“Our Own Language, Our Own Voice, Our Own Art”: The Second Wave Feminist Media in Boston

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Abstract

The second wave feminist media, defined as ideological contributions via the written word, played an essential role in the second wave by sharing radical ideologies and bringing women into a feminist consciousness. This study examines the herstory of three groups in Boston at the time: the *Second Wave* magazine (1971-1983), the Combahee River Collective (1974-1980), and Persephone Press (1976-1983). Each group had different motivations yet remained dedicated to the radical feminist media and various methods of societal upheaval. As a radical feminist magazine, a black feminist organization, and lesbian-feminist publishing house respectively, the women behind the three entities aspired to alter the face of second wave feminism. Each had several commonalities: including a commitment to the feminist media, factionalism and ideological strife, difficulties in balancing beliefs with harsh systemic realities, and a great connection to coalitions and the greater feminism community. The *Second Wave,* the Combahee River Collective, and Persephone Press may appear conflicting at first glance but shared a great commitment to facing sexist oppression through the written word.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Combahee River Collective- CRC or Combahee

Community Programs Against Sexual Assault and Rape Prevention- CPASA

Congress of Racial Equality- CORE

National Black Feminist Organization- NBFO

National Organization for Women- NOW

Socialist Worker's Party- SWP

Third World Women's Alliance- TWWA

Young Socialist Alliance- YSA

INTRODUCTION:

The Second Wave Media in Boston

In the early 1970s, Kathi Maio walked into an alternative bookstore in Washington D.C. At the time, she was questioning her burgeoning feminist identity and looking a lifeline to support her evolving politics. She came across an issue of the *Second Wave,* a radical feminist magazine--one of the few of its kind at the time. As soon as she opened its pages, the experience changed her life.[1] She described her feelings when first opening the pages of the publication. "I practically yelled 'Eureka!'" She explained that the *Second Wave*, "was just what I was looking for– practical polemics, feminist theory, and poems and stories that could make me weep (or exclaim, 'Right on, sister')."[2] It may seem dramatic to state that opening up a magazine could alter the course of a person's life, but for feminists like Maio, the publication held great significance beyond its delicate pages. Feminist publications represented sisterhood and community, the hope to connect with women who had similar life experiences, and perhaps most importantly, a chance to challenge patriarchal oppression through consciousness-raising and the written word. Printing a feminist publication or contributing to the feminist media at the time was inherently radical and risky, from both political and economic perspectives. However, women like Maio found hope and strength in the well-loved, dog-eared pages of feminist publications. She explained what opening the magazine meant to her in simply stating that the "*Second Wave* was a brave new voice for me."[3]

[1] Kathy Maio, "*Second Wave:* Gone, But Not Forgotten" *Sojourner,* Sept. 1984, Box 2, Folder 25, *The Second Wave* Papers, Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, 23.
[2] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[3] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.

Maio came to join the staff of the *Second Wave* and contribute to the feminist media in this way. Many other women came to a feminist consciousness through feminist publications like the *Second Wave* and other outlets in the feminist media. Publications aimed to create a communications network for women for decades. In her renowned article "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics," June Arnold explained that "the independent women's communications network began early in the women's movement as mimeographed newsletters and position papers. Very early, women saw the need to write down for clarification and make available to other women what feminism stood for."[4] Women from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries felt compelled to build a feminist communications network, just as women felt inspired to do in the second wave of feminism.

At the time of writing in 1976, Arnold identified more than a hundred and fifty feminist presses or journals in over thirty states.[5] Additionally, between March 1968 and August 1973, at least 560 feminist publications surfaced across the United States.[6] Feminist publications in the late 1960s and early 1970s, ranging from newspapers and magazines to newsletters and books, allowed feminists to share their ideas with other women in the hopes of bringing them into the movement and creating a space where feminists could thrive outside of the patriarchal media. Historian Agatha Beins highlighted the significance of these publications in stating that "the role of periodicals in creating and sustaining an imagined community for feminism should not be underestimated: they allowed readers to see themselves as part of a much larger entity and to make connections with women on a local scale."[7] In this sense, publications were able to draw

[4] June Arnold, "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics," *Quest: A Feminist Quarterly*, July 1976, 18.
[5] Arnold, "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics," 18.
[6] Anne Mather, "A History of Feminist Periodicals, Part 1," Journalism History 1, no. 3 (1974): 82.
[7] Agatha Beins, *Liberation in Print: Feminist Periodicals and Social Movement Identity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2017), 8.

women into the movement via consciousness-raising and the dissemination of feminist ideas. Most of these publications were alternative or underground because "deficiencies in the traditional media caused their birth," aside from more mainstream magazines like *Ms.*[8] Many women either felt alienated or felt that the mainstream media produced harmful images of women.

Boston itself became a significant location for the development of the second wave feminist media. As second wave feminism emerged across the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, Boston soon became a known as a "major hub of feminist activism."[9] The city was home to a massive student population with many people engaging in a variety of radical protests, especially within civil rights and the anti-war movement.[10] Many women involved with these student movements came to join and create second wave feminist groups with varying degrees of radicalism. Historian Kimberly Springer explained that Boston had "a rich activist-intellectual environment."[11] With dozens of universities in the Boston area, many women came to the city to learn and to engage with radical ideas. Numerous women's colleges were also in the general area, including Smith College, Mount Holyoke College, and Wellesley College. Additionally, the first wave of feminism, which began in the mid-nineteenth century and advocated for women's suffrage, provided a broader feminist foundation for emerging activists in the mid-twentieth century. These factors contributed to Boston as a site brewing with radical activism, revolutionary ideas, and individuals willing to diverge from the status quo.

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[8] Mather, "A History of Feminist Periodicals, Part 1," 82.
[9] Daphne Spain, "Women's Rights and Gendered Spaces in 1970s Boston," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 32, no. 1 (2011): 157.
[10] Nancy Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism: Boston Female Liberation, 1968-1972 An Account by Participants,* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2022), 6.
[11] Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 60.

Women in and around Boston were quick to respond to the fervor of the second wave and were eager to make their own contributions in a variety of ways. In her dissertation on the Boston-based organization Bread and Roses, Anne Hunter Popkin highlighted the significance of feminist activism in stating that Boston was "one of the first places where women got together and also where the movement has best survived."[12] Several feminist organizations emerged in the area in the late 1960s and early 1970s, including a Boston chapter of the National Organization for Women (1969-present), the socialist-feminist Bread and Roses (1969-1971), radical Female Liberation (1968-1974), female-separatist Cell 16 (1968-1973), and the black feminist Combahee River Collective (1974-1980).[13] Each of these groups aimed to end the sexist oppression that all women experienced throughout their lives.

As Nancy Rosenstock stated, however, "the second wave of feminism was not monolithic."[14] As a whole, second wave feminists wanted to challenge the patriarchy, but organizations had varying opinions on how to achieve that goal and who should be included in the fight. Though their politics and ideologies differed dramatically, Boston feminist groups were connected, exchanged ideas, and even "actively and amiably [supported] many of the same causes."[15] Tia Cross, a feminist and photographer, explained in a letter, "I think that some profound and major changes are taking place in the women's movement here in Boston. Women from all different backgrounds and with lots of different politics are working together in a way that's unprecedented."[16] Some women drifted between organizations or worked to establish their own group if they disagreed with another's ideologies. This tendency was a common element of

[12] Anne Hunter Popkin, "Bread and Roses: An Early Moment in the Development of Socialist-Feminism" (PhD diss., Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, 1978), 3.
[13] Popkin, "Bread and Roses," 237.
[14] Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism,* 11.
[15] Diane White, "Liberation Movement Building in Strength," *Boston Globe,* Feb. 22, 1970.
[16] "Letter from Tia Cross to the staff of *off our backs*," Tia Cross Papers, Box 9, Folder 18, MC801, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

second wave feminism, as factionalism and schismatic politics were a constant. Women disagreed on issues and priorities, strategies of activism, and organizational structures. Feminist organizations in Boston engaged in a wide range of radical actions with varying levels of success but played significant roles in shaping second wave feminism across the United States.

Central Arguments and Defining the Feminist Media

This study examines the feminist media in Boston through three distinct outlets: the *Second Wave* (1971-1983), the Combahee River Collective (1974-1980), and Persephone Press (1976-1983). As a radical feminist magazine, a black feminist organization, and a lesbian-feminist press respectively, each outlet contributed to the feminist media in different ways, but the women behind each hoped to share radical feminist perspectives and bring women together through the written word. These feminist entities at first glance appeared to have little in common, despite a general commitment to radical feminism and being located in the Boston area. This thesis seeks to connect these varying groups via their distinct commitment to the feminist media as a form of consciousness-raising and protest, their experiences with divisiveness and sectarianism, and perhaps most surprisingly, through their simultaneous participation in coalitional connections with other feminist groups. Additionally, the *Second Wave,* the Combahee River Collective, and Persephone Press struggled with balancing idealistic, radical ideologies with the various realities, such as economic difficulties, the lack of resources, little feminist support, or struggles in finding a platform to articulate their radicalism. Each of these groups had different aims and perspectives; however, they all wanted to uplift feminist voices using the valuable tool of the feminist press. Each group also sought distinct

representation and defied marginalization with their contributions to the feminist media, such as in including black, Jewish, and lesbian-feminist voices in the movement.

For the sake of clarity, I will define the feminist media and feminist press, as these terms have not been widely used in the historiography. I first came across the term "feminist media" when reading archival material from Female Liberation and the *Second Wave.* In a passionate plea to readers titled "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," the editors of the *Second Wave* described the feminist media as a means of challenging male domination in the press.[17] They defined the feminist media in three distinct ways. They wrote, "First of all it is media controlled by women. Secondly it is a media used to explore our lives–the realities of being a woman– and if possible to find out what common denominator there is in the experiences of all of us." The editors continued, "Finally, the feminist media is the means through which we can explore our own language, our own voice, our own art, borrowing what is useful from the old male standards, throwing off what is not."[18] The editors of the *Second Wave* were closely committed to their definition of the feminist media and referred to it consistently in their editorials. An important element of the feminist media for the *Second Wave* editors was to publish their work completely without the help of men. In a following editorial, they discussed their elation at finally being printed by a female run press, Mother Jones, as it meant "we are participating one step less in a male-controlled printing market based on competition and profit."[19] Printing a magazine without the help of men was incredibly important to the editors and this opportunity also allowed them to support other feminist businesses as well.

[17] "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 2*,* Spring 1974, 3.
[18] "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 2*,* Spring 1974, 3.
[19] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 3, Spring 1976, 2.

Building on the *Second Wave* editors' use of the term, I created a definition of the feminist media for reference in this study. The feminist media was a means by which women built and contributed to a media of their own, created and run by feminists, thus directly challenging the hegemonic patriarchal media. Ideally, the feminist media functioned without any male intervention, but at times male participation was deemed necessary--for example, due to the lack of feminist presses during the early second wave. Finally, the feminist media included feminist publications, books, art, and numerous creative outlets for feminists to express themselves. In referring to the feminist media (and in using 'the' as an article) I imply that the feminist media existed as a community and a concrete entity, rather than various women sporadically contributing feminist writings. Some feminists viewed themselves as part of the feminist media, while others had not used that term. Nevertheless, the women contributing to the feminist media, whether or not they referred to it as such, saw their writings and publications as much bigger than themselves. The feminist written word served a greater purpose, thus contributing to the feminist media as a communications network, a consciousness raising tool, and a beacon of hope. In this study, I specifically refer to the feminist media as represented through the written word via feminist publications, but the term can be used more widely.

