Women Strike for Peace:
How 1960s American Mothers Used Diplomacy to End Atmospheric Nuclear Testing

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For this year’s project, I was particularly interested in choosing a topic that took place in the 1960s or 1970s, as good records are kept of this period and people of the era are still around to share memories and insights. I wanted to study a civil or human rights issue and found myself researching elements of 1960s Counterculture. Thus, I discovered Women Strike for Peace (WSP), a largely maternal movement that called for nuclear disarmament through nonviolent protest, letter-writing campaigns, and lobbying in Washington, DC. The diplomacy that this movement utilized to fire up the debate over the arms race and atmospheric testing was indeed fitting for the 2022 National History Day theme.

In my research, I interviewed three women, including an early member of WSP, the chief operating officer of the Arms Control Association, and a University of Minnesota Regents Professor who specializes in gender relations and the Cold War. I acquired archival Women Strike for Peace letters from Swarthmore College’s Peace Collection, Columbia University’s Rare Book and Manuscript Library, and American University; from Columbia, I also obtained transcribed oral histories of two women who had been with WSP since its inception. Otherwise, I referenced memoirs, government documents, and newspaper articles of the time. To fill in gaps, I found the National Archives’ presidential records and secondary source periodicals incredibly useful.

Having collected my resources, I next decided how to best divide my paper sections. I first contextualized the Cold War, discussing the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) and McCarthyism, as well as the arms race between the US and Soviet Union. Next, I examined the growing fears in America over nuclear fallout, which led me to retell the story of Dagmar Wilson; she was responsible for initiating a massive grassroots campaign that rallied
50,000 women across the US to protest the arms race in 1961. I narrated the WSP movement’s subsequent work, highlighting the negative attention that it received from HUAC; as WSP is given credit for both the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty and the decline of the House Committee, I outlined the implications of both topics. In closing, I wrote about WSP’s later work and the ultimate precedent it set for feminism.

At the height of the Cold War, American culture was rigidly defined by anti-communist and pro-arms race sentiments, leaving little room for debate over disarmament. Yet in 1961, 50,000 ordinary US women marched to end atmospheric nuclear testing. These women feared that the testing of nuclear weapons released radioactive elements that could poison milk and hurt children, resulting in nearly two years of diplomatic campaigns for disarmament through nonviolent protests, letter-writing campaigns, and lobbying. Consequently, Women Strike for Peace is credited with the success of the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, as well as for the de-escalation of the Second Red Scare in America. Although these women at first used traditional ideals around motherhood to garner support, they ultimately created a precedent for female activism that would fuel second-wave feminism.
At the height of the Cold War, American culture was rigidly defined by anti-communist and pro-arms race sentiments, leaving little room for debate over disarmament. Yet in 1961, 50,000 ordinary US women, who by and large fit the stereotype of the American housewife of the time, came together to march for an end to atmospheric nuclear testing. These women were motivated by fears that the testing of nuclear weapons released radioactive elements that could poison milk and hurt their young children, so for nearly two years, they diplomatically campaigned for disarmament through nonviolent protests, letter-writing campaigns, and lobbying the federal government. Consequently, the movement known as Women Strike for Peace is credited with the success of the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty, as well as for the de-escalation of the Second Red Scare in America. Although these women at first used traditional ideals around motherhood to garner appeal to their cause, they ultimately created a precedent for female activism that second-wave feminism would indeed reflect.

The Cold War: Another Red Scare and the Arms Race

At the close of World War II, a new conflict emerged upon the global stage. The struggle was of diametrically-opposed ideologies, pitting the democratic-capitalist United States against the authoritarian-communist USSR. The Soviet Union, a former Allied power, worked to install pro-communist governments in Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, and later

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Eastern Germany, creating a blockade between Western Europe and Russia. In response to these
invasions and Europe’s worsening financial and political instability as a result of the war’s
devastation, the US Congress passed the Marshall Plan in March of 1948, injecting $12 billion
into Western Europe’s infrastructure and economy. Together, the Soviet Union and America
sliced Europe in half and began the Cold War, setting a precedent of division for nearly 50 years
to come.

