

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

**INVIOABLE MOTHERHOOD: THE FAR-RIGHT AND THE BATTLE
AGAINST THE CONSCRIPTION OF WOMEN DURING THE SECOND
WORLD WAR**

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BY

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¹ Caption Reads: "Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, fanatically [unreadable] prepare to trample on a "World Federation" flag [unreadable] is proposed in England. 9-17-43. Jacob H. Gomborow Papers, Temple University Special Collections Research Center. Collection ID: SCRC 246. Series 1: Police Work, 1909-195. Box 1, Folder 69, "Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, 1942-1943."

Abstract

This paper examines the responses of far-right American mothers to proposed efforts to conscript, draft, or otherwise “regiment” women into the labor force via the Austin-Wadsworth Bill during World War II. In particular, this essay explores the fierce anxieties pertaining to gender and motherhood, how they manifested, and how they reveal a profound and broad sense of vulnerability on the part of the women speaking out against the bill. Ultimately, I demonstrate that the mothers opposing this draft reacted so fiercely because they perceived a threat to their citizenship: namely, the assumption that their citizenship inhered in their maternal roles and in their general distance or separation from state or public control. Establishing the existence of a “gendered” status anxiety that informs the mothers’ opposition to the bill, I then explore the importance of their reactions in any scholarly understanding of conservatism and gender in the 20th and even 21st century U.S.

Introduction

The year is 1943, and the United States is consumed by the prosecution of the Second World War. Amidst the calls for patriotic unity, for self-sacrifice, and for massive productivity, several American mothers - themselves often representatives of influential mother's groups - will give testimony before the Senate Military Affairs Committee on a proposed bill that aims to buttress women's wartime productivity. Though the hearings and procedure are routine, for these women the issue is anything but; they have come to the capitol building in an effort to ward off "the final act of regimentation," the spawn of a hostile government seeking to destroy the American home and republic.² That government, of course, was the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the "final act" the Austin-Wadsworth Bill, which would have allowed the drafting of both men *and* women for labor in the private sector.³ Bolstered by decades-old maternal rhetoric and steeped in anti-statist thought, a coalition of conservative women marshalled their power as mothers and homemakers to dispute the idea that the drafting of women for labor was a benign, patriotic, and necessary step for the war effort - indeed, they argued it was anything but.

Yet, this chorus of voices has been largely skimmed over in scholarly works on gender and World War II. Even those historians who have advanced an understanding of the gendered aspects of the home front - or who have analyzed those women who opposed the FDR administration and its handling of crises foreign and domestic - have mentioned outcry against the bill only in passing. Only Holly Stovall has taken on responses to the bill, but she emphasizes

² *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) (Bernice St. Clair, Testimony of Bernice St. Clair for the Women's League for Political Education).

³ Holly Stovall, "Resisting Regimentation: The Committee to Oppose the Conscription of Women." *Peace and Change* Vol 23, No. 4 (October 1998): 483.

pacifist activists and their most visible protest organization.⁴ Stovall makes an excellent case for gender anxieties surrounding the draft as the clearest representation of the “public sphere” subsuming women, an insight not lost on this paper. Missing in her analysis, however, is that the women opposing Austin-Wadsworth were not anxious *just* about the idea of being thrust into the public realm in spite of long-held philosophies situating women in the “private sphere.” Rather, their anxiety stems from the very idea of having to become a citizen in the “full sense of the word,” with new responsibilities and civic duties quite separate from the home.⁵ In other words, Austin-Wadsworth seemed to demand that American women re-earn or regain their place; it threatened their status as citizens by imposing new requirements that went well beyond what they considered to be their ultimate civic service: motherhood.

The far-right opposition to this bill, so impassioned and agitated, cries out for notice and for its rightful place in the historiography of gender, of motherhood, and of conservatism. Interestingly, it is perhaps because of their conservatism that these women have been ignored; historian Michelle Nickerson has written that right-wing women are one of the “orphans” of conservative history, especially women of the “old-right” – those who were active before and during the rise of McCarthyism and Barry Goldwater.⁶ Nickerson and other scholars working to fill this gap have noted that scholars have typically assumed right-wing women and mothers to be mere accessories to their husband’s political agenda, silent backers of the patriarchy confined to the home.⁷

It is important to situate this research within scholarship dealing with the development of conservative women’s movements. Historian Leo Ribuffo has argued persuasively for a need to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 492.

⁶ Michelle Nickerson, “Women, Domesticity, and Postwar Conservatism.” *Organization of American Historians: Magazine of History* Vol 17, No. 2 (January 1, 2003): 17.

⁷ Ibid., 20; and June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-wing Politics, 1933 - 1945*. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002): 7.

enlarge the timeline of conservatism to retrieve the 1930's from their "chronological isolation," lending much needed context to the evolution of the post-war right, where the conservative ideologies of the 30's "won general acceptance during the 1950's."⁸ Ribuffo's advice has been well taken, especially with regard to gender history. Laura McEnaney, for instance, examined the female-dominated "America First" movement during the late 30's and early 40's debates over the growing European conflict, arguing that the women's isolationist opposition to intervention was rooted in "a [conservative] defense of the nuclear family...traditional gender roles...[and] social and sexual purity" that they worried mobilization and the absence of American men would disrupt.⁹ Glen Jeansonne and June M. Benowitz have examined key far-right women's organizations and figures in the midst of the great depression, and revealed their disdain for the New Deal's strengthening of government and their fears that communists were directing both the expansion of government and intervention in the European conflict.¹⁰

Scholars like Kim Nielsen and Kirsten M. Delegarde have extended the timeline even further, reaching into the 1920's to explore conservative women's opposition to the women's progressive organizations that sought to use their recently won voting rights to bring government regulation to matters like child labor or infant mortality. These women typically gendered the discourse of the red-scare to portray progressive women as radicals who were either influenced or "duped" by communist philosophies that would destroy the sanctity of the American family via government reach into the domestic sphere and its subsequent control of women.¹¹ This

⁸ Leo P. Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983) XII - XIII.

⁹ Laura McEnaney "He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism." *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 1 (1994). 48.

¹⁰ Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers' Movement and World War II*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996; June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-wing Politics, 1933-1945*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002.

¹¹ Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001); Kirsten M. Delegard, *Battling Miss Bolsheviki: The Origins of Female Conservatism in the United States*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.)

paper works also to place itself within scholarship that “extends the timeline,” and leans heavily on the analysis of “anti-radical” women in the 20’s to demonstrate the continuity of gendered anti-statist thought. Emphasizing such continuity allows for the placement of World War II in dialogues dealing with conservative ideology, and helps call attention to the staying-power of gender ideology and various political fault lines in a period many see as utterly transformative.

Recent political events have also called into question the validity of dominant historiographies of the right, and some historians have called for a re-evaluation of how past scholars have written about and defined the right, especially the *far* right.¹² Of particular interest is the old and largely discarded “consensus history” exemplified by historian Richard Hofstadter, whose famous (or infamous) work *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* dismissed those on the ideological right as “cranks.” “Status anxious” and completely out of touch, their philosophies were fueled by a sort of “psychological need.”¹³ When Hofstadter described the characteristics of “the paranoid style,” he noted that the belief in a “preternaturally effective” enemy was commonplace, and attended by a sense of “[systemized] persecution.”¹⁴ While the widespread application of this analytical framework has been seen as deeply flawed, with scholars like Leo Ribuffo and Lisa McGirr referring to this historiography as “reductionist” and rejecting it in their own analyses, some of Hofstadter’s terminology can be used in more specific ways without clinging to psychological diagnosis as a tool of historical analysis. In spite, for example, of Leo Ribuffo’s somewhat tongue-in-cheek comment that “panicking” liberal historians hasten to confine the right to the mental fringe whenever confronted with the strength of conservatism, this paper demonstrates the staying power of conservative views on gender and

¹² Rick Perlstein, “I Thought I Understood the American Right. Trump Proved Me Wrong.” *The New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2017; and Kim Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field.” *Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (2011): 727.

¹³ Rick Perlstein notes that Hofstadter singled out Barry Goldwater and his supporters as prime examples of the right being out of touch with the American consensus.

¹⁴ Richard Hofstadter, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*. (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 4 and 14.

gender citizenship.¹⁵ It does not, however, hesitate to refer to certain examples of rhetoric or images presented by the opposition to Austin-Wadsworth as paranoid, as rooted in the impression of persecution, or as simply irrational.

Some scholars, including the author of this modest paper, are attempting to strike a balance between the likes of Hofstadter and newer historians.¹⁶ This too is why the conservative women reacting to the Austin-Wadsworth Bill present a valuable case study for historians of the right: the sheer emotional fervor of their testimony, the clear articulations of feelings of vulnerability - they seem to call out for a reexamination of Hofstadter's arguments about status-anxiety and paranoia in conservatism – precisely the claims that led most scholars reject him.

This paper attempts to follow and lengthen the trail blazed by scholars of gender and the right. By honing in on conservative mothers responding to one political moment, it seeks to illuminate key gender anxieties surrounding motherhood and sexual immorality during a period many assume was one of patriotic unity and a “watershed” for women and women's work. Furthermore, this work emphasizes the irrationality of the women who testified before Congress, and in doing so concludes that Hofstadter's label of “status anxiety” deserves some measure of rehabilitation, but with a new twist. A great deal of the anti-statist and gendered rhetoric they expressed revealed a preoccupation with the extent to which the state saw their motherhood as sufficiently patriotic, self-sacrificing, and productive relative to industrial labor. In other words, these women expressed a *gendered status-anxiety* in their opposition to a bill that demanded more of them, for they resented the implication that their status as guardians of moral virtue and the home might be less vital than munitions production. By exploring these gender anxieties and

¹⁵ Leo P. Ribuffo, “Twenty Suggestions for Studying the Right Now That Studying the Right is Trendy.” *Historically Speaking* Vol 12, No. 1 (2011): 5.

¹⁶ Ibid (Perlstein)., Ibid., 725 (Phillips-Fein); Leo P. Ribuffo, “The Discovery and Rediscovery of American Conservatism Broadly Conceived.” *OAH Magazine of History* Vol 17, No. 2 (2003): 3.

how they were manifested, the historiography of gender and the right is enriched and refined, as the insights of previous scholarship are applied to capture a better sense of how conservative women in the 1940s saw themselves and their status as citizens.

“The Right to Train Your Son”: Maternalism and the State

The women testifying against the Austin-Wadsworth Bill articulated an enormous host of gender anxieties centered around a defense of an idealized motherhood entitled to protection and respect. To borrow a phrase from historian Rebecca Jo Plant, these women defended a “maternalist conception of female citizenship.”¹⁷ They saw their motherhood and maternal activities - even in the context of a war “production frenzy” - as the single most important and valuable duties they could perform.¹⁸ The only scholar to take on a dedicated study of gender and the Austin-Wadsworth Bill, Holly Stovall, has argued convincingly for the prevalence of this sort of response. Scarce in her analysis, however, are members of the far-right - women who bitterly opposed the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and, as I argue, felt threatened by expansions of state authority. Their opposition was grounded in their motherhood, for they deemed their maternal duties more than just valuable: indeed, these responsibilities informed their status as citizens - their motherly role worthy of praise and defense. This mother-centered vision was nothing new: there exists a vibrant body of scholarship that concerns itself with this form of political expression, which scholars often call “maternalism.” Plant, for example, has referred to the maternalist ideal as “motherhood as both a familial and civic act,” which describes perfectly the sentiments of the mothers protesting the bill.¹⁹ Such scholarship has demonstrated that motherhood was articulated and perceived not only as a valuable service to the nation

¹⁷ Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: the Transformation of Motherhood in America*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012) 25.

¹⁸ For this aspect of wartime maternalism, I am indebted to Holly Stovall's “Resisting Regimentation: The Committee to Oppose the Conscription of Women.” *Peace and Change* 23, no. 4 (October 1998): 483-99.

¹⁹ Plant, *Mom*. 5.

insofar as reproduction and the moral training of the next generation was involved, but that the American family was the basic unit of a democratic society.²⁰ Should the institution of the family collapse, so would the nation.