None of the scholars I examined for this study used this exact term, and instead often referred to the feminist press. In order to define the feminist press, I will first examine two different uses of the term. Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel, of the Combahee River Collective, used the term when highlighting the necessity of black feminist voices in their edited edition of *Conditions* magazine. They explained that this black feminist centered issue of the publication "clearly disproves the 'non-existence' of Black feminist and Black lesbian writers and challenges forever

our invisibility, particularly in the feminist press."[20] In this statement, Bethel and Smith referred to the feminist press in a similar manner to which the *Second Wave* referred to the feminist media—namely, as publications or publishing entities uplifting feminist voices via the written word. An important element of Bethel and Smith's use of the term was that the feminist press, as they described it, served as an outlet for intersectional feminist representation. Alternatively, the women of Persephone Press, which was itself a lesbian-feminist press, used the term in a different manner. One of the goals of their publishing was "for women to view feminist presses *not* as an alternative but as their most logical option."[21] Gloria Greenfield used the term "feminist press" in its most literal sense. She defined feminist presses as feminist publishing houses like Persephone Press that worked to publish feminist books and anthologies. The most literal definition of feminist presses defined them as businesses that published women-oriented books, such as Persephone Press. When using the term feminist press, it can refer to a similar definition of the feminist media but is more closely concentrated on the written word. In using the terms feminist media and the feminist press, I am seeking to characterize second wave feminist writing as a catalyst within the movement, as a means of consciousness-raising and of building connections with other women. Other scholars have alluded to this idea as well, but few have stressed the significant and revolutionary nature of Boston's alternative feminist publications themselves.

[20] Lorraine Bethel and Barbara Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 11.
[21] "80 Women to Watch in the 80's," *Ms. Magazine,* January 1980, Persephone Press Papers, Box 1, Folder 1, Schlesinger Library.

Historiography

In exploring the history of second-wave feminist publications in Boston, this study builds upon the works of numerous influential scholars in the fields of history and gender studies. Scholars have used feminist publications as sources to trace movement politics along with its changes and conflicts. Historians have grappled with questions concerning the legacies of second-wave feminist publications but have not looked closely at the impact of the *Second Wave.*[22] In "A History of Feminist Periodicals," Anne Mather documented a wide range of feminist publications, yet since her work was published in 1974 it did not fully cover the history of second wave feminist publications. More recently in 2016, Daphne Spain grappled with questions of space within the context of second-wave feminism in, among other works, her book *Constructive Feminism* and article "Women's Rights and Gendered Spaces in 1970s Boston." Focusing on the broader activism of the time, she argued that second-wave feminists aimed to create women's spaces in the midst of unwelcoming male urban environments. This thesis draws upon Spain's arguments about physical feminist spaces to situate the feminist media as a metaphorical space for women writers, artists, and activists at the time. Much in the way that second-wave feminists in Boston carved out physical spaces for themselves in the city via domestic violence shelters, women's bookstores, and women's health centers, feminist publications also served as spaces for women to express their ideas, rage against the patriarchy, and to find a sense of sisterhood.[23]

Agatha Beins' book *Liberation in Print* made a significant contribution to the study of feminist periodicals as she focused her work on five publications. One of them was the *Female*

[22] Recommended for further reading: Amy Erdman Farrell, *Yours in Sisterhood: Ms. Magazine and the Promise of Popular Feminism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Her research is significant but the mainstream appeal of *Ms.* does not closely compare to alternative publications like *The Second Wave.*
[23] Spain, "Women's Rights and Gendered Spaces in 1970s Boston," 158.

Liberation Newsletter, which was produced by Female Liberation and circulated locally among members and friends. The *Female Liberation Newsletter* proved to be very different from the *Second Wave,* largely because the newsletter was local, small-scale, and intrinsically tied to its mother organization. Nonetheless, Beins's study proves helpful for this study, especially in conjunction with Spain's argument. Both works aided this thesis by establishing the centrality of feminist publications and providing a framework from which to examine the impact of the *Second Wave.* Most recently, Nancy Rosenstock's *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, published in Fall 2022, provided a close look at Boston Female Liberation's aspirations and activities in the voices of members themselves. This recently published book also included important documents of the movement, such as articles from the *Second Wave* and *No More Fun and Games,* as well as photographs of participants. This book was incredibly useful for the primary and firsthand perspective it provided, with members such as Chris Hildebrand explaining how Female Liberation influenced their feminism and their lives subsequently. She described her feelings during the prime of Female Liberation around 1970, stating "we were floating on clouds, so excited about everything we were doing."[24]

In examining the impact of the Combahee River Collective on Boston and the second wave movement as a whole, I utilized the works of numerous scholars. Kimberly Springer's *Living for the Revolution* focused on five black feminist organizations, including the Combahee River Collective. Springer's nuanced analysis of the Combahee was fueled by personal interviews and complex analysis that provided a comprehensive image of the motivations and conflicts the group faced. *Sisters in the Struggle,* edited by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin, was also incredibly helpful in this study. Within this anthology, I used Tracye Matthews chapter titled

[24] Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism,* 68.

"No One Ever Asks What a Man′s Role in the Revolution Is″: Gender Politics and Leadership in the Black Panther Party, 1966–71" to understand the gendered dynamics within black nationalist movements that pushed many black feminists towards creating their own groups. I also closely examined Duchess Harris's chapter titled "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective: Black Feminist Organizing, 1960–80." Harris traced the development of black feminism from earlier, somewhat conventional forms of organizing to the radicalism of the Combahee. Her examination of the Combahee provided me with a sense of the group's tangible and lasting impact, as well as the uniqueness of Combahee activism. Among other texts, I used Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *How We Get Free,* in which Taylor utilized interviews with Combahee members and black feminists today, as well as Combahee documents, to examine the nuances and profound impact of the organization. Taylor's work was crucial for presenting a picture of the future of black feminism, whilst building on the foundational work of the Combahee. My examination of the Combahee in chapter two builds off this existing scholarship but seeks to emphasize the contributions of the organization to the feminist media without a publication of their own.

When examining Persephone Press, I relied on many of the above monographs to understand how feminist publishing fit into the conception of the feminist media. I specifically examined Bein's work in order to situate Persephone Press amongst other examples of feminist presses. *This Book is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics*, edited by Jaime Harker and Cecilia Konchar Farr, examined the role of the written word in second wave feminism via an anthology featuring work from numerous authors. Within this book, Jennifer Gilley's chapter titled "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism: Experimentation in Second-Wave Book Publishing," proved especially useful. Gilley examined the debate within the

feminist community over the big corporate press versus small feminist press, and also examined Persephone Press via *This Bridge Called My Back*. Her work helped me to situate Persephone Press within the larger world of feminist publishing. Finally, Kristin Hogan's *The Feminist Bookstore Movement* also proved useful for this research, as she examined the emergence of feminist bookstores, which I used to examine the relationship of feminist bookstores and feminist publishing houses like Persephone Press. Each of these scholars examined a different facet of feminist publishing, thus laying the groundwork from which I could examine Persephone Press's impact.

This thesis exists in conversation with the above historiography but diverges from the historiography in numerous ways. First, this study examined second-wave publications in Boston, which few scholars have done in depth. The above scholars analyzed Boston feminism in diverging ways or utilized one of the above groups instead of analyzing feminism in Boston in a more comprehensive manner. I also specifically use the term "feminist media" in my arguments to highlight the transformational nature of feminist publications in the second wave of feminism. Additionally, in analyzing the *Second Wave,* the Combahee River Collective, and Persephone Press—three seemingly disparate entities—this study seeks to find patterns and connections where other scholars have not. These groups were connected through their commitment to the feminist media as a form of consciousness-raising and advocacy, their experiences with divisiveness and feminist conflicts, and through their simultaneous participation in coalitional connections with other feminist groups. Historians have studied each of these organizations to different extents separately, but in bringing them together this study seeks to examine the nuances of the feminist media in Boston. The work of the above scholars

provided essential groundwork for my secondary and archival research, and I am honored to build upon their innovative scholarship.

Organization

Within each chapter of this work, I analyze each group for its distinct nature while also seeking deeper patterns and connections. Each group must be analyzed on its own and as a larger part of the feminist media in Boston in order to develop a comprehensive picture. In chapter one "In Sisterhood and Separatism: Legacies of the *Second Wave* Magazine and Building a Feminist Media in the midst of Schismatic Politics, 1971-1983," I examine the emergence and decline of the *Second Wave* amongst dramatic conflicts with their mother organization Female Liberation, outside groups such as Young Socialist Alliance and the Socialist Worker's Party, and internal divisions between *Second Wave* staff members themselves. The magazine had strong initial goals of unifying radical feminists by making their magazine a forum-like environment, intended to bring a wide range of perspectives and thus many women into a feminist consciousness. The magazine experienced massive staff turnover and editorial changes in 1974 when it officially split from Female Liberation. The editors thus wanted to turn a new page and reassert their commitment to radicalism while also correcting what they perceived as mistakes of the early years of the *Second Wave.* The new staff struggled to balance radical goals with harsh realities and eventually collapsed due to staff burnout, financial difficulties, and lack of interest in the publication in the end. This chapter explores numerous recurring motifs, such as feminist consciousness raising, schismatic politics, and ideology vs. reality.

Chapter two, "'We Wanted to Speak in Our Own Voice, as Black Feminists':

Locating Black Women in the Feminist Media via Boston's Combahee River Collective, 1974-1980," traces the development of the Combahee River Collective and argued that the organization contributed greatly to the feminist media in Boston without an outlet to call their own. The Combahee were most well-known for their transformative Combahee River Collective Statement that is reprinted and studied to this day, but they also created space for black feminists in the feminist media in a variety of ways. They contributed to the feminist press via their pamphlet, "Why Did They Die?," which highlighted the unjust murders of twelve black women in the Dorchester and Roxbury neighborhoods in Boston in 1979. In addition to this organizing, the Combahee also encouraged members in their Black Feminist Retreats to write and contribute to alternative feminist presses. Barbara Smith and members of the Combahee represented the numerous facets of oppression they faced as black lesbian-feminists and fought to ensure that black feminist voices in Boston would be heard, regardless of having a traditional platform.

In chapter three "'Persephone Press: A Lesbian Strategy': The Herstory of Persephone Press and the Impact of Lesbian-Feminism in Publishing, 1976-1983," this study examines the development of the lesbian-feminist press via its editorial policies and ideological stances. The press, founded by Gloria Greenfield, Pat McGloin, and Marianne Rubenstein aspired to create space for lesbian-feminists in the publishing world and to challenge male dominated corporate presses. During their active years, the founders published fifteen books with some of their books still being read today. The women of Persephone claimed to privilege feminist ideology over business but had to balance these two factors in light of the challenges of running a small-scale press. They used the press to make space for diverse voices in the feminist community and built strong connections via a feminist network, but still experienced disagreements and struggles with

other feminists. Though Persephone Press closed due to financial difficulties in 1983, it left a legacy of lesbian-feminism in publishing and numerous influential books in its wake.

The feminist media, though sometimes overlooked by historians, had a transformational role in the second wave feminist movement. The above examples in Boston emphasize the diversity of the feminist media, as well as the tensions between community-building and ideological schisms inherent in many second wave feminist organizations. Above all, the feminist media represented an outlet for women who were previously silenced to share their voices via feminist publications. It was evidently flawed and privileged heterosexual white women's voices above others, but black and lesbian feminists fought to create space for their voices in the feminist press. Ultimately, feminist publications were the unsung heroes of feminist-consciousness raising, allowing women all across the country to connect on unprecedented levels. June Arnold, lesbian writer and publisher, argued that "the women's presses are not alternate either but are mainstream and the thrust of the revolution."[25] Arnold fought the idea of feminist presses as alternative and highlighted the revolutionary and liberatory nature of feminist presses. The feminist media, as flawed as it was, was a catalyst in the second wave feminist movement in Boston, paving the way for women to share their voices with a zealous audience.