At home in America, anti-communist fears enveloped the nation. In 1938, the US
Congress had established the House Committee on Un-American Activities (otherwise known as
HUAC) to investigate private citizens and organizations’ affiliations with the Communist Party.
Its status as a government commission allowed HUAC to lawfully investigate so-called
communist activities in the baseless-claims manner that it did. Indeed, HUAC labeled groups
such as the Hollywood Peace Forum and the Student Congress Against War as communist
fronts. Furthermore, in 1950, Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin first alleged that 205
communists worked for the Department of State, initiating the Second Red Scare. It is estimated
that 13 million out of 65 million working Americans dealt with the resulting loyalty and security
programs that the government implemented as a result of McCarthyism, and 11,000 were fired

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3 “The Cold War.” John F. Kennedy | Presidential Library and Museum, National Archives,
4 “Marshall Plan, 1948.” Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State,
history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/marshall-plan.
5 Marzani, Carl. “Free, With an Eye to See Things as They Are.” A Quarter-Century of Un-Americana, edited
by Charlotte Pomerantz, Marzani & Munsell, 1963.
6 Ibid.
7 United States, Congress, House, Committee on Un-American Activities. Guide to Subversive Organizations and
8 “McCarthyism / The ‘Red Scare.’” Dwight D. Eisenhower | Presidential Library, Museum, and Boyhood Home,
for suspected communist affiliations. To this day, HUAC and McCarthyism are regarded as two of the largest US governmental privacy violations in American history.

In 1946 at the United Nations, the US proposed the Baruch Plan, which would create an international organization that would collect countries’ nuclear weapons in all stages of development and monitor future peaceful atomic energy; yet the Russians repudiated the Baruch Plan, arguing that it would allow the US to maintain its atomic knowledge and prevent the Soviet Union from ever nuclearizing. When diplomacy failed between the two, the USSR tested its first atomic bomb in 1949, ending America’s monopoly on nuclear weaponry and commencing the arms race. Thus, both countries proceeded to build up their nuclear stockpiles. In 1952, the US tested the first hydrogen bomb; in 1961, the USSR tested its “Tsar Bomba,” producing 50 megatons of explosive force and becoming the largest nuclear deployment in human history. By the early sixties, nuclear weapons testing had peaked: in 1962, the US conducted 96 tests, while the USSR completed 79.

Atmospheric Testing, Strontium-90, and Atomic Moms

This proliferation of nuclear weapons did not come without consequence. Atmospheric testing entailed environmental destruction: in the late 1950s, it was estimated that because so much bomb debris was accumulated in the stratosphere, radioactive “drip out” to the ground

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10 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid.
would—if testing was halted immediately—continue to increase for seven to eight years.\(^\text{15}\)

Meanwhile, the spring of 1959 saw the “hottest” radioactive season yet.\(^\text{16}\) Similarly, when atomic bombs exploded upon the earth, nuclear fallout absorbed into vegetation.\(^\text{17}\) As a result, grazing farm animals, most notably cows, ate grass poisoned by strontium-90 and other dangerous chemicals found in atomic bombs; in turn, these cows produced America’s milk.\(^\text{18}\) Radiation poisoning became an everyday fear as American writers and journalists revealed how strontium-90 could build up on the bones of children and cause deformities and premature deaths for the unborn.\(^\text{19}\) The US government collected as many as 50,000 baby teeth to test for strontium-90 levels, while mothers began stockpiling dry milk.\(^\text{20}\)

In September of 1961, Dagmar Wilson, a mother of three and children’s book illustrator from Washington, DC, heard about the jailing of a man named Bertrand Russell in England for anti-thermonuclear civil disobedience.\(^\text{21}\) Wilson, a middle-aged woman who self-admittedly liked wearing skirts and had a nuclear family customary to the early sixties, felt outraged at the notion of a man being jailed in the name of peace.\(^\text{22}\) That next day, Wilson called a number of friends and asked if they could stage a demonstration; after receiving positive responses, she expanded her horizons to her entire phonebook, calling acquaintances across the country.\(^\text{23}\) These women also feared strontium-90 and nuclear fallout, so thus, they utilized PTA and church groups,

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\(^{16}\) Ibid.


\(^{18}\) Ibid.