Furthermore, motherhood was “beautiful,” a role completely immersed in love and bestowing an almost martyr-like status on those who took up its mantle. The maternalist ideal held also that women, as the “self-sacrificing” defenders of the home, had a role to play outside the domestic sphere. Scholars on maternalism have long held that it defies political alignment; progressive women used their motherhood in an attempt to provide cultural and economic uplift in the public sphere, while more conservative women - sometimes called “patriotic maternalists” - fought against the largesse of the state (and against progressive women), communism, and pacifism by appealing to fears that the family unit and American motherhood was threatened.²¹ The conservative women testifying against the bill manage to blur political lines further by combining the talking points of both left and right leaning maternalists. They wielded their motherhood as a weapon against internationalism and interventionism, but for a strong defense; against government interference in family, but also against the greed of private industry and its “unmotherly” attributes; and for traditional gender roles but against absolute male privilege. Conjuring up fantasies of a sexually deviant, criminal, and totalitarian nation, the women opposed to the bill saw respect for their motherhood as the bulwark against a dystopian future one could supposedly catch glimpses of in the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

The testimony of the mothers opposing the Austin-Wadsworth Bill reveals the extent to which they perceived the legislation as a threat to their motherhood, and simultaneously, as a threat to the nation. In particular, the bill was emblematic of an overweening federal government,

²⁰ Ibid. For an exploration of the ways in which the American Family was seen as sustaining democracy, see Kim E. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood: Antiradicalism, Antifeminism, and the First Red Scare*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2001)

²¹ Plant, *Mom*. 7; Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*. 92-98.

already bloated by the New Deal and seeking to further lengthen its reach into the personal lives of Americans. One Mrs. Florence H. Griesel described the bill as invariably leading to “state control of the children,” or the substitution of the state for mothers and motherhood.²² A profound and agitated anti-statist component of their maternalism emerges in just one comment, and is followed up by claims that the bill is “Nazi, Communist, and Fascist” - somehow all at once, a confusion that emerges repeatedly in their gendered critiques of the bill. As prior historians have shown, these claims and fears have strong roots in the 1920’s and 30’s. Historian Kim Nielsen has written extensively on the ways in which anti-feminist and anti-radical women came to perceive government welfare actions directed towards children as an example of “nationalization,” communism, and the reduction of parental authority in the home - all arguments rooted in a defense of the nation.²³ For Griesel and the mothers testifying at the capitol, the Austin-Wadsworth Bill was simply another means to the same end: by forcing mothers to register with the selective service and labor for the war effort, the state would finally have the empty homes and control over mothers they needed to enact what some called “cradle to grave planning” for children.²⁴

Regardless of source, the efforts of the government to raise children themselves, these women believed, was nothing less than the purposeful erosion of an American institution by the power-hungry and subversive. Though Griesel was assured that the bill contained provisions that exempted mothers of children under the age of 18 from registering for the labor draft, she insisted that “the clause deferring women with little children means nothing - for if the bill

²² *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Florence H. Griesel for the Women’s League for Political Education.

²³ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*. 92-98.

²⁴ Qtd. from an article in the Washington Times-Herald from March 25th, 1943, entitled “Former Tugwell Aide Blasts Cradle to Grave Planners,” *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother’s Association.

passes the various clauses are dropped whenever the powers that be desire it.”²⁵ Convinced that the government was actively disguising its motives, there was simply no way to convince Griesel that the bill was anything but an attempt at penetrating the home masquerading as a war measure.

Gendered opposition to Austin-Wadsworth explicitly linked maternalist ideology with anti-statist sentiments, and molded domesticity as a barrier against the state. “No one can take the mother’s place,” Griesel argued - “[I have a] God-Given right to train [my son].”²⁶ There is more at play here, however, than mere political ideology; the fantasy of the “nationalization” of children is linked to “rights” and to an argument about the necessity of untampered with motherhood. A fundamental aspect of this testimony, therefore, is a gendered status anxiety, a perception that their citizenship - as defined through their irreplaceability and rights as mothers - is under siege.

Nielsen writes that the discourses of the anti-feminist and anti-radical women of the 1920’s cannot be viewed primarily through the lens of maternalism precisely because their emphasis was on “saving” the nation rather than “building upon their identity as mothers.”²⁷ I argue, however, that the conservative women opposing Austin-Wadsworth employed a vigorous defense of their roles as mothers to prevent a redefining of women’s citizenship that shifted patriotism away from motherhood and towards the public sphere. “Every mother...is within herself, in her little home, an organization and an American sovereign who rules over a free American institution,” claimed one mother, providing a succinct construction of her domestic role and form of citizenship as necessarily free from state interference. In this conception, maternal identity was a microcosm of American democracy, or, more precisely, the sustainer of

²⁵ Ibid. The bill did, in fact, exempt both women and men from having to register should they demonstrate that they had children under the age of 18 or had elderly or sickly dependents that required their care.

²⁶ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Florence H. Griesel for the Women’s League for Political Education.

²⁷ Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*. 51.

democracy. As the “hand[s] that rock[ed] the cradle[s],” these mothers and their guidance of the next generation within a space and relationship wholly theirs was their primary argument for protection against “regimentation,” or the imposition of the state discipline on their free spaces.²⁸ The rhetoric here is rooted in a more personal defense of self and identity than an ideological defense of the nation. When they reminded Congress that mothers “rule[d] the world,” it was a cry of a group who felt they were on the defensive, and needed to remind the public that their “freedom” was a necessary aspect of their identities. Thus, I argue that defense of the nation does not preclude or overshadow a defense of the self in this conception, as they are in fact inextricably linked. While the nation was at stake, so too was the ability of mothers to carve out a respectable and protected space for themselves during the war.

As Griesel’s testimony suggests, the conservative mothers who opposed the bill were beset by twin anxieties. In their minds, moral-motherhood and its links to conceptions of respectable citizenship was intertwined with an anti-statism, one that regarded government intrusion into the gendered affairs of the home as damaging to the patriotic physical space and role mothers had carved out. This anti-statism manifested most glaringly in the mothers’ efforts to discredit the bill, the FDR administration, and often the war itself as subversive and communistic. Anti-communism and gender anxieties went hand in hand, and the imagery of nationalization, regimentation, or even gender chaos either accompanied or evoked anti-communism. Moreover, further testimony will demonstrate that the mothers believed the Bill to be situated within a losing battle; that is, they saw Austin-Wadsworth as merely one symptom of a corruption that has already festered deeply within the U.S. government. In order to fully understand and capture the tenor of the opposition, one must explore the gender anxieties and

²⁸ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother’s Association.

personal vulnerability from the mothers' standpoint: those who believed they were beset by enemies both visible and invisible, physical and philosophical, enemies who did not have the best interests of American women, womanhood, or the nation at heart. The next section of this paper deals with the perceived threats of both sorts, and serves as a larger demonstration of the intertwining of anti-statism, the politics of gender and maternalism, and the issues of status and citizenship that arise in the mix.

**“The Communal Feeding Places so Admired by Mrs. Roosevelt”: Motherhood,
Communism, and Sexual Vulnerability**

Key components of the testimony that illuminate the status-driven maternalism of the Austin-Wadsworth opposition are rooted in fantastical concerns of a sexual disarray that would devalue motherhood, betray the traditional gender order, encourage immorality, and render women sexually vulnerable. Traditional gender roles, for example, were at the top of the list of concerns for Mrs. Bernice St. Clair of the Women's League for Political Education, and factored into her conception of motherhood. Launching immediately into a defense of a gender order in which both fathers and sons are benevolent defenders of the women of their homes, she testified that that any argument framing the draft of women as something that would benefit the male soldier was absurd. Claiming the authority to speak for her male sons and indeed all male soldiers, St. Clair insisted that no man - with the exception of “alien-minded” and subversive men - would demand the “subjection” of his mothers, wives, and daughters to such “slavery.” Men enlisted to protect both the American form of government and the home, she contended, the two being inextricably linked. All proper men, she argued, are too “respectful” of the women in

their life to desire this “final act of regimentation” (the imposition of military discipline), and are fighting at that very moment to protect their women from that kind of life.²⁹

There is a deep investment in the patriarchal order here - a theme especially prevalent in testimony regarding sex. A family structure that allowed women such as St. Clair to claim quite confidently that mothers are respected -and thus not to be relegated to “slavery” - the patriarchy meant male protection and an inviolability within the maternal role. St. Clair’s insistent claim, for instance, that her son went to war to protect her and her way of life was equally a claim of entitlement to protection. The comparison of the draft of women to “slavery” is some indication of the extent to which St. Clair believed her status as a respected and protected mother was under threat, just as much as it was meant to juxtapose the freedom-fighting efforts of her sons to the efforts of her government. Previous scholarship has noted that, more than just the intentional politicization of motherhood by mothers, the maternalist argument held that motherhood - as a morally pure and beautiful “institution” - designated mothers as the just recipients of male “gratitude and affection.” In other words, there was a status and citizenship form inherent in motherhood: by producing male citizens who partook in the ultimate form of male citizenship - soldierhood - which in turn defended motherhood.³⁰ This cycle of citizenship within traditional gender roles articulated in St. Clair’s testimony thus reveals the extent to which opposition to the Austin-Wadsworth Bill was a defense of a “maternalist conception of citizenship,” one in which mothers were accorded well deserved respect and protection from external forces - including their own government.

²⁹ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Bernice St. Clair for the Women’s League for Political Education. For a discussion on why military discipline and women were seen as incompatible, see Holly Stovall, “Resisting Regimentation: The Committee to Oppose the Conscription of Women.” *Peace and Change* 23, no. 4 (October 1998): 483-99. Holly Stovall’s use of the term “regimentation,” along with its use in congressional testimony, galvanized its frequent use in this paper.

³⁰ Plant, *Mom*. 7.

Right-wing testimony also demonstrated fears that Austin-Wadsworth upset the gender order and the expectations of soldierhood. In one sweeping and gendered condemnation of “regimentation,” St. Clair articulated a vision of domesticity dependent upon the sexual expectations of men, and the motherhood of women. “Our boys,” she said,

Are entitled to come back to homes, not camps. They are entitled to find that our girls are eagerly awaiting for them to come back so that they may bear the babies they have dreamed of and to build the homes...our boys will be proud of the girls in the US uniforms...but that doesn't mean they want the womanhood of their country lined up in uniforms forever... [men expect] a frilly little apron and his child in her arms...³¹

Constructing an image of a home transformed into a military barracks, and the “frilly little apron” swapped out for fatigues, St. Clair presented a vision of a regimented future in which the gendered expectations of male war heroes are subverted, the gender order and sexual entitlement of the returning soldier destroyed by the state. Why though, would a mother insist upon the fulfilling of male sexual privilege in her defense of a mother’s status in the home? Historians have discussed the nature of investment in patriarchy, and have noted that any action that seemed to “subvert the proprietary relationship” of male sexual ownership of his wife, and dominance over her and their children, was understood as rendering women vulnerable to the power of “the state or unscrupulous men.”³² When male soldiers return from protecting American woman and motherhood abroad, they must resume their stance as domestic husbands, fathers, and protectors of and in the home. By regimenting women and substituting state control for the umbrella protection of patriarchy, women are no longer safely ensconced in monogamy and domesticity (and no longer producing the strong and moral children of the next generation). Thus, St. Clair’s

³¹ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong. (1943)* Bernice St. Clair for the Women’s League for Political Education.

³² Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*. 2.

previous articulation of male defense from “slavery” reveals a new sort of gendered status anxiety: sexual vulnerability.

This notion of regimented women as sexually vulnerable is borne out by the conjured up fantasies of sexual chaos and male sexual privilege run wild, as well as by gender scholarship of the Second World War. While Bernice St. Clair made no explicit references to what might be termed ‘carnal anarchy’ in her testimony, other women made clear that they believed the destruction of heterosexual male and female sexuality within monogamous relationships was at hand. For instance, Mrs. Grace G. Keefe, speaking also for the Women’s League for Political Education - noting First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s support for “communal kitchens” (thereby raising the spectre of communism also) and the Austin-Wadsworth Bill - built upon the notion of a home transformed into a camp.³³ Insisting that the future of regimented womanhood included multiple mothers/women in the home - as befits a communal kitchen and “army barracks” - the rest of her critique reads:

*Unless the homes continue to furnish their innumerable services, they must be supplied elsewhere...the communal feeding places so admired by Mrs. Roosevelt will replace the family dinner table. The child must now have two homes where one served before; two beds are necessary; two of nearly everything, including two mothers...*³⁴

Keefe, in a leap of logic typical to this testimony, surmised that the regimentation of women invariably led to the ultimate perversion of patriarchal monogamy and domesticity: polygamy.