[25] June Arnold, quoted in "From Us," *The Second Wave 4, no. 3, 2.*

CHAPTER ONE

In Sisterhood and Separatism:

Legacies of the *Second Wave* Magazine and Building the Feminist Media in the midst of Schismatic Politics, 1971-1983

In a 1974 editorial in the *Second Wave* magazine, the publications' staff eloquently proclaimed: "We are a people without a country, without even a ghetto, and what community we have had has been precarious, fragmented, constantly invaded. There have been Amazons and there have been harems, but essentially we have lived out our lives in men's worlds, separated from each other except for limited and circumscribed times. We have not evolved our own street language, our own slang–the passwords that tells us we are of the same tribe. The feminist media is a means of creating–or unearthing–our own language."[26] The *Second Wave* identified the necessity of a feminist media as a means of self-definition and for its ability to create a space for women outside of a patriarchal, masculinist, and heteronormative society in which they had been long separated from each other. The desire to create a feminist press by and for women inspired countless feminists as they built new publications across the United States.

As one of many publications emerging in the early 1970s, the Boston radical feminist magazine The *Second Wave* stood out as an early feminist publication that greatly impacted those who read it and encapsulated the schismatic nature of 1970s feminism. The *Second Wave* has not been the subject of in-depth study but was widely disseminated in its time and read by

[26] "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 2, Spring 1974, 3.

women across the greater Boston area, as well as all over the country and the world. The publication grappled with a wide variety of issues concerning women and welcomed submissions from all feminists. The *Second Wave* became well-known in its early years but was plagued with internal divisions and conflicts with its mother organization, Female Liberation.

This chapter suggests that the *Second Wave* became defined by its editors' struggle to find balance between the idealistic vision of mass community-building via a feminist media and the underlying internal and external political divisions and problems present in Female Liberation. The history of the *Second Wave* can be encapsulated in this struggle between a unifying vision for the publication and the reality of its schismatic politics. These tensions were prevalent in the broader second-wave feminist movement and plagued a myriad of other organizations in a similar manner. The *Second Wave* had many goals and purposes during its twelve-year tenure, from bringing more women into a feminist consciousness, building a feminist media, creating a forum for women, and inciting political change by disseminating an explicitly radical perspective. Some of these purposes coexisted while others emerged as the publication's staff changed and conflicts ensued within and outside of the magazine.

The *Second Wave* was closely tied to Female Liberation when it was first created, but increasingly became autonomous. Despite this independence, the publication was affected by and drawn into Female Liberation's schismatic politics. The *Second Wave* also had a variety of problems of its own, from disagreements about editorial policies to limited resources.
As the *Second Wave* became independent from Female Liberation, staff and editors struggled with balancing a commitment to radicalism with an attempt to appear non-ideological, and in attempting to right the errors of their predecessors. Despite conflicts and the magazine's eventual demise, the women behind the *Second Wave* built a legacy of sisterhood, consciousness-raising,

and radical activism that inspired countless women and subsequent feminist publications. This chapter diverges from the historiography by closely examining the community-building impact of the *Second Wave* and the lingering effects of sectarian politics as a divisive force in second-wave feminism.[27] Examining the rise and fall of the *Second Wave* offers historians and activists alike guidance in navigating movement politics and community-building through the publication's structural model, grand visions, schismatic politics, and obscured legacy.

1.1 "A Need for a Voice": Female Liberation in Boston

Of the numerous Boston feminist organizations, Female Liberation stood out because of its radical feminism, its broad membership, and overall commitment to the feminist media through its publications, radio show, and emphasis of other cultural pursuits. Female Liberation eventually claimed to "[encompass] all aspects of the feminist struggle, including education, consciousness raising activities, and action around such basic demands of the movement as childcare, abortion and equal pay."[28] Aside from their work in publications, the group worked to organize conferences and events to bring feminists together. In 1969, Female Liberation/Cell 16 "helped organize the New England Regional Female Liberation conference" and had over six hundred people in attendance.[29] Members of Female Liberation also spoke at several women's liberation conferences hosted by other organizations in order to foster a feminist camaraderie and common sensibility.

[27] Another source on feminism in print is Laurel Forster, "Spreading the Word: Feminist Print Cultures and the Women's Liberation Movement," *Women's History Review* 25, no. 5 (2016): 812–31.
[28] "A Statement about Female Liberation," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 1, Spring 1971. I include page numbers in most references to *The Second Wave*, but the first issue did not include page numbers.
[29] Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 2.

The radical group wanted to target many elements of women's oppression and hoped to appeal to a wide range of women. They articulated the radical notion that, "revolution is necessary, and that it probably will not be peaceable, because those in power are violent and inhumane."[30] Former Female Liberation member, Nancy Rosenstock, described the numerous factors that made the organization stand out from other groups in the metropolitan area. "Boston Female Liberation was part of [second wave feminism's] radical wing, which saw women's oppression as the result of the entire structure of society," she explained. "Female Liberation, as an organization, was uncompromising in its fight for women's emancipation."[31] The group saw the hegemonic monstrosity of the patriarchy and believed that the only way to improve women's lives was to completely restructure society in favor of gender equality. In the early years as described by Rosenstock, Female Liberation/ Cell 16 were dedicated to challenging mainstream conceptions of beauty, womanhood, and femininity, as well as "teaching self-defense to women to combat sexual violence."[32] These beliefs manifested in numerous ways, with some members choosing to wear traditionally male clothing, cutting their hair, and expressing feminist separatist sentiments as well.[33] Feminist separatists imagined a world completely removed from men and the patriarchy in every possible way. Liberal feminists, and even radical feminists, found this view to be aggressive and extremist.

Rosenstock also explained that Female Liberation stood out "sharply for both its militancy and its clarity on the nature of sexism."[34] Though the members expressed radical and specific viewpoints, the group remained open to all and did not identify with a specific branch of

[30] "Which Way for Female Liberation," 1970, Box 1, Folder 6, *Female Liberation* Papers, Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, Snell Library.
[31] Nancy Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 11.
[32] Nancy Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 2.
[33] Delphine Welch, "Neighborhood Matters: A Conversation with Members of Boston Female Liberation, 1968-1972," Northeastern University, Filmed Sept. 17, 2019, video of event, 1:58:34.
[34] Nancy Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 11.

feminism. Historian Alice Echols in *Daring to Be Bad* described the nuances of radical second wave feminists and described various groups adhering to beliefs like cultural feminism, lesbian separatism, and Marxism.[35] As an organization, Female Liberation never explicitly identified with any of these categories, but specific members associated with various radical feminist sects. Throughout its tenure, Female Liberation remained dedicated to social upheaval as the only possible means of liberating women, but members each had varying opinions and goals within their activism. Some feminists in the area saw their actions as extreme, thus the radical political nature of Female Liberation/Cell 16 in the early years notably deterred other feminists from joining the organization. In her dissertation, Anne Hunter Poplin, as a former member of Bread and Roses, highlighted the group's radicalism in stating "other women took the feminism and anti-male rhetoric of Female Liberation as a referent."[36] Poplin, as a member of a different feminist group in Boston, viewed Female Liberation's politics as much too radical. Other groups offered varying perspectives on feminism, but in its early years Female Liberation advocated for radical strategies like self-defense and anti-male rhetoric. Group members even advocated for complete separation from men, as they believed all men participated and furthered the oppression of women.

In order to establish a feminist consciousness and group action, the organization used meetings, discussion groups, actions, and eventually publications. These approaches provided the group with many successes, but Female Liberation became most well-known for its feminist publications. In 1968, members of the organization began to publish *No More Fun and Games* (originally titled *A Journal of Female Liberation)* to engage in feminist discussions and share

[35] Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 21.
[36] Popkin, "Bread and Roses," 54.

their radical ideas. It was one of the first feminist journals in the United States and "the demand for the journal was so great that at times those involved in sending it out could hardly keep up."[37] *No More Fun and Games* published six issues between 1968 and 1973 with each issue ranging from 80 to 190 pages and the first issue had a distribution of more than 10,000 copies.[38] Female Liberation/Cell 16 became well known through these radical publications and "became a pole of attraction nationally."[39] The journal was originally published by members of Female Liberation and a smaller subsect of the group that would later separate from the larger group and call themselves Cell 16.[40] Tensions began to rise between the two groups and would eventually lead to a series of conflicts.

Conflicts emerged within Female Liberation/Cell 16 in 1970 as members closely related to the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) and Socialist Worker's Party (SWP) joined and gained roles in Female Liberation.[41] As YSA/SWP members joined the organization, the group changed from the previous small structure model preferred by Cell 16 into a large-scale model that welcomed a wider range of women. Cell 16 members critiqued this tendency in stating that Female Liberation, "should not attempt to become the movement themselves by bringing everyone into their group."[42] Members of Female Liberation even acknowledged that "this kind of development was a big change…since we had always been a small group and never encouraged other women to become involved in our group."[43] Eventually, this disagreement

[37] Nancy Rosenstock, "Neighborhood Matters: A Conversation with Members of Boston Female Liberation, 1968-1972," Northeastern University, Filmed Sept. 17, 2019, video of event, 1:58:34.
[38] "Budget—9/24/70-11/28/70," cited in Beins, *Liberation in Print*, 22.
[39] Nancy Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 2.
[40] Both groups cite 1968 as their founding year but began to organize separately in late 1970.
[41] I refer to the early years of the group (1968 to late 1970) as Female Liberation/Cell 16 because Cell 16 was a sect of Female Liberation but was part of the larger organization up until the eventual split in 1970.
[42] "Original Cell 16 Statement on YSA/SWP" Nov. 25, 1970, Box 1, Folder 5, Female Liberation Papers.
[43] "Which Way for Female Liberation," 1970, Box 1, Folder 6, Female Liberation Papers.

formed a small-scale legal battle and dramatic split between Female Liberation and Cell 16 beginning in 1970.

Cell 16 members alleged that these YSA/SWP members had a reputation for attempting to takeover organizations and thus tried to keep these individuals away from Female Liberation and its assets, including *No More Fun and Games.* The women of Cell 16 felt ownership over the journal, especially as they raised much of the money for its publication. Cell 16 condemned the women of YSA/SWP, stating that, "the effect if not the intent, of the tactics of YSA, has been to weaken the movement and to waste its valuable energy."[44] Moreover, this conflict led to personal and legal battles over the Boylston Street office, equipment, publication copyrights, funds, and rights to the name Female Liberation.[45] Female Liberation diplomatically stated that "the members of Cell 16 have retreated into their closed circle. F.L. respects the right of all women in the movement to work in whatever structure they feel is the most effective."[46] Ultimately, Cell 16 left the group amidst this conflict, but problems with the YSA/SWP sect would reemerge later within Female Liberation in 1972 and impact the *Second Wave*.

In late 1970, there was a "final, dramatic parting of ways" between members of Female Liberation and the smaller cell-like organization, Cell 16.[47] As political differences mounted and the groups separated, Cell 16 took over *No More Fun and Games* and continued to publish this radical feminist journal for several years. The group identified as a separatist feminist organization according to Roxanne Dunbar, coming to terms with their more radical politics as a

[44] "Follow Up Cell 16 Statement on YSA/SWP," n.d., Box 1, Folder 5, Female Liberation Papers.
[45] "Letter from Attorney William P. Homans Jr. to Barbara L. Hassenfeld," Dec. 8, 1970, Box 1, Folder 7, Female Liberation Papers, Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections.
[46] "Where have we come from? Where are we going?" Statement from Female Liberation, 1970, Box 1, Folder 6, Female Liberation Papers.
[47] Photocopy of Article, "New Publications: Feminism in Print," by Pat Arnold, Nov. 16, 1971, Box 2, Folder 31, *The Second Wave* Papers.

separate entity.[48] Female Liberation felt the loss of the journal during the Female Liberation/Cell 16 split. Liza Bingham, a founding member of the *Second Wave*, explained that Female Liberation felt "a need for a voice to replace *No More Fun and Games.*"[49] The women of Female Liberation began planning a publication in 1970 and the *Second Wave* was born in Spring 1971, providing the group with a voice and an outlet to share their feminist ideas.