\(^{22}\) Ibid.

supermarket flyers, and the League of Women Voters to spread the word. What started as one phone call turned into a massive grassroots operation that employed phone trees and chain letters to urge women out of their houses and into the streets for a national protest on November 1st of 1961. Wilson argued that the women would march and “sign letters to Mrs. Khrushchev and Mrs. Kennedy,” using the wives of the Soviet and American leaders to save the world from a nuclear war. Just six weeks after Wilson’s first phone call, this initial peace march saw 50,000 women protest across 60 US cities and became the first women’s movement reported on front pages of New York newspapers in 41 years—when the suffragettes had marched to win the vote. In this manner, Women Strike for Peace (WSP) was born, arguing that its members wouldn’t strike “with the sword or the bomb shelter, but with the pen.”

**Women Strike for Peace: A Movement, Not an Organization**

The women did not stop with one day of marching. From its inception, WSP set itself apart from other anti-nuclear organizations. For one, it wasn’t so much a hierarchical organization, but rather a decentralized movement. Unlike other groups such as the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE), WSP was entirely female-run and portrayed itself as a feminine—as opposed to feminist—movement made up of middle-class, middle-aged

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mothers who wore white gloves and flowered hats while picketing the White House. They used their roles as mothers to their advantage, protesting on behalf of their children’s well-being to stop atmospheric nuclear testing. The women’s overarching goal was to end the international arms race by creating a nuclear test ban treaty, utilizing the United Nations as a world peacekeeper, and achieving universal military disarmament. Following an American decade in which the public was expected to possess the same anti-communist, pro-arms race sentiments, the WSP movement came on the scene to spark debate. Featuring future US Representative Bella Abzug as a political spokesperson, WSP staged massive marches while lobbying and sending delegations to meet with congressmen in the capital. The movement never resorted to civil disobedience to achieve its means. On January 15th of 1962, WSP organized an international demonstration that spanned 22 countries, including England, China, and the Soviet Union. It was downpouring that afternoon in Washington, DC as 2,000 women picketed (see Appendix A), and that evening, President Kennedy discussed in his news conference how he understood them and that their message had been received. Later that year, WSP sent a 50-woman delegation to Geneva, Switzerland, where they advocated for nuclear test bans at a 17-nation disarmament conference.

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32 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
Yet before WSP could achieve victory, the movement felt backlash in the face of Cold War politics. In December of 1962, the House Committee on Un-American Activities subpoenaed 13 WSP members from the New York City area, along with Dagmar Wilson.\textsuperscript{40} HUAC alleged that the Communist Party had infiltrated peace movements in order to disarm the free world.\textsuperscript{41} Yet the women didn’t balk at these baseless claims, again choosing diplomacy as 100 additional members asked HUAC Chairman Francis Walter to subpoena them as well.\textsuperscript{42} Ultimately, 300 women showed up at the hearings, bringing along flowers and babies in carriages (see Appendix B); the women showed no reluctance to testify on their alleged—and nonexistent—communist affiliations, arguing that they only protested out of fear for their children’s lives.\textsuperscript{43} At the end of the three days, HUAC had been humiliated, making national headlines that read, “Peace Gals Make Red Hunters Look Silly” and “Peace Ladies Tangle with Baffled Congress”\textsuperscript{44} (see Appendix C).

The following August, the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty was signed, banning atmospheric, outer space, and underwater nuclear testing in America, the Soviet Union, and Britain.\textsuperscript{45} This monumental event came after years of failed disarmament talks, which the USSR had initiated in 1955.\textsuperscript{46} Without the pressure that Women Strike for Peace exerted on the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}


\bibitem{44} Ibid.


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government as the movement continually pushed for disarmament, President Kennedy would not have signed the nuclear test ban treaty with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{47} Jerome Wiesner, Presidential Science Advisor under Kennedy, later attributed the success of the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty not to US governmental arms controllers, but to Women Strike for Peace and other reform groups, such as the SANE Committee.\textsuperscript{48} It was these movements that forced the United States to tackle international disarmament debates and reach an agreement with the Soviet Union (see Appendix D).

\textbf{An End to Atmospheric Testing and the Second Red Scare}

One day in the Oval Office, President Kennedy had asked Jerome Wiesner where nuclear fallout went; the advisor replied that it was brought down by rain and washed into fields.\textsuperscript{49} It wasn’t until 1997 that a 100,000-page report by the National Cancer Institute revealed that 1950s Nevada’s atmospheric testing had released ten times as much radiation as the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and exposed millions of American children to radioactive elements; atmospheric testing had created enough radiation to cause thyroid cancer in as many as 25,000 to 50,000 Americans.\textsuperscript{50} The immediate halt of atmospheric testing, thanks to the Partial Test Ban Treaty, put a stop to further humanitarian consequences and helped de-escalate the Cold War.

