahPAC and is archived on the organization’s website (SarahPAC).

activists emphasized their maternal role of saving their families from the destructive influence of alcohol. Temperance activist Carry Nation adopted the rhetoric of motherhood and dubbed herself a “Home Defender.” Early working women’s organizations, like the Ladies’ Federal Labor Union, a women’s union granted a charter by the AFL in 1888, connected the plight of female workers with that of child laborers, both suggesting that such a connection is natural given women’s roles as mothers and infantilizing women by equating their struggles to those of children (see clipping cited in Tax 55). The famous poem associated with female activists at the protests in Lawrence, Massachusetts in 1912, “Bread and Roses,” (later adopted and performed by folk singers in the 1960s and 70s) includes a pledge to “battle . . . for men / For they are women’s children and we mother them again” (qtd. in Tax 241).⁹⁰ While making liberal claims to women’s equality in the name of a universal human capacity for reason, U.S. women’s suffrage activists simultaneously emphasized women’s particular nature (including their heightened morality) in part due to their maternal capacity, and their ability as potential and actual mothers to pacify the male-centered political sphere of war-mongering destruction (see Chapter 1). Highlighting the role mothers might play in effecting change, the suffragists of the National Woman’s Party collected information about

⁹⁰ The historical association between this poem by Jerome Oppenheim and the female strikers at Lawrence, Massachusetts has recently been brought into question (Ross). While some sources associate the song with the protest (even calling the strike the Bread and Roses strike), arguing that the women held signs or banners containing messages similar to those in the song or that they inspired the poem, these things may not have actually occurred. The enduring association, however, is notable, and evidence of our tendency to perpetuate myths compatible with our cultural understanding of gender and motherhood. Robert Ross argues that this myth speaks to a general desire to articulate a need for both dignity and food and fair wages, providing “as Ardis Cameron says, a wrong story in a right cause” (Ross 67). Voicing this need through the rubric of womanhood (or motherhood) makes it more compatible with prevailing cultural myths. Says Ross, “we all want the Roses—even the tough and silent men—but it is the women who are allowed to say so” (63).

Congressmen's mothers, arguing that it was useful to have such information on hand since "Mothers continue to have strong influence over their sons" (qtd. in Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 217).⁹¹ A few decades later, Women Strike for Peace organized as mothers in the 1960s to protest nuclear testing, and later, the Vietnam War. Today, participants in Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the Million Mom March, the Second Amendment Sisters, the Tea Party mama grizzlies, Moms Demand Action, and many other movements remind us that the ethics of motherhood are still very much alive.

This chapter explores the idea often advanced by female protestors in the U.S. that one's role as a mother (or potential mother) situates her in a unique ontological position, a position from which she can make political claims. My focus on ontology, rather than biological or natural predisposition, is important here. The notion that women generally or mothers specifically are biologically or innately predisposed to certain behaviors or tendencies has long been critiqued by scholars and activists (even as a minority of activists persist in advocating this notion). What is perhaps more interesting, and more pervasive, is the notion that, due to their lived experiences from infancy to adulthood (often determined by their perceived biological capacities, or ones that are socially ascribed as biological), women generally and mothers specifically have developed a unique way of being in the world, or, more precisely, a separate *category of existence* that produces a unique ontology of motherhood. The theorists making these

⁹¹ Interestingly, the *New York Times* (after six years of opposing women's suffrage and the National Woman's Party), attributed the organization's ultimate success in gaining the vote for women to the organization's card catalog, which included information about Congress members' mothers, rather than their public protest tactics (Walton, *Woman's Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 236).

claims do more than simply note the importance of women's or mothers' shared lived experiences but their theories are also rarely so facile as to suggest that women are biologically, naturally, or essentially predisposed to certain behaviors or political outlooks. These claims are the ones that most interest me here.

In this chapter, I look specifically at the historical trajectory of two ethics of motherhood from early American history to their use in contemporary movements: first, the idea that mothers are predisposed to peace politics and nonviolent tactics due to their relational ties to their children and their acute understanding of interdependency, and second, that motherhood predisposes mothers to protective violence due to an overwhelming need to fight any threat to their child. I argue that while it can be tempting for protestors to embrace the limited power and short-term tactical success we can enjoy by defining our politics and our political personhood as mothers in this way, such an approach—particularly when it means making ahistorical claims about historical material conditions—is ultimately limiting. Such an approach is incompatible with the model I've outlined in this project. In fact, the ethics of motherhood as deployed by U.S. protestors illustrate problematic claims related to all aspects of my model: ambiguity, vulnerability, and relationality amid uneven power relations. Beyond using this case to discuss the model I've advocated throughout this project, however, I would also like to suggest that reliance on the ethics of motherhood occupies such a large space in the history of women's activism in the U.S. that it possesses its own unique ideological history and therefore requires special attention.

Both of the major positions I explore here might be viewed as compatible with Nancy Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory, an analogue to Marx's supposition that the proletariat possess a distinctive perspective on the structures of capitalism and are therefore uniquely qualified to destroy it. Just as the proletariat must topple capitalism, argued Hartsock, so, too, do women offer the best perspective from which to topple patriarchy. While not especially concerned with motherhood or (non)violence, Hartsock's theoretical framework offers the potential for imagining an ontology specific to women as mothers that provides them with unique power and perspective and places them in a powerful tactical and instrumental position. Hartsock's theory (like Marx's) allows activists to imagine an avenue to political agency predicated on their position of marginality. Both of the ethics of motherhood I explore here result from attempts by mothers to exploit the widely accepted notion that they possess an especially acute moral authority, but, I argue, this authority is granted to them in lieu of political power. It is due to an attempt to carve out political agency in the face of their marginalization that I would argue often leads women to embrace mothers' heightened morality in the name of political change. However, the bounded stage allowed them to make their claims is very often situated outside of the center stage of politics. Rather than serving as an avenue from marginality to the powerful viral destruction of the hegemonic political economy, I contend that this tactic is often permitted in the U.S. context precisely due to the limited threat it poses to current structures of power. Regardless of the tactical efficiency or inefficiency of the tactic, however, it is on the basis of long-term ethical tenability rather than short-term tactical success that we should ultimately judge protests advancing an

ethic of motherhood. On these grounds, I argue that both the position that mothers are predisposed to peace politics and nonviolent action and the position that mothers are predisposed to violent protective action lead to ontologically flawed claims. Shaking the temptation to resort to such ethics will no doubt be difficult, however, especially since motherhood has historically been so inextricably tied to the very foundation of discourse in the U.S. Parsing out the historical reality of the experiences of motherhood—which are crucial to acknowledge—from the ahistorical ontological claims that are based on such lived experiences is, I would argue, an important part of the process.

A Long History of Motherhood as an Ontological Factor

Just as a premise of sexual difference is instrumental in early liberal democratic theory despite its emphasis on rationality over bodily difference (see Chapter 1), so, too, is its history tied to the premise that mothers play a specific role in the democratic state. But this premise is not based in belief in a maternal instinct. While he notes “the tenderness of mothers for their young and . . . the perils they have to brave in order to protect them” (“Discourse on the Origins of Inequality” 133–134), Rousseau sees these sentiments as innate in all animals. He also argues that in the early history of humankind mothers initially breastfed their children to fulfill their own needs, growing to care for them out of “habit,” and that children were not intuitively bonded to their mothers.⁹² He further implies that girls need to be educated to be good mothers in his chapter on Sophie

⁹² Rousseau argues that in the early history of humankind, “The mother at first nursed her children for her own need; then, with habit having endeared them to her, she later nourished them for their own need. Once they had the strength to look for their food, they did not hesitate to leave the mother herself. And since there was practically no other way of finding one another than not to lose sight of one another, they were soon at the point of not even recognizing one another” (128). He notes further that, in this early history, “the child no longer meant anything to the mother once it could do without her” (140).

in *Emile*, demonstrating that such abilities are not naturally endowed.

Mary Wollstonecraft, a feminist critic of Rousseau's failure to apply liberal democratic principles to women, appears to share his skepticism of a maternal instinct. What is usually meant by a 'maternal instinct' is, of course, a propensity for peaceful nurturing and gentle care of one's own children, but also other children and adults. It is sometimes used to describe the impulse to use protective force when one's children are in trouble, but not simply the biological ability to give birth or skills or proclivities that may result from being solely or largely responsible for the care and upbringing of children. The term invokes not simply the biological reality of physical motherhood or the material practice of female parenting, but a particular notion of what it means—or should mean—to be a mother. However, to possess an 'authentic' maternal instinct, the myth goes, one must actually *be* a mother. The behaviors this instinct supposedly fosters fall in line, of course, with societal expectations of motherly behavior.

As Gunther-Canada notes, "Wollstonecraft's novels . . . highlight the fact that she believed mothering was not an instinctual effort but a social behavior that reflected the constraints of class, ethnicity, and personal history like any other human activity" (Gunther-Canada 121). That the kind of mothering implied by the notion of a 'maternal instinct' was not seen as 'natural' not only by this early liberal feminist, but also by one of the earliest liberal democratic theorists, is particularly interesting given the central place of the ethics of motherhood in American political, philosophical, and protest history. One might expect a political framework that marginalizes and depoliticizes women in other ways would also replicate the myth of the maternal instinct, especially

given the theory's complicity with the idea that women are especially material, especially tied to their bodies, and categorically weak and vulnerable. However, what these early liberal democratic theorists recognized despite their skepticism of the maternal instinct is a *duty* to mother, and the connection these theorists made between mothering and marriage and civic duty rather than a natural urge provides, perhaps, a more constricting concept of motherhood than belief in a maternal instinct as one need not feel a compulsion to nurture to be expected to take on domestic care work or sole responsibility for one's children, or, more pointedly, to sacrifice one's own political personhood for the sake of educating one's children to be political subjects. The liberal democratic conception of motherhood is not entirely divorced from the body, however, as the duty to mother is viewed as being tied to biological womanhood.

While Rousseau is hesitant to claim that mothering is instinctual, he argues that women's capacity for childbearing imparts responsibility on them to care for children: "It is up to the sex that nature has charged with the bearing of children to be responsible for them to the other sex," he asserts (*Emile, or On Education* 535). So while women's biological ability to birth often leads to their role as mothers, proof of an urge to mother or any abilities thereof are unnecessary to bind women to their mothering duties—presumably even those who have not birthed children but simply belong to "the sex that nature has charged" with childbearing. Like Rousseau, despite her critique of his failure to extend political personhood to women, Wollstonecraft connects womanhood and motherhood, arguing that newly educated women whose schooling she advocates will still choose marriage and motherhood, but will simply be better wives and mothers. She

includes a brief section on career paths educated women might take in her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1791–1792), a passage that appears to reveal her progressive ideas, but that ends with a discussion of how “rational fellowship” with men would create “more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, *more reasonable mothers*” (179, emphasis added). This statement is immediately followed by a chapter on “parental affection” that mostly concerns the need for women to be more present and caring with their children. It is possible (and even likely) that Wollstonecraft tempers her arguments about what women will do with education and political rights due to awareness of her audience, but if read at face value, her text endorses the maintenance of traditional domestic roles for women, including a traditional liberal notion of motherhood that includes women’s acceptance of their duty to mother.⁹³ Almost eighty years later, women’s suffrage supporter and liberal democratic theorist John Stuart Mill asserted that wives probably should not take up other economic burdens since these would only prevent them from properly managing their households and caring for their children. In a passage later dissected by Carol Pateman in her feminist critique of liberal political theory, Mill equates marriage with the choice to serve chiefly as mother, wife, and household manager: “Like when a man chooses a profession, so, when a woman marries, it may in general be understood that she makes choice of the management of a household, and the bringing up of a family . . . and that she renounces, not all other objects and occupations, but all which are not consistent with the

⁹³ Wollstonecraft does note, however, in a bolder moment, that men cannot expect women to be generous wives if they have nothing of their own and cleverly argues that rights and responsibilities go hand in hand so uneducated women cannot be expected to perform well as wives and mothers: “take away natural rights, and duties become null” (182).

requirements of this” (Mill 50–51). The concept of choice or consent, so ingrained in liberal discourse, is very much a part of the discussion about motherhood, then and now. Mothers (and sometimes women in general, read as potential mothers) are presumed to have consented to not only the condition of motherhood, but the implied duties thereof, even when an active choice is absent. Advocates of both ethics of motherhood outlined here alternately embrace the liberal democratic idea that women have a duty to their children and the idea that women possess a maternal instinct or that they have developed a particular worldview through their experience as mothers, but even when the latter rhetoric is employed, all of these activists must ultimately contend with the liberal concept of the duty of motherhood and its implied connection to politics.