1.2 "Attempting to Redefine Structure": The Functions and Content of the Second Wave

The first page of every issue of the *Second Wave* referenced its namesake—a Kate Millet quote in *Sexual Politics* that goes "it may be that a second wave of sexual revolution might at last accomplish its aim of freeing half the race from its immemorial subordination and in the process bring us all a great deal closer to humanity."[50] The staff at the *Second Wave: A Magazine of the New Feminism* (later *A Magazine of Ongoing Feminism)* believed they were continuing the work of first-wave feminists and in many ways aimed to improve upon the work of their predecessors. The Boston/Cambridge-based magazine had a small staff and limited resources when publication first began. The *Second Wave* personnel also had limited knowledge of running a publication. The staff described the process of putting out the magazine as a "kaleidoscope of ideas and people looking for ways to fit them together."[51] In a fundraising letter, Fran Taylor explained the extensive work that went into putting out an issue of the *Second Wave* when she stated that "among us, we write a large proportion of the material and edit, copy-edit, and proofread all of it; design layout, contribute artwork, and do final camera-ready paste-up; handle subscriptions;

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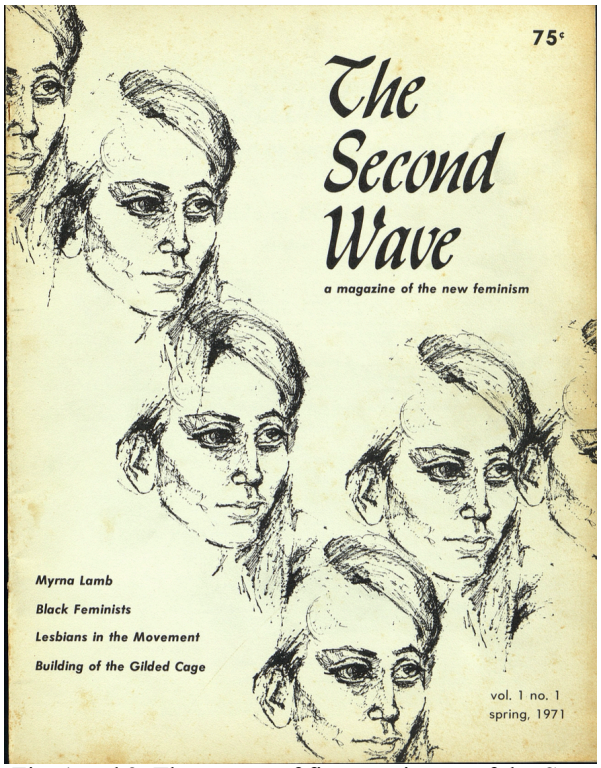
[48] Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 164.
[49] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[50] Kate Millet quoted in *The Second Wave* 1, no. 1, spring 1971. This quote was also used near the table of contents in every other issue of *The Second Wave.*
[51] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 2, Summer 1978, 6.

distribute to bookstores by hand in the Boston area and by mail elsewhere; and keep the books."[52] The women of the *Second Wave* collective worked extensively to put out each issue.



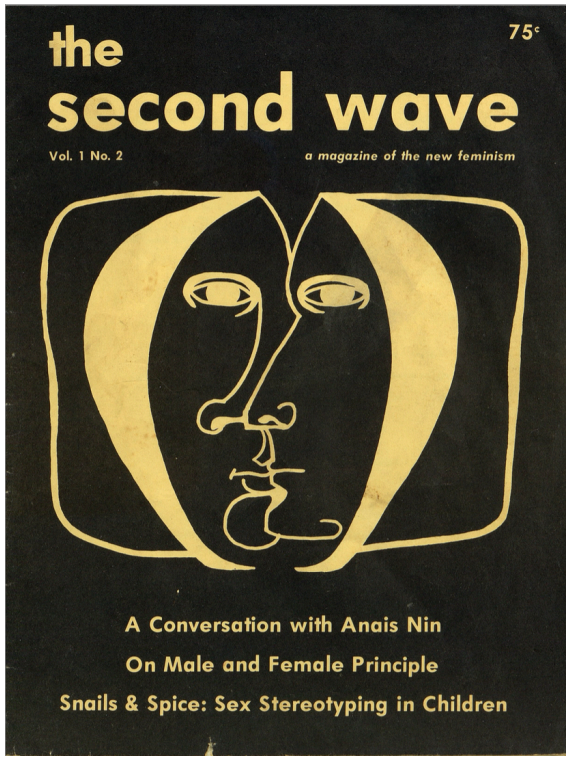


Fig. 1 and 2. The covers of first two issues of the *Second Wave,* featuring feminist art and subjects to be addressed in the magazine's content.[53]

The initial structure of the *Second Wave* staff was unlike most conventional magazines—for one, there was no editor in chief. Instead, all committee members were listed as editors. The staff explained that in this unique organization, they were "attempting to redefine structure: not to eliminate it, but to work it so that there are no 'leaders' in the traditional sense, so that the leadership that does exist is flexible [and] non-hierarchical."[54] This structure made the magazine function differently than mainstream publications as it focused on collaboration and consensus within the group as a whole. The magazine itself was intended to be run as a collective, but

[52] "Drafty Fundraising Letters to Fellow Barnards Grads, etc.," by Fran Taylor, n.d., box 2, folder 17, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[53] "Cover," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 1, Spring 1971; "Cover," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 2, Summer 1971.
[54] "Draft on the Purpose of *The Second Wave,"* n.d., box 2, folder 25, *The Second Wave* Papers.

"unlike many collectives, there was no correct line at the magazine."[55] Staff members often found it difficult to reach political consensus and align with a specific political ideology. The *Second Wave* staff later implemented structural changes because the concept of consensus-building proved to be much less collective and less efficient in practice.[56]

Moreover, in contrast to the commercial feminist magazine *Ms.,* the personnel of the *Second Wave* did not try to make a profit, largely due to a "deep distrust of capitalism" and thus they "chose a publishing practice that actively resisted the values of the economic system."[57] Additionally, the magazine's staff members were not paid for their efforts due to financial constraints and a resistance to capitalism. That being said, Female Liberation still needed funds to put out issues of the magazine. For example, in 1971 each issue cost about $2,345 to create and publish.[58] The magazine staff had to raise money, either through donations, subscriptions, or fund-raising events. As the magazine progressed, the staff had to raise the price of the magazine a few times, but also explained that the magazine would continue to be free to women who could not afford it.[59]

The magazine's readership was local, national, and even international at times. Though the magazine could be mailed across the country, it was likely more widely read in cities rather than suburban and rural areas. In a letter to the *Second Wave,* Jennifer Jason told the staff, "what I, and many others I know of, would really like to see is your type of information in the suburbs, where it appears the most <u>un</u>liberated women dwell…I believe your influence is needed there."[60] Jason's letter highlights the fact that many suburban bookstores would not carry feminist

[55] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[56] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 1, Fall 1973, 2.
[57] Beins, *Liberation in Print,* 22.
[58] "Letter from Female Liberation to Jeanne Boudin," Nov. 11, 1971, Box 2, Folder 15, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[59] "Front Matter," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 4, Summer/Fall 1976, 1.
[60] Jennifer Jason, "Jennifer Jason Letter to Claire and *The Second Wave,*" April 26, 1972, Box 2, Folder 16, *The Second Wave* Papers.

publications, thus many women remained unaware of the *Second Wave* and its potential to liberate women. The *Second Wave* did its best to reach a broad audience of women but did not have a similar reach to a commercial magazine like *Ms.*

Each issue of the *Second Wave* contained a variety of articles addressing issues applicable to all women. The articles were written both by women involved with Female Liberation and women outside of the organization. By the third issue, the publication explicitly stated that "the views expressed are not necessarily those of Female Liberation" and continued to include this disclaimer in its issues through 1974.[61] The *Second Wave* included news articles, opinion pieces, book and film reviews, fiction, poetry, and feminist art. Through these varying formats,

> Women show both the pleasure and struggle in their discovery of feminism: artists who are using their gifts to portray a new consciousness; gay women who are developing a tenable life style in a predominantly straight, sexist society; radical feminists who are planning a strategy for revolution; working women who are organizing; women interested in technology, raising children, legalizing abortion, ending the war, and the dehumanization of pornography.[62]

The diversity of topics and formats included in the *Second Wave* allowed women to read about a range of topics, engage in discussion, and form ideas for themselves.

Contributors to the *Second Wave* dealt with a range of topics and issues that they felt were applicable to the feminist movement. In a 1973 issue, Barbara N. Cohn wrote an article titled "Succumbing to Rape?" that analyzed the significant impact that sexual assault had on a woman's life as well as the demographic statistics of survivors. Cohn described the sense of loss that a sexual assault survivor might feel, when she wrote: "What she loses forever is a belief in the goodness of people and a trust in others… she pays the final, most brutal price for being a

[61] "Front Matter," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 3, Fall 1971, 2.
[62] Holly Newman, "In Review: *The Second Wave," The Militant,* Oct. 15, 1971, Box 2, Folder 31, *The Second Wave* Papers.

woman in a world ruled by men."[63] Issues of the *Second Wave* contained many discussions of sexual assault, as it was a central focus of organizing in second-wave feminism.

Additionally, many articles of the *Second Wave* also addressed movement politics and opinions on how second-wave feminism should proceed. In an article entitled "Tyranny of Structurelessness," author Joreen criticized the tendency towards non-hierarchy and structurelessness of many organizations, including Cell 16 and the *Second Wave*. Joreen wrote that "if the movement is to grow beyond these elementary stages of development, it will have to disabuse itself from some of its prejudices about organization and structure."[64] This critique, along those present in other issues, addressed what the author thought about current movement politics and how the author wished for the movement to develop. The debate between traditional structure and structurelessness would be a key issue among magazine staff as well.

Race also proved to be an important topical issue in the *Second Wave.* The magazine periodically published editorials written by black women who hoped to share their writing in the magazine, but addressing issues of race and racism was not its primary goal. The *Second Wave* often included discussions of race, but the magazine largely followed the broader patterns of the second wave in relegating race as a less significant factor than gender or class. In the summer 1971 issue of the *Second Wave,* activist Maryanne Weathers explored the ways in which black women were impacted by abortion laws and practices in the article "Black Women and Abortion." She wrote an impassioned article and stated, "Black women must and will decide everything concerning our lives…no man, no state, no society will ever again dare to intrude or dictate how we live."[65] Weathers, along with other black feminists, wrote for the *Second Wave*

[63] Barbara N. Cohn, "Succumbing to Rape?" *The Second Wave* 2, no. 2, Summer 1972, 27.
[64] Joreen, "Tyranny of Structurelessness," *The Second Wave* 2, no 1, Spring 1972, 20.
[65] Maryanne Weathers, "Black Women and Abortion," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 2, Summer 1971, 5.

and was a member of Female Liberation, as well as the Black and Third World Women's Alliance.[66] Female Liberation itself was largely white, college educated, and middle class. Thus, women of color involved in the feminist movement began to establish their own organizations in the late 1970s. Even as they collaborated with women such as Weathers to share more diverse feminist perspectives, the staff of the *Second Wave* focused on white feminist issues.

Fig. 3. Feminist dancing at Liberation Day Protest in Boston Common, April 1971. Featured in the *Second Wave.* [67]

The *Second Wave* staff intended for the magazine to bring women together via consciousness raising and to create a sense of sisterhood among feminists. In the first issue of the *Second Wave* the staff wrote "we want to help mobilize the energies and power of these masses

[66] Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 10.
[67] "Woman dancing at Liberation Day Rally," photograph, April 1971. From Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20247216.

of women to fight for nothing less than our total liberation."[68] Female Liberation hoped that all women would join the movement and they saw their magazine as a tool that could encourage a wide range of women to organize against sexism. The *Second Wave* was largely successful in helping women establish a feminist consciousness. Jane Tuchscherer, a *Second Wave* staff member, explained how she reacted when she first read the magazine. "The first time I saw *Second Wave* I was in a lefty bookstore in State College, Pennsylvania, dreaming of being in a city where women talked about the issues discussed in *Second Wave*," she recalled. "I was so hungry for these sorts of ideas, for more information."[69] In envisioning a community for women and a feminist consciousness, the *Second Wave* created a unique and uplifting space for women.