Likewise, WSP was successful in taking the edge off the Second Red Scare. HUAC was already facing criticism from \textit{The New York Times}, which in 1961 had published a petition signed

\begin{multicols}{2}
\textsuperscript{47} Weiss, Cora. Zoom Interview. 11 Feb. 2022.
\textsuperscript{49} Wiesner, Jerome. “Europe Goes Nuclear.” \textit{War and Peace in the Nuclear Age}, 27 Mar. 1986. GBH Archives, WGBH, openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_E3CCFA5A4A1148579C7FB7FF0FA961EB.
\end{multicols}
by hundreds to abolish it and its unconstitutional practices. Using diplomatic means, WSP deconstructed the idea that an anti-nuclear movement was inherently communist, in part using the traditional idea of femininity to appeal to its cause. With headlines across the country now denouncing HUAC, WSP opened the debate over what communism really looked like, exhibiting that, if anything, peace movements were as American as it got.

When depicted in contrast with other anti-war protests of the era, the work of WSP proved the importance of diplomacy in politics. Take the case of the 1968 Democratic National Convention, during which 20,000 members of the Youth International Party arrived in Chicago to protest the Vietnam War, poverty, and racism, among other social issues of the era. Looking to make a political statement and receive national coverage, young agitators clashed with police, army troops, and national guardsmen, resulting in 192 police and hundreds of protester injuries. This disturbing event served a blow to the Democratic Party, which may have lost the following election because voters were turned off by the violence that the left-wing protestors had caused. Thus, people cannot have debate and create change without first showing diplomacy.

54 Ibid.
The Precedent and Legacy of Women Strike for Peace

Following the disarmament victory, WSP turned its attention to the ongoing Vietnam War. Two of its members, Mary Clarke and Loraine Gordon, were the first American anti-war activists to visit North Vietnam following US bombings in 1965.\textsuperscript{57} WSP formed connections with the Vietnamese Women’s Union (VWU), becoming authorities in foreign relations debates as a result of its unique connection with the Vietnamese people.\textsuperscript{58} Furthermore, the movement’s women petitioned the US government to reduce economic aid and military involvement in South Vietnam, arguing that the continued intervention made true peace impossible.\textsuperscript{59} In 1974, in spite of 15 months of supposed peace in Vietnam and Cambodia, the region still saw one million new refugees and 75,000 deaths.\textsuperscript{60} That same year, WSP saw the US Senate fail to pass a $474 million funding bill for South Vietnam, another success that the women’s movement celebrated and won some credit for.\textsuperscript{61}

In its early years, WSP utilized the idea of female domesticity to garner credibility in the era of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{62} The women of the movement didn’t come across as radical for the time, instead appealing to a conventional image of femininity and motherhood that made them appear earnest and heartfelt (and, for the most part, non-communist). In fact, this image draws criticism from some historians, who find fault in how the women used motherhood to ignite their cause amidst the beginnings of second-wave feminism.\textsuperscript{63} Yet historically speaking, the old idea of

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
Republican Motherhood, which women had used for centuries to argue that they needed to nurture the republic just as they nurtured children, had always been an effective tool.\textsuperscript{64} Moreover, WSP’s acts of protest actually set the stage for feminist protest seen in the 1970s.\textsuperscript{65} The movement’s “structurelessness” became a model for women’s liberation, and the acts of Women Strike for Peace visiting Geneva to debate nuclear disarmament, lobbying politicians, and traveling to Vietnam proved that women could be actively involved in political discourse.\textsuperscript{66} In addition to working to end the Vietnam War, WSP went on to participate in the women’s liberation movement and began advocating against poverty and racism.\textsuperscript{67} However, Women Strike for Peace always kept its focus on the humanitarian impact of war, continuing to look to a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which would put a halt to underground nuclear testing.\textsuperscript{68} Although WSP fell short of achieving this ultimate goal, their diplomatic legacy of peaceful protests to win disarmament lives on.\textsuperscript{69}

Horrified by atmospheric testing and the effects of nuclear fallout on their young children, ordinary American mothers took to the streets one day in 1961 and never looked back. Choosing non-violent protest, letter-writing, and lobbying, the ladies of Women Strike for Peace championed diplomacy amid the Cold War, bringing the issue of disarmament to the forefront of American politics and forcing a debate over whether atmospheric testing was worth the cost of human life. Along the line, the women shattered the baseless idea that communism had infiltrated peace movements, all the while setting a precedent for female activism.