The concept of Republican Motherhood reflects and describes this early liberal democratic theoretical history. The phrase was coined by Linda K. Kerber in 1976 to describe the idea—compatible with principles developed by early liberal democratic theorists, but solidified and applied nationally by early Americans—that American women have a duty to educate their children to be good citizens. This notion, “a device which attempted to integrate domesticity and politics” (Kerber 203), provided an avenue for women’s recognition by the state through their roles as educators of children in “civic virtue” (202) rather than as a result of their own political subjectivity. It has historically been the case that women in the U.S. have been held responsible for the daily care of their children (or the management of other women, often women of color, who they employ to manage the daily care of their children). This historical condition has often led to mothers’ concern for their children’s education and political future. We must

distinguish, however, between such a concern borne out of historical reality and theoretical traditions that point to a more fixed relationship between biological womanhood and motherhood and a special political role for mothers, or to a particular duty to provide political education while sacrificing one's own political personhood.

Of course, both the experience of mothering in the U.S. and its theoretical underpinnings have a very different history in the case of African-American women. African-American slaves' experience of mothering was marked by forced separation, physical labor, dispossession, and, in some cases, mothers determined that abortion or infanticide was a more humane option than submitting their children to the conditions of slavery. Their very condition of motherhood was often forced upon them as their husbands were chosen for them and they were often raped by their white male owners. Black mothers were contradictorily stereotyped as brutish, strong, and violent, hyper-sexual and sexually available, and as asexual and maternal (especially in the case of the Mammy figure). Likewise, as sociologist Marci Bounds Littlefield points out, "Motherhood was connected to the success of the institution of slavery, and this created a very unique and dynamic relationship between black women and their children" (56). Post-slavery models were (and are) influenced by these realities and contradictions. Colonial narratives of womanhood and motherhood similarly influence the experiences of female immigrants and women of color whose bodies mark them as Other.

Littlefield explores the experience of motherhood by black women in the U.S. in the late nineteenth century and argues that, due to the enforced estrangement of so many slave families and the dispossession of black mothers, embracing motherhood as central

to the identity of black women actually presents a challenge to hegemony whereas the same move by white women—long privy to the cult of true womanhood—does not have the same effect. She argues that black women’s material conditions did not allow for the passivity privileged in the cult of true womanhood and their active responses to their conditions—especially in the form of fighting to prevent their children from being taken from them and participating in revolts—actually resulted in a motherhood of agency and power. Littlefield’s points are well taken. However, while her arguments help invalidate the (white) ontological model of ‘true womanhood,’ she doesn’t tackle the problem of complying with the notion that mothers—more than fathers, parents in general, or caretakers—enjoy a unique ontological position from which they can make political claims, whatever that position may be. Her arguments also do not remove the pervasiveness and normative power of ethics like Republican Motherhood despite their failure to consider the material reality of African-American women.

The normative power of this model—particularly in contrast to black American women’s historical experiences—takes on a particular heft in the face of the dismissal of the Welfare Queen from legitimate motherhood. This myth became a particularly powerful rhetorical tool in the 1980s. As Carly Hayden Foster explains, the Welfare Queen “is demonized not just because of her race or her gender or her class, not just because she is single, and not just because she has children. The Welfare Queen is specifically located at the intersection of all of those status markers” (163). This construct signifies the unique position of the poor black single mother in the United States whose

motherhood is deemed illegitimate and further complicates normative conceptions of motherhood and weakens ontological models built around them.

While Republican Motherhood ostensibly dissolved in 1920 when women gained the right to vote and arguably became political subjects themselves, remnants of the philosophy remain, even since the advent of the *neoliberal* political subject that arguably places more emphasis on subjects' economic utility rather than their role as political actors. Meanwhile, feminist ethicists drawing from work in the care feminist tradition (described in detail in Chapter 3), particularly Sara Ruddick, have countered models based in liberal and justice-based models of motherhood to point to maternal practices like “preservative love, nurturance, and training” (17) as avenues to political agency and, specifically, a maternal ethics of peace. There is little evidence, however, that American women's roles as mothers—or female protestors' deployment of an ethic of motherhood—has led to their acceptance as full political subjects, particularly since ‘legitimate’ motherhood is synonymous with married motherhood and thus carries with it all of the historical problems of building an identity as a woman that is tied to one's participation in the institution of marriage. If anything, a reliance on an ethic of motherhood has prevented such recognition, even for married heterosexual white women of privilege who have been deemed uniquely capable of Republican Motherhood and of modeling the kind of mothering described by care feminists. Activists relying on ethics of motherhood must still contend, for example, with the connection between citizenship and the ability to fight on behalf of the state (explored in depth in Chapter 2), a role women are generally not believed to be capable of or intended for. One common solution to this

dilemma is the suggestion that women can gain citizenship by offering up their mothering instead of an ability to fight (an ability they have historically been deemed lacking). Such an approach may appear to constitute complicity with the notion that mothers have a unique role in the liberal state, but it is often deployed by feminists who see such an approach as a way of revising motherhood into a potent enterprise and making more visible their reproductive power. Some theorists, such as Carole Pateman, have taken a nuanced critical approach to comparing men's ability to fight on behalf of the state with women's ability to birth citizens (and, consequently, soldiers).

While Pateman is critical of the radical feminist argument, particularly as it has been deployed in Shulamith Firestone's book *The Dialectic of Sex*, that the major difference between men and women is biological and specifically related to procreation (125–126), she nonetheless critiques liberal feminists for “assum[ing] that the relevant political problem is to show that women possess the capacities men possess and can do what men can do,” including military service (44). This strategy “assumes that there is no political significance to the fact that women have one natural ability which men lack: women, but not men, are able to give birth” (44).⁹⁴ “Men's duty to die for the state,” she argues, “is matched by women's duty to give birth for the state” (11). Under social contract theory, Pateman explains, “Eve's procreative, creative capacity is . . . denied and appropriated by *men* as the ability to give *political birth*, to be the ‘originators’ of a new form of political order” (44). Pateman's suggestion that women give birth as men give their lives should be read not as a literal proposal, but as an illustration of the

contradictions inherent in liberal democratic theory and the ways that the theory allows men to erase the material reality that childbirth—the creation of humans—depends on women. It also allows us to deny that the very process of reproduction contradicts a political model of totally autonomous citizens. In other words, it highlights our universal relationality. In this light, writer and activist Charlotte Perkins Stanton's fictional creation Herland, where women have discovered how to reproduce without men, seems much less bizarre a notion as liberal democratic theory has effectively accomplished a male world in which men create worlds and governments through reason, expunging women's role in the process.

While, on the surface, Pateman's critique appears to support the actions of activists employing an ethic of motherhood, she presents her comparison of men's and women's relative abilities mostly to point out the flaws in the idea that men are uber-citizens due to their ability to fight for the state. She does not believe that women's birthing capabilities should *actually* be the source of their citizenship, but her comparison serves to expose the fallacy that women do not offer as much as men do to the state. Interestingly, the idea that women birth citizen soldiers has been embraced by peace activists and hawks alike to justify their relative ethical frameworks. Peace activists building an ethic of nonviolence based on mothering argue that the experience of mothering provides them an insight into the loss or potential loss of children-turned-soldiers, while other mother activists see themselves as serving a particularly important role supporting their soldier sons, brothers, and fathers in war by supporting the wars themselves. Of course, many activists have offered arguments that fall somewhere

between these two claims. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, for example, in 1863, in the midst of the U.S. Civil War, appeared to offer something of a middle ground in their call for a meeting to discuss women's suffrage. The least the state could do in return for mothers' ultimate sacrifice of their soldier sons, they seemed to suggest, was enfranchise women: "when a mother lays her son on the altar of her country," they argued, "she asks an object equal to the sacrifice" (Stanton and Anthony 198).

Historically, however, while the acceptance of one's duty to mother as one's obligation to the state has not led unproblematically to the embrace of mothers as full political subjects, the embrace of various ethics of motherhood in U.S. protest continues. What's more, such ethics have consistently been intimately tied up in concerns with domestic and foreign conflict, peace, technologies of violence, and life and death, making this a tactic that elicits a sense of great consequence and a topic that demands our engagement. The following sections engage with the ethics' accounting for ambiguity, vulnerability, relationality, and uneven power relations, ultimately arguing that such an approach presents an impoverished notion of ontology.

Motherhood and Ambiguity

As I've explored in earlier chapters, our ambiguity implicates us in the constant process of negotiating our material reality with our desire to imbue our world and ourselves with meaning, meaning that sometimes contradicts with or complicates our lived experience. As I discussed in Chapter 3 and above, the material reality of childbirth and the need to care for helpless infants and children (work historically carried out by women) have provided useful case studies for combating the concept of total autonomy

and independence implicit in traditions like liberal democratic theory with the reality of relationality and interdependence. Both childbirth and care work are intimately associated with motherhood. But fathers, parents in general, caretakers, and, really, all of us, are implicated in this process and its ontological implications. In fact, what is most useful about the challenge the lived reality of childbirth and dependence brings to the concept of total autonomy is what happens when we take what we've learned from looking closely at labor historically carried out disproportionately by mothers and apply it across humanity. An effort to make motherhood into a unique meaningful category of personhood defined by an enhanced capacity for relationality and its embodied manifestations betrays the fact that such relationality is common to all of us. Our desire for meaning making—defining ourselves as subjects—can be severely constrained rather than expanded when we begin to read the historical role of mothers' caretaking as indicating a need for a distinct gendered ontological category. While the tactic of embracing an ethic of motherhood may have the appearance today of challenging the most recent manifestations of concepts like Republican Motherhood, it, in fact, often reifies the notion that mothers are endowed with a particular manner of being and particular ethical responsibilities. I argue that this problem is at play in both ethics of motherhood explored in this chapter. In these cases, the work of motherhood is read as creating a uniquely gendered ontological category rather than helping us rethink prevailing concepts of ontology in their entirety.

Of course, this process of balancing embodied and lived experience with meaning making is easier said than done. Avoiding common missteps requires a delicate

negotiation of acknowledging material experiences and considering the pragmatics of protest and the tenable positions from which claims can be made while also being careful not to concretize historical categories and render certain subjects more relational or more vulnerable than others or fail to hold them accountable when they make claims that defy these common ontological qualities. I certainly don't intend to strip mothers of the community they (we) rely on based on shared experience. Ambiguity is messy and conflict-laden. But it is nonetheless present and must be carefully accounted for, this tension between material life and meaning making, reaching toward the future despite our inability to fully control it. For the reasons I've explored, I believe this accounting requires opening up the possibilities of public protest beyond the ethics of motherhood. This task is quite difficult given the pervasive beliefs that extend starting from pregnancy—when women are believed to be categorically vulnerable—to the enhanced relationality all mothers are believed to possess.

The Pregnant Activist as Categorically Vulnerable

In Chapter 1, I explored at length the tactical exploitation of our cultural belief in women's categorical vulnerability. Such a belief seems magnified when the woman in question is pregnant, connecting even the very beginnings of maternity with vulnerability. In some cases, female protestors have taken advantage of a belief in the enhanced vulnerability of the pregnant body. In other cases, onlookers have reacted to these women as especially vulnerable despite their ontological claims. One example of the former is women's first independent action in the streets during the Lawrence strike, which was organized by a pregnant woman from Italy. The woman attended the meeting

where Bill Haywood was slated to speak and took the microphone, rallying her female compatriots by saying, in part, “Men all stay home, all men and boys stay home. Just now all woman and girl come with me. Soldier he hurt man. Soldier he no hurt woman. He no hurt me. Me got big belly. She, too [. . .] she got big belly too. Soldier no hurt me Solider he got mother” (qtd. in Tax 261). This pregnant activist was well aware of a prevailing cultural belief in women’s categorical vulnerability, particularly when those women are pregnant. Despite the fact that, in this case, distain for the strikers tragically outweighed police sympathy for pregnant women, this woman and her cohort’s understanding of a belief in a pregnant woman’s categorical vulnerability was strong. Ultimately, the violent treatment this pregnant woman and her female counterparts received resulted in a dramatic sympathetic response from President Taft’s wife and deep public sympathy for the strikers (Tax 263).⁹⁵

The suffragists in the National Woman’s Party similarly sought to take advantage of the cultural protection offered pregnant women. In December 1916, when the President gave a speech to Congress, the Woman’s Party managed to get ten tickets from their contacts and arrived early to be first in line. Suffragist Mabel Vernon “wore an oversized large brown coat and appeared to be pregnant” (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 143). She was given a front row seat in the gallery that overlooked the House floor and the rest of her female companions sat around her. When the President mentioned his efforts to extend voting rights to the men of

⁹⁵ The chief of police described the women as inviting arrest and even going so far as to get into police vehicles to be arrested. He also explained that they had assaulted scabs and were arrested for that action. The strikers’ account explained that the women were “[p]eaceful” and did not provoke the police in any way (qtd. in Tax 262).