The original staff of the *Second Wave* explained that they hoped to create a feminist forum. In the first issue of the magazine, the staff explained that "when we began to discuss plans for the magazine our idea was to provide a forum for feminist ideas…we conceived of a publication that would present a variety of opinion from women within and without the movement on all topics that concern women."[70] The forum-like environment was intended to solicit contemplation and discussion among feminist readers. In order to accomplish this, the magazine relied on submissions from readers and the editorial staff believed "it would brighten the publication to have writers with more varied experiences and viewpoints."[71] The *Second Wave* staff constantly appealed to readers for their input, noting that "part of the strength of the women's movement is its diversity: there is no one 'correct' line."[72] As Female Liberation consisted of mostly white middle-class women, members aimed to produce a more comprehensive image of the movement

[68] "A Statement about Female Liberation," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 1, Spring 1971.
[69] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[70] "A Statement about Female Liberation," *The Second Wave* 1, no. 1, Spring 1971.
[71] Laura Shapiro, "Women's Notes: Up and Coming," *The Phoenix*, Sept. 21, 1971, from Box 2, Folder 31, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[72] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 1, Spring 1972, 2.

via their magazine. Their goal was not to indoctrinate readers, but instead to inspire them to form their own opinions on feminist issues.

The *Second Wave* staff worked to create and build up a feminist media as a rare space for women to openly express their ideas in a comfortable setting. The publication's dedication to community and consciousness raising aided in this goal. In her works *Constructive Feminism* and "Women's Rights and Gendered Spaces in 1970s Boston," historian Daphne Spain explained how second-wave feminists built physical spaces for themselves within male urban environments. She argued that in defying traditional notions of a limited women's sphere, "feminists' struggles for rights and liberation would work in tandem to change the way women used urban space."[73] Women felt the need to create spaces by and for women due to how unwelcome and even unsafe they felt in male-dominated spaces. With the emergence of female spaces in the 1960s and 1970s, Spain explained that women created "places to obtain contraceptives and abortion, seek shelter from an abusive partner, meet socially with other women, read feminist literature that promoted nontraditional roles for women, and invest their money where other women banked."[74] The creation of female spaces transformed the way women would act in the public sphere.

In addition to Spain's argument about the emergence of physical spaces for women, feminist periodicals were metaphorical spaces for women to write and express their opinions, learn from each other, and develop a feminist consciousness. The freedom to write was essential in second-wave feminism, as many women found themselves alienated from or disparaged by male-dominated mainstream publications. In the pages of feminist periodicals, women had an unprecedented opportunity to contribute to an emerging feminist media. The magazine was also

[73] Spain, "Women's Rights and Gendered Spaces," 157.
[74] Spain, "Women's Rights and Gendered Spaces," 170.

run out of several offices during its tenure, which made providing a tangible women's space for the collective difficult.

The *Second Wave* addressed the larger significance of a feminist media and the ways in which this publication contributed to it. In an editorial in a 1972 issue, the staff explained an objective of the magazine in stating, "we see ourselves working together with other feminist publications to build a strong movement media…while we can use the mass media for our own purposes, it is crucial that we build an alternative."[75] The staff aimed to use the close relationship with Female Liberation to form a feminist press, but also highlighted how collaboration with other groups would allow them to express more diverse ideas. In the Spring 1974 issue, the staff continued their definition of the feminist media:

> Finally, the feminist media is the means through which we can explore our own language, our own voice, our own art, borrowing what is useful from the old male standards, throwing off what is not. And this discovery of our own voice is one of our hardest challenges... The feminist media is a means of creating–or unearthing–our own language.[76]

The publication defined the feminist media as one made for and by women, used to explore commonalities and differences in women's lives, and capable of creating a common language.

A significant aspect of the feminist media was providing women with an opportunity to learn essential skills in publishing. Women had been alienated from the field for decades and unable to learn these skills, thus it was important for publications like the *Second Wave* to provide a space for staff to gain experience so that feminist publications could be created and published without the help of men. In a letter asking for donations, staff member Fran Taylor explained that "we believe that a feminist media is essential, both to present our ideas in an undistorted way, and to provide women with a rare opportunity to learn every aspect of the

[75] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 1, Spring 1972, 2.
[76] "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 2, Spring 1974, 2-3.

publishing process."[77] In the first few years of the magazine, the staff explained they were largely self-taught and worked very hard to put out each issue with limited knowledge. When reflecting on her time at the *Second Wave*, Kathi Maio explained that, "despite the fact that none of us ever got paid for working on *Second Wave*, it's amazing how many of us learned to write or developed even more marketable skills through the magazine."[78] She knew of other members who used these skills in their future careers, such as Peggy Kornegger, who went on to become a proofreader. In creating a feminist media, many staff members wanted to learn publishing skills in order to remove men as much as possible from the publication process. The staff explained the value of the publication, when they stated that "the magazine gave us skills, a voice, and ideas; the more we worked together, the more we came to identify ourselves with it, and the more important it became for the next issue to come out. It gave us on the staff a place to work out ideas of cooperation, shared responsibility, the meaning of sisterhood."[79] The magazine meant a great deal to those involved and also allowed women to develop skills that they had been systemically denied.

Even as the staff benefitted from their involvement, the publication also ran into numerous conflicts regarding its structure, falling staff membership within the *Second Wave*, ideological differences, financial difficulties, and factional strife. As a result, the purpose and structure of the magazine evolved during its years of publication, as staff members did their best to navigate through these difficulties while grappling with the immense responsibility of the magazine as an inspiration for women across the country. The publication had the overarching

[77] Fran Taylor, "Drafty Fundraising Letters to Fellow Barnards Grads, etc.," n.d., box 2, folder 17, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[78] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[79] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 2, Summer/Fall 1978, 6. This was the first issue published in a year due to lack of funds.

goal of building a united feminist sisterhood, but as second-wave feminism fractured and evolved over the magazine's tenure, the *Second Wave* dealt with new challenges that made these goals elusive.

1.3 "An Overall Commitment to Feminism Was Not Enough": Schismatic Politics and Internal Problems of the Second Wave

Throughout its twelve years of publishing, the goals and content of the *Second Wave* evolved in relation to factionalism and the political beliefs of its members. The magazine was hardly a static entity; the publication's staff changed constantly, with women leaving and joining its ranks frequently. Each woman brought her own experiences and political beliefs into the magazine, which had an impact on the trajectory of the publication. Throughout the twelve years of the *Second Wave*, the magazine changed its purposes and goals, largely due to internal conflicts, the dissolution of Female Liberation, and changing membership. In many ways, feminist periodicals like the *Second Wave* were largely able "to record the complexity of a movement in action."[80] The magazine had a variety of goals during its years of publishing, including to bring women together via consciousness raising, to contribute to a feminist media, and to make a political and personal impact. The purposes and goals of the magazine evolved as the staff were faced with the harsh realities of sectarianism and personal disagreements.

Signs of ideological differences were evident early in the magazine's tenure. Female Liberation and the staff of the *Second Wave* aimed to create a forum environment, but they also distanced themselves from some of the political viewpoints they were encouraging by publishing disclaimers. According to a staff member Liza Bingham, the *Second Wave* was "totally

[80] Jordan and Meagher, "Introduction: Feminist Periodical Studies," 98.

committed to being non-ideological" and "had a personality in and of itself…it didn't represent any particular individual or viewpoint."[81] The publication staff's desire to remain non-ideological, while seemingly impossible for a radical publication, encouraged them to create a forum-like environment, but also hinted at the organization's ideological strife. Due to the ideological diversity and amateur nature of the staff in the first few issues, staff members were "in wonderment that we managed somehow, with all our crazy incoherence, to produce such a fine magazine" according to Karen Lindsey.[82] Moreover, ideological conflicts and factionalism made it difficult to produce each issue, thus leading to this sense of amazement when the magazine came to fruition. The staff of the *Second Wave* found themselves in "conflicts over its relationship to Female Liberation, to the rest of the women's movement, to itself," while also dealing with the political splits in Female Liberation.[83]

Fig. 4. Discussion among Female Liberation/Cell 16 members, circa 1972.[84]

[81] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[82] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[83] "Forum," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 2, Summer/Fall 1978, 6.
[84] "A group of women seated in a circle on the grass," photograph, circa 1972. From Snell Library at Northeastern University Archives and Special Collections, Box 2, M122, http://hdl.handle.net/2047/D20262549.

Additionally, the *Second Wave* grew out of and was closely connected to Female Liberation, but "conflicts were beginning to develop between women focused primarily on the [magazine] and those in the mother organization."[85] Some women complained about staff members of the *Second Wave* not attending general Female Liberation meetings, leading to some members viewing the magazine staff as "elitist."[86] In order to cope with these conflicts, the magazine staff explained in a 1972 editorial that they discussed the feelings of disconnectedness and "now want to put more of the organization into the magazine as well."[87] Though they attempted to bridge this gap, the *Second Wave* struggled to determine its relationship to its mother organization, especially as the magazine achieved more success and thus gained more autonomy. This impacted the membership of the magazine collective and left the staff consumed by these conflicts.

The *Second Wave* staff had internal and structural conflicts which tested the Female Liberation's as well as the magazine's dedication to a forum-like environment. The publication was supposedly collective, but in reality, it became a **"**system of relying on one person, burning her out and plugging in another victim for the next issue."[88] In this editorial, the staff explained that this process was far from collective, cruel to the person in charge, and damaging to staff relationships. The publication had only existed for three years at this point, but its staff were already very self-critical and divided. A staff member described the staff turnover rate by stating "collective members sometimes dropped like proverbial flies" and that those who stayed long term also felt burnt out. She said, "eventually, when we couldn't fight the exhaustion and the

[85] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[86] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[87] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 2, Summer 1972, 2.
[88] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 1, Fall 1973, 2.

resentment any longer, we left."[89] This system led to low morale, internal conflicts, and high membership turnover.

Due to the wide range of ideologies represented in the publication, many women had personal arguments and disagreements that also impacted the *Second Wave*. Maio articulated the magazine's dynamic in writing, "imagine what would happen if you got Marxist, anarchist, lesbian, lesbian separatist, 'militantly straight,' and moderate political feminists (and various combinations thereof) together in a very small office, told them to work together, sometimes eighteen or twenty hours a day, to put out a magazine" through a collective process.[90] She described this process as almost impossible and explained that it forced the staff to engage in long, unending debates instead of putting matters to a simple vote. In addition to staff conflicts, the publication staff had to deal with larger political schisms.