\textsuperscript{64} Tyler May, Elaine. Zoom Interview. 18 Feb. 2022.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Weiss, Cora. Zoom Interview. 11 Feb. 2022.
\textsuperscript{68} Crandall Robinson, Kathy. Zoom Interview. 8 Feb. 2022.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
During an international day of rallies, 2,000 demonstrators of Women Strike for Peace picketed the White House on January 15th of 1962. The same evening, President John F. Kennedy acknowledged them in a press conference, explaining that their message was received.

On the first day of hearings with the House Committee on Un-American Activities, women arrived at the Capitol with young children. The WSP movement’s appeal to motherhood was especially an asset in its early years.

In 1964, *The Washington Post* published this political cartoon, mocking HUAC and its investigations into peace movements. This cartoon shows a shift in the public’s perception of HUAC, which was caused by Women Strike for Peace.

Dagmar Wilson (left) and Coretta Scott King (right) celebrated the second anniversary of Women Strike for Peace and the Partial Test Ban Treaty success on November 1st of 1963. However, they continued to advocate for disarmament, then protesting to stop underground testing (which had been excluded from the ban) and total nuclear disarmament.

Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Books


This memoir, written by an original member of Women Strike for Peace, tells the story of the movement from its inception to its work in the 1980s. For the purposes of my paper, I used Barol Taylor’s writing on strontium-90 and the movement’s dealings with the House Committee on Un-American Activities to gain a first-person perspective on these issues.


This text compiles essays regarding various women’s issues amidst wars, including disarmament, working, and even feminism. In my paper, I first used primary-source Amy Swerdlow’s essay to discuss how everyday women organized a 50,000-person protest; later, I touched on WSP traveling to Geneva for disarmament talks, illustrating how these women not only picketed in the streets, but were also directly involved in political discussions.


Author Amy Swerdlow was both an early member of Women Strike for Peace as well as a historian who wrote a great amount of content on the movement; in her book, she details the work of Women Strike for Peace from beginning to end. From her text, I cited WSP’s original slogan, “End the Arms Race—Not the Human Race,” as well as mothers’ fears of what radioactive strontium-90 could do to children’s bones; in addition, I included her profound argument that WSP was a forward-thinking feminist group.


Written by Women Strike for Peace itself, this text follows the struggle towards disarmament following Hiroshima and Nagasaki all the way up to the Cuban Missile Crisis. In my paper, I used this chronology to outline the Baruch Plan and the Soviet Union’s rejection of it, as well as their first successful atomic bomb test; additionally, I noted from the text the USSR’s 1955 call for disarmament and subsequent (and failed) peace talks.
Dissertations


To get her Ph.D. in history, Swerdlow wrote her dissertation on the Women Strike for Peace movement; similar to her book, the dissertation reflects upon the origins of WSP, its battle against HUAC, and work in Vietnam. I use Swerdlow’s description of how WSP members were largely middle-aged/middle-class and wore white hats and gloves to convey how, at least early on, the movement identified as more feminine than feminist.

Government Documents and Reports


Stored among the National Archives’ “Milestone Documents,” a reproduction of the 1963 Partial/Limited Test Ban Treaty is displayed on the webpage, alongside an article detailing its history. I used Article 1 of the treaty when detailing its implications, writing how the US, Britain, and the USSR agreed to ban atmospheric, outer space, and underwater nuclear testing.


I requested this government document from the Wilson Library at the University of Minnesota so that I could read the actual transcript of the HUAC-WSP hearings; the transcript features the testimonies of the subpoenaed women as well as content from members of HUAC. In my paper, I used HUAC’s discussion around how communists were infiltrating the peace movement in efforts to disarm America.