Puerto Rico, the women unfurled the banner that Vernon had carried in under her coat over the gallery railing. It read, “MR. PRESIDENT, WHAT WILL YOU DO FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE?” Wilson continued with his speech, a page removed the banner, and police flanked the women, but they didn’t remove them (Walton, *Woman’s Crusade: Alice Paul and the Battle for the Ballot* 143–144). The women had taken advantage of cultural beliefs about the vulnerability of pregnant womanhood and the protections due pregnant women to stage their protest, and the men who ultimately ended their performance seemed befuddled by the transgression.

In another case, three out of six female New Haven Panthers arrested in 1969 were pregnant at the time. Two gave birth while in jail. The women’s imprisonment led to outcry from the Panthers and a report from at least one news outlet about the harsh conditions the pregnant women faced. It arguably forced Panther leadership to consider the sacrifices female members were making and contributed to calls to eliminate male chauvinism within the organization (LeBlanc-Ernest 314). Even in this case where the female activists presumably did not aim to elicit sympathy for their vulnerable pregnant state, the belief in their vulnerability ultimately drove observers to see their case as a call to action. This deeply rooted understanding of the pregnant body as a categorically vulnerable one, a body that requires protection even when those in a pregnant state do not seek it, seems an apt precursor to the belief in these women’s eventual motherhood as offering them a particularly acute understanding of what it means to be tied to others.

Mothers as Nonviolent Peacemakers, Especially Relational Subjects

The quotation referenced in the title of this chapter (“If the mothers ruled the world, there would be no goddamn wars in the first place”) is representative of the most dominant ethic of motherhood—the idea that mothers are predisposed to peace politics. This quotation comes not from a social protest staged on the streets, but from the acceptance speech Sally Field gave when she received an Emmy in 2007 for her portrayal of a mother in the drama *Brothers & Sisters*. In the show, Field’s character, Nora Walker, struggles with her son’s deployment and in her speech, Field reflects on this character’s struggle and its larger significance. Her comments echo a long history of the notion that mothers—namely through their experience of handing over their children (usually sons) as soldiers to fight on behalf of the state or coming to grips with that possibility—possess a uniquely acute notion of the sanctity of life and that if mothers “ruled the world,” this understanding would prevent warfare due to their reluctance to engage in tactics of war.

In her book *Peace as a Women’s Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women’s Rights*, historian Harriet Hyman Alonso outlines a history of U.S. women’s movements from 1820 to 1985 that pinpoints an indelible connection between feminism and pacifism. Alonso explains that “the military represents an exaggerated microcosm of . . . power and abuse” for many female peace activists (9). She identifies the related connection these women make between motherhood and pacifism, since women are “the childbearers of society” (10), and, by extension, soldiers. She explains that because “*only* women can experience maternal feelings,” men cannot question the claims women make based on these feelings; indeed, even women who are not mothers can benefit from this special kind of political power since “just possessing the proper

biology or the emotional capacity to ‘mother’ has been enough to claim the superiority of motherhood” (11). Alonso claims that this argument “has been an essential element in the women’s rights (or feminist) peace movement” since “[i]t has provided women a societally acceptable cover for their highly political work” and has “allowed women to be angry and to express that anger within this acceptable context” in addition to preventing men from questioning their unique perspective (11–12). This line of thinking adopts a belief in the supposed ontological difference inherent in women’s role as mothers and potential mothers and uses it to claim a position from which to do important political work. Alonso describes a history of women’s insistence on a biological impulse or a maternal instinct, a history which does, in fact, exist, but is certainly not the only position women deploying an ethic of motherhood have taken. Other activists would take issue with her emphasis on biology and emotion, but some would embrace her accounting and the tactic she describes as important responses to the liberal democratic emphasis on reason and duty. Such an approach and critique of liberal democratic theory, however, does not escape the importance of these things to political personhood in a state like the U.S. Rather, it merely neglects to contend with it.

Some female protestors throughout U.S. history have acknowledged the perceived duties of motherhood as defined in a liberal state while also taking tactical advantage of their marginality to make claims for peace *as women* and, more specifically, *as mothers*. As I explored in Chapter 1, women’s suffrage activists invoked women’s propensity for peace (sometimes using maternal arguments) to argue that women’s vote could help usher in an era of political peace, but they also made liberal feminist arguments for

enfranchisement. In *The Motherless State*, Eileen McDonagh explains that the hybrid tactic of emphasizing both women's capacity for reason under the liberal model of individualism as well as their particular capacity for maternal care was made possible by the Progressive Era of the 20th century. During this era, people began to acknowledge the state's duty in carrying out public policies associated with care work. Due to this rethinking of the state (what McDonagh calls the "maternalization of the state"), the concept of Republican Motherhood could no longer be used so effectively to justify women's disenfranchisement. Women, who were widely perceived to be particularly skilled at maternal care work, could now highlight that particularity as a powerful skill they offered the state rather than a hindrance. As McDonagh explains, "It became extremely difficult to argue that women should be kept from participating in governance as voters because of their maternal duties to the family, when the state itself was undertaking those same duties in its public policies" (186–187). The claims to women's particular capacity for things like peace making and civility that had been a "sidebar to liberal arguments" in the nineteenth century took on greater power and momentum in the Progressive Era. McDonagh notes that after the advent of progressive policies, "It did not take woman suffrage reformers long to argue that the state could perform its new maternalistic policies even better if members of the group associated with maternalism—women—were allowed to vote" (187). Both male supporters and female activists seemed more comfortable with this politics of women's difference from men than they were with the idea that women were similarly political. One might argue that winning women's right to vote within this context helped paved the way for a continued politics of

women's difference, including their maternal propensity for peace-making. Such a tactic also arguably left female activists in a tough spot during the incremental adoption of neoliberal policies that favored deregulation and disavowed welfare policies as the provenance of the private sector rather than the government.

Even working women during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, more commonly associated with bodily strength and decreased vulnerability, invoked their roles as especially relational, and therefore peace loving, mothers in making their claims in protest during this time. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, an 1879 parade float sponsored by the Working Women's Union carried a banner that read "WHEN WOMAN IS ADMITTED INTO THE COUNCIL OF NATIONS, WAR WILL COME TO AN END, FOR WOMAN MORE THAN MAN, KNOWS THE VALUE OF LIFE" (Ashbaugh 35–36), foreshadowing a long history of women's claims to female and maternal peace politics, including Sally Field's 2007 comments about mothers and peace. The fight to end child labor and to improve conditions for working women sometimes went hand in hand during this time, further underscoring how inextricably connected women (as mothers and potential mothers) were seen with children. The famous protests in Lawrence, Massachusetts were colored by the images of working and striking mothers bravely sending their children off to stay with sympathetic families in nearby cities and, despite the independence they demonstrated and the activist work they temporarily privileged over their duties to mother, their participation in the protests themselves was colored by their roles as mothers.

Decades later, the second wave feminism of the now enfranchised women of the

1960s and 70s was largely preoccupied with problems facing white married housewives and therefore reflected a concern with the prevailing model of suburban motherhood. Much of the feminist work produced during this time was aimed at freeing heterosexual women from being defined solely by their relationships to their husbands and their children rather than embracing the rhetoric of motherhood. The mantra “the personal is political,” however, invited connections between familial identities—like motherhood—and politics. Also, some feminists and other female activists who did not necessarily self-identify as feminist found it useful to tie their activism, especially in anti-war campaigns, to women’s roles as mothers. Like many of the protestors that preceded them, they sought to fashion a source of marginalization into a source of political power. One particularly relevant case study is the 1960s organization Women Strike for Peace (WSP).⁹⁶ While many of its members may have not been aware of it, WSP occupied a place in a long historical line of maternal movements for peace along with Julia Ward Howe, the Women’s Peace Party, and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (Stimpson ix). The organization was created in 1961 and consisted mostly of white, middle-class, self-identified “concerned housewives” (qtd. in Swerdlow 1) who opposed the Cold War arms race and nuclear testing on the grounds that these developments posed great harm to their children. They went ‘on strike’ to protest nuclear testing, and, later, the Vietnam War, with direct action demonstrations, including pickets, sit-ins, and die-ins, as well as letter writing and political lobbying. WSP created a public image of

⁹⁶ While they were not *anti*-feminist, WSP participants were “sometimes put off” by contemporary feminists’ critique of their ethic of motherhood. But the women’s experience with political organizing led to involvement in events like the 1970 Women’s Equality Day March, in which they carried a banner that declared, “The Women of Vietnam are Our Sisters” (Swerdlow 4–5).

“respectable middle-class, middle-aged ladies, wearing white gloves and flowered hats, picketing the White House and protesting to the Kremlin to save their children and the planet” (Swerdlow 3). They justified their absence from the home by reassuring themselves, in a similar manner as temperance activists, that they “had to leave the home to save it” (8).

WSP members’ status as mothers took center stage in their protests. They pushed their babies in strollers along the strike route, held signs that announced their motherhood, bearing slogans such as “Save the Children” and “Testing Damages the Unborn” and, in some cases, bearing photographs of their own children (Swerdlow 15). They pointed to their roles as mothers as their bona fides rather than their organizational alignment. One protestor hung a sign around her daughter’s neck at a demonstration that read, “I want to be a mommy someday” (16), not only harping on the ill health effects of nuclear testing, but also warning that the practice could prevent the very reproduction of mothering. During protests of the Vietnam War, WSP members emphasized their role as mothers of male soldiers. Offshoot local organizations associated with WSP like the Mothers’ Draft Resistance Movement in Frederick, Maryland encouraged mothers to refuse to allow their sons to be drafted and to go to court and ultimately to jail if necessary (175–176).

WSP members were encouraged in their actions by the outcome of its members’ rare decision to charge through a barricade to reach the area in front of the White House during an anti-war protest in 1967. Likening their actions to those of a lioness protecting her cubs, the protestors argued to President Lyndon Johnson, “We women gave you our

sons” and “you used them to kill and you returned 12,269 caskets and 74,818 casualties to heart-broken mothers” (qtd. in Swerdlow 178). While the female protestors received bad press for stepping outside of their generally more compliant approach (180), two young male protestors who joined them received much harsher physical treatment, including being “dragged on the pavement, beaten, and arrested.” As WSP historian Amy Swerdlow explains, “This only confirmed the women in their belief that middle-aged, middle-class mothers could get away with more militancy than young men and that WSP had to do even more to aid the resistance” (179). Swerdlow, herself a participant in WSP, acknowledges that she found emphasizing her maternity to be a useful tactical approach: “I recall that I stressed my maternal interests, rather than my radical politics, when I spoke and wrote for WSP, because I believed that my genuine motherly concerns would be received and understood by nonpolitical women, the media, and public officials,” she explains. “I was certain, on the other hand, that my radical ideas regarding economic and social justice would turn them away and place me outside credible political discourse” (236). Members of WSP were, this suggests, both supportive of the notion that motherhood defines a particular ontological category and the idea that relying on maternal rhetoric has major tactical advantages. The anxiety these mothers felt about the effects of nuclear testing on their children and, later, the possibility that their sons might die in the Vietnam War and the grief of those who lost their children soldiers was no doubt real. We must not overlook, however, the tactical import of their performance of these feelings. The strategic advantage of the rhetoric of mothering has no doubt heavily influenced activists’ decision to support the notion that there is an ontological connection

between motherhood, mothers' ties to their children, and peace politics, despite the problematic repercussions.