³³ According to Holly Stovall, Mrs. Roosevelt did, in fact, support the Austin Wadsworth Bill, and had come out in support of women taking care of one another during the war. Interestingly, the pacifist women of the Committee to Oppose the Conscription of Women (COCW) spoke extensively of women’s and mother’s activities in the community to provide a rationale for why the draft, in shifting women around, would damage American Communities. The non-pacifist and conservative women testifying against the bill don’t appear to disagree with this view, but perceive a communist influence in Mrs. Roosevelt’s emphasis on community action. Why anti-communism is gendered will be discussed later on. For more on the COCW and its arguments against the bill, See, Holly Stoval, *Resisting Regimentation*; for more on why anti-communism had significant gender components to it during the first red scare in the 1920’s, see Kim Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*.

³⁴ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong. (1943)* Grace G. Keefe for the Women’s League for Political Education.

Indeed, the practice was mentioned explicitly by another speaker for the Women's League, Mrs. Helene Johnson. Arguing that the war itself and American interventionism was a betrayal of the family unit, she claimed that "our young men...scattered over the far horizons," forced to protect the subjects of other nations rather than their own families, will produce "children...out of polygamous relationships."³⁵ It is difficult to understand precisely what Johnson believes is going to occur: she might be operating on the assumption that married soldiers abroad would give into their lust and sleep with foreign women, only to move their American families abroad and join mistress and wife in one home.³⁶ Perhaps she is building upon the statement of her fellow Women's Leaguer, Bernice St. Clair, who insisted that GIs expected to come home and resume the business of baby and family making. In Johnson's vision - informed by deep isolationist sentiments - these soldiers, instead of returning home to "camps," would not be allowed to return home at all, for the US would be trapped in its role as the "arsenal of democracy," forced to continuously police other nations.³⁷ While it is not clear why American men who moved their families abroad would necessarily take multiple wives (and after all, the siring of an illegitimate child is not equivalent to polygamy), the sentiment is clear: the destruction of the American family is at hand in either St. Clair or Johnson's predictions.

The anxiety centered around "two mothers" and concerns of increasing sexual immorality also raised the spectre of lesbianism. Quoting a priest at Loyola University who claimed a spike in "delinquency and social disease, especially among the adolescent girls of America," Keefe associated the increasing degradation of the family unit with social dysfunction. Leisa Meyer has included within her study of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) - the members of which St. Clair

³⁵ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong. (1943)* Helene Johnson for the Women's League for Political Education.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

and Keefe might be “proud of,” so long as their regimentation was temporary - a discussion of a “lesbian threat” within the Corps. She demonstrated that “in a culture increasingly anxious about women’s sexuality...homosexuality in particular, the formation of a sex-segregated women’s unit within [a] wholly male institution...[led to] public speculation [about the] potential breakdown of heterosexual norms.”³⁸ While the American home was not “wholly male,” it was male dominated, and with men away fighting the war, a communal home - led by multiple women - must have raised eyebrows for those, like Keefe, invested in and protective of traditional morality and the domestic sphere.

Conversely, the communal/regimented home and woman was also depicted as having the potential for reinforcing unbridled and unscrupulous male heterosexual privilege. Keefe, for instance, pointed to birth control as a tool of regimentation. As women are encouraged to join the labor force, driven by “every inducement...to influence women to leave their homes” - finally culminating in the draft - the government and corporations must ensure that productivity is kept high, and that women do not return home.³⁹ According to this testimony, women must be kept from becoming pregnant, for it invariably meant their return to the home and the cessation of their industrial productivity. Keefe’s initial evidence and testimony was more or less sound - noting that the former chairman of the US Shipping Board, A. D. Lasker, had donated a significant sum to the “Birth Control Federation of America” (BCFA, now Planned Parenthood) for the purposes of “[winning] the war by curbing illness among war workers.” It is, of course, understandable that those interested in productivity might be less so in ‘reproductivity;’ but in apocalyptic rhetoric characteristic of this testimony, Keefe asserted that the government and

³⁸ Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women’s Army Corps During World War II*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). 153; *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Bernice St. Clair for the Women’s League for Political Education.

³⁹ This is an interesting and gendered critique of private industry coming from the right. Other testimony demonstrates a profound admiration for private industry, and an utter disdain for government/bureaucratic regulation of such industry.

corporations have deemed motherhood to be a “disease,” something to be treated and prevented.⁴⁰ Ignoring all other possible issues of reproductive health that the BCFA might have dealt with, Keefe honed in on what threatened her most: the devaluation of her cherished role as a mother. Amid the excitement and anger of her testimony, then, is a deep gendered status anxiety informed by a belief that motherhood was being deemed less valuable, productive, and in this time of war, less patriotic, than industrial labor.

The opposition to the bill, in a powerful example that captures the emotional tenor of the testimony, constructed the apocalyptic results: that motherhood would be disparaged beyond repair. Citing an apparent authority on the subject of birth control, Keefe asserted a vision of sexual dystopia with rampant male sexual privilege. The authority, “Canon Jackman of London,” begins:

*The woman who practices birth control and prevention can be put upon the industrial market very successfully. Indeed she tends more and more to supplant man. The ultimate tendency of this would seem to be what has happened in some pagan nations. In those nations the man tends more to be polygamous living in a leisure supported by his womankind.*⁴¹

Three things are made clear from Keefe’s choice to present this quote: firstly, she believed that women are replacing man as the default wage-laborer. Already this is problematic, for scholars have long noted that a vital component of patriarchy is the image of the male as the breadwinner, earning wages for the security of his family. This is one of several reasons why a female investment in patriarchy occurs - it is an economic privilege granted to females as part of their

⁴⁰ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Grace G. Keefe for the Women’s League for Political Education.

⁴¹ Qtd. in *ibid.*

subordination to the male in the public and private spheres.⁴² Secondly, Keefe believed that this economic inversion allows for male domination without any of the benefits and privileges the gender order provided mothers and women. Women will become the breadwinners, while men maintained traditional domination, gaining economic privilege heretofore reserved for women and mothers. Thirdly, Keefe implicitly tied together her concerns over the devaluation of motherhood - as a result of birth control and regimentation - with polygamy and the enhancement of male sexual privilege. Let there be no mistake: Keefe, armed with Jackman's writings, asserted that the creation of polygamous harems, serving the every economic and sexual need of men, awaited should the Austin-Wadsworth Bill pass. For Keefe, there was a clear pattern and cycle here: motherhood is denigrated through the meddling of the state and through the regimentation of women, which results in female-wage labor and an absence of motherhood, further degrading the position of the female and weakening the vision of the male breadwinner. Birth control is distributed to prevent motherhood, now considered a "disease," thus opening another untapped channel of male privilege: sexual freedom from monogamy, marriage, and child-rearing.⁴³ Thus, a vision of a sexual and pagan dystopia was developed, one in which women are taken out from under the sexual and economic umbrella of monogamy and motherhood, and left to service males no longer responsible for sexual consequences.

The scholarship of Leisa Meyer has demonstrated clearly that among the fears surrounding women in the service, beliefs that members of the Women's Army Corps would

⁴² Men who did not provide this particular female privilege were deemed less-than masculine. Of course, women who were not of the middle or upper crust, especially non-White, immigrant, or poor White women, this particular privilege was not available, speaking to the class and racial dynamics of the gender order. For a discussion on masculinity as tied to the image of the breadwinner, as well as the class and racial aspects of patriarchy, see Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*; for a discussion on the class and racial makeup of right-wing women, the American public's views on women's work, and the extent to which right-wing women saw themselves as requiring breadwinners, see June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-Wing Politics, 1933-1945*. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

⁴³ This perception of sexual liberation/freedom as drastically favoring males is, as always, nothing new. Susan B. Anthony, for instance, criticized fellow suffragette Victoria Woodhull - an advocate of free love - as playing right into the hands of men who - wished to reap the pleasure of love without the consequences or responsibilities of children. For a discussion on the politics of free love within the women's suffrage movement, see Amanda Frisken, "Sex in Politics: Victoria Woodhull as an American Public Woman, 1870-1876." *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 1 (2000): 89-111. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

serve as prostitutes/be sexually vulnerable for/to GI's was widespread.⁴⁴ This fear was carried over to all forms of regimentation, implicitly in Keefe's testimony, and far more explicitly with Mary Tappendorf. One historian noted Tappendorf as claiming that what government really wanted from women was "SEX...they tell [the boys in the army] they'll go insane without it. The administration has sold out the flower of our womanhood."⁴⁵ Ms. Laura Bernice Bengé described just how the sexual exploitation of regimented women might occur: women being placed "under the complete supervision of men" - which she linked to the fantasy of nationalization of women - would be extraordinarily vulnerable to the sexual whims of males. In Bengé's vision, it need not be the officers that cause the problems: providing an anecdotal example in which "two military police who made themselves very obnoxious" to women on a train by virtue of their claimed military authority, she insisted that - were these women drafted via the Austin-Wadsworth Bill - they would be forced to submit to the MP's without any civilian due process. It would be easy, Bengé claimed, for such unscrupulous men to "frame" the women, who would be entirely "without recourse." While there is no explicit reference to demands for sex, Bengé follows up with an expression of concern about the "lowered moral tone" among women workers.⁴⁶ It is clear, given her linkage of the issue to "nationalization" and its attendant sexual connotations- coupled with an environment in which female military service was an issue imbued with sexual meaning - that Bengé articulated a fear of male sexual privilege asserted in the context of military control.

Previous scholarship on the Austin-Wadsworth Bill has demonstrated that a broad coalition of pacifist, liberal, and maternalist women expressed anxiety regarding the placement

⁴⁴ Meyer, *Creating GI Jane*. 33, 39, and 41.

⁴⁵ Qtd in Benowitz, *Days of Discontent*, 115.

⁴⁶ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Laura Bernice Bengé for the Mothers and Sons Forum of Ohio.

of women under direct male supervision outside the home. They argued, however, that women's conscription and/or military service would be a setback to women's equality in the public sphere, claiming that the men who found themselves in control of these new female subordinates would exercise the same patriarchal control over them that fathers and husbands once wielded.⁴⁷ Note the absence of sexual vulnerability in this more liberal critique; both critiques demonstrate an anxiety about loss of status, but only the right-wing version of this "male supervision" complaint encompasses fears regarding sexual privilege. Certainly, the women on the right feared the risks of *outside, non-domestic* male control, and its risks to their sexual respectability - i.e., male supervision and protection (or lack thereof) outside heterosexual monogamy. They did not, however, infuse their rhetoric with concerns about female bondage within private patriarchal systems. For the far-right women opposing Austin-Wadsworth, it was not freedom from patriarchal control that concerned them - rather, it was being placed under public control without the auspices of domestic male protection that frightened them. This critique thus illustrates how profoundly the issues of sexual respectability were tied into considerations of women's relationship with the state, and more broadly with the ongoing conversation about the status that inhered in their sexual inviolability.