In addition to its internal problems, the *Second Wave* also continued to be impacted by the involvement of Female Liberation members in YSA/SWP. In 1972, YSA/SWP members officially left the organization. This decision reflected tensions prevalent in Female Liberation but ultimately resulted from a disagreement on "whether to turn FL into an abortion rights group–at the expense of its many other activities."[91] YSA/SWP members wanted the organization to focus exclusively on reproductive rights, while the majority of the group favored a broader feminist perspective. Once YSA/SWP members left the organization in early 1972, the other members experienced somewhat of an identity crisis. In one editorial, the staff explained the impact of the split on Female Liberation and the publication in stating that the magazine was "a split self" with "the presence of members of the [SWP and YSA] within Female Liberation for

[89] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[90] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[91] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.

two years [marking them] deeply."[92] Members felt compelled to define themselves as either for or against SWP/YSA involvement, and thus found it difficult to identify themselves outside of this binary. The staff explained that "in the half-year since the SWP/YSA women have left the organization, we have intensified the painful struggle to integrate personal reality and political action."[93] Female Liberation experienced an identity crisis with the YSA/SWP split in 1972 and this sense of uncertainty inevitability filtered down into the *Second Wave.*

The *Second Wave* and Female Liberation survived this period of uncertainty, but this split led the publication staff to pursue a more defined ideology for the next few years. Staff began to think critically about the political impact of their publication and "*Second Wave* took on a more autonomous identity."[94] This split ended up being more detrimental to the mother organization than the magazine, as Female Liberation "was experiencing a severe energy and identity crisis, while its daughter, the *Second Wave,* was growing and thriving."[95] As the magazine evolved and its membership changed after the split, the *Second Wave* staff began to adopt a more personalized and political perspective instead of viewing themselves simply as providing a forum for all. Staff members continued to rethink the magazine's structure and overall politics. Members aimed to change the editorial process shortly after as "lack of political definition has been accompanied by lack of clear cut collective editorial policy…as a result, we have occasionally published work that most of us regretted sooner or later."[96] The staff largely disagreed on what the magazine should say to its readers and found themselves seeking a more politically defined magazine.

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[92] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 2, Summer 1972, 2.
[93] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 2, Summer 1972, 2.
[94] Karen Lindsey, "Beyond *Ms.*- Boston's Feminist Magazines," *The Boston Phoenix,* Aug. 27, 1974, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[95] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[96] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 3.

Female Liberation dissolved into three separate entities in 1974, leaving the *Second Wave* independent from its mother organization for the first time. The *Second Wave* continued to be run by former members of Female Liberation for some time but were no longer influenced or restrained by the group's politics. The group also branched out to create a radio show called "I am Woman" and former members continued to contribute to the movement via poetry readings and other consciousness raising events.[97] Members of Female Liberation released a statement at this time in the *Second Wave* highlighting the internal divisions that led to Female Liberation's disintegration. They largely attributed their dissolution to differences in opinion and concluded. "We learned that an overall commitment to feminism was not enough to base a group around," they admitted, "and that unity of political principles cannot be taken for granted, since our break-up was mainly due to differences over how to accomplish our goals."[98] The tendency of Female Liberation to include all women meant that the group was largely heterogenous and did not claim to reach any kind of political consensus. This is evident in the many conflicts and splits the group faced, from YSA/SWP friction to the Cell 16 separation to the eventual dissolution of Female Liberation due to lack of consensus. Former staff member Maio explained that the idea of the *Second Wave* as an amorphous political entity reflected the beliefs of Female Liberation but also proved detrimental to the publication itself.[99]

The dissolution of the magazine's parent organization directly impacted the publication. Despite the split and constant membership changes, the magazine continued to publish. The staff made changes to the magazine, such as altering its structure to have a hierarchy of editors, associated editors, and apprentices by late 1974. They maintained a commitment to the

[97] Female Liberation, "Letter to Deborah Rose," Feb. 22, 1973, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[98] "For Release: March 1979," *The Second Wave* 3, No. 2, Spring 1974, 3.
[99] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.

alternative press and wrote "we feel our energies belong with women and that one of the tools for breaking down the patriarchy…is the building up of a feminist media."[100] In being independent, they could better advocate for a feminist media instead of being consumed by internal conflicts. The end of Female Liberation presented the staff with an opportunity to explore their own politics. The *Second Wave* staff explained this challenge and opportunity when they stated that "we are going to have to define ourselves with neither the support nor the limitations involved in being part of a larger organization."[101] At the same time, the demise of Female Liberation alienated the magazine from resources, staff members, and other essential elements necessary for putting out new issues. The magazine was becoming more independent over several years but was still adversely impacted by the end of Female Liberation.

After YSA/SWP women left the organization in 1972 and Female Liberation dissolved in 1974, the magazine itself expressed a desire to reignite their original radical fervor that they felt was lost in pursuing such an open forum. They explained that before the dissolution of Female Liberation, "the majority seemed to feel that the magazine should be loose in its politics, a forum for all women, open to different, even opposing viewpoints."[102] After 1974, the group still wanted the publication to be a forum but wanted a forum to align with their original radicalism, instead of being a bland, amorphous representation of feminism. They referred to crises going on over the world such as the busing crisis in Boston, war in Southeast Asia, and fascism in Chile.[103] These horrific events at home and abroad inspired the staff as they explained "we feel a renewed sense of urgency about keeping a radical perspective in *the second wave.*"[104] In order to

[100] "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 2, Spring 1974, 2.
[101] "From Us: Thoughts on the Feminist Media," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 2, Spring 1974, 2.
[102] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 2.
[103] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 2.
[104] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 2.

keep this perspective alive, they altered editorial policies and worked hard to balance a forum setting with radical politics.

The staff began this process in 1972 but continued with full force in 1974. Critiques of the magazine's amorphous politics were evident from an early stage, but the dissolution of Female Liberation provided staff with a clean break and an eagerness to try something new. The *Second Wave* still dealt with disagreements and difficulties after the disintegration of Female Liberation. One of the first problems the publication faced after the split was in defining its politics. The staff wrote that "our reason for publishing has always been political…yet we never got around to defining exactly what political means."[105] In dealing with the problems inherent in Female Liberation, the staff was unable to focus on defining its politics. As staff members began to reexamine the magazine's function, many began to stress the importance of explicitly informing the audience about their goals for the magazine and their political beliefs.

The staff made more efforts to present the magazine as political and ideological through its content and process. They explained that the *Second Wave* was "a tool with which we hammer at the existing social and economic structures to open up new directions for a woman's revolution."[106] In bringing together political perspectives and defining their own, the staff worked hard to redefine the magazine while still bringing meaningful content to its readers. Shortly after the dissolution of Female Liberation, the staff editorials or "From Us" section at the beginning of each issue became much more radical and aimed to confront a variety of issues. In the Fall 1975 issue, the staff wrote about female oppression in very strident terms, arguing that, "women's lives have been 'battered' for centuries…we have been burned, beaten, and physically

[105] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 2.
[106] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 3, Spring 1976, 2.

and psychologically tortured whether we were, witch, whore, wife, or virgin."[107] The "From Us" section changed in tone to represent their radical alignment. In comparison to other magazine editorials, this statement was much more radical as it highlighted an innate sense of rage from the staff members themselves. In other editorials as well, the staff made efforts to make its stances clear on a variety of issues, such as lesbian feminism.[108] Members continued to disagree on political issues, but also still made efforts to highlight different perspectives.

The staff continued to make changes to the publication's content and structure. In the summer 1976 issue, the staff addressed movement factionalism and their forum-like approach. "[B]ecause *The Second Wave* is not written for a small group of women who already agree on everything," they wrote, "we are making this space available for an open grappling with issues."[109] In order to accomplish this goal, the staff temporarily stopped publishing editorials and instead included a forum section in each issue to prevent a hierarchical relationship between readers and editors.[110] After a few issues, the editors then added in the editorial section in addition to the forum. While the magazine staff still clearly advocated for the magazine as a forum, many staff members were still unhappy with the publication. In one editorial, they wrote, "it seemed enough for us to be publishing a 'good' magazine, presenting a range of feminist issues and perspectives, and giving exposure to talented women writers and artists…but it is no longer reason enough."[111]

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[107] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 2, Fall 1975, 2.
[108] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 3, Spring 1973, 2-4. In this editorial, the staff explained that they had been discussing the role of lesbians in the organization and decided that they must encourage dialogues about lesbianism in order to learn more about their sisters.
[109] "Forum," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 4, Summer 1976, 2. The "From Us" section was removed from this issue and replaced with the "Forum" section.
[110] "Forum," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 4, Summer 1976, 2.
[111] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 2.

In many ways, the new position of the staff at the *Second Wave* centered on learning from the mistakes of the past. They saw that their predecessors' dedication to a forum to be a distraction from the publication's radical aims. However, the staff still wanted to include diverse conversations in the movement through its community-centric structure. Balancing both radicalism and a true forum in the magazine would prove to be difficult. Staff members moved forward by choosing articles that they perceived as the most radical and compelling issues of second wave feminism. Soon after the dissolution of Female Liberation and implementing new editorial policies, the staff published articles that were regarded radical by other feminists. In Spring 1975, they published "Anarchism—The Feminist Connection" by Peggy Kornegger, in which she drew connections between anarchism and radical feminism. She used historical examples in the Spanish Civil War and French Revolution to argue that "the radical feminist perspective is almost pure anarchism."[112] This statement would frighten and alienate many feminists, but the editors remained committed to displaying a radical edge. They printed on topics such as "violence, rape, spirituality, motherhood and daughterhood, lesbianism, herstory and myth, and revolutionary feminist vision and action."[113] Earlier iterations of the second wave touched on similar issues, but the new editorial leadership made efforts to ensure that their content was still diverse yet remained dedicated to the proponents of radical feminism.

The staff also were presented with "anti-feminist forces" at home, such as institutionalized racism, the rise of conservatism, and the reduction in the fervor of the feminist movement.[114] *The Second Wave* expressed a degree of urgency and saw themselves as essential in advocating for radical feminism and decisive political change. Staff members continued to

[112] Peggy Kornegger, "Anarchism—The Feminist Connection," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 1, Spring 1975, 31.
[113] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 4, no. 3, Spring 1976.
[114] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 3, Summer 1979, 4.

disagree on this policy and a variety of other issues but agreed that *The Second Wave* was capable of inciting real political change. Despite the dissolution of Female Liberation and the numerous other problems *The Second Wave* itself made efforts to contribute to the feminist media as a space for women outside of the male-dominated media. Staff members even suggested that the publication's "*lack* of political line" gave *The Second Wave* a "receptiveness to any woman's experience.[115] *The Second Wave* maintained that a feminist media was essential as it allowed for women's voices to be shared in an unprecedented way, but the reality of the staff and tendency towards separatism made this vision difficult to achieve. In reflecting on the magazine's tenure, the staff wrote, "in those years, *Second Wave* survived several political splits in FL; differences in expectation of what the magazine was about; conflicts over its relationship to Female Liberation, to the rest of the women's movement, to itself."[116]

When the magazine was involved with Female Liberation, the organization's internal conflicts consumed the publication and led to staff conflicts**.** The magazine was finally able to explore political, ideological vision for the first time and to continue building the feminist media when Female Liberation dissolved but struggled with resources and staff turnover more than ever. The staff envisioned *The Second Wave* as feminist forum to unite women across the globe but struggled to achieve this amidst the realities of sectarian politics and limited resources. With their new vision, they aimed to unite their radical feminist roots with the concept of the forum. They did not adopt a specific ideology outside the label of radical feminism but chose to publish works on controversial topics that aligned with their initial cause. Though early on the publication aspired to be "non-ideological," the new vision for the *Second Wave* involved

[115] Jacqui Parker quoted in Lindsey, "Beyond *Ms.*- Boston's Feminist Magazines," *The Boston Phoenix,* Aug. 27, 1974, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[116] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 2, Summer 1978, 6.

balancing a forum like environment with their commitment to radical feminism, meaning that true equality would only be possible through dramatic social and political upheaval. Balancing a forum like environment and radical feminist stance was difficult, but the new staff of the *Second Wave* wanted their publication to represent militant feminist ideas while also existing in conversation with the broader feminist movement. *The Second Wave* dealt with problems of resources and finances for much of its existence, but these problems only worsened. The magazine persisted through these countless problems and divisions until 1983.