The notion that mothers have a particularly acute understand of grief, in fact, has surfaced many times throughout U.S. protest history and is so widely accepted that it is sometimes invoked without any further discussion or clearly stated maternal agenda. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), for example, was founded in 1980 by a mother whose daughter was killed by a drunk driver. The organization's literature does not highlight the focus implicit in the name on mothers and their grief over the loss of their children or their particular worry about their children's safety, but the name itself invokes this notion without naming it outright. The Million Mom March, which occurred in 2000, was more explicitly centered around motherhood than MADD; mirroring the use of an ethics of motherhood in reaction to war, it signified a very public demonstration of maternal opposition to gun violence and support for gun control. Female participants brought their small children with them to demonstrate their role as good mothers and to take advantage of these 'props' in situations where they may not normally have been given as much consideration, a tactic that echoed that of both women's suffrage parades (Borda 37) as well as WSP in the 1960s. They even planned a "stroller march" to the main stage (Ball). Like some participants in Women Strike for Peace, organizer and publicist Donna Dees-Thomases simultaneously believed that "We [mothers] are nurturers whether we want to acknowledge that or not" (qtd. in Goss and Heaney 35) and understood the tactical and rhetorical power of building a movement—and efforts to garner media attention—around the ethic of motherhood (35–37). She decided to focus

on mothers, in fact, based in part on her understanding of the demographic from her experience in public relations (Crowley). Other similar mom-centered organizations have sprouted up in the intervening years, including Moms Rising, among others. Cindy Sheehan might be seen as another quintessential modern day peace activist inspired by her experience of losing her son in the Iraq War who built her activist persona around her role as a mother. This peace-centered ethic of motherhood has been used repeatedly in the context of gun control (recalling some of the claims around technologies of violence I critiqued in Chapter 2). Most recently, it has been used by an organization called Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America (often shortened to Moms Demand Action), formed in response to the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in December of 2012. The organization has staged “stroller jams” and other actions that highlight its members’ roles as mothers uniquely positioned to understand and combat the harm posed to the country’s children by weak gun control laws (Moms Demand Action; *Motivated Moms--Could They Be a Game Changer in the Gun Debate?*).

As I explored in more detail in Chapter 3, women’s historical monopoly of parenting and care work in heteronormative nuclear families led to examinations of motherhood through a psychoanalytic lens in the wake of the second wave of feminism and the theorizing of relationality favored by women and girls due to mothering as an alternative ethical outlook to justice-based models. Nancy Chodorow described the process of mothering as leading to developmental differences between men and women and psychologist Carol Gilligan applied this idea to her study of girls’ and boys’ reasoning through moral dilemmas, discovering that girls’ differing solutions to moral

problems, received by prominent psychologists as proof of deficiencies in their development of a moral compass, were actually indicative of their adherence to an ethic of care as opposed to the dominant male ethic of justice favored by boys and men. Theorists like Sara Ruddick pondered whether this ethic of care, fostered by mothers skilled in what she calls “maternal thinking,” could lead to a political ethic of peace. These scholars were, in some ways, theorizing what activists were already experimenting with in their practice of protest.

One problem with this ontology of mothering—particularly in its claim that mothers are especially attuned to the sanctity of life—is the blind eye it turns to other witnesses to innate vulnerability or the exposure of vulnerability in the experience of injury or death of another. These witnesses are just as capable of experiencing the consequences of vulnerability and relationality in the form of grief. Indeed, by denying or minimizing fathers’ grief, for example, we reinforce the idea that only mothers are capable of the unique work of nurturing parenting, the very notion used to confine women to the private sphere, to vilify women’s choice not to have children, and criticize mothers’ entry into the workforce. One might argue that mothers who have historically devoted so much of their lives to caring for infants and children at their most dependent and who are largely responsible for having kept them alive and healthy through to adulthood—who have engaged most prominently in care work—have an especially intimate connection to their children that others do not share. And indeed, my goal is not to belittle the deep grief of mothers who have lost their children nor to deny that they have historically been disproportionately responsible for the health and welfare of their

(our) children and that this experience colors their (our) view of the world and sense of self and their (our) relationships to their (our) children. However, there is not much to be gained by denying others' grief over the loss of these children in the name of carving out an ethic of motherhood, particularly when that ethic is rooted in false ontological connections between vulnerability, hyper-relationality, mothering, and nonviolence. Indeed, by suggesting that mothers have a corner on grief, activists actually risk denying the ways in which grief uncovers our universal vulnerability and relationality. As Judith Butler explains, grief

furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order . . . by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorizing fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility. If my fate is not originally or finally separable from yours, then the 'we' is traversed by a relationality that we cannot easily argue against; or, rather, we can argue against it, but we would be denying something fundamental about the social conditions of our very formation. (Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* 22–23)

Here, Butler speaks not of mothers' grief for their lost children, but a common capacity for grief which has the potential to reveal our shared relationality.

We can find examples of the ethics of motherhood deployed in protest in the name of peace and avoidance of the grief associated with the loss of a mother's children not just in the U.S., but around the world. The movement called Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (or Madres de la Plaza de Mayo) in Argentina continues to this day as one of the

most oft-cited examples of a maternal pacifist women's movement, one that has been cited by Western scholars, like Sara Ruddick and Jean Bethke Elshtain, as an example to be followed. This organization was created in response to the 1976 coup staged by three military leaders in Argentina and the resulting suppression of what the junta viewed as "leftist terrorists" and anyone the new government "suspected of being a subversive" (Guzman Bouvard 23). Feared subversives were taken care of by "disappearing" them or taking them from their homes or workplaces, leaving family members and friends to wonder whether they were killed or imprisoned (24). The Mothers—an organized group of middle-aged mothers of "disappeared" children—began their actions in 1977 as concerned citizens, but "eventually challenged the entire military regime" (61–62). The Mothers began to assemble in the Plaza de Mayo—the site of several government offices—every Friday (and later, every Thursday) (69–70). They began marching around the pyramid in the middle of the plaza when they were told by a government official that remaining stationary "was tantamount to holding a meeting and would mark them as an illegal organization" (70). The mothers soon began wearing baby shawls on their heads (74) to mark themselves as an organized group and continued their protests even after the junta was replaced with a new government since the new government refused to satisfactorily explain their children's disappearances.

Groups like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo simultaneously embrace motherhood—building their political action from their experiences as mothers and as women and acting as caretakers—and challenge some aspects of traditional motherhood and womanhood by breaking out of the private sphere and adopting a subversive identity.

They are defined by their *pacifist* politics, not necessarily their *passive* nature. Researcher Marguerite Guzman Bouvard recounts how when the two Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo who met her at the airport put on their white shawls so she could recognize them, “the crowd anxiously edged away,” indicating that these women’s actions are read by others as subversive and even dangerous (4). Bouvard explains further that “The Mothers not only transformed political action, but they also revolutionized the very concept of maternity as passive and in the service of the state into a public and socialized claim against the state” (62). Despite this important point, however, the Madres and other similar groups do suggest that there is something inherent in motherhood or womanhood—an enhanced relationality—that links logically with peace activism and pacifist action. While subversive, these mothers are exploiting an accepted role for women, essentially arguing that to make political claims as a mother is to act as a witness. This role is often accepted at the cost of full political personhood. I must acknowledge, however, that in the deeply oppressive and grave context in which these women protested, using the role of mother to make political claims may have been one of the only options available to them despite its ontological problems. Holding up this example as one to be followed in the U.S., however, is very problematic.

In her book *Maternal Thinking*, Sara Ruddick is careful to note that she cannot conceive of herself as a protestor like the Madres nor unproblematically view their tactics outside of their context. However, she explicitly universalizes about the demands children make for the protection of their lives and ultimately admits that she also universalizes about a maternal identity that can be employed in the name of peace politics

(54–56). Ruddick celebrates the Madres precisely for the way they perform their connectedness with their children, expressing their maternal grief and literally cloaking themselves in photographs of their children—symbols of their violated children’s bodies: “In resistance to this violation mothers’ bodies become instruments of nonviolent power. Adorned with representations of bodies loved and violated, they express the necessity of love even amid terror” (229). Ruddick celebrates the way the women themselves fade into the backdrop as they become surrogates for their disappeared children: “The women do not speak of their work but of their children; they carry children’s photographs, not their own. The distinctive structuring of the relation between self and other, symbolized in birth and enacted in mothering, is now politicized” (228) in a protest movement that serves as a model for Latin America “and . . . the world,” suggesting “that the peacefulness latent in maternal practice tends to be realized as participants act against, and therefore on, violence itself” (234). Here Ruddick romanticizes the Madres, making problematic ontological connections between motherhood, relationality, and peace politics, and suggesting that their protest might become a model for others.

In addition to the problematic notion of mothers’ enhanced relationality, the idea that relationality necessarily leads to nonviolence and that motherhood is therefore ontologically connected to peace politics is also flawed for several reasons, many of which I’ve explored in Chapter 3. It is certainly true (and troubling) that associating motherhood with peace effectively removes mothers from conversations about war and, arguably, from full political personhood since, in a liberal democratic context, the ability—and willingness—to deploy violence in the name of the state is considered a key

component of political participation. More foundationally, however, even if one rejects the notion that mothers constitute a separate category of existence, the idea that the experience of caring for children necessarily predisposes one to nonviolence is flawed. In theorizing “maternal thinking,” Ruddick argues that the ways mothers meet demands “for *preservation, growth, and social acceptability*” for their children with “preservative love, nurturance, and training” (17) make mothering a practice well suited for creating and fostering a politics of peace. While she very carefully acknowledges that men are not inherently violent and women are not inherently peaceful, she also argues that “there is a peacefulness *latent* in maternal practice” (137, emphasis added). Ruddick tempers her arguments by acknowledging that an acceptance of maternal practice need not mean a total rejection of violence.⁹⁷ However, her suggestion that the practice of nurturing and caring for children leads to peace politics or creates a latent ethic of peace is misguided.⁹⁸ In fact, some advocates of the ethic of peaceful motherhood employ imagery of mothers voraciously protecting their young and metaphors of mother animals fighting off threats. Another (less dominant) ethic of motherhood also adopting such imagery illustrates the potential for mothers to react to threats to their children or their domestic space not with an insistence on nonviolence or even a militant effort to shield them from harm, but with

⁹⁷ Ruddick argues, for example, that “the best peace should not entirely prevent battle” (172), that “it is unnecessary and divisive to require of all peacemakers an absolute commitment not to kill” (138), and that “a peacemaker may herself act violently in careful, conscientious knowledge of the hurt she inflicts and of its cost to her as well as her victim” (138).

⁹⁸ In addition to considering female slaves’ experience of motherhood, which sometimes led to mothers’ decisions to end their children’s lives rather than have them face a life of slavery, as I explored above, we might also consider other cases that might complicate easy associations between motherhood and peaceful nurturing. The cases Nancy Scheper-Hughes explores in *Death Without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil*, for example, including cases of loving mothers who feel compelled to let go of those children they feel are destined to die of illness, complicate the notion of loving motherhood as being necessarily connected to uncomplicated nurturing. In fact, Scheper-Hughes frames her chapter “M(O)ther Love: Culture, Scarcity, and Maternal Thinking” as a direct challenge to Ruddick’s model of motherhood.

active protective violence. These activists challenge the prevailing notion that motherhood somehow uncomplicatedly leads to peace politics and that motherhood ontologically translates to an unwillingness to use violence. In fact, this approach takes the opposite view: that motherhood may very well make women even more predisposed to violence given their acute connection with their children, who they will do anything to protect. Ultimately, however, despite its use as a corrective to an ethic of peaceful motherhood, using the same historical realities of motherhood relied on by peace activists to argue that mothers are predisposed to protective violence also offers an impoverished model of ontology, as I explore below.

Mothers as Home Defenders, Mama Grizzlies

While many female activists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were making maternal claims to women's peace politics, some female temperance activists (some of whom were also suffragists) fought for the full abolition of alcohol and the enforcement of existing local prohibitions by using violent rhetoric and sometimes employing property destruction. Like other activists, they emphasized their roles as wives, sisters, and mothers and made claims to women's heightened morality, but in doing so, some activists made their claims by publically smashing liquor barrels in the streets and seeing their destructive actions as part of their efforts to protect their homes. While making some of the same associations between womanhood and morality as other activists and basing their actions in a notion of mothers' compulsion to protect their children, these women demonstrated through their actions that the duty to care for one's children sometimes necessitates the use of violence when it is used to protect them. One example

of a temperance activist who took such a claim to extreme levels was Carry Nation, whose “hatchetations” involved regular destruction of not just liquor barrels but saloons themselves and were typified by Nation’s adoption of a hatchet, her Bible, and the rhetoric of motherhood.