The opposition also imagined profound moral chaos within the new 'regimented' spaces women labored or lived in. Spaces in which women congregated under auspices of the state - or really anything other than something pertaining to domesticity - were 'regimented,' for they removed women from the respectability of the home and placed them within the grasp of the public. To be 'regimented' was to be under the thumb of the state and therefore vulnerable,

⁴⁷ Holly Stovall, "Resisting Regimentation." 490-491. It was Mildred Olsted, a leader in the Committee to Oppose the Conscription of Women, that expressed fears that conscription efforts would tend to "sexual discrimination" against female draftees: "Women cannot be persuaded that labeling such legislation 'equality' will alter the fact that it is a return by an indirect route to the old bondage from which they have so recently freed themselves." Olmsted make that statement in response to the claims of one liberal commentator that the draft was a "tool of women's equality."

making the likelihood of sexual immorality far greater. The Mothers and Sons Forum illustrated this point when they claimed to be aware of “the immorality going on in girls’ camps and in defense plants,” presumably referring in the former case to the WACS (or perhaps to Mrs. Roosevelt’s communal kitchens), and to both current and future defense laborers in the latter. For Mahler, God’s laws demanded that “decent men protect their women and homes from being despoiled,” demonstrating once again a preoccupation with male defense of female virtue.⁴⁸ Clearly, there was a measure of hysteria about sex and sexual privilege and permeates any discussion involving women’s subordination to the government, whether in the barracks or the industrial factory. The right’s assault on regimented motherhood was informed by the same nightmarish visions of sexual exploitation that permeated conservative discourse regarding women in the military. Furthermore, these dialogues can once again be credited to a gendered status anxiety, for women like Keefe, Tappendorf, and Mahler insisted upon the sexual inviolability of American women and mothers. The state, by degrading motherhood and eroding female/maternal privilege, had allowed women to become sexually vulnerable, both to the whims of the state and to men no longer burdened by sexual responsibility. Thus, resistance to the bill was a defense of sexual status, a call for the maintenance of sexual protection that they perceive as vital to their respectability as American women.

The gender anxiety surrounding the notions of communal kitchens, lesbianism, and the nationalization of women is best understood when examined along with a more overtly political element to their opposition: anti-communism/radicalism. More specifically, their vision of the gender order, or lack thereof, in a communist society led them to present images of the communist or radical woman, in implicit contrast with respectable, American womanhood.

⁴⁸ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Josephine Mahler for the Mothers and Sons Forum.

Agnes Waters, for instance, perhaps the most aggressively anti-communist in her rhetoric, made it clear that gender anxieties had galvanized her dedication to far right causes. Describing her visit to a meeting of radicals, Waters noted tellingly that “the place was black with anarchists, principally women who looked like men.”⁴⁹ This association of radical, liberal, or communist women with unflattering or masculine physical traits is not at all an uncommon theme in conservatism, and speaks to the intensive gendering of political ideology among the mothers opposed to Austin-Wadsworth. Previous scholarship has demonstrated the potency of such negative imagery in the context of women’s political activities, especially those activities conservatives deemed subversive or radical. The red scare of the 1920’s, for instance, witnessed various media mainstream media outlets refer to either foreign or domestic “communists,” “bolsheviks,” or “radicals” as “short haired,” “leather jacketed,” and ultimately lacking the “gentleness,” “respectability” or even “mental stability” that made up “the heart of fine womanhood.”⁵⁰

Key to the internal logic here is that femininity - and thus, the entitlement to protection it entails - emerges as a result of adherence to proper domestic ideology. Those who hold “improper” views are more or less literally ‘unsexed’ as a result of their corruption. Speaking at a rally hosted by the Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania in April of 1942 (name changed in 1943 to the National Blue Star Mothers) - a rally in which resolutions against Austin-Wadsworth were read aloud - Agnes Waters described the “horrible...great, heavy-set Russian Cossack military-looking women” in attendance at yet another subversive meeting she had “infiltrated.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother’s Association.

⁵⁰ Qtd in Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 32.

⁵¹ Jacob H. Gomborow Papers, Temple University Special Collections Research Center. Collection ID: SCRC 246. Series 1: Police Work, 1909-195. Box 1, Folder 69, “Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, 1942-1943.” Note: The National Blue Star Mothers are not to be confused with the Blue Star Mothers of America, members of which volunteered in the war effort and raised money for veterans, and who resented fiercely the Crusading Mothers for having chosen a name so similar to their own. Glen Jeansonne,

The self-appointed champions of domesticity and democracy never made it quite clear if these qualities that *led* such “horrible” women to subversive ideology, or if the ideology itself transformed the women. In either case, the mothers whose opposition to Austin-Wadsworth was based on both the belief that the bill was communist and that it threatened respectable femininity provided an image of physical vulnerability as stark as their vision of lesbianism or harems. Note the use of the phrase “military-looking” in the description: in the context of a raging debate over the imposition of military and state discipline over women, there can be no clearer link between regimentation and a physical ‘defeminization’ than in this image of subversive women.

There is a contradiction brewing here, however: in one vision, regimented women are physically vulnerable to unconstrained male sexuality, females as extensions of the state - or regimented women - are used for the sexual gratification of the male. There is no defeminization found here, only the abuse and degradation of femininity. In the vision presented at the rally, the women who have given themselves to regimentation are unsexed or were unsexed to begin with. It is not clear how both dystopian images can exist simultaneously, for they though they perceive men as a threat in this regimented world, they also define what men enjoy and expect out of their females. The “frilly little apron” is nowhere to be found on these “cassock” women, and so it might be presumed that unsexed women are no longer sexually vulnerable. Regardless, the latter vision feeds into the gendered status anxiety present in the former vision. To be unsexed in this view is to be part of a indistinguishable mass of militarized women, potentially unwanted and lacking any respectability or the attendant privileges given to “true womanhood.”

Indeed, this “mass” of women was situated or conceived of in worlds far beyond the safety of domestic life that the status of maternal citizenship inhered in. Waters, for instance,

Women of the Far Right. 49-50. The views and character of the Crusading Mothers organization will be discussed in the next sections of the essay.

placed her anarchists and communists in unspecified episodes of chaos and violence, describing “women” with their “heads cracked open on the sidewalks,” and “fighting the mounted police on the streets.”⁵² Waters presents these moments as seminal in her decision to consecrate her life to the fight against subversive ideology, and through the lens of status anxiety this is absolutely consistent. It was gendered chaos of the most literal sort that drew her ire precisely because she perceived the demise of her idealized womanhood in its results: the women she witnessed fighting the police - communist women she undoubtedly perceived as unsexed - were bloodied in a confrontation with a state that had ceased to protect them. Little wonder then that the women opposing Austin-Wadsworth appealed so strongly to the respectable images of their motherhood as a defense against the government’s intrusions. Though they no doubt believed the state was correct in its use of violence to crack down against subversives, the fact that *women* were involved in such made them anxious. In fact, Waters used the word “victims” to describe at least the women whose heads lay open, indicating perhaps a profound discomfort with their gender involved in any such confrontation with either the coercive power of the state or violence in general.⁵³ Thus, one dimension of her thinking opposes ‘subversion’ because it victimizes women and renders them vulnerable.

Feminist theory has long noted that western discourse has constructed a perception of female violence or relationship to violence as essentially abnormal. The main thrusts of western discourse about women and violence are the following: women are “disorderly” by nature, tend to impose a personalization, “vindictive[ness],” or chaos on violence that society finds discomfoting. Ultimately, male violence could be “idealized” and “ordered,” while female violence could not. Female “disorder” was restrained in private sphere; conscription or

⁵² Waters refers to the former as simply “women,” and the latter as “communist women.” *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother’s Association.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

regimentation drew them out from the private sphere into the public, where their natural inclination for ‘disorder’ would prevent them from “taking” to regimentation. More importantly, the public sphere was a place of “accountability” and since women, in their capacity as fully “private figures,” were not meant to be so exposed to the law. Thus, women being beaten on the streets was not only reinforcement of “disorder,” but was a profoundly threatening notion to those who conceived of women as essentially ‘non-public’ individuals, not meant to be truly subject to the state in the same way men were.⁵⁴ Furthermore, regimentation need not only mean the imposition of state authority; Waters describes Communist women as “militarized,” and therefore the women fighting mounted police were regimented in a different sense, exposed to violence as a result of their militant ideology.

Though the women testifying against Austin-Wadsworth were equally ‘exposed’ to and participating in the public sphere by virtue of their very public activities, they did not understand this as hypocrisy: a “maternalist conception of citizenship” ideologically enables mothers, with their motherhood and domesticity as a shield, to enter the public sphere to preserve their domestic space.⁵⁵ Armed with the respectability of ‘true womanhood,’ right-wing women did not perceive themselves as “exposed” in the same way “militarized” communist women were. Indeed, it was only without their very loud voices in the public sphere that they would be rendered vulnerable, their status reduced to that of the “exposed” woman lying on the sidewalk with her head cracked open. Ultimately, an analytical framework that includes long-held “discourses” on women and their relationship to the public sphere provides us with a deeper understanding of the ways in which gender anxieties played a role within anti-communism, and its linkage to opposition to Austin-Wadsworth.

⁵⁴ Stovall, “Resisting Regimentation.” 493-94.

⁵⁵ Plant, *Mom*. 25.

“It is the Hand that Rocks the Cradle that Rules the World”: Motherhood and “Idleness”

The testimony demonstrates the extent to which these mothers saw their roles as the selfless and devoted nurturers for the entire nation. Articulating a classic vision of maternalism, one embedded in the survival of Christianity, American culture, and the morals of the next generation, the women testifying against the Austin-Wadsworth Bill perceived the demise of respect for their self-sacrifice. Helene Johnson, for instance, articulated a vision of a regimented world typical of testimony against the bill: “our women will be making munitions or performing the drudgery of farm work or menial labor,” she begins, her tone and word choice revealing her sense that women ought to be preserved from this sort of work. Just as fellow Women’s Leaguer Bernice St. Clair proclaimed GI’s to be “too respectful” of their mothers to condemn them to regimentation - and declared the fundamental mission of US soldiers to be the defense of the home and the mother from slavery - Johnson made it clear that the work the Austin-Wadsworth Bill might require of mothers and daughters is beneath them.⁵⁶

The opposition to the bill linked this notion of drudgery to a regimentation and degradation of motherhood that resulted in a cultural dystopia. Johnson, for instance, continued on to claim that:

*Schools can be abolished and higher education for the masses will no longer be necessary, since the girls must only learn to do physical labor and the boys will be instructed in the use of armaments. We will all wear uniforms, and the drab days will follow the drab nights in sequence, unless right now some courageous Cicero in Congress will arise...*⁵⁷

It is clear from her testimony that Johnson saw the subordination of motherhood to state and corporate interests as draining away the warmth and color of the nation. There was no room in

⁵⁶ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Helene Johnson for the Women’s League for Political Education.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* Note also the appeal to male assistance here - ‘won’t you protect American womanhood,’ is the implicit question.

this vision for the idealized sort of mother these women believe themselves to be, no room “mother-love” and certainly no room for its “beautiful” and “primitive instincts” to shine through.⁵⁸ As manual labor supersedes education - presumably both moral and otherwise - and the burden on women is shifted from moral and cultural uplift to industry, the nation would be overrun by a uniformity, no doubt meant to call up images of communism and fascism.

Those opposed to the bill also expressed significant resentment that their martyr-like motherhood was deemed insufficient - that they were being asked to give more despite having given so much already. In a particularly clear example of such resentment, Grace G. Keefe questioned why congress “not content with taking their sons...now proposes to take the mothers,” and to heap unfathomable “indignities” upon them despite their sacrifice.⁵⁹ In this view, part of the many sacrifices intrinsic to motherhood is surrendering the son to fight; there is a dialogue of sacrifice in this view, between soldier, mother, and government that the Austin-Wadsworth Bill is interfering with. For these women, the maternal role necessitates sacrifice: “[mothers] have been willing to subordinate their talents and voluntarily serve...to bear and rear the nation’s manhood, with no thought of material compensation,” Keefe asserted, thereby creating a moral and economic imperative to defend motherhood.⁶⁰

The notion of “giving up” one’s sons and husbands for the sake of the country was quite prevalent among these mothers. Agnes Waters, for instance, spoke for all when she claimed to have “voluntarily...laid down on the altar of liberty...the costliest hostages to fortune.” Such mawkish oratory is well established historically; mothers were supposed to “bind” their sons “with silver cords of love” to their homes, a bond of pure warmth nurturing the growth of the

⁵⁸ Qtd in Plant, *Mom.* 4.