1.4 Conclusion: Impacts and Legacies of The Second Wave

By the early 1980s, *The Second Wave* was struggling more than ever. The publication consistently dealt with problems concerning finances, resources, and staff but these omnipresent issues were hard to ignore by the start of the new decade. *The Second Wave* needed funds to survive and pled with readers for donations. In other attempts to deal with their financial problems, the staff changed the quality of the magazine to keep a lower production cost and even raised its price several times.[117] In summarizing the constant financial struggles of the magazine, Kathi Maio explained that "besides interpersonal tension and movement martyrdom, we also had to worry constantly about money. In fact, our ledgers were always redder than our politics."[118] The lack of money for the publication led to immense stress and also contributed further to the publication's burnout problem.

The publication's staff were overworked and were not paid for their efforts at the magazine.[119] By the last few issues, the staff of the publication was dwindling. They explained

[117] "In the Red Blues: A Letter to Our Readers," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 2, Summer 1978, 4.
[118] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[119] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 4, Winter 1974, 3.

that they were facing staffing problems with only five people working on an issue.[120] Though Female Liberation at times caused strife within the magazine, the staff struggled without the large network, supply of members, and the resources that the organization provided. Many other feminist organizations and publications dealt with similar issues as the initial fervor of second-wave feminism faded. In the last issue of the magazine in 1983, the staff pleaded for donations and explained these problems when they stated that "at a time when many feminist publications are disappearing, we're still here—but we're struggling."[121] This plea would be fruitless but emphasized the significant place of *The Second Wave* in the hearts of staff and loyal readers.

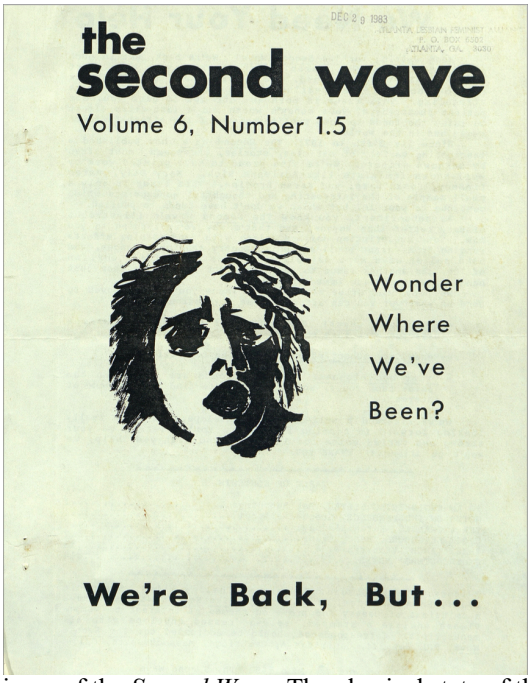

Fig. 5. The cover of the final issue of the *Second Wave*. The physical state of this issue showed evidence of their hiatus, staffing issues, and insurmountable financial troubles.[122]

The final issue of the magazine in many ways encapsulated the long-standing problems of the magazine and was the staff's final attempt to uphold their radical feminist legacy. The June 1983

[120] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 5, no. 2, Summer 1978, 6.
[121] "We're Back, But…We Need Your Help," *The Second Wave* 6, no. 1.5, Summer 1983.
[122] "We're Back, But…We Need Your Help," *The Second Wave* 6, no. 1.5, Summer 1983. The tangible differences of this issue of the magazine to others was astounding. I was able to view and read this issue in the Northeastern Archives and Special Collections and was amazed at the difference of this issue to others. The physical quality was much poorer, the magazine was substantially smaller, and the entire issue was in black and white (even the cover)—which all indicate the immense financial struggle the magazine was under at this point.

issue contained five articles and was 14 pages long, as opposed to most other issues that typically ranged from 40 to 60 pages. The cover contained the simple phrase, "wonder where we've been? we're back, but…" and continued inside the front cover to say "…but we need your help."[123] The staff explained that this simple issue was all they could afford, but they remained passionate about continuing publication. Before including the articles, the staff included a last plea to say, "as subscribers, you know The Second Wave's illustrious history better than anyone, and that's why we're turning to you now."[124] The staff published this final issue in 1983 with hopes to continue, but the financial problems of the magazine ultimately triumphed. Both current and former staff members had mixed emotions about the demise of the magazine. Maio articulated this ambiguity:

> Some even felt a sense of relief. It was 'like hearing about the death of someone who's been in the throes of dying for ages,' said one former collective member…The magazine was no longer on the minds or coffee tables of radical feminists. But it was still the hearts of some women; faithful readers, writers, and especially the women who had worked on *The Second Wave.*[125]

The publication was plagued with divisions, lack of money and resources, and diminishing staff members for over a decade, thus the relative longevity of the magazine begs the question: why did *The Second Wave* persist for so long? The magazine was functionally moribund by 1978, yet women remained dedicated to publishing more issues, obtaining resources, and prolonging the dying magazine's life. The *Second Wave* survived for so long due to the dedication of feminists who believed in the publication's message and saw it as a powerful contributor to the feminist media. The magazine represented a feminist forum and a safe place for women to publish their work. As a result, some feminists saw the publication as worth saving, though their actions in the

[123] "We're Back, But…We Need Your Help," *The Second Wave* 6, no. 1.5, Summer 1983.
[124] "We're Back, But…We Need Your Help," *The Second Wave* 6, no. 1.5, Summer 1983.
[125] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.

later years were largely fruitless. Despite the slow demise of *The Second Wave,* the publication greatly impacted its readers and contributors in its years of publishing and can provide lessons in consciousness raising to aspiring activists.

In building the early feminist media and in using a forum-like atmosphere, the publication had a wide reach across the world, even reaching feminist organizations as far as Australia.[126] *The Second Wave* also had well-known contributors and readers, ranging from Mary Daly, Susan Saxe, and Karen Brodine.[127] Famous feminist poet and writer Adrienne Rich even wrote to the magazine several times to share her admiration. In a letter, later published in *The Second Wave,* Rich wrote, "I use the *Second Wave* as a constant source, underlining articles, sending clippings to friends…I think you are doing one of the finest jobs in the women's press."[128] In addition to having famous contributors and admirers, *The Second Wave* received countless letters from women explaining how the magazine impacted them by bringing them into a feminist consciousness. Another reader, Pat Proctor of Westboro, Massachusetts, expressed how the magazine brought her into a feminist consciousness in stating, "being able to read *The Second Wave* here in suburbia is like having the wall of my cell blown off so I can feel, smell, taste, and enjoy the prospects of freedom and liberation."[129] Gloria DeSole eloquently explained how the magazine forced her to confront uncomfortable ideas, when she wrote "thank you for *The Second Wave…* it is an agony (for what it does not let me overlook), and a joy (that so many women are getting there)."[130] These women and many others attributed their feminist

[126] Letter from Martha Kay to Fran Taylor, n.d., Box 2, Folder 16, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[127] "We're Back, But…We Need Your Help," *The Second Wave* 6, no. 1.5, Summer 1983.
[128] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 3, no. 1, Fall 1973, 3.
[129] "Letters," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 3, Spring 1973, 4.
[130] "Letters," *The Second Wave* 2, no. 1, Spring 1972, 2.

consciousness to *The Second Wave* and its discussions of a wide range of activities. The publication had a wide scope and the ability to inspire women across the globe.

This chapter argued that *The Second Wave* struggled to balance a vision of the publication as a broad feminist forum with the power to unite radical feminists with the reality of organizational schisms, conflicts in Female Liberation, and limited resources. The magazine had many goals throughout its tenure, including bringing more women into a feminist consciousness, building a feminist media, creating a forum for women, and inciting political change by sharing radical perspectives. The magazine became entangled in the struggle between this idealistic vision of sisterhood and the actuality of feminist separatism. *The Second Wave* was born out of the Cell 16/ Female Liberation split and persisted through the 1972 YSA/SWP split, as well as the demise of Female Liberation in 1974. *The Second Wave* was inevitably drawn into these conflicts, which thus impacted its editorial policies, staff, and content. *The Second Wave*'s constant push and pull between sisterhood and schisms connect to common themes within the broader second-wave feminist movement. In its last few years, the magazine staff increasingly dealt with problems of resources and staffing, which ultimately limited its ability to create a utopian community and impacted the longevity of the publication as a whole. Despite schisms and the magazine's demise, *The Second Wave* left behind significant legacies in its staff, readers, and in the broader feminist movement.

The Second Wave's legacies lay in its ability to reach women across the country, and the world, and to open their minds to a broader feminist consciousness. The staff inevitably made mistakes that limited the longevity of the publication, like being drawn into Female Liberation's organizational schisms, attempting to be broad based and non-ideological, and in problems of the organization's exhaustive structure. However, *The Second Wave* survived for twelve years and in

that time inspired and educated countless women on feminist issues. In attempting to be non-ideological before the dissolution of Female Liberation, the women involved tried to accommodate a wide range of views within the feminist movement. As a radical feminist publication, the *Second Wave* could never be truly non-ideological. Their radicalism shone through the rhetoric of forums and coalitions due to the unique political perspectives of each person in the staff. New women joining the staff post-1974 critiqued this concept of appearing non-ideological and wanted to reassert their radical feminism whilst also keeping the forum-perspective of the founders. The publication was initially intended to be radical, thus these women wanted to appeal to this original idea whilst improving on it. In order to make an impact as a publication, the staff felt that they needed to make radical statements and introduce new, even surprising ideas to their audience. The publication itself never aligned with a specific branch of feminism outside of the radical feminist label, but the individual ideologies and beliefs of women on the staff shone through in the later years of publication.

The magazine was not intended to indoctrinate women, but to encourage them to read articles and make up their own minds on feminist issues. The staff itself benefitted from the building of a feminist media as they learned essential skills in writing and publishing in a time where women had few opportunities to do so. They also benefitted from the same radicalization and the sense of sisterhood the magazine created. Female Liberation member Evelyn Clark wrote that her "work in Female Liberation allowed me to experience an awakening—an elevation in consciousness. I witnessed a mass awakening around me."[131] *The Second Wave* and Female Liberation undeniably dealt with a number of internal problems, but the publication was

[131] Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism*, 107.

ultimately successful in providing many women struggling under the weight of misogyny with a sense of hope. Maio explained that *The Second Wave "*was a beacon to many of us out there."[132]

As one of the earliest examples of the feminist media, the publication represented the possibility of a new life and a more just world for its readers. *The Second Wave* and other feminist publications are essential in the historical study of second-wave feminism as they are "the only valid way to record the constant rethinking that characterizes feminism."[133] Feminist publications should be further examined by historians because they reflect the conflicts, ideologies, and community-building essential to the study of women's rights. Much like the broader feminist movement, the histories of Female Liberation and *The Second Wave* are complex, dynamic, and ever-changing. *The Second Wave* ultimately told the story of sisterhood and schisms over the course of twelve years. In one of the last issues, the staff highlighted the enduring legacies of second-wave feminism and *The Second Wave* in stating, "this belief that we can do the impossible is a large part of what the Women's Movement has given us…the gains of the past ten years have been habit-forming, and we don't intend to give up."[134] While *The Second Wave* ceased publishing in 1983, the legacies of this organization in forming a feminist media, building a radical sisterhood, and bringing hope to women across the country endured long past its last issue and far beyond its pages. Other feminists took note of the impacts of the *Second Wave* and worked to contribute to the feminist media in new ways, especially with regard to race and diversity. The *Second Wave* included works from feminists self-identifying in many different categories, but as the second wave of feminism continued into the early 1980s, many women found themselves seeking an outlet of their own to share their voices.

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[132] Maio, "*Second Wave*," 23.
[133] "'Second Wave' Rolls In," by Paula Span, BU News, March 25, 1971, Box 2, Folder 31, *The Second Wave* Papers.
[134] "From Us," *The Second Wave* 6, no. 1, Summer 1981, 2.