This government publication contains an extensive list of organizations in the United States that the House Committee on Un-American Activities deemed communist fronts. In order to illustrate the absurdity of HUAC’s claims, I took the Hollywood Peace Forum and the Student Congress Against War as organization names from the text that the Committee investigated.

Published shortly after the 1968 Democratic National Convention, Walker’s report details the riots that the city of Chicago saw that week. For the purposes of my paper, I simply drew out statistics on police injuries to help depict the level of violence that the convention saw—interestingly enough, it is unclear exactly how many protesters were hurt, although it’s evident that hundreds sustained tear gas and other injuries.

**Interviews**


Cora Weiss is another early member of Women Strike for Peace and a lifelong peace advocate; a four-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee, Weiss campaigned against the Vietnam War and Apartheid in South Africa, going on to draft the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. In my paper, I used my conversation with Weiss to outline how there was no hierarchical structure within WSP and examine the movement’s influence on the Partial Test Ban; in addition, I mentioned Weiss’s discussion around WSP’s work in women’s liberation, as well as against racism and poverty.

**Letters**


Scanned from Columbia’s Rare Book & Manuscript Library, this particular Bella Abzug letter discusses how WSP was against sending economic and military aid to South Vietnam and other Indochina countries, as the women feared that it would prolong the war. In the final section of my paper where I discuss WSP’s work during the Vietnam war, I write about the women’s opposition and offer up some statistics on Vietnamese refugees and the war’s death toll.


Although I requested letters detailing the WSP-HUAC struggle from American University, the library also sent me a petition asking for HUAC’s abolishment signed by several hundred and published in *The New York Times*. I cited this petition in my paper to reflect how some Americans were already discontent with HUAC’s unconstitutional practices.

Found in the same file as the previous letter written by Bella Abzug, this 1974 letter celebrates the US Senate’s failure to pass a bill that would provide economic aid to South Vietnam. I explained this in the Vietnam War portion of my paper, identifying the bill failure as another success for WSP.


Retrieved from American University’s archives, this letter contains a list of 22 countries that were slated to have peace marches on January 15th, 1962; furthermore, the letter details plans to picket the Whitehouse from 12:30 to 1:30. I used this letter to simply discuss the growing power of the WSP movement by writing about the international scope of the march, noting that 22 countries (including the USSR) were planning marches.


Requested from the Swarthmore Peace Collection, this letter written by Dagmar Wilson implores a professor to attend Women Strike for Peace’s first march on November 1st, 1961. I utilized this particular letter to explain how Wilson intended to petition the first ladies of the Soviet Union and the United States to pressure their husbands into disarmament.


A little over a month following the initial peace march, Dagmar Wilson sent out Christmas cards to her fellow members, urging them to join her letter-writing campaign. I quoted this particular source, which explained that the movement wouldn’t strike “with the sword or the bomb shelter, but with the pen.”

Another letter retrieved from Swarthmore College, this text details the initial success of the November 1961 peace march; the letter estimates that 20,000 to 50,000 women attended marches (it was later figured to be on the high end). In my paper, I noted how the protests were the first female movement to receive front-page coverage in New York papers since women had won suffrage, as this was an interesting detail that I hadn’t seen anywhere else.

News Clips


This video, held in ABC’s archives, showed footage of the 1968 riots at the DNC, explaining how as many as 20,000 members of Youth International Party converged on Chicago to protest the social ills of the era. In the section of my paper discussing the 1968 DNC, I used this source to introduce the convention and explain why some members of the Youth International Party were looking for police confrontation.

Non-Personal Interviews & Oral Histories


Naomi Goodman was another founding member of Women Strike for Peace; in her interview, she talks about her family, WSP, and her work with the Jewish Peace Fellowship, another group within the peace movement of the era. In my paper, I use Goodman’s oratory to discuss Bella Abzug’s involvement with WSP and the movement’s nonviolent tactics; Goodman offered up the powerful idea that WSP never resorted to civil disobedience to achieve its means—though interestingly enough, she actually claims that she regrets not committing civil disobedience amidst protests.
Transcripts of President Kennedy’s news conferences are featured in the National Archives’ records of the former president; in his speech, JFK discusses everything from declining enrollment in engineering school to India’s failed free election system. However, in my paper, I note Kennedy’s reference to Women Strike for Peace, whose international strike had occurred that afternoon; the president notes that “their message was received,” reflecting the women’s influence on the government.