⁵⁹ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Grace G. Keefe for the Women’s League for Political Education.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

nation's future.⁶¹ This sentimentality functions here as the ultimate defense of patriotism: mothers claimed the same emotional attachment to their sons that theoretically were at play in the sons desire to defend the nation. Waters' was therefore claiming not only a share of the respect entitled to the citizen soldier, but a sort of ownership of the sentiment that caused men to fight. The mothers thus seemed, in a war in which many men were conscripted, to vacillate between whether or not to place emphasis on the state having "taken" their sons, or mothers having "given" their sons. Both served as arguments for protection against the state, but there lies a subtle difference in power dynamics between the two: in the former case, the mothers could present the state as overbearing and thus signal its need to be contained; in the latter, they signaled their influence over their sons and emphasized their own generosity to the state and public.

That said, these two points of emphasis sometimes clashed with the mothers' avowed opposition to the FDR administration and its entrance into the war. Speaking at the same Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania Rally mentioned earlier, Waters chose to start the proceedings with a prayer: "Judge me, O God, and plead my cause against an unholy nation," setting the tone for the evening as the members and guests listened to Waters describe "Stop Hitler" and "Aid to Great Britain" meetings as "packed with communists" without a genuine Christian in sight.⁶² Clearly, she viewed the war as a morally questionable enterprise, and the country headed by the sacrilegious (and therefore communist) and deceitful. The U.S. engagement in the war was more or less a betrayal for these women, the result of a government

⁶¹ Plant, *Mom*, 2.

⁶² Jacob H. Gomborow Papers, Temple University Special Collections Research Center. Collection ID: SCRC 246. Series 1: Police Work, 1909-195. Box 1, Folder 69, "Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, 1942-1943." Glen Jeansonne notes that the Crusading/National Blue Star Mothers straddled the line between being pro-Nazi and simply being opposed to war with them. Several key leaders in the organization were utterly hostile to Jews, ethnic or religious minorities, and progressives/liberals, believing them to be either avowed communists, ruled by communists, or at least infiltrated by communists. Their isolationism was a part of their anti-communist/anti-semitic philosophy, believing the war to be for the benefit of communists or Jewish banking interests. For more on the Crusading Mothers, see Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*. 49-50.

that baited Japan into attacking us all for the sake of various and alternating but undoubtedly nefarious goals: for Britain's colonial empire, for Jewish and Communist interests, or for the broader destruction of American democracy and nation in favor of a communist "World Government"⁶³ Thus, Waters ended the rally by cautioning the women there that "you needn't think [they] are being real patriotic letting your son go out into that ocean," and asked mothers to investigate the real causes and status of the war.

How is such a statement to be reconciled with the mothers' claims to being patriotic by virtue of their giving up their sons for the nation? Simply put, it cannot be. Waters and her maternalist ilk oppose Austin-Wadsworth on the grounds that it diminishes motherhood and its many patriotic sacrifices, and invoke the imagery of Abraham's surrendering of his son to God to compare their surrender of their sons to the nation. Demanding respect and protection on the basis of this sacrifice, they must nonetheless contend with their belief that the state had cruelly stolen their sons for an unjust cause, and to have "let them go out" was no great patriotic act. Keeping with the advice of Kim Phillips-Fein to acknowledge the "bizarre, unusual, or unsettling" in studying the American right, I add the addendum that historians should not impose a rationality or consistency upon the "bizarre" elements they uncover. Too many times have historians smoothed over contradictions or worked to understand the internal logic of far right movements without acknowledging that it simply isn't logical at all. Mothers cannot both "lay down their sons at the altar of liberty" and meanwhile "[let their sons] go out into the ocean" for

⁶³ Agnes Waters poses the question "what right did he [FDR] have to give an ultimatum to the Emperor of Japan," presumably referring to the various diplomatic actions that denied Japan access to oil unless they withdrew from certain actions in East and Southeast Asia. Waters believed that FDR had basically maneuvered the Japanese into attacking the United States as a "false flag" method of garnering support for a war to assist Great Britain. What's interesting here is that Waters, as an ardent opponent of "internationalism" or anything that appeared to reduce the sovereignty of the United States, saw the diplomatic actions of the president as illegal and wrong when in fact they were exercises of American sovereignty. Waters' loathing of the FDR administration is clear - she favors the rights of foreign nations when it comes to his diplomacy, but fears the United States' apparent vulnerability to takeover and blames this vulnerability on the president. The women testifying against the bill express similar sentiments: that the war was a costly and nefarious decision that damaged democracy and American sons. Jacob H. Gomborow Papers, Temple University Special Collections Research Center. Collection ID: SCRC 246. Series 1: Police Work, 1909-195. Box 1, Folder 69, "Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, 1942-1943;" *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother's Association.

a government that “know[s] where to send your sons to destroy them.”⁶⁴ As historians, we must discard the notion that to ‘call out’ instances of irrationality or inconsistency in politics is ‘lacking objectivity’ simply because we might disagree with the movements and people studied.

Rational or otherwise, the women articulated another claim on the soldierhood of the United States in their broader assertion of the right to protected from state interference or regimentation. The soldiers who enlisted, they argued - whether ‘given up’ or ‘taken’ - were fighting to protect their mothers, wives, daughters, and the home. Thus, the government was betraying the very efforts of their men, and were ultimately voiding what I refer to as a “protection transaction” that was supposed to have been enacted: the mother has raised the son, and is therefore entitled to the protection of both the state and her children (now soldiers) for the most noble and vital services performed. The state is meant to accord respect for mothers by leaving the family alone, allowing children to be raised unimpeded. Indeed, one Grace G. Keefe attempted to demonstrate this by quoting English Philosopher Gilbert K. Chesterton, whose book *What’s Wrong With the World* describes “sex and childbirth [as never being] inside the state, but always outside,” women as “dominant” within that private sphere, and that sphere as “better governed...because it is not governed at all.”⁶⁵ This is the second part of the transaction - the state is bound to non-intervention out of their deference to mothers, the family unit, and the nature of democracy itself. Instead of the protection *of* the state, this latter part of the deal specified protection *from* the state, who could only diminish the efficiency and results of the maternal sphere. The labor draft proposal, then, is seen as a clear breach of protocol: the state’s demanding of more labor of its mothers was economic folly and disrespect that bordered, in the words of Keefe, on “madness,” for what nation “would discard the freely given labor and

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ qtd. in Ibid.

sacrifice” of mothers, especially given that they produced the soldiers the government relied upon.⁶⁶

As noted, the state was also betraying their soldiers by subverting what they were purportedly fighting for: “imagine these young sons,” Keefe exclaimed, “fighting to defend - well, just what? A job in a factory, or a place as a field hand for the mother who bore them, who worked and saved and sacrificed to rear them?”⁶⁷ For Keefe, the Austin-Wadsworth Bill was a double blow - mothers were enslaved and degraded, their roles no longer respected or seen as valuable, and their sons - willingly given away to battle by mothers - had nothing to return home to. A clear example of maternalist-driven status anxiety, women like Keefe, Johnson, and St. Clair saw their selfless and “beautiful instincts” as being exploited in the short-term, and undervalued in the long term. Sensing their prestige on the wane, these mothers posed an implicit question to their government: “haven’t we given enough?”

Further testimony illustrates the extent to which these mothers felt their patriotism called into question. It is at this point critical to provide some context for these anxieties, for they neither emerged in a vacuum nor were they developed in response purely to wartime legislation. One historian has provided a useful framework for an analysis of maternal anxiety through her study of “moral motherhood” and “Mother Love,” intertwined concepts that held mothers to be a most prolific source of both civic and moral virtue.⁶⁸ This conception of motherhood is clearly identifiable within the testimony, and needs no reiteration. But the mothers opposing the bill are not simply beset by legislation - their opposition is situated amid a heated cultural examination of motherhood, one that threatened to diminish the status of mothers in the same way that the opposition believed regimentation would. This exchange, along with the ebb of moral

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Plant, Mom. 2.

motherhood, is personified in Philip Wylie and his notorious publication, *Generation of Vipers*. Wylie's text includes within it a chapter seemingly dedicated to excoriating the many aspects of moral motherhood, but one critique stands out as particularly relevant for an analysis of motherhood and Austin-Wadsworth: "the critique of female idleness."⁶⁹ Arguing essentially that middle-class mothers in an era of unprecedented comfort, wealth, and automation deeply exaggerated the level of sacrifice required of their role - making their demands for respect, gratitude, and protection absurd - Wylie would no doubt have seen Keefe's lamentations regarding being put to work in a factory after years of maternal devotion and Christ-like agony as bemusing.⁷⁰ Interestingly, Keefe stressed not only her sacrifices, but also that she had "subordinated [her] talents" for the sake of motherhood. Keefe therefore insisted that her role - as noble, productive, and laborious as it was - prevented her from taking up other activities that might be of use. Wylie's work, published in 1942 (just a few months before the Austin-Wadsworth Bill was put forth), contextualizes Keefe's comments - perhaps her insistence upon her stifled alternative productivity was given with this critique in mind. Regardless, the vast majority of the women who testified against the bill made sure to include in their statements a defense of their productivity and patriotism, believing that the bill's demands for factory and farm labor implicitly deemed their motherhood less than productive, and perhaps even idle.

The testimony sometimes bucked against the idleness critique quite explicitly, and several women lamented its use as not only offensive, but a distraction to enlarge the scope of government. Mrs. Florence Griesel, for instance, asked rhetorically "where are the idle women?" while her companion, Helene Johnson, asserted that she knew "where the surplus women are...in

⁶⁹ Ibid., 32.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 32-33.

[the] war plants.”⁷¹ While these women may not have necessarily approved of the war, nor of the women working in the plants, they were willing to use their presence in industry as a shield against demands for their own labor. Griesel couched her rejection of the idleness critique in very personal terms, in anecdotes that revealed a measure of economic anxiety. Describing the dearth of female labor available for her bakery, she facetiously asked the government to send some women her way, as she was unaware of any labor that had not already been driven to the factories. Claiming regular communications with hundreds of women laboring for the war effort, she insisted that the government's purported need for more was a thinly veiled means of enlarging state domination, a lie that perverted and manipulated patriotic sentiments.

Curiously, one among the opposition seemed to have embraced the notion of women's idleness: Bernice St. Clair, previously noted for her vigorous defense of gender roles and for asserting that soldiers would be expecting upon their return their women to be in “frilly little aprons,” claimed that the death of her husband had catapulted her out of the “smug, complacent attitude which has so often characterized the average American wife and mother.”⁷² This is perhaps the most Wylie-esque statement to emerge within the idleness critique, and serves to highlight the the importance of motherhood's broader cultural context in the period. But St. Clair did not take her motherhood, domesticity, or rearing of children to be idle - rather, she perceived her lack of political activity in the *defense of her home and children* to be idle. Claiming to be made aware of the “tremendous responsibility thrust upon [her],” St. Clair outlined her increasing participation in “patriotic organizations” that sought to prevent US entrance into

⁷¹ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Florence H. Griesel and Helene Johnson for the Women's League for Political Education.

⁷² *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) (Bernice St. Clair, Testimony of Bernice St. Clair for the Women's League for Political Education).

WWII and its inevitable destruction to her sons and her home.⁷³ Now that men and boys were being destroyed abroad, and women and the country were faced with the “final act of regimentation,” it was up to the mothers of the nation to resist what the government tried to convince its citizens were necessary and temporary war measures. The particular war measure St. Clair was testifying against was only “necessary” because motherhood wasn’t enough, a notion she soundly rejected. Thus, even the one instance of testimony that seems to have internalized Wylie’s “momism” critique subverts its claim that American motherhood was fundamentally overstated in its righteousness. For the mothers opposing the bill, motherhood and mother love - in its desire to protect and sanctify the home from “totalitarian” efforts - was every bit the patriotic force that wartime volunteerism was.⁷⁴

In response to the belief that their patriotism was being questioned, the mothers opposed to the bill articulated a particularly cynical view of a wartime patriotism as tainted by self-interest, one that includes a critique that descends from the state level and onto private enterprise and personal greed. Johnson alleges that the women in war plants truly are surplus, for they are actually idle in their employment, doing nothing more than cavorting around with their coworkers in the factory’s bathrooms.⁷⁵ While it’s not immediately clear to whom Johnson refers when she claims that “they will do everything to get some money” - the companies controlling the war plants or the women “working” in them - it is clear that Johnson is offering her own idleness critique in response to the one she sees residing in the Austin-Wadsworth Bill.⁷⁶ Rather than denigrating those women who are engaged in domestic or home-based activities, the state

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Johnson refers to those who “will do everything” immediately after referencing women “smoking in washrooms,” but the line is situated in a broader critique of war-profiteering from the likes of Chrysler and Buick. This critique was prevalent in the wake of the First World War. For a discussion on the relationship of the right to isolationism, see Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right*; for a discussion on the relationship of gender to isolationism, see Laura McEnaney “He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism.” *Diplomatic History* 18, no. 1 (1994): 47-57.