CHAPTER TWO

"We Wanted to Speak in Our Own Voice, as Black Feminists": Locating Black Women in the Feminist Media via Boston's Combahee River Collective, 1974-1980

Black feminists were closely involved with second wave feminism from its origins, having roles in a variety of familiar organizations like NOW and Female Liberation. Some women of color came to resent the mainstream white feminist movement for sidelining the unique concerns of women of color across lines of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Barbara and Beverly Smith co-wrote an article describing the importance of black feminist coalitions and community-building which highlighted the zealous and urgent goal for black feminists to share their perspectives and make a mark on history, or "herstory" as they referred to it. "One thing we know as Black feminists is how important it is for us to recognize our own lives as herstory." They continued, "Also as Black women, as Lesbians and feminists, there is no guarantee that our lives will *ever* be looked at with the kind of respect given to certain people from other races, sexes or classes."[135] The Smith sisters expressed uncertainty that they would be remembered in history and thus aimed to document their lives in addition to other radical feminist efforts.

Black feminists made a significant efforts in the United States for decades including women like Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Shirley Chisholm. Scholar Duchess Harris pinpointed many examples of black feminism in politics prior to the Combahee River Collective, from black women being appointed to President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of

[135] Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "'I Am Not Meant to Be Alone and Without You Who Understand': Letters from Black Feminists, 1972-1978," *Conditions* 3, no.3, Spring 1983, 63.

Women to the formation of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) in 1973.[136] Harris argued that "the black feminist movement can be seen as moving from the relatively liberal and univocal focus on gender of the Presidential Commission to the more radical and polyvocal focus on gender, race, class, and sexual orientation of the Combahee River Collective."[137] She explained that these groups became increasingly radical as they continued to argue for the liberation of black women with increasingly harsh rhetoric and actions. Harris stated that these groups built off one another as "the later groups existed as a result of the efforts of the earlier ones, and that there was significant overlap in membership."[138] Black feminist theory existed prior to the 1960s but evolved dramatically over the next decade as shown by the evolution from Commission on the Status of Women and the NBFO. Black women were also often involved in white feminist groups, but increasingly sought to create a new feminism of their own.

As second wave feminism emerged in the 1960s, many black women were interested in the ideas of the movement but felt conflicted as to whether white feminists would advocate for the specific interests of women of color. Even with this sense of apprehension, Nancy Rosenstock of Female Liberation explained that "Black women were an integral part of the movement from the beginning… Black women—triply oppressed as Black people, as women, and as workers—were able to raise specific class-based issues."[139] Though Rosenstock likely aimed to highlight the significant works of women of color in this statement, her rhetoric indicated that black women largely had to advocate for themselves and their class-based concerns. Though some women of color felt at home in white feminist organizations, many

[136] Duchess Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective: Black Feminist Organizing, 1960–80," in *Sisters in the Struggle,* 281-282.
[137] Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective" in *Sisters in the Struggle,* 282.
[138] Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective" in *Sisters in the Struggle,* 282.
[139] Nancy Rosenstock, *Inside the Second Wave of Feminism,* 8.

women felt alienated and even marginalized by the hegemony of white feminism. Kimberly Springer, author of *Living for the Revolution,* explained that "black women had deep and compelling reasons for not joining the women's movement and shunning sisterhood with white women," such as racist histories between white and black women and many black women's dedication to the civil rights movement.[140]

Women who felt isolated from mainstream and alternative organizations then sought out organizations of their own. This chapter examines the impact of the Combahee River Collective, founded in Boston by the Smith sisters and Demita Frazier and soon joined by other local black feminists. The group brought attention to the particular concerns of black feminists, in regard to underlying factors of women's oppression. The Combahee River Collective looked at the daily lives of black women and challenged their marginalization from a variety of perspectives. Though the politics of the Combahee River Collective were complex, their major motivations for their activism can be summed up in a simple sentence: "we realize that the only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation is us."[141] As the only black feminist organization in Boston in the late 1970s, the Combahee River Collective was in many ways groundbreaking and unique in its organizing. The women involved aimed to address the racist, sexist, and classist interlocking systems of oppression that impacted their daily lives as black women. Additionally, black feminism was not a new concept, but continued to develop and expand with second wave feminism, with the Combahee playing a huge role in defining this sector of the feminist movement.

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[140] Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 29.
[141] Barbara Smith, Demita Frazier, and Beverly Smith, "The Combahee River Collective: A Black Feminist Statement," in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, ed. Zillah Einstein (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), 365, in Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers, MC801, Schlesinger Library.

The group played a large role in establishing black feminist thought, with member Demita Frazier explaining "we had to create black feminism."[142] Frazier referenced the impacts of black feminists in the past, but the term "black feminism" as well as the major ideologies behind the term were largely unknown to a wider audience. The Combahee played a huge role in creating a new black feminism that was intersectional in nature, addressing the interlocking systems of oppression women of color experienced. Cherríe Moraga, a close friend and collaborator of Barbara Smith, explained that Smith was "one of the first Black Lesbian Feminists to call herself that."[143] Additionally, in focusing on identity politics, Barbara Smith and members of the Combahee were the first to create a black feminism that allocated space for diversity in sexuality. In this manner, the Combahee did not create black feminism in itself, but created a new iteration that demanded dramatic social political upheaval and attempted to break down barriers of gender and sexuality within the black community.

This chapter draws upon the expertise of historians but examines the collective in a different light. Though they did not have a feminist publication of their own, the Combahee River Collective remained dedicated to contributing to the feminist media and produced numerous works that altered the development of black feminism as well as feminism as a whole. The Combahee published the *Combahee River Collective Statement* in 1977 which defined their early politics and paved the way for intersectional feminism. Additionally, the Combahee contributed to the feminist press via the wide reach of their pamphlet "Why Did They Die?" regarding the 1979 murders of twelve black women in the Dorchester and Roxbury neighborhoods of Boston. The Combahee also encouraged its members and other black women to contribute to the feminist

[142] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, ed., *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2017), 124.
[143] Letter from Cherríe Moraga, April 8, 1981, in Box 20, Folder 24, Persephone Press Papers.

media via their Black Feminist Retreats and commitment to sharing their voices in alternative feminist publications. The Combahee became incredibly well-known for their Collective Statement, but few scholars have delved into the numerous other contributions the organization made to the feminist press. Without a recurring publication of their own, the Combahee had to get creative in order create space for black feminists in mainstream feminist circles. Black feminist contributions to the feminist press have often been overlooked, but this examination of the Combahee highlights the transformational nature of their work, as well as the interlocking systems of oppression they were up against. The Combahee worked arduously to make their voices heard on platforms not specifically intended for them, thus paving the way for black feminism to impact the daily lives of black women across the country.

2.1 "After Years and Years We Had Finally Found Each Other": The Birth of the Combahee River Collective

This new black feminism emerged alongside mainstream feminism of the late 1960s and black nationalist organizations like the Black Panthers. Black women had always been integral in political organizing around race yet were often relegated to background roles in Black nationalist organizations despite their knowledge and passion for activism. Tracye Matthews explained that "black women were critical players in the [Black Panther Party]," yet many women felt that the Party was not challenging the combination of racism and sexism that black women experienced.[144] It is also significant to note that black women felt that their roles in the civil

[144] Tracye Matthews, "'"No One Ever Asks What a Man's Role in the Revolution Is": Gender Politics and Leadership in the Black Panther Party, 1966–71," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African-American Women in the Civil Rights-Black Power Movement*, ed. Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 234.

rights movement were limited and noticed an increase in black masculinist discourse.[145] Additionally, many black women were hesitant to join the feminist movement because the early facets of this movement were overwhelmingly white, thus focusing on ending sexist oppression with little consideration of race. Bell hooks explained that many feminists aiming to represent something new, such as black feminism "often found themselves ostracized and silenced."[146]

Some women of color still made attempts or even joined second wave feminism groups at the time. Women of color were involved in the initial formation of NOW.[147] Ultimately many women of color felt alienated from mainstream white feminism, as well as civil rights organizations. Springer explained that "black feminists' voices and visions fell between the cracks of the civil rights and women's movements, so they created formal organizations to speak on behalf of black women with an explicitly feminist consciousness."[148] Women of color were simultaneously alienated from civil rights organizations and feminist groups, thus many women sought to create their own organizations advocating for issues affecting black women.

Black feminist organizations emerged in the late 1960s and 1970s with the goals of bringing black women together and developing an intersectional feminist consciousness.[149] Hooks highlighted the necessity of a black feminist movement in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center.* She explained that "it is essential for continued feminist struggle that black women recognize the special vantage point our marginality gives us and make use of this perspective to criticize the dominant racist, classist, sexist hegemony as well as to envision and create a counter

[145] Springer, *Living for the Revolution,* 44.
[146] bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000), 9.
[147] Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective" in *Sisters in the Struggle,* 287.
[148] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 1.
[149] I use the term "intersectional" even though it was not used at the time. The term was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s. She used the term to describe the study of overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

hegemony."[150] Many black women echoed hooks's sentiments and aimed to create feminist organizations that acknowledged the unique systems of oppression black women faced, in terms of gender, race, and class discrimination. Springer identified:

> four sociopolitical factors [that] influenced the emergence of black feminist organizations: (1) black women's activist roles in the civil rights movement, (2) their paradoxical marginalization and leadership in the women's movement, (3) representations of black women in popular culture, and (4) racist and sexist depictions of black women in social policy.[151]

Some of the original second wave feminist organizations founded by women of color in the United States were the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) in 1968, the NBFO in 1973, and Combahee River Collective (CRC or Combahee) in 1974.

Members of the Combahee River Collective first began meeting in Boston in 1974 and developed wide-reaching goals to end sexist, racial, classist, and heterosexist oppression. Barbara and Beverly Smith, raised in Cleveland, Ohio, had both developed an increasingly radical political consciousness in their youth. The Smith sisters "came from a family of black southern women" even though they grew up in the North.[152] The twin sisters never met their father and were raised by their mother Hilda Beall Smith, as well as extended family members. Their mother was a college graduate with a degree from Fort Valley State College in the mid 1940s.[153] She passed away when they were both nine, however Barbara Smith described being primarily raised by her grandmother. "Our grandmother was always our primary caretaker because our mother had to work, like most black women, and particularly a black woman who did not have a husband." She explained, "So our mother, with her college degree, a Bachelor's of

[150] hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 15.
[151] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 16.
[152] Barbara Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," interview by Loretta Ross, Transcript of audio recording, May 7, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 2. I attained most of this biographical information from Barbara, as Beverly has not given in depth personal interviews to date.
[153] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 3.

Science in Education, the two jobs that she had during my young life as I know them were, the first job was that she was a nurse's aide and the other one was she was a supermarket clerk."[154] Despite her mother's advanced degree, she worked low income jobs up until the time of her death, which Smith explained as typical for black women at the time. The Smith sisters grew up in a working-class family. Their family had money for newspaper subscriptions and magazines and were not "dirt poor," but Barbara Smith explained that their childhood "wasn't about any kind of silver spoons."[155]

Smith described her and her sister being actively politicized due to her foundation of being raised by powerful black women and by growing up at the end of Jim Crow and amidst the Civil Rights Movement. She explained why she turned towards activism from a young age and dedicated her life towards fighting injustices. "I think it'd be really hard to be a person of African heritage born before the midpoint of the twentieth century and not to have some kind of political consciousness about being born into US apartheid." She continued, "That's where my politicization comes from. I'm sure that it was enhanced by being around a family of what I like to refer to as 'race women.'"[156] Smith attributed her and Beverly's politicization to the racist oppression she experienced from a young age, as well as the impactful role of women in her family whom she called "race women." She also explained that she "learned about Black feminism from the women in my family—not just their strengths, but from their failings, from witnessing daily how they were humiliated and crushed because they had made the "mistake" of being born Black and female in a white man's country."[157] As stated previously, she was raised

[154] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 6.
[155] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 6.
[156] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 40.
[157] Barbara Smith, ed., *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983), xxii.

by her grandmother and aunts, all of whom highly valued education and encouraged the twins to learn about the injustices around them