Cora Weiss, whom I later interviewed for my paper, narrates her life story—including how she spent her high school summers traveling, joined Women Strike for Peace, and continued to advocate for peace amidst Vietnam and with UN Resolution 1325. Although the transcript includes hundreds of pages on Weiss’s life—which alone contains many topics for History Day papers—I used her oral history to understand the process in which radioactive fallout was absorbed into the earth and subsequently milk.

Wiesner, Jerome. “Europe Goes Nuclear.” War and Peace in the Nuclear Age, 27 Mar. 1986. GBH Archives, WGBH, openvault.wgbh.org/catalog/V_E3CCFA5A4A1148579C7FB7FF0FA961EB.

Jerome Wiesner, Presidential Science Advisor under Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, discusses the arms race amidst the Cold War in this radio interview. For the purposes of my paper, I recounted Wiesner’s anecdote about the time he was sitting in the Oval Office with President Kennedy and explained to him where radioactive fallout went.


In the interview with host Studs Terkel, Wilson recounts her work in the Women Strike for Peace movement, focusing on her part in launching it. In terms of my paper, I described how Wilson received warm responses from her friends after asking if they’d be interested in staging an anti-nuclear demonstration and, in turn, how she launched a massive phone tree campaign.
**Periodicals**


About six months after the initial peace strike, Dagmar Wilson was interviewed by *The New York Times* to discuss how the WSP movement began. I used this article to outline how Wilson heard about the jailing of peace activist Bertrand Russell and pioneered a massive phone tree and chain letter campaign to launch the first march; I also used the article’s detail regarding how Wilson enjoyed wearing skirts and had children to depict how she wasn’t so much a radical activist, but a woman stereotypical to the Cold War era in America.


This article belongs to a conservative newspaper that was referenced in Amy Swerdlow’s book; it was among other articles of the time that began raising awareness around the dangers of atmospheric testing. I found the content this article provided on radioactive “drip out” in the stratosphere and radioactive seasons useful in illustrating the dangers of atmospheric testing as well as the real fears of American women.


In another article written by Amy Swerdlow, the early member of WSP focuses on the confrontation seen between the WSP movement and the House Committee on Un-American Activities. I used this particular article twice, first discussing how WSP shattered Cold War expectations by speaking out against the arms race and then how this unexpected act caught up to them, as 13 WSP members were subpoenaed by HUAC.
Secondary Sources

Books


Frazier’s text connects the work of many women’s groups of the Vietnam War era, with its introduction detailing how two members of WSP were the first women to work with the Vietnamese following US bombings in 1965. I used this book to introduce WSP’s involvement in the war following the Partial Test Ban Treaty.


Called a “tragico-comical memorabilia ofHUAC,” Pomerantz’s book compiles essays and political cartoons to reflect on the work ofHUAC; interestingly enough, this text was published the year followingHUAC’s confrontation with Women Strike for Peace. When I first introducedHUAC, I used Carl Marzani’s article to write about the House Committee and explain how it was essentially breaking the law with its baseless investigations.


Written by University of Minnesota professor Elaine Tyler May, whom I later interviewed for my paper, Homeward Bound details the ugly “Cold War consensus” that alleged that communism had made its way to American families. When discussing WSP’s ability to appeal to the public and the government, I used May’s book to explain how the movement’s emphasis on femininity and motherhood actually worked to their advantage.

Dissertations


Similar to Amy Swerdlow’s, Coburn’s dissertation recounts the WSP movement with great detail. In this text, I first came across the fact that 100 additional women asked HUAC to be subpoenaed following the initial 14, so I included this in my paper.
Interviews


Kathy Crandall Robinson serves as the chief operating officer for the Arms Control Association; I learned about her after reading an extensive article she wrote regarding Women Strike for Peace, and I had to reach out. Although our conversation included everything from the Partial Test Ban Treaty to HUAC, I wrote about her point on how WSP always, more than anything, focused on the importance of disarmament for humanitarian purposes, going so far as to call for a total ban on nuclear testing.

Tyler May, Elaine. Zoom Interview. 18 Feb. 2022.

Elaine Tyler May is a professor of American Studies and History at the University of Minnesota who specializes in gender relations and the Cold War era. In the final section of my paper, I used our conversation around Republican Motherhood and Women Strike for Peace’s transition into a feminist movement to reflect how it contributed to both disarmament and feminism.