(if this weren't a transparent power-grab, of course) ought to turn its attention to those companies and women profiting off and subverting calls for patriotic labor. Apparently tired of war-profiteering factories and their idle women being seen as exemplars of productivity and patriotism, Johnson went on to insist that they would be the ruin of the country and the deaths of U.S. soldiers abroad. Their charade and refusal to "look ahead of the salaries," she argues, would not only encourage the government to regiment women further, but also doom the nation to truly parasitic enterprises and individuals. In the most telling section of her speech, she demands to know "why in the world should we fight for a country that does not think enough of its people to take care of them in the home?" For Johnson, the government's implicit critique of her domestic activities is the ultimate betrayal, and so in self-defense she paints an image that accompanies her status as a moral mother, an image of one more concerned with the future of the nation and the children than profit.

It seems, however, that the representatives of the Women's League for Political Education could not decide on whether the women engaged in war labor were engaging in war profiteering on a micro scale, or if they were overburdened victims of the state. The League adopted a resolution, submitted to the congressional record that "challenging the proponents of [the Austin-Wadsworth Bill] to point out where the so-called idle women exist." Asserting that they could not possibly be among the women on farms "carrying double burdens," or among the city women "working day and night," the resolution departed from Johnson's earlier image of women lazing about and smoking cigarettes.⁷⁷ It would appear the League was willing to employ contradictory arguments against the idleness critique; one would conjure up images of women desperately trying to fulfill both state and domestic obligations (no doubt the "double burden"

⁷⁷ Resolutions adopted on March 2, 1943, at 1402 West Sixty-fourth Street, Chicago, Illinois. These resolutions were submitted to the congressional record, and appear within Grace Keefe's testimony on behalf of the Women's League for Political Education. The Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania adopted similar resolutions on April 16th, 1942, at Reyburn Plaza, Pennsylvania.

referred to earlier); the other would present non-working mothers as transcending the desire for the mere material gain surrounding the war factories. It is not clear if the distinction between the two arguments is rooted in whether or not the working women are also mothers, but their final statement dealing with the idleness critique brings home their point that motherhood is necessary for the war effort: “will you find [the idle women] among the millions of mothers (...whose husbands are in service) whose first-born even now send the nation’s birth rate soaring?”⁷⁸ Reminding congress of women lacking their husband’s protection and assistance (and therefore not idle), they hoped to demonstrate that “compulsion” would detract from the “common sense” that the next generation was in need of real moms, not regimented workers.⁷⁹ Finally, Keefe laid out the consequences: the dearth of full time mothers will result in defenseless children, demonstrably unfit for service in the military.⁸⁰ Raising the spectre of a weakened and emasculated country, these objections make clear the mothers’ perceived role in the transactions of citizenship and prestige with the state: mothers would provide the nation with soldiers, and in exchange those soldiers would defend the mothers that wrought their soldierhood.

“When They Wanted Slaves”: Race and the Black Press

The testimony presented so far represents the perspectives of mothers who had not had to perform intensive manual labor outside the home. White, middle-class conservative women excluded from their maternalist conception of “respectable” citizenship those who did not fit their demographic and economic profile.⁸¹ Indeed, the question of who was or who was not eligible for protection from “slave labor” or “drudgery” depended for some of the women

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Grace G. Keefe for the Women’s League for Political Education.

⁸¹ For a discussion on the characteristics of women in the far right from the 1930’s to the 1940’s, see June Melby Benowitz, *Days of Discontent: American Women and Right-wing Politics, 1933-1945*. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002; see also, Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996. For a discussion on the ways in which conservative women ignored non-White or non-middle class concerns in their gendering of anti-statism, see Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*.

opposing the bill on race or nationality. Agnes Waters, for instance, the most virulently anti-semitic and racist woman of the witnesses, based her opposition in part on her belief that American soldiers were being betrayed by unpatriotic, “internationalist” efforts at serving other country’s needs before those of the United States. Referencing constantly examples of supposed treachery against US servicemen, including lend-lease for its supplying of other nations, Waters argued that the war effort was calculated to enforce scarcity to make bills like Austin-Wadsworth seem palatable to the public.⁸² While the FDR administration did the fighting and production for other countries, it was Americans - now American mothers - who were paying the price. Asserting that “below the Mexican border,” nations with “the most...food, peace, happiness, and everything,” were essentially idle in their neutrality, Waters proposed to remedy this allegedly unfair balance through nothing less than the complete colonization of Latin America. “My ancestors were kings of this earth,” she began, “and when they wanted slaves...[they] went out took somebody else’s people, they did not take their own.” Thus, Waters proposed to fly the “stars and stripes” above all Latin America, that they be “made to go out and fight” for themselves rather than allowing them to benefit from US jobs (in the Mexican case), or Lend Lease (for which Waters targeted Brazil, especially).⁸³

While Waters never explicitly mentioned the women or mothers of Latin America, her callous statements regarding slavery made it clear that she did not regard them as entitled to the same freedom from government interference or protection as White Americans. This point is borne out further by Waters’ stated belief that American men ought to be allowed, after being

⁸² *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother’s Association.

For a discussion on the gendered and pro-domesticity context of isolationism, opposition to lend-lease, or US intervention in European affairs, see McEnaney, “He-Men and Christian Mothers: The America First Movement and the Gendered Meanings of Patriotism and Isolationism.” *Diplomatic History* Vol 18, No. 1 (1994): 47-57. doi:10.1111/j.1467-7709.1994.tb00194.x. For an examination of right wing activism in opposition to interventionist policies, as well as the activities of Agnes Waters among them, see Glen Jeansonne, *Women of the Far Right: The Mothers’ Movement and World War II* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996).

⁸³ *Ibid.*

replaced by another man, to return home after “training” so as to tend his farm or household to prevent the “outrage [of] stripped farms...and [foreign] labor.”⁸⁴ The idea that the government owed its citizenry the return of American men, even in wartime, to produce for both the home and the soldier certainly reinforced the male breadwinner and protector ideal. Latin American women received no such consideration from Waters, however: if the US government was to have “slaves” or conscripts, she argued it should find them among the ungrateful, neutral nations content to enjoy the benefits of Lend-Lease. Waters had no compunction about substituting this sort of coercion from gender lines to those of race and nationality, something that would undoubtedly have subjected Latin American women to the same sorts of labor Waters and her ilk saw as degrading.

Given the rhetoric surrounding slavery and race, it is hardly surprising that the African-American reaction to the bill was distinctly negative, with opposition coming from numerous Black organizations all expressing comparable sentiments about the potential for a stark decrease in Black mobility, both social and physical. The anxieties of Black-Americans were distinct in that, of the many interests opposing the bill, theirs was based on the existence of a perpetual threat to their security, both economic, political, sexual, or otherwise. Racial discrimination, segregation, and the politics of racialized employment harried Blacks attempting to take advantage of the demand for labor and its attendant high wages, and many believed Austin-Wadsworth would only increase their hardship. For instance, one Edgar G. Brown, speaking for the United Negro Council, worried that the law would “perpetuate upon the negroes in the Southern States, peonage,” while the NAACP’s *The Crisis* publication variously decried the bill

⁸⁴ Ibid. Waters refers to “Mexicans” taking American jobs here, but the broader implication is that no foreign workers should be doing what Americans could be.

as “violat[ing] the 13th amendment,” as “an attack upon labor...and negroes,” and as a “forced labor act.”⁸⁵

What distinguishes these cries of opposition from those of the right-wing mothers is the historical legitimacy of Black fears: White, middle-class mothers really had no cause - other than unsubstantiated rumors from the USSR of women being forced into polygamy, harems, or sexual slavery of any kind - to fear government “coercion.” Black-Americans, on the other hand, had experienced in the post-slavery era decades worth of efforts to re-exert control over their labor and bodies. Edgar Brown’s testimony provides an example of such efforts within World War II:

*...one case in Jackson, Mississippi...when the [Federal] Government wanted to set up a plant to make bullets for the men who are fighting all over the world for democracy, [the] mayor objected to colored women being employed on the ground that it would inconvenience the local people who were able to pay three or four dollars a week for servants, and deprive them of the services of these colored women...*⁸⁶

First, this selection demonstrates, in a similar rhetorical strategy to that of the right-wing mothers, an insistence that African-American patriotism already exists, and yet is called into question. Instead of questioning the assumption that an untapped labor force of “idle” women existed, or denying their “idleness” by virtue of their special domestic roles, Black organizations admitted to there being a vast labor force available, but claimed it was discrimination that kept them from properly exercising their patriotism. The question posed to the government, then, was captured best by the title of an article published in *The People’s Voice*, a short-lived newspaper founded in New York dealing with African-American issues: “Why Compulsory Labor Draft

⁸⁵ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Edgar G. Brown for the United Negro Council.

⁸⁶ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee*, 78th Cong. (1943) Edgar G. Brown for the United Negro Council; *The Crisis*, April, May, and September, 1943. Appearing under various subheadings, including “Labor Conscription Bill Questioned,” “Forced Labor,” “Fight Labor Conscription Bill,” and “Forced Labor Again.” There are no listed authors or contributors to the sections these subheadings appeared in.

When Negro Manpower Is Going to Waste - Shackled by American Jim Crow?"⁸⁷ That same article, as well as numerous other articles published by the Black Press, summarized the testimony of NAACP head Walter White, who spoke to the need for Austin-Wadsworth and ultimately the FDR administration to be far stricter in both their language and actions regarding racial discrimination in employment.⁸⁸ To these leaders, the bill coerced them to perform labor they were attempting to perform in the free market, and worse, did nothing to stop the prejudice that blunted their patriotic efforts in the first place. To understand these anxieties about discrimination, some context will be necessary; we may now turn to back to Brown's testimony for an understanding of why Black labor in wartime was bound up with racial injustice.

The second portion of the Brown selection quoted, when situated in the context of African-American experience during the First World War, reveals the remarkably non-hysterical quality of their opposition. Racialized and gendered labor, like domestic servitude, has deep roots, and scholarship has recognized the extent to which Whites perceived such labor critical to the maintenance of the racial order and - in the case of the "people" Brown spoke of - to the maintenance of their economic privilege.⁸⁹ One scholar, tracing the development of a World War I measure to allot a portion of a soldier's pay directly to their dependents, especially their spouses. This measure was an especially dramatic boon for the dependents of Black servicemen in the south, who received from the allotments a larger salary than their labors typically provided them. For Black women, this meant being able to quit or avoid taking the domestic service or

⁸⁷ Adam Clayton Powell Jr., "Why Compulsory Labor Draft When Negro Manpower is Going to Waste - Shackled by American Jim Crow?" *The People's Voice*, April 10th, 1943. Found online via African American Newspapers, 1827-1998 collection on Readex Database, Archive of Americana Collection.

⁸⁸ Ibid. Examples of "other" Black Press papers picking up the story or sharing similar sentiments include the *Pittsburgh Courier* (Joe Shepard, April 10th, 1943), the *Chicago Defender* (George McRay, March 20th, 1943), and *The Crisis* (May, 1943).