Despite her repeated use first of bricks she called “smashers” and then of a hatchet to destroy saloons, Nation was subjected to harsher treatment than her fellow crusaders (in part because of her refusal to accept the myth of her own vulnerability and frailty) but she still arguably escaped the fate that would meet male protestors employing similar tactics. The harshest treatment she received was from saloon owners and their supporters, with one saloon owner hitting her with a chair (Nation 166) and others attacking her with a broom, a horsewhip, and raw eggs, among other tactics, and at least one of the saloon owners resorting to hiring women to physically confront Nation rather than assaulting her himself (Carver 39). And while she served repeated jail sentences (twenty three, by her own count) in less than comfortable conditions and was assessed multiple fines she found herself unable to pay, her sentences were relatively short. Her longest sentence was thirty days and most were one or two days long (Nation 105). Nation was eventually able to parlay her experiences into a successful career as a public speaker, a venture that, along with her tactic of selling miniature metal hatchets, ultimately made her enough money to not only pay her fines but also to fundraise for her temperance projects. As Frances Grace Carver points out, just six months after her first action, “she amassed a virtual army of thousands of followers, men and women” (39) and maintained a touring schedule that “was booked months in advance” and that required

Nation to keep “a grueling schedule of jumping from city to city, train to train, and hotel to hotel for several years” (41). Those who reacted most viscerally against her justified their reactions by unsexing her; she had arguably opened herself to such treatment by failing to embrace women’s vulnerability. But those who embraced her as a woman and as a mother acting on behalf of other mothers everywhere embraced her moral and religious gravitas and her campaign to protect the domestic sphere, viewing her as “Mother Nation” just as they embraced Mother Thompson and Mother Stewart of the Woman’s Crusade. As Carver explains, “she was a master at packaging herself as the consummate mother whose foray into the public sphere was nothing more than an effort to save her ‘boys’ from saloon-induced self-destruction” (49). Janice Hume’s survey of coverage about Nation in twentieth century American magazines finds unease with her use of violence and challenges to femininity mixed with contemporary praise that grew over time, culminating in a 1989 article that viewed Nation as a symbol of the “distracted, suffering, loving motherhood of the World” (qtd. in Hume 45). Her popularity was likely due in part to the fact that she targeted establishments that were breaking the law by serving alcohol and, in some observers’ view, had the law and justice on her side; in some cases it was due to a fascination with her rhetoric, her aura, and her celebrity. But, importantly, it was also due to her participation in a narrative of women’s—and mothers’—morality. As Carver deftly explains, she couched her motivation in religious terms (explaining, for example, that she was inspired to begin her hatchetations by a message from God) to attribute her unwomanly conduct to religious

conviction rather than her own ideas (38).⁹⁹ And she connected her religious convictions and her morality with her motherhood and the compulsion of all mothers to act in any way necessary to protect their families. Nation's autobiography is rife with references to protective motherhood and connections between motherhood and her temperance activism; it also connects this ethic of motherhood with the need for women's suffrage and mothers' need to shape their sons into "good citizens" (Nation 109). Although Nation's rhetoric seems exceptional, fascinating as a historical case, and even quaint, we can hear echoes of Nation's rhetoric of motherhood in contemporary protest.

In a critique of the notion that motherhood necessitates disarmament and peace politics, the Second Amendment Sisters staged a counter protest to the Million Mom March in 2000 to express their belief that good mothering sometimes involves arming oneself with a gun and properly educating one's children about guns. The group's website carried an image of woman pointing a gun at the viewer accompanied by a caption that read "As seen by a would-be rapist (for about 0.2 seconds)" (qtd. in Tyson), illustrating the group's focus on combating assault on women, an emphasis that paralleled their emphasis on mothers' need to protect their families. Kimberly Watson, one of the group's founders, explained that the organization was created "to let Congress know that we won't stand for having our right to defend our families ripped away" and warns that "a crush of new [gun control] laws will make it that much easier for criminals to take advantage of children and their mothers" (qtd. in Richardson). The pairing of the

⁹⁹ Carver explains, "Conflating one's own inner voice with one issuing from God was a common way (both consciously and unconsciously) for women autobiographers to justify certain actions that would have been culturally offensive to a society bent on keeping women confined to specific roles" (38).

Million Mom March with the counter demonstration of the Second Amendment Sisters exemplifies the way in which we so often map arguments about legitimate violence and motherhood onto a Left/Right political spectrum where politically Left-minded mother activists advocate gun control and demonstrate against war and politically Right mothers advocate arming oneself for self-defense, educating one's children about safe gun use, and supporting their sons and daughters in war. But this association is far from static. As recently as the Weather Underground and the Black Panthers (explored in Chapters 2 and 3) as well as more recent theorists that advocate arming women to protect against sexual assault (see Chapter 2), female activists on the Left have made public claims about the need for violent action. For example, while depictions of mothers in the *Black Panther* newspaper included traditional rhetoric of maternal sacrifice in the name of a peaceful future for one's children, they also included images of mothers with guns, including a drawing of "a mother teaching her son to shoot" as well as a depiction of a "woman in African tribal dress carrying a baby on her back—a 'Black Studies' book in one hand and a rifle in the other" which "framed black womanhood as encompassing motherhood, intellect, pride, agency, and resistance" and was accompanied by the caption, "Until the day of liberation, protection for my child can only be guaranteed through the barrel of the gun" (Lumsden 908). The rhetoric of activists like the currently active "mama grizzlies," however, only serves to reinforce the connection between politically conservative motherhood and protective violence, Second Amendment rights, and the necessary use of military force.

During the 2010 mid-term election cycle, former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin described the female candidates she endorsed as “mama grizzlies,” referring to the tendency for mothers to act out in violence when their children—or their home front—are threatened. This term has since been adopted by many conservative women—usually in the spirit of or in sympathy with Palin herself—to describe themselves. In doing so, they endorse the notion that good mothers are predisposed to protective violence or violent rhetoric. The “mama grizzly” label—accompanied in Palin’s case by the rhetoric and symbolism of guns and targets—is a particularly interesting and a contemporary application of the notion that mothers must violently defend their domestic sphere. In the late nineteenth century, temperance activists who emphasized women’s moral authority in the private sphere over their political personhood and lacked political enfranchisement made claims to their ability to defend their homes whereas, in the 21st century, mama grizzlies, long ago legally enfranchised, extend the concept of the “domestic” beyond their own homes and onto the nation as a whole. In their political campaigns to become members of Congress, mama grizzlies touted their unique ability to defend their ‘domestic’ sphere. As Palin proclaimed at the Patriotic Gala Celebration in San Diego in 2010, “We are going to protect our young, we are going to protect the next generation of Americans, so the mama grizzlies are growling, we are rising up on our hind legs and saying no, we are going to change course, we need that real hope, we need that real change” (qtd. in Atal). While the original mama grizzlies, Palin-endorsed female conservative candidates in 2010, touted their maternal skills of fierce protectiveness as individuals, a second meaning of the word “domestic,” read as the U.S. writ large, sat

beneath the surface, as they painted themselves as not only protective of their own children, but also most able to protect the country against dangerous ‘foreign’ elements both from the opposing political party and what they saw as external threats to their country. Even as the mama grizzly label transitioned from a term specific to 2010 political candidates to a general term for conservative women as online fora and events (like the annual GrizzlyFest) were born, activists emphasized their concern for the nation as a whole and their unique capacity to protect it. Interestingly, in this and contemporary social movements, the ethics of motherhood are seen as a way in to political engagement even as activists borrow imagery and rhetoric of maternal power as something moral and private, outside of the political economy. Their rhetoric remains tangled in the sticky web spun by early liberal advocates of Republican Motherhood as they must balance an inherently contradictory conception of motherhood simultaneously tied to the domestic, material world outside of politics and to the promise of political agency. Such complications remain even in this late capitalist, neoliberal age, as boundaries between the private and public spheres have arguably dissolved, and as mothers brand themselves as hot commodities with popular and lucrative blogs, books, and media appearances, but must still barter in the trade of domestic, especially relational, motherhood.

Inderpal Grewal’s exploration of the phenomenon of “security moms,” a label that emerged in 2004, a few years before the mama grizzlies, but that is in many way theoretically compatible with the model, sheds some light on the ways in which the figure of the potentially violent protective mother functions in a neoliberal world. “While some critiques of neoliberalism suggest that it implies the reduction of the state and increasing

power to private realms,” Grewal suggests, “for feminists neoliberalism has come to mean new collaborations and dynamism between public and private patriarchies” (25). Grewal points to an article by columnist Michelle Malkin in *USA Today* that appeared in August of 2004 in which Malkin describes her vigilance in the aftermath of 9/11 to protect her child and her family against “Islamic terrorists” and “criminal illegal aliens” as the “manifesto of the security moms” (26). Understanding this security mom model, adopted by many conservative women, as “a new subject that is created on the foundation of historically embedded subjects,” Grewal explains that this model is the manifestation of older models that connect imperialism with the domestic but in a neoliberal context where divisions between the domestic and the public realm become less distinct (28). Grewal describes a notion of the mother not unlike that reflected in the notion of Republican Motherhood where “the state remains powerful and uses female subjects within the private sphere, such as the mother, to produce soldiers and patriots” but in this age of neoliberalism, these women “become both the subject and agent of security through new surveillance technologies that emphasize the governmentality of security” (28). Because “neoliberalism suggests that the state is unable to provide security and thus . . . disavows its ability to protect all citizens,” “the work of security is governmentalized through the function of the mother” (28) who picks up the role that the state cannot handle alone. Grewal describes the security mom in action, where not just the home, but the suburban community as a whole, the shopping mall, and other similar spaces are seen as domestic spaces that require policing by mothers to protect against dangerous strangers. Viewing the mama grizzlies through this lens, we can understand them as not

stopping in these spaces, but extending their purview to the nation as a whole, advancing political candidates as mama grizzlies who can protect the domestic nation from foreign threats as “race and territory, home and homeland, and family and nation become coextensive” (Grewal 31). Arguably, while mama grizzlies represent the drive protect their homes and their homeland, we cannot conflate their desire to work on behalf of their homeland with their desire to work on behalf of their state as evidenced by their commitment to gain government office to reform it from within, seeing threats to homeland not just outside of the state but also within it. We can see some parallels between their case and that of Carry Nation. While Nation’s use of a hatchet “recaptured the integrity (‘I cannot tell a lie’) and revolutionary fervor of George Washington” and “symbolized a revitalization of Washington’s revolutionary plea for self-preservation and popular sovereignty” (Carver 52), Nation also took on the job of protecting families from saloons that she felt the state was failing to do and advocated for political reform (in the form of prohibition and women’s suffrage) not because of her support of the state, but because of what she viewed as a need to reform it. Similarly, the mama grizzlies have adopted the language of the American Revolution to simultaneously celebrate the nation while critiquing the state.

This ethic of motherhood as endorsed by groups like the mama grizzlies provides a useful foil for the more dominant notion that mothers are predisposed to peace politics and that their involvement in politics will necessarily lead to the pacification of U.S. domestic and foreign policy. Ultimately, however, this ethic of motherhood is also problematic. Importantly, it is not problematic because of its suggestion that mothers are

ontologically *capable* of violence, nor even because of the notion that women may need to employ violence. This distinction is important as mama grizzlies have been rejected by the Left both because of very real and fundamental disagreements about domestic and foreign policy and, at root, ontology, but also due to a hasty and unfortunate dismissal of the idea that mothers are violent or might endorse violence in any context. As I have argued elsewhere, the possibility of violence is not in conflict with the ontological realities of vulnerability or relationality (see especially Chapters 1 and 3). Instead, the suggestion that violence is not just possible but *necessarily* connected with mothering and with political personhood makes this position ontologically problematic (as it denies ambiguity). While activists that embrace this ethic escape the fate of the women's suffragists I discussed in Chapter 1 by refusing to embrace women's categorical vulnerability, the claims on which they base their path into conversations about war, political violence, and domestic and foreign policy are flawed. In addition to their endorsement of unambiguously violent motherhood, the model of relationality endorsed by an ethics of motherhood that sees mothers' role as protecting a neoliberal nation against evil, foreign influences provides an impoverished model of mutual interdependency. This model is impoverished not because these mothers fail to imagine the family as some early care feminists and contemporary activists have, with mothers developing a particularly acute capacity for care or a politics of peace, but because they fail to fully account for the implications of our interconnectedness with the global Other amid uneven power relations. Indeed, both of the ethics of motherhood that I have explored in this chapter can arguably be critiqued for their problematic models of

relationality. Both can also be faulted for their notion that motherhood is a unique ontological position from which to make political claims. This is, at root, my main critique of the ethics of motherhood.