Periodicals


Bethke Elshtain, who also edited one of the books I referenced in my paper, writes this article that actually criticizes the “femininity” tactics that Women Strike for Peace employed. I used her writing to illustrate this criticism but later proceeded to counter it by arguing that WSP actually set a precedent for feminist activism.


Brozan’s article begins by discussing the current work of WSP in Vietnam but then backtracks to discuss the origins of the peace movement. I was intrigued by the writer’s description of WSP’s “three-prong” goal of winning “a nuclear test ban treaty, strengthening the United Nations as a peacekeeping instrument, and universal military disarmament;” as I hadn’t read discussion of this before, I made sure to include this content in my paper, along with the statistic that 50,000 women had marched on that first day of “striking.”

This article details the implications of McCarthyism in the United States over 50 years after the fact. In the section of my paper on the Second Red Scare, I noted information found in this article regarding McCarthyism loyalty and security programs, as well as the idea that HUAC and McCarthyism grossly violated citizens’ privacy.


Hamilton’s article considers a one-day war research halt that MIT students participated in as a war protest. Presidential Science Advisor Jerome Wiesner is mentioned in the text, citing that credit to the 1963 Partial Test Ban Treaty is given to Women Strike for Peace, so I included this profound idea when discussing the impact of the movement.


Schlesinger’s journal article offers an overview of the Cold War, analyzing the events following World War II and contrasting the different moral ideologies possessed by the Soviet Union and the United States. When I first introduced the Cold War, I used this article to contrast the different governmental and economic systems of the two countries.


I first read about this article in Ethel Barol Taylor’s book and later looked for it online; reporter Matthew Wald details a recent report by the National Cancer Institute that discloses just how radioactive and dangerous 1950s atmospheric testing was. In order to demonstrate how atmospheric testing needed to stop, I used the article’s comparison to the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and discussion on thyroid cancer cases as a result of the testing.


In order to learn about the effects of the 1968 DNC riots, I looked to Waxman’s article, which included quotes from the Chicago Seven, who were charged for inciting the riots. From this secondary source, I utilized primary-source rioters’ quotes to explain how the lack of diplomacy at the DNC ultimately hurt the Democratic Party when Hubert Humphrey lost the presidential race.
Websites


To add a bit of context to the first section of my paper detailing the Cold War, I looked to the National Archives’ collection on JFK’s presidency. Here, I found some details on the USSR’s work to install pro-communist governments in Eastern European countries, which I explained was one factor that initiated the Cold War.


The United Nations details the progression of the arms race, discussing the proliferation of atmospheric, underground, and underwater testing following World War II. In the section of my paper that contextualizes the arms race, I used this article to write about the United States’ first hydrogen bomb, Russia’s Tsar Bomba, and some statistics on atmospheric testing in the 1960s.


As I had previously heard of the Marshall Plan and knew that it was significant to the Cold War, I referenced the State Department’s archives to learn a bit more about it. This site simply provided me with some background details on the Marshall Plan.


To again put some context to the Cold War, specifically the Second Red Scare, I looked to the National Archives’ content on the presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower. This website provided me with some basic information on McCarthyism; in my paper, I discuss how Senator McCarthy alleged that 205 members of the State Department were communists, which is a point that I pulled from this webpage.
Appendix Graphics


Although Women Strike for Peace was non-hierarchical, I wanted to put a face to Dagmar Wilson, so I included this image in my project. Although I don’t discuss her in my paper, it is interesting to note that Coretta Scott King, wife of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was involved with the women’s movement.


I found this image in Amy Swerdlow’s book, which I felt accurately displayed the strength in numbers of the Women Strike for Peace movement. Thus, I included it in my paper to reflect the picketing outside of the Whitehouse on January 15th, 1962.


Another photo published by the Bettmann Archives, this image displays members of Women Strike for Peace at their HUAC hearings. I used this photo to signify how the women used motherhood to their power, arguing how they largely protested in the name of their children.


This political cartoon, published in The Washington Post, reflects growing criticism over the House Committee on Un-American Activities. I used this illustration in my paper to discuss just that, noting how the cartoon was published the year following HUAC’s debacle with Women Strike for Peace.