⁸⁹ Kim Nielsen shines light on the ways in which anti-radical, anti-progressive, or anti-feminist women believed racial ordering and hierarchy to be just as critical as the gender order: "...argued that a health nation required adherence to a social order...Sometimes unstated, sometimes explicit, was the belief that racial hierarchies were part of that social order...belief that white households should be protected from federal incursion but that individual whites and the white-dominated federal government should be left free to intervene in the household governance of families of color." For the African-Americans protesting Austin-Wadsworth, it seemed that the federal government was indeed intervening on behalf wealthy individual whites. Nielsen, *Un-American Womanhood*, 9; Hickell, *War, Region, and Social Welfare*, 1385.

agricultural jobs that often characterized Black employment in that region. The government had inadvertently emancipated a number of Black dependents from their employers, and substituted this relationship with a direct link and dependence on the federal state.⁹⁰ The reaction to a citizenship and livelihood that did not require service to White households provoked a hostile reaction that revealed the existence of a race line in matters such as gender order and domesticity. Demanding the extension of a “work or fight” provision which would have required the recipients of the allotments to engage in some form of labor outside the home, the effort demonstrated that the domestic ideal of the male breadwinner and female caretaker was subordinated to economic privilege and the ideal of racial hierarchy. Numerous southern counties enacted miniature versions of such demands, noting the stress the absence of Black women placed on agriculture and White households.⁹¹ For the United Negro Council and other Black advocacy organizations, Austin-Wadsworth smacked of “work or fight,” and promised to maintain the illusion Brown critiqued in his testimony: that there existed an enormous, untapped labor pool of Black-Americans, neither working nor fighting, that required coercion to engage in the war effort.⁹² Just as Black women in the First World War protested work or fight on the grounds that they “refused to be classed parasites,” so too did the likes of Edgar Brown and Walter White revolt against that classification, declaring instead that the lack of protections for Black laborers would only encourage the real parasites, those who would profit off the exploitation of patriotic American citizens.⁹³ On the surface, this seems a replica of the right-wing mothers’ allegations of war profiteering, but their concern reflected their particular concern with the historical confinement of black labor to certain types of work. Thus, Black visions of

⁹⁰ K Walter Hickel, “War, Region, and Social Welfare.” *The Journal of American History* Vol 87, No. 4. (March 2001): 1362, 1364-65.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1387-88.

⁹² Indeed, one article referred to Austin-Wadsworth directly as “work or fight,” and NAACP head Walter White apparently referred to it as such in his testimony against the bill. See “Danger Seen In ‘Work Or Fight’ Bills: Return To Slavery In Dixie Feared,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 27th, 1943. Found via Proquest’s “Black Historical Newspapers” collection.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1389.

corrupt private enterprise and “work or fight” centered around the desire to preserve economic gains and escape the clutches of racialized labor.

Black-Americans believed that “Work or fight” threatened both their social and physical mobility. Of the concerns articulated, chief among them was the stifling of skilled Black labor, which would be channeled instead towards the menial and often degrading task of serving whites in agricultural and domestic capacities. Combined, the Black Press and testimony against Austin-Wadsworth by Black organizations constructed the process by which their labor would be regimented, devalued, and then confined: “Indistinguishable from slavery,” one writer argued, was the banning of strikes and the fining of those who refused to work for private industry. A slave was not able to decide when and where he worked, and if he refused he could be punished, or sent away from his family and community, a scenario they saw in the provision in the act that allowed the president to direct the selective service to supply the new draftees to a certain area of production.⁹⁴ The first part of the exploitation is complete: the worker has been regimented, unable to protest. The issue of “transferring” laborers, however, wasn’t only an issue when applied to Blacks: in fact, its application to Whites was equally disturbing for the reasons outlined in testimony by Walter White:

10,000 White workers could be...transferred to a southern community even tho [sic] there were...10,000 Negroes capable of fulfilling the job. A prejudiced draft board at the behest of a prejudiced employer who refused to hire [Negro labor] could then order 10,000 Negro workers to pick cotton tho [sic] they possessed the skills to work in industry.⁹⁵

In the same way that “work or fight” dealt with the dependants of Black servicemen refusing to work for the poor wages and conditions offered by white agriculturalists and households, so too

⁹⁴ George S. Schuyler, “Views and Reviews,” *The Pittsburgh Courier*, September 25th, 1943. Found via Proquest’s “Black Historical Newspapers” Collection. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202132723/71EC445CF68C4BADPQ/35?accountid=14524>

⁹⁵ A. C. Powell Jr., “Why Compulsory Labor Draft,” *The People’s Voice*, April 10th, 1943.

would Austin-Wadsworth offer White industry and agriculture the government sanctioned exploitation of unskilled Black labor. In this way, the second part of the process comes to be: the devaluation of black labor, wherein “a qualified Negro machinist,” hoping to secure a patriotic job working for an airplane factory in the north would be “classified a common field hand,” thus keeping him in perpetual economic and social bondage.⁹⁶

Finally, the Black press expressed concern over physical mobility and confinement. Noting the existence of significant Black movement from the south in what historians have come to term “the Second Great Migration,” Black leaders feared that Austin-Wadsworth was a thinly veiled attempt to prevent additional flight from the south, and even reverse what migration had already occurred.⁹⁷ Claiming to have access to a memorandum from Attorney General Francis Biddle indicating the desire to curb Black migration to relieve communities which “cannot absorb them, either on account of their physical limitations or cultural backgrounds,” the *Baltimore Afro-American* believed conscription intended to circumscribe Black labor. Offering a hypothetical scenario in which a man seeking to leave Mississippi for Detroit - a city rocked by an enormous racial violence just two months prior to the publication of this article - would be denied on the grounds that no more “absorption” could occur, and instead be forced to remain.⁹⁸ To make matters worse, an African-American man living in Detroit, they argued, could be shipped to the south to work as a field hand, with companies that preferred white labor simply requesting prejudiced draft boards to provide them with white labor transfers. Thus, the confinement aspect of the process was complete, with physical mobility, and its attendant opportunity for economic mobility, destroyed by the state and its refusal to protect its patriotic

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Thomas W. Copeland, Reviewed Work: “Making a Way out of No Way: African American Women and the Second Great Migration by Lisa Krissoff Boehm *The Oral History Review* 39, no. 1 (2012): 123-25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41440969>.

⁹⁸ Frank M. Davis, “Biddle’s Plan Real Threat to Freedom: Attorney General’s Anti-Migration Memorandum and National Service Bill Condemned,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, August 21st, 1943; H.W. Brands, *American Dreams: The United States Since 1945*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2011) 14.

Black citizenry. With Black labor regimented, devalued, and confined, Jim Crow will have succeeded in “turning [the] clock back 100 years.”⁹⁹

What is further notable about African-American resistance to Austin-Wadsworth is the lack of gender ideology present. Unlike the right-wing mothers, articles mention the gender-neutral aspect of the bill only in passing, and discuss it only in terms of potential racial prejudice. Only one column published in the *New York Amsterdam News* encouraged Black women specifically to study the bill, noting that the gender-neutrality “might break the traditional exclusion of negro women from industry,” while the same column published a week prior discusses the “double jeopardy based on race and sex” that afflicts working Black women in terms of “starvation wage[s]” and “prejudice.”¹⁰⁰ The author does not take up the cause of domesticity, and argues only for the existence of economic vulnerability bound up with race *and* gender. In a time in which respectability for black women is already scarce, and when “a greater percentage of negro women have always held jobs,” the author emphasized the more concrete realities of Black women “frozen by tradition and prejudice” rather than abstract visions of sexual or gender chaos.¹⁰¹ In the same vein, an article from the *Pittsburgh Courier* included the subtitle “Women Subjected to Conscription,” but notes only that the bill would require women aged 18 to 50 to register, and renders no further commentary regarding the special aspects of “subjection” as they applied to women. Instead, the article swiftly moves on to the “grave and threatening problem...of [putting millions] of negro adults in 12 southern states at the disposal of

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ M. Moran Weston, “Labor Forum,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 17th, 1943; and M. Moran Weston, “Labor Forum,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 24th, 1943. Both found via Proquest’s “Black Historical Newspapers” Collection. Apr. 17th: <https://search.proquest.com/news/docview/226067479/fulltextPDF/686FB1BF126D4A04PQ/1?accountid=14524> Apr. 24th: <https://search.proquest.com/docview/226036539/71EC445CF68C4BADPQ/14?accountid=14524>

¹⁰¹ M. Moran Weston, “Labor Forum,” April 17th, 1943.

the 1,641 local draft boards...not one of which has a single negro member.”¹⁰² The real threat perceived was neither gender chaos nor the female relationship to the state, but the failure of the federal state and the bill to secure *all* Black laborers against the whims of White industry and local government. Even the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority testified against the bill without emphasizing gender, noting only that it promised “conscript labor for the vested interests that own the factories and the big farms and the railroads,” damaging communities and lacking protections for Black laborers. It is important to note, however, that the “community damage” argument could be and most certainly was folded into gendered opposition to the bill by both right-wing and pacifist organizations; it is therefore possible that the *Chicago Defender* neglected to include aspects of their testimony centered around gender.¹⁰³ It seems unlikely, however, that a paper friendly to AKA’s cause would refuse to mention anything significant to their testimony, and far more likely - given what African-American opposition emphasized in the documentary record - that gender-based arguments were either negligible or non-existent in AKA’s testimony.¹⁰⁴ Ultimately, if programs like the allotments in the First World War - as well as the nascent welfare state present in the New Deal - indeed resulted in the development of a new “relationship” between Black-Americans and the federal state not seen since Reconstruction, then Austin-Wadsworth threatened to subvert and betray this relationship, allowing states to coerce Blacks into the unscrupulous hands of more powerful private citizens.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² “Danger Seen In 'Work Or Fight' Bills: Return To Slavery In Dixie Feared,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, March 27th, 1943. Found via Proquest’s “Black Historical Newspapers” collection. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202147010/71EC445CF68C4BADPQ/5?accountid=14524>

¹⁰³ “AKA Lobby Opposes Bill for War Labor Draft,” *Chicago Defender*, March 20th, 1943. Found via Proquest’s “Black Historical Newspapers” collection. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/492646347/71EC445CF68C4BADPQ/16?accountid=14524>

¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, access to Alpha Kappa Alpha’s documents or publications was not possible within a reasonable time frame. I have, therefore, only the *Defender* to rely on in this matter. Secondary literature on Black opposition to Austin-Wadsworth is scarce as well. Interested readers may find snippets within Joyce Blackwell’s *No Peace Without Freedom: Race and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1975*, in which she mentions AKA leader Bertha McNeill’s opposition to the bill. See page 106 for the reference.

¹⁰⁵ As noted, K. Walter Hickel speaks of a new “social citizenship” and “relationship” between Black-Americans and the Federal government as a result of the allotment bill. For more on Reconstruction after the U.S. Civil War and the notion of Black freedmen being brought into “federal spaces” and developing never before seen links with the federal government, see Hannah Rosen,

Curiously, despite obvious and notable African-American resistance to the bill, at least two among the far-right opposition refused to recognize the validity of Black criticisms - this in spite of the rhetorical parallels between their two “slavery” arguments. When Charles H. Houston, litigator for the NAACP went before Congress, he asked the legislators to ensure that “adequate” housing would be available to Black laborers drafted, and demanded the inclusion of a provision that would bar racial discrimination in housing facilities, with the Federal Government setting and enforcing a standard for what defined “adequate.”¹⁰⁶ Houston found no allies among the right-wing women, for Agnes Waters, though ‘charitably’ noting that she “think[s] there are a great many good colored people,” lambasted the NAACP’s worries about housing facilities as “filthy, most horrible looking pictures...put out at the expense of the American taxpayers,” and nothing less than “propaganda to incite revolution.” Describing the NAACP as being “led by communists,” she argued that their concerns were crocodile tears, for the NAACP and various Black organizations were attempting to “incite...the negro element” by feigning disapproval of the bill; their real work behind the scenes to get it passed would ultimately cause a communist revolution. Both Waters and Catherine Brown, head of the Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, described communist meetings they attended as being rife with “negroes,” and the perception that Black-Americans were easily radicalized is evident in their testimony.¹⁰⁷ It is clear once again that the race line is present here: the government may be full of communists, hell-bent on depriving Americans of resources and ultimately freedom, but an NAACP exhibit demonstrating real examples of that deprivation is communist propaganda,

"Testifying to Violence," In *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 222-41.
http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5149/9780807888568_rosen.9.