Conclusion: The End of Motherhood?

What I wish to underscore here is that claims that emphasize mothers' *particular* ontological propensity for a universal element of ontology, like relationality or vulnerability—particularly when such claims effectively render others incapable or less capable of exhibiting one or more of these traits—are ethically untenable, as are claims that unambiguously connect violence or nonviolence with motherhood. Surely historical uneven relations of power affect the claims made by particular groups throughout history; however, it is imperative that we distinguish between historical realities about power and ahistorical truths.

It is important to note, however, that an emphasis on what is universal need not lead to a dismissal of difference, nor, I should note, a dismissal of the significance of historical material life. I argued in Chapter 3 that the category of woman is still necessary. This is not because it is ahistorical, but because it is useful to describe a particular kind of oppression, a raft of common lived experiences, and associations around our embodied differences. We can—and should—acknowledge the discursive and constructed nature of gender categories, but when we need to specifically and accurately describe our oppressions, experiences, and communities, and unpack the associations between embodied differences and gender categories, labels like “woman” become important. Likewise, motherhood is a necessary category—women are still

disproportionately responsible for parenting and their work is largely unpaid and undervalued, major reasons for engaging as activists to change this. Women's historical monopoly on parenting also creates some important common material experiences and embodied differences that include menstruation, the capacity for childbearing, and breastfeeding continue to be the source of celebration, contention, and oppression. But despite the need for categories like "woman" and "mother," these are not categories from which to build an ontological model. When we protest, we are describing current realities of the human condition as well as looking forward to the future, to building a new future. Endorsing an ontology based on a category that might eventually disappear is ultimately limiting and—I would argue—ethically indefensible.

While we cannot control the future, we can be wary of converting theoretical models that account for historical patterns of motherhood into ontological categories and foreclosing the possibility of a future without them. The history of two early psychoanalytic texts on mothering might provide a kind of cautionary tale in this regard. Shortly after Nancy Chodorow published *Reproduction of Mothering* (discussed above and in Chapter 3) in 1978, it was widely embraced. But a lesser known text by fellow psychoanalyst Dorothy Dinnerstein titled *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise* was published two years earlier (1976) and tackled the very same phenomenon (the enduring preservation of mothers' historical monopoly of child care and child rearing) through the same lens: psychoanalysis. Chodorow described some important negative consequences of mothers' monopoly of parenting and, in her book's afterword, paid lip service to shared parenting as a way out of this pattern,

but she later backed away from that suggestion, focusing instead on her stated goal to simply describe the reproduction of mothering and most of her text is descriptive rather than prescriptive.¹⁰⁰ Dinnerstein, by contrast, placed great emphasis on shared parenting as a possible solution because she viewed the reproduction of mothering as indicative of a larger societal problem that needed to be addressed immediately. Her writing in *The Mermaid* pulses with a sense of urgency that is notably absent from Chodorow's text. Of course, both women were blinded by their focus on white middle class nuclear heterosexual families, a problem both were forced to reckon with later. But it is significant that while Dinnerstein sought a solution to the problem of women's monopoly of childcare and Chodorow sought simply to describe the phenomenon, Chodorow, rather than Dinnerstein, was embraced and it was her text that launched the care feminist tradition.

To be fair, Chodorow likely never intended to suggest that women's relational thinking due to their historical familial role be embraced as an alternative ethical paradigm.¹⁰¹ But her text, rather than Dinnerstein's, leaves the door open for that kind of

¹⁰⁰ In her original afterword, Chodorow rejects the argument that there is nothing inherently wrong with the sexual division of labor and asserts that we cannot separate sexual division from sexual inequality (214). To change the perpetuation of this inequality, Chodorow argues for "a fundamental reorganization of parenting, so that primary parenting is shared between men and women" (215). This proposal is supported by some of the evidence Chodorow cites earlier in the book about how children's experience of multiple bonds with caretakers (versus "exclusive mothering") is not only possible, but may be preferred (75). Chodorow backs away from this suggestion in the new preface to the 1999 edition of her book, explaining that the feminist movement she found herself in the midst of while writing her book compelled her to make a call for equal parenting but "If you take seriously that psychological subjectivity from within . . . is central to a meaningful life, you cannot also legislate subjectivity from without or advocate a solution based on a theory of political equality and a conception of women's and children's best interests that ignores this very subjectivity" (xv).

¹⁰¹ In the 1999 preface to *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow skillfully explains that her intent was not to blindly celebrate women's relational subjectivity but that the strength of her argument was actually that "there is no simple valuation of the outcomes I describe" (ix). In other words, "it is possible to see the

theorizing. Our embrace of Chodorow's text indicates our investment in understanding (but not rejecting) the reproduction of mothering rather than seeing the expectation of women's role of primary or only active parent as part of a deeper, systemic problem that requires a solution. Chodorow's text allowed for the development of a body of literature that embraced girls' exhibition of relational thinking and, in adulthood, women's particular aptitude for relationality, and, eventually, Sara Ruddick's theory that this kind of relational thinking, developed through the reproduction of mothering, might pave the way for a maternal ethics of peace. Looking back on this history, we might wonder why we were so ready to embrace Chodorow's text instead of Dinnerstein's. Perhaps the allure of an ethic of motherhood that sees power in women's relational thinking was more compelling than a need to come to terms with the ontology that traditional care ethics suggests. Perhaps we were, like many before us, contending with the inherent contradictions of motherhood in a liberal democratic state and intrigued with the idea that maternal motherhood could be imagined as something positive rather than something to be covered over with a privileging of the capacity for reason. Perhaps we were tempted by the concept of imagining a maternal legacy of morality and ethical thinking.

Whatever our intrigue then, we would do well now to be more self-reflexive about the continued seduction of an ethics of motherhood. We should closely watch the almost

female self-in-relation either in terms of potential or actual strengths or in terms of typical problems, say in claiming enough autonomy or agency or in feeling enough separateness. Similarly, the mother-daughter relationship as I describe it is clearly a passionate and central one . . . but I also point to ways the mother-daughter relationship may overwhelm and invade both the mother's and daughter's psyche" (ix-x). In her seminal work *In a Different Voice*, however, which arguably launched the care feminist tradition, Carol Gilligan celebrates Chodorow for demonstrating how girls and boys develop differently, leaving girls with a better capacity for empathy and relationships. She highlights only the positive attributes of relationality that Chodorow mentions, arguing that "Chodorow thus replaces Freud's negative and derivative description of female psychology with a positive and direct account of her own" (8).

inevitable Presidential run by Hillary Clinton—and the almost inevitable public commentary and protest surrounding it, some of which will no doubt be caught up in the rhetoric of motherhood. We should closely watch institutions like Moms Demand Action and MADD, mama grizzlies, and others amid the changing political economy but remarkably constant conceptions of motherhood. It is my hope that an ontological model based on the assumptions of ambiguity, vulnerability, and relationality amid uneven power relations is a possible way out of recycled observations and claims about waging political action as a mother in the United States.

CONCLUSION: AN IMPERFECT WAY AHEAD

“...the [wo]man of action, in order to make a decision, will not wait for a perfect knowledge to prove to [her] the necessity of a certain choice; [s]he must first choose and thus help fashion history. A choice of this kind is no more arbitrary than a hypothesis; it excludes neither reflection nor even method; but it is also free, and it implies risks that must be assumed as such.”

--*Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity*¹⁰²

“Two years ago we began a campaign to announce that the people of the world were directly entering the global political narrative and that we have no intention of ever leaving. We are still here – battered & scarred we may be, but ‘Occupy!’ is still a vibrant global call for an exploited humanity. The time is ripe for revolution.”

--*Occupy Wall Street, occupywallst.org, July 16, 2013*¹⁰³

In my introduction, I proposed a four-part model as the basis for an ethical framework that might replace our misplaced devotion to a violent/nonviolent dichotomy in ethical explorations of protest. I suggested that we are ambiguous, vulnerable, and relational, and that our relationships are situated in a context of uneven power. I argued that, despite the constant negotiation required, the perpetual accounting for the present with an eye toward the future, protests that acknowledge and embrace these realities are most ethically productive, both in the short term and in their legacy movements. In this conclusion, I will revisit and expand on my proposed model and suggest how we might use our imperfect knowledge of the present to shape our future activism.

¹⁰² Page 123.

¹⁰³ This statement opened a post noting that two years had passed since the initial call for participation in the Occupy movement and calling for another action on November 5, 2013 (Occupy Wall Street, “Anonymous Call to Action: #Nov5th 2013 — the Lion Sleeps No More”).

Ambiguity

Simone de Beauvoir opens *The Ethics of Ambiguity* with a deceptively simple accounting of the human condition. Humans desire to make meaning in the world, to imprint our worldview onto our lives in order to become subjects rather than simply unmeaning living objects. But, alas, we are embodied, and that reality makes our process of meaning making a messy endeavor as we cannot simply think ourselves into whatever form or condition we desire. Each of us is, as Beauvoir explains, “still a part of this world of which [we] are a consciousness.” We cannot react to “this tragic ambiguity of [our] condition” with attempts “to reduce mind to matter, or to reabsorb matter into mind, or to merge them within a single substance” (de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 7). Similarly, we cannot, as others have, imagine “a hierarchy between body and soul which permits of considering as negligible the part of the self which cannot be saved” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 8). We must instead grapple with the reality of our ambiguity, which means accepting the messiness and unpredictability of our embodied lives as well as the fact that we can influence but ultimately not control the future.

Given the ambiguity of our condition, violence, or nonviolence, like other practices, cannot be accounted for using universal prescriptions. As Beauvoir explains, “[t]he fundamental ambiguity of the human condition will always open up to men [sic] the possibility of opposing choices” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 118). Beauvoir sees violence as indefensible in most cases, however, since most uses of violence not only preclude others’ freedom and their ability to render themselves into meaningful subjects, but they also render both so-called ‘enemies’ and those employing violence in the name of a ‘higher’ cause *things* or *symbols*, objects rather than subjects that must be sacrificed,

martyred or dehumanized in the pursuit of abstract ideals. She likewise rejects the idea that people must be sacrificed now to prepare for a future, as the future is not predictable. However, writing in the aftermath of World War II, Beauvoir is not so naïve as to preclude the use of violence altogether. Using the case of a young Nazi soldier as an example, she argues that we might attempt to convert the soldier, “to re-educate this misled youth” rather than killing him, particularly since he is not the ultimate source of the oppression we oppose. But, Beauvoir explains, “the urgency of the struggle forbids this slow labor” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 98). Thus, violence is sometimes necessary when others are acting in ways that threaten our embodied lives or preclude our freedom to make our lives meaningful. Death by violence is always a “misfortune,” however, according to Beauvoir, and we must always acknowledge the particularity of each death or act of violence rather than objectifying the killed or harmed or chalking up the death of those fighting on behalf of a cause we support as necessary sacrifices in the name of a higher value (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 108). These deaths are always tragic and always particular, but violence is nevertheless sometimes necessary. “[V]iolence is justified only if it opens concrete possibilities to the freedom which I am trying to save” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 137), Beauvoir argues, even though it is impossible to predict the ends of our actions, but “one must retreat from neither the outrage of violence nor deny it, or . . . assume it lightly” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 133). Thus, members of the Weather Underground and the Black Panther Party that I explored in Chapters 2 and 3 rightly acknowledged the sometime necessity of violence in preserving lives in the face of oppressive violence that precludes the freedom of entire populations and their ability to

make themselves into meaningful subjects. However, in mirroring the ontology projected by the modern state where violence is elemental to state action and political persons, these activists also replicated the flawed idea that violence, or its constant rhetorical performance, is *always* ethical, that it is part and parcel of political action. These activists, like those who insist that *nonviolence* is a requirement for ethical, legitimate political action, including many women's suffrage activists, groups like Women Strike for Peace, and contemporary groups like CODEPINK and others (see Chapters 1, 3, and 4) have failed to account for our shared ambiguity, as I've demonstrated throughout this project. Likewise, groups like the Second Amendment Sisters endorse legitimate ethical rationales for supporting women's need to sometimes use violence to prevent the destruction of their freedom or their embodied selves, but when the discourse of a sometime need for self-defense gives way to rhetoric and political identity mired in violence and, in the case of the organization Smart Girl Politics Action (as well as others), a fetishization of technologies of violence, activists cross an ethical line into endorsing a model of an unambiguous subject, an untenable contention. We must be careful, however, not to deem the belief in an unambiguously nonviolent subject benign simply because it does not appear to produce violence (especially when deployed in combination with a belief in women's categorical vulnerability, which might appear to protect women from the ill effects of violence). As I argued in Chapter 2 in my treatment of the Black Panthers, a belief in women's categorical vulnerability and unambiguously nonviolent subjectivity is fed by the same logic that results in a belief in black savagery and its seemingly positive effects are proverbial golden handcuffs.

How, then, might one successfully stage ambiguity in a public protest, particularly since protestors are often attempting to demonstrate particular needs and desires in particular contexts rather than the entirety of the human experience? How can one publically perform a sometime need for violence, its potential rather than its permanent necessity? The female Black Panthers who apparently sometimes felt the need to arm themselves but only occasionally performed their potential for violence by publically displaying arms (see Chapter 2) pose an interesting model but also illustrate the difficulty of the public performance of ambiguity. Perhaps since, as I illustrated in the introduction, we are wrong to place our focus on the violent-nonviolent dichotomy, we are similarly wrong to look to protests centered around the question of violence for our models. Perhaps the best models of protests that embrace ambiguity are not focused on violence per se, but instead skillfully argue for the needs and desires of marginalized subjects while avoiding fetishizing the larger ideals of a movement, the slogans that hold abstract ideas and particular tactics over the embodied individuals at stake. We must likewise be careful to particularize our protests rather than feeling compelled to speak for all about all facets of the human condition but in so doing, remain careful not to employ slogans and declarations about humanity in general that envision an unambiguous subject.

Although I advocate for the dissolution of the violent/nonviolent dichotomy, activists will no doubt continue to find themselves among like-minded protesters who insist on an ethic of nonviolence informed by a belief that the use of violence is never ethical or those who see violence as ultimately necessary for all those wishing to assert

their political personhood. This project represents a call for such activists to consider the ambiguity of the human condition and avoid replicating the terms of such discourse.

While protestors may very well ultimately reject the use of techniques widely accepted as violent or ultimately decide to embrace them, these decisions should be informed not by the violent/nonviolent dichotomy as an ethical model but by an understanding of human ontology as well as the historical conjuncture in which a particular protest or movement is situated.

Vulnerability

Liberal feminists informed by Enlightenment thinking have historically responded to questions about women's embodiment by insisting that, despite any bodily differences, the ability to reason is what determines one's personhood. Useful critiques of positivist science and Enlightenment theoretical and philosophical models from cultural studies scholars, postmodern feminist theorists, queer theorists, and others have usefully rejected the concept of objectivity implicit in positivist models as well as the concept of rational, atomistic individuals. They have forced us to rethink the problematic concept of a 'true' or 'factual' self, and, in the context of gender, to reject a conception of gender identity as stable and rooted in immutable biological "facts." We cannot pretend that womanhood, for example, is fixed, biologically determined, and intelligible outside of social, cultural, political, and historical contexts.¹⁰⁴ Both contemporary feminist theory and queer theory have in recent years been influenced by the concept of performativity and the idea that

¹⁰⁴ Even Simone de Beauvoir referred to the category of "woman" as a historical, socially constructed category that may, in fact, be "destined to disappear" In explaining how one can reject seemingly permanent categories grounded in history and the social world, Beauvoir explains, "To reject the notions of the eternal feminine, the black soul, or the Jewish character is not to deny that there are *today* Jews, blacks, or women" (*The Second Sex* 4).

gender either has a significant performative component or that it is entirely performative. Theorists risk taking this concept too far, however, when they all but disavow the body in favor of the social.

These useful theories do not allow us to deny the existence of the material world or embodiment altogether. The fact remains that bodies are real and we cannot escape the things we do to our bodies and the things that are done to them based on how they are read by others and (in instances where it can be seen or known) their biology. We experience real material consequences for the performances we enact, as Judith Butler has acknowledged, noting that “we continue to live in a world in which one can risk serious disenfranchisement and physical violence for the pleasure one seeks, the fantasy one embodies, the gender one performs” (*Undoing Gender* 214). The Stonewall Riots of 1969 were, arguably, at least in part the result of repeated instances of such violence. We no doubt need to contend with the distinction between *real* bodily difference and *the discursive use* of difference in creating contrasts and binaries where none exist *except* discursively, but while our understanding of biology is influenced by culture and not as fixed as we often like to believe, and, as Donna Haraway reminds us, we are better conceived of as cyborgs than purely natural biological beings (see Chapter 2), biological realities like the ability to reproduce, for example (or the physical reminders of such an ability, whether or not it actually exists, like menstruation and menopause), the presence of ambiguous sex organs in intersexed individuals, or the embrace of a gender identity that others see as in conflict with one’s biological sex organs are read and acted upon in material ways, sometimes literally resulting in life and death situations. Skin color and

other cultural markers of race similarly provoke material reactions. Some of these things, of course, may be shaped and changed by emerging technologies, but we will continue to occupy different embodied selves.

As I explored in Chapter 2, some male Black Panthers recognized the material reactions black people experience in the U.S. because of their race and tactically embraced the stereotype of the black thug, a decision that ultimately escalated the already strong belief that the black body is a dangerous, violent body and led to great violence against the Panthers. The material realities of our bodies—and the cultural and social meanings that surround them—affect us, and these effects cannot be ignored. We cannot accept that these realities are necessarily inherently *limiting* or *hindrances* or that certain materialities are inherently *advantageous*, however, as such things are culturally and socially determined. Therefore, as some theorists have argued, one assumption we cannot make about women's bodies is that they are uniformly weaker than the bodies of men.¹⁰⁵ This is true even when defining weakness and strength using widely accepted biological definitions but its veracity does not preclude the need to unpack our assumptions about the nature of weakness and strength and to understand these concepts as being culturally and socially defined, as I began to explore in Chapters 1 and 2.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, a presumption that often goes hand in hand with the presumption of women's weakness is the related but not synonymous belief in what I call women's *categorical vulnerability*. This is a sometimes explicitly identified and

¹⁰⁵ This assumption is often made about women defined by biological sex, but the assumption also affects women defined by gender category, even as it is revealed to be discursively rooted rather than biologically determined.

sometimes implicitly honored myth that often includes the assumption that women are more open to the effects of violence and environmental hazards and has historically justified efforts to keep women in the domestic sphere as well as claims that women are, in part due to their vulnerability, morally superior than men and predisposed to a politics of peace (see Chapter 1) in part due to greater connections with others (see Chapters 3 and 4). Although it is a myth, the *belief* in women's categorical vulnerability is a powerful construct that leads to real physical consequences when women and others both accept and reject its validity, as I explored at length in my discussion in Chapter 1 of the women's suffragists and temperance activists who attempted to use the circumscribed stage provided to them by the myth of women's categorical vulnerability to make their claims. Today's activists might not face the same shocked reaction these protestors did at women's audacity to enter the public sphere to make political claims or to the suggestion that women are capable of physically demanding work or of enduring jail conditions, but in addition to facing more nuanced versions of such beliefs (like the contention that women should be prohibited from certain physically demanding occupations, for example), activists today continue to face the notion that women are more vulnerable than men are to violence, be it sexual assault or acts of war. Thus, the myth of women's categorical vulnerability manifests itself differently today, but it endures nonetheless and it remains problematic. In accounting, therefore, for our embodiment, we must replace concepts like women's categorical vulnerability with an understanding that we are all vulnerable.

The mutually reinforcing myths of women's vulnerability and men's invulnerability are, of course, complicated by factors such as race, class, and sexuality, as our cultural beliefs in the relative vulnerability of individuals differs based on these and other factors. The importance of acknowledging vulnerability, in other words, extends beyond the need to dismiss notions of women's vulnerability as women are not the only populations we speak of as being categorically vulnerable. Rather than acknowledging vulnerability as a universal condition, as activists, we often see our role as acting on behalf of particularly vulnerable populations, including women, children, and others subject to exploitative social conditions or laws like illegal immigrants or those susceptible to environmental hazards and the effects of global warming who may lack the means to relocate or change their living conditions. This is because while vulnerability is a universal reality of our embodiment, we understand it through the lens of culture, history, and, importantly, power. This often leads to the conflation of our *beliefs* about the categorical vulnerability or invulnerability of certain groups of bodies with our actual embodiment. Thus, levels of vulnerability are understood as varying among entire categories of people—different genders, as I have explored, but also different racial groups, economic classes, and ages and due to certain historical or geographic conditions (as well as at the intersections of multiple categories). I contend, however, that when we speak of certain populations as categorically vulnerable, we are actually recognizing uneven power relations. The people on whose behalf we advocate may lack money, access to technology and health care, political advocates, and the like, and these problems

might indeed lead to their disproportionate experience of illness and premature death, but those who possess wealth, technology, and health care remain vulnerable.

While my insistence of recognizing such hardships as an issue of power rather than vulnerability may seem a petty dispute over semantics, I believe that much more is at stake. To name certain populations as more vulnerable or even to name them, and not others, as “vulnerable” implies that others—namely those possessing more power—can somehow be less vulnerable or even not vulnerable at all. Doing so would be to concede too much. We are all mortal. Our bodies, “the part of the self which cannot be saved” (de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* 8), can be harmed by events not caused by humans, and people can also seriously harm and even kill each other; we can likewise only feel the deep connections we experience in our lives due to our vulnerability. This is not to say that all bodies are *identically* vulnerable. Bodies are *differently* vulnerable, but these differences are not based in truths about all bodies of a particular *category* (all women, all older bodies, all children, all sick bodies, etc.) and in all facets (strength, limited immunity, pain threshold, etc.). There are differences in vulnerability, yes, but those differences transcend and confound social categories and, importantly, power relations. The fact of universal vulnerability, however, applies to all bodies, including the most powerful among us. In the case of a belief in women’s categorical vulnerability, the accompanying belief that makes this myth possible is the belief in men’s invulnerability, or at least the belief that men are less vulnerable than women. The current dominant model of full political personhood is based in this mythic male invulnerability, rendering especially vulnerable women less than full persons. Likewise, advocating in our public

protests for ‘particularly vulnerable’ populations implies that there are others who have the ability to escape or dodge vulnerability altogether, when what they actually have is more power.

I am not the first to suggest that we are universally vulnerable. However, existing theories differ from each other in important ways. One area of diversity is the value theorists place on vulnerability. I reject models that acknowledge universal vulnerability but view it either explicitly or implicitly as an unfortunate reality to be dodged or protected against. Among the important ways my theory of vulnerability differs from that of theorists like sociologist Bryan Turner is in my conception of a risky but pleasurable vulnerability, one that holds the potential for exciting political and personal possibilities. In a chapter titled “Vulnerability and Suffering” in his book *Vulnerability and Human Rights*, Turner explains that “Human beings are ontologically vulnerable and *insecure*, and their natural environment, *doubtful*” (emphasis added). Institutions are seen as the solution, according to Turner, as they help people “protect themselves from the uncertainties of the everyday world” and provide “collective security” (26). Reminding us of the word’s Latin root, *vulnus*, meaning “wound,” Turner explains, “Our vulnerability is a traumatic wounding. It signifies the capacity to be open to wounding and to be open to the world. In modern usage, the notion of vulnerability . . . refers to human openness to psychological harm, or moral damage, or spiritual threat” (28). Turner’s description of vulnerability suggests that it is something to be wary of, to be protected against. Being “open to the world,” in Turner’s model, elicits fear and a need for protection rather than excitement and anticipation of connection. While Turner uses a

theory of human vulnerability to explain the need for social institutions, his purely negative model opens the door to the privileging of invulnerability. However, viewing all persons as universally vulnerable need not mean imagining them as weak and degraded. Despite the potential for protest tactics like hunger strikes and submission to violence to romanticize martyrdom, particularly when they are associated with ‘nonviolence’ or ‘passive resistance,’ such tactics also have the potential to demonstrate how vulnerability need not be read as synonymous with weakness. The Silent Sentinels, for example, who I explored in Chapter 1, successfully problematized the notion of women’s categorical vulnerability while simultaneously demonstrating our fundamental vulnerability through their hunger strikes, a method that has been, throughout history, a tactic requiring great strength and resilience but whose success relies on reminding others of our shared vulnerability.

I prefer a concept of vulnerability like that imagined by Debra Bergoffen, who explains, “To be vulnerable is to be exposed to the pleasures and dangers (to the pleasures of danger) of the surprise and wonder of the unexpected” (Bergoffen 102). Judith Butler, who is concerned in her exploration of vulnerability with sexuality as well as grief, aptly explains, “We’re undone by each other [. . .] If this seems so clearly the case with grief, it is only because it was already the case with desire” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 19). Ultimately, we all die. This bodily fragility almost certainly ends in grief at the end of each life. However, only because of this vulnerability can we enjoy the pleasures of risk, the euphoria of desire and sexuality, of being open to and for, and dependent on each other. We feel such great grief at the end of another’s life only

because we were able to feel such connection to the one we've lost all due to the same vulnerability. The pain that we feel when someone's life is lost through the exploitation of their vulnerability, in other words, is only so deeply felt because of the connection we were able to feel with that person due to the pleasures possible through that very same vulnerability. In this context, we might imagine new protest methods that go beyond simply acknowledging universal vulnerability, to demonstrate the *pleasures* of vulnerability, despite the inherent risks of desire and connection.

Importantly, the ontological fact of universal vulnerability does not in and of itself prescribe nonviolence as a practice, as some theorists have suggested. Such a move is possible but not *necessitated* by an acknowledgement of vulnerability.¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, when universal vulnerability is the defining characteristic of one's concept of ontology, no particular action can be prescribed. As Simone de Beauvoir argues, "the body itself is not a brute fact. It expresses our relationship to the world, and that is why it is an object of sympathy or repulsion. And on the other hand, it *determines* no behavior" (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 41, emphasis in original). Indeed, as I've argued elsewhere, one can imagine someone embracing violence not despite but *precisely because of* their acknowledgment of vulnerability. Instead, our ambiguity, our simultaneous existence as meaningful and meaning makers and as vulnerable bodies, points to the need to perpetually consider what is at stake in choosing violence.

¹⁰⁶ Judith Butler arguably makes the leap from universal vulnerability *combined with universal relationality* to nonviolence, but it is a leap nonetheless. Although Butler sees violence as "an exploitation of that primary tie" of vulnerability and suggests that universal vulnerability "become the basis of claims for nonmilitaristic political solutions" (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 22), she must assert that people *should* use their understanding of this vulnerability to preserve what she calls "livable lives" to make her insistence on nonviolence a tenable concept. She does not acknowledge, in other words, the possibility that one might acknowledge universal vulnerability but ethically respond to it with violence.

Relationality amid Uneven Power

While Beauvoir does not use the term “relational,” her ethics suggests an interdependent ontology, as I explored in more detail in Chapter 3 by borrowing expedient theories of relationality from her as well as from Hegel, Kristeva, and Butler. In that chapter, I explained how I conceptualize relationality and demonstrated what I see as weaknesses in how some relational models have been deployed by theorists and in protest movements. Highlighting the fact that we are born from others’ bodies and rely on others for our own lives, that as infants we are dependent on others for our survival, and that, as adults, our dependence continues led to instrumental interventions by early care feminists and others. However, relationality is sometimes deployed in theory and protest in problematic ways.

As I suggested in Chapters 3 and 4, the reality of childbirth and women’s monopoly on childrearing should not lead us to endorse a unique ontology of womanhood or motherhood, but it should serve to remind us that we depend on others for our survival. While liberal political subjectivity is based on atomistic autonomy and thus ignores the ways in which we are tied to each other and, importantly, renders invisible subjects on whom those in power rely and more recent neoliberal models might celebrate the (seemingly creative) concept of one’s ability to generate entire worlds through thought alone (particularly in an intellectual economy), the reality of birth and our shared embodiment are cracks in the façade of independence, small reminders of the reality of relationality. After birth, infants are very obviously dependent on others for their very survival, but so are children and adults, albeit in less palpably obvious ways. Judith Butler, among others, has noted the phenomenon of dependency in infancy and into

adulthood in her works *Undoing Gender* and *Precarious Life*, as I explored in Chapter 3. After birth, Butler explains, “infancy constitutes a necessary dependency, *one that we never fully leave behind*” (*Undoing Gender* 24, emphasis added). Women are not uniquely connected to others as potential and actual mothers because of our capacity for or actual experience of childbirth nor the fact that women have historically been largely responsible for childrearing obviously dependent children and carrying out other care work. We are not *especially* connected to others and *especially* sensitive to the potential risks of these connections. We all experience a deep and obvious dependency before we know ourselves as subjects, we depend on recognition by others to define our very subjectivity, and our interdependency does not disappear as we age. Instead, we remain connected to others—even those with whom we never make physical contact—due to enduring power relations, a reality that should inform our concept of relationality.

Interestingly, as I demonstrated in Chapter 3, some U.S. movements that have relied on the idea that women are especially relational have also failed to acknowledge how the experience of women and men in other parts of the world, including the Global South, might not only inform our approaches to or understanding of those parts of the world, but also alter the ontological models that we apply to ourselves. Relationality, as I’ve argued in Chapter 3, is not just the sentimental notion that we are all connected to each other nor the idea that we share a common sisterly/brotherly/familial connection, but is actually a much more radical idea that requires a total rethinking of our own concept of ontology when we discover ‘Others’ who contradict our model, others with whom we are connected by power relationships. These relationships of uneven power are precisely

what allow those with more power to discount or disavow the degree to which they are connected with others and perpetuate the notion that they are acting independently. Building movements on the notion that some of us are more relational than others, like contending that some of us are more vulnerable than others, may have the effect of perpetuating the fiction that those in power are not tied to others and thus have no responsibility to recognize the labor or care work—or the dehumanization and invisible structural violence—that maintains their position of power. It also allows the notion to remain unspoken that one’s tyranny over others is as much a threat to their own freedom as the Other’s subjugation threatens theirs. Thus, as I argued in Chapter 3, we cannot fight for the cause of someone else’s freedom without also simultaneously fighting to prevent our own tyranny of others (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 86).¹⁰⁷

Over time, uneven power relations develop historical trajectories that are experienced categorically (by women, people of color, etc.) based on long standing cultural and social beliefs and the structures of power that develop as these beliefs are institutionalized. Beauvoir traced this phenomenon in her exploration of women’s oppression in *The Second Sex*. Ontological theories premised on people’s possession of equal power and resources, therefore, are very flawed indeed. This does not mean, importantly, that vulnerability is in flux, or that relationality is experienced unevenly. It is important, however, to acknowledge that relationality is experienced among parties with

¹⁰⁷ For Beauvoir, a moral world cannot exist outside of freedom: “To will oneself moral and to will oneself free are one and the same decision” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 24). Beauvoir’s dialectical understanding of freedom prevents it from becoming a synonym for power. In other words, one cannot have the “freedom” to do anything one likes (including overpowering others) as this definition of “freedom” necessarily (and contradictorily) involves the denial of (others’) freedom.

differing amounts of power. This presents a quandary for categories of humanity, like women, for example, who experience oppression in very real and embodied ways due to a long history of oppression, but whose oppression is just that: historical. Because of our need to always account for the present, given the way bodies are read and experienced today, as I have argued in Chapter 3, both sexed and gendered notions of ‘womanhood’ are still necessary for describing and making sense of the world, at least at this historical conjuncture. And, despite my critique of the two prevailing ethics of motherhood in Chapter 4, it may sometimes be necessary—and even important—to politically organize as mothers given mothers’ continued monopoly of child care. At the same time, we must be very careful to use these labels—womanhood and motherhood—to describe and particularize current oppressions and lived experiences and not employ them in making pronouncements of ahistorical ontological truths.

Importantly, relationality is not rendered obsolete by the presence of modern technology. Despite the utility of the ontology Haraway proposes in her “Cyborg Manifesto” (which I explored in depth in Chapter 2), while the concept of an “organic wholeness” or “original unity” of the natural body is a myth, I disagree with her contention that we are (as always already cyborgs) “untied at last from all dependency” (150–151). While the cyborg model plays a role in helping us reject models that suggest women have a corner on relationality or a hyper-interdependency with their children not possible for others, we should not take this argument too far by suggesting that technology renders us atomistically independent. Despite the ubiquity of technology both in and around our bodies and its role in rendering the completely natural body a myth, we

remain both vulnerable and tied to one another. Denying bodily dependence only works in service of the myth of total autonomy.

In addition to rejecting models that imagine certain populations as being especially dependent or particularly capable of human connection or imagine technology as offering a way of escaping our interdependency, embodied relationality should also make us suspicious of ontological theories that are premised on total autonomy while not precluding us from fighting for legal rights. We need to imagine, in other words, protest movements that fight for rights—the right to vote, the right to bear arms, the right to marry, etc.—while simultaneously challenging the ontology that the discourse of liberal democratic rights presumes, perhaps by reimagining autonomy as individuation and singularity amid fundamental relationality. Likewise, we must understand ourselves as relational while not imagining an indelible relationship between our interdependency and the proscription of violence. In fact, a model of relationality amid uneven power might help us understand precisely why some groups have seen violence as a necessary tactic.

The Ethical Practice of Protest: A Way Forward

Despite the fact that ambiguity calls for a constant negotiation of ethical practice, Beauvoir warns that it “must not be confused with . . . absurdity” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 129). She suggests instead an ontological ethics wherein “meaning is never fixed, [but] must be constantly won” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 129). As I suggested in the introduction, this means that the ethical practice of protest is laborious and difficult, not freed from the constraints of ethical prescriptions. One might imagine an ethical framework of protest informed by ambiguity as functioning as a series of decisions

guided by our embodied lives and meaning making needs, our relationality amid uneven power, and our vulnerability.¹⁰⁸ Such an ethics does not offer what Beauvoir calls “recipes” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 134) but ontological facts that must be interpreted contextually, all the while balancing what is universal with what is particular. As Beauvoir argues, “it is not impersonal universal man [sic] who is the source of values, but the plurality of concrete, particular men [sic] projecting themselves toward their ends on the basis of situations whose particularity is as radical and as irreducible as subjectivity itself” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 17–18). In fact, while my model is rooted in ontology, it fails to be meaningful without consideration of the specific historical, economic, political, and cultural conditions in which it is applied. This quality simultaneously makes the model both robust and difficult to apply. In the U.S. context, we are rooted in a neoliberal, capitalist context and read in the ontological framework of those institutions, complicating the work of ethical protest even further when we aim to make claims that contradict with that ontology but remain intelligible to others. But, of course, we cannot be paralyzed by the difficult work of ethical practice.

As even Beauvoir acknowledges, the very need for an ethical framework implies that failure is intrinsic to human action. As she explains, “the most optimistic ethics have all begun by emphasizing the element of failure involved in the condition of man [sic]; without failure, no ethics; for a being who, from the very start, would be an exact coincidence with himself, in a perfect plenitude, the notion of having-to-be would have no meaning” (*The Ethics of Ambiguity* 10). Thus, we must assume the risk of ethical practice

¹⁰⁸ Beauvoir does not specifically use the terms “vulnerability” or “relationality,” but I argue that such concepts are compatible with her ethics of ambiguity.

and act now to make what we see as necessary change despite the hard work of ethical protest and the inevitability of sometime failure.

The Occupy movement is an apt example, despite my critique of its preoccupation with (non)violence, of a movement that is thoroughly and openly attentive to the process of ethical action. Hyperaware of the need to preserve the meaning making and embodied freedom of all persons, the movement concerns itself perpetually with its radical model of participatory democracy. In some ways, the participatory democratic methods suggested by the movement expose our vulnerability and interdependency in ways that are sometimes excruciatingly uncomfortable for those both inside and outside of the movement and, indeed, oftentimes make many of us impatient for a more efficient, albeit potentially less ethical, tactical approach. The Occupy movement is not necessarily a model of my ethical framework in action, but it is a model of a movement that has very publicly wrestled with ethical questions about tactics and rhetoric, all the while proceeding with its activism.

A document circulated by WomenOccupy.org to prepare for International Women's Day in May of 2013 suggests a still active contingent of Occupy participants remain concerned with contending with the oppression women face (Mancias). But its slogans and suggestions for participating in the day's events—"Honor Mother Earth!", "Boycott AHAVA [cosmetics]!", "End Violence Against Women & Girls!", "Give Peace a Chance!", and "Pledge to Join the Arms are for Hugging Campaign!"—associate womanhood with nature, beauty, victimhood, and peace politics, suggesting that the movement's supporters—like activists in the United States writ large—still have a long

way to go. However, by paying heed to ontology rather than 'violence' and 'nonviolence' first and foremost, we may very well be able to make a start.

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BIOGRAPHY

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