¹⁰⁶ Joe Shepard, "NAACP's White, Houston Rap 'Work-Or-Fight' Bill: NAACP LEADER FIGHTS AUSTIN-WADSWORTH BILL," *Pittsburgh Courier*, April 10th, 1943. <https://search.proquest.com/docview/202129759/71EC445CF68C4BADPQ/3?accountid=14524>

¹⁰⁷ *Testimony on the National War Service Act Before the Senate of Military Affairs Committee, 78th Cong.* (1943) Agnes Waters for the Mother's Association; Jacob H. Gomborow Papers, Temple University Special Collections Research Center. Collection ID: SCRC 246. Series 1: Police Work, 1909-195. Box 1, Folder 69, "Crusading Mothers of Pennsylvania, 1942-1943."

their opposition to Austin-Wadsworth part of a broad conspiracy to actually pass the bill. While the documents available reveal only Waters and Brown racializing anti-communism, the remainder of the mothers share their concerns with communist influence and a ‘compromised’ government. It is therefore possible that they shared the views of their more outwardly racist compatriots, but for the purposes of establishing the existence of racial ideology within opposition to Austin-Wadsworth, Waters and Brown offer more than enough evidence. In the final analysis, the women who suspected the formation of a “World Government” believed non-white groups to be either complicit, duped, or (in the case of Latin America) simply taking advantage of the chaos its imposition caused.

Conclusion

The introduction to this paper referenced the controversial historiography of Richard Hofstadter and his “consensus” and “status-anxiety” theses, both of which have come justly under fire by recent historians. Deeply flawed, the former assumes the existence and dominance of a “vital center” - the majority - to quote another consensus scholar, was tended to by the pragmatic, reasonable, and rational politicians like Eisenhower, Truman, or FDR. That Eisenhower was a Republican did not matter - there was essentially a centrist consensus that prevailed. On the outskirts, of course, were exemplars of the latter thesis: impractical ideologues of the right (and left) that were left reeling as a result of their psychology, encapsulated by the terms “paranoia” and “status anxiety.”¹⁰⁸ In “diagnosing” his historical subjects, Hofstadter ignored their relevance and implicitly rebutted serious analysis of conservative goals, thought process, and continuity in U.S. History. This paper has sought a path between the condescension of Hofstadter and more forgiving recent scholarship: by taking seriously visible political and

¹⁰⁸ Ribuffo, “The Discovery and Rediscovery,” 5; Leo P. Ribuffo, “Twenty Suggestions for Studying the Right Now That Studying the Right is Trendy.” *Historically Speaking* Vol 12, No. 1 (2011), 5.

ideological fault-lines, and by capturing the emotional tenor, apocalyptic rhetoric, and dystopian fantasies of the women testifying against Austin-Wadsworth. This path does not seek to diagnose or define the right wing by psychology, or label them as motivated solely by personal investment. Rather, it illuminates both the importance and existence of a sincere conservative and maternalist ideology - something that is not merely a cynical rhetorical strategy to avoid conscription.

It is also evident, however, that the mothers feel insulted and vulnerable, and their concerns were bound up with their ideology. Their emphasis on the rights and respect accorded to moral motherhood; their concerns about sexual protection, immorality, and marriage; their noticeable bristling at the notion of domestic female idleness - all these anxieties speak to a personal stake in an anti-statist ideology in which the government does not intrude upon their domain. While it would be folly to insist that status-anxiety is the sole driving force here, I argue that the linkage between anti-statist thought, moral-maternalist ideology, and their perception of a credible attack upon their status allows for a better understanding of the rhetoric employed. Furthermore, by shaping a bland, generalized, and dismissive analysis like “status anxiety” into a more specific and context-dependent “gendered status anxiety,” we can avoid the pitfalls of Hofstadter. Perhaps most importantly, by examining this heated political moment we gain the ability to glimpse more effectively the continuity of maternalist thought and rhetoric within conservatism, the ways in which gender factors into conservative views of citizenship, and “the bizarre, the unusual, or the unsettling” within the American Right.¹⁰⁹

Finally, in an age where conversations about the “economic anxiety” of the “rustbelt” states permeate the media, and the notion of women in the draft and the military is still a source

¹⁰⁹ Qtd. from Kim Phillips-Fein in Rick Perlstein, “I Thought I Understood the American Right. Trump Proved Me Wrong.” *The New York Times Magazine*, April 11, 2017.

of consternation on the right, scholarship on gender and conservatism take on important public meanings.¹¹⁰ During the 2016 Presidential Election, for instance, concerns about the drafting of women into the armed forces bubbled up in famously right-wing, pro-Donald Trump forums. One particularly infamous forum, a subsection of the social media website Reddit known as “r/The_Donald” created a “meme” known as “draft our daughters,” which insisted that candidate Hillary Clinton was pushing for women in the armed forces for the sake of an impending war with Russia. Apparently attempting to create some sort of gender-based army that would back her politics in the military, the creators and supporters of the meme believed that these women were “ready to go to war for her.”¹¹¹ While rooted more in paranoia about liberal politics rather than more explicit gender concerns, the meme nonetheless revealed a profound mistrust of women’s ability to remain apolitical in the armed forces; at the very least, it demonstrated similar apprehension about women organized under a female leader, especially in the context of violence. Recall that western discourse has long held women’s violence to be a source of discomfort, and the “draft our daughters” meme seems deeper than mere conspiracy.

Similarly, “r/The_Donald” expressed disdain for the Swedish decision to draft women, noting in the title of a post that “draft our daughters” was “real,” and therefore had the potential to take place in the United States.¹¹² Indeed, the top comment in response to the news article claimed that Sweden was forcing its women to fight and die “for [the sake of] diversity” and

¹¹⁰ Abby Ohlheiser “What Was Fake on the Internet This Election: #DraftOurDaughters, Trump’s Tax Returns.” *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2016. The “economic anxiety” discussion became so widespread that social media websites like Reddit and Facebook employed them as something of a meme when discussing them. Furthermore, right-wing groups within these websites have frequently discussed the drafting of women or transgender women.

¹¹¹ Abby Ohlheiser “What Was Fake,” *The Washington Post*, October 31, 2016. See also, <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/draftourdaughters>, published 2017 by Don Caldwell.

¹¹² The posters on “The_Donald” are well known for worrying that the US would embrace Nordic policies, especially those involving the acceptance of Islamic refugees. Thus, the title “draft our daughters’ is real” indicates a very real concern that the US might follow the example of Sweden. Author Unknown. “BREAKING!! Sweden Initiates Draft for MEN AND WOMEN!!! Blames Russia (it’s Not Russia They’re Worried About. #DRAFTOURDAUGHTERS IS REAL!!! MEME MAGIC IS REAL!!! • R/The_Donald.” *Reddit*, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/The_Donald/comments/5xa62n/breaking_sweden_initiates_draft_for_men_and_women/?st=j9p6fuh&sh=6bdd58b8.

political correctness, referencing the creation of a “police state” that reminds one of the anti-statist and conspiratorial rhetoric of those right-wing mothers opposed to Austin-Wadsworth. Furthermore, the commenters expressed similar concerns about the sexual vulnerability of women, noting that both “unprotected loved ones,” meaning those without a mother or father in the home, would be vulnerable to the sexual proclivities of “muslim immigrants” who were brought in by the Swedish government to “rape your women.”¹¹³ Clearly, the issue of both women in the armed forces and the notion of the government requiring their presence remains a deeply controversial topic in certain circles. Only by having an open and honest scholarly discussion on the continuity of such thought through history, we can perhaps avoid another instance of being caught unawares by the staying power and cultural cache of gender ideology.

Ultimately, if historians are to stay true to our humanistic intentions of creating historical understandings that enact positive change in the present, we cannot be afraid to condemn or expose the irrationality of certain ideologies or forms of political thought and behavior. A narrow conception of objectivity that demands only neutral rhetoric does our profession and society a disservice. As scholars, we should reflect on why we react to certain sources the way we do and be cautious of interpreting sources without giving full consideration to how the producer, subject, or contemporary of the source might react to it. Yet, once we have done that, we can only acknowledge that these sources are produced by or detail equally flawed humans who are not always consistent or rational. We have the advantage of being able to compare and contrast thoughts in different places and times through different sources, and we have the advantage of

¹¹³ User: Harambeforgives, and User: Unknown. Comment on "BREAKING!! Sweden Initiates Draft for MEN AND WOMEN!!! Blames Russia (it's Not Russia They're Worried About. #DRAFTOURDAUGHTERS IS REAL!!! MEME MAGIC IS REAL!!! • R/The_Donald." *Reddit*, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2018. https://www.reddit.com/r/The_Donald/comments/5xa62n/breaking_sweden_initiates_draft_for_men_and_women/?st. User "harambeforgives" posted the top comment referencing "diversity" and the "muslim rape of women." An unknown user posted a response to that comment referring to "unprotected loved ones."

being distant, even if we do find ourselves emotionally engaged. It is not a weakness, then, to point out that two statements from the same individual don't perfectly align, or in the case of this essay's broader argument, point out that certain statements might be the emotional products of a sense of personal vulnerability.

In the final analysis, historians must acknowledge that in some cases we have blunted our critiques of the right-wing's sordid history and rhetoric precisely because we often lean left or liberal and fear accusations of scholarly impropriety. But the more historians attempt to "sanitize" the past by smoothing over its contradictions or imposing a rationality and consistency where none exists, the more unprepared we are to apply our scholarship to contemporary issues. The fact is that the sources I have spoken of in this paper demonstrate rhetoric driven by anxiety, hate, and personal status intertwined together. The reality is that gender anxieties are primal, deeply rooted in the psyche of certain ideologies. Conceptions of gender are instilled early on - they are informed by our upbringings and, being so deeply embedded, are highly resistant to change. Even those who intellectually conceive of gender ideology in one way may *feel something* very different when confronted with the physical manifestations of their views. One who supports the drafting of women intellectually may ultimately feel discomfort or disgust when seeing women in uniform, for instance. There is nothing logical or rational about gender anxieties a great deal of the time - political issues and anxieties about the role of government or the economy are conflated with or mapped onto gender (or vice versa), as in the case of the anti-statist thought of the right-wing mothers becoming more about maternal "rights" and "respect" rather than just a rejection of an active state.

It is my hope that this paper has illuminated the existence and intensity of fault lines surrounding gender in a context in which gender roles were challenged as a result of wartime

exigencies. Often seen as a period of political consensus, as well as a “watershed” moment for women’s work, an intensive study of the right and gender illustrates that the period was more conflicted than previously assumed. In seeking to capture the apocalyptic thought and personal vulnerability expressed or experienced by those opposed to Austin-Wadsworth, I have tried to demonstrate that there is a balance to be struck between “pathologizing” the right, and simply acknowledging that conservative gender ideology can be better understood if historians accept that it is not “reductive” or inappropriate to examine gendered politics through the lens of “status anxiety” and personal stake in an idealized conception of the gender order. If Kim Nielsen is correct in her claim that “we know frustratingly little about how right-wing women conceptualize their citizenship,” then I assert that this paper - having paid close attention to the expressions of right-wing moral-motherhood and its insistence on the civic duties of motherhood and its right to be protected - has drawn scholarship closer to an answer.¹¹⁴ For the mothers opposing Austin-Wadsworth, their citizenship - in negative terms - inhered in their freedom from state control; and in positive terms, in their privileged relationship to their husbands and sons within the private sphere.

¹¹⁴ Kim E. Nielsen, "Doing the "Right" Right," *Journal of Women's History* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 168-72. doi:doi:10.1353/jowh.2004.0068.

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User: Harambeforgives, and User: Unknown. Comment on "BREAKING!! Sweden Initiates Draft for MEN AND WOMEN!!! Blames Russia (it's Not Russia They're Worried About. #DRAFTOURDAUGHTERS IS REAL!!! MEME MAGIC IS REAL!!! • R/The_Donald." *Reddit*, 2017. Accessed March 24, 2018.

https://www.reddit.com/r/The_Donald/comments/5xa62n/breaking_sweden_initiates_draft_for_men_and_women/?st.

User "harambeforgives" posted the top comment referencing "diversity" and the "muslim rape of women." An unknown user posted a response to that comment referring to "unprotected loved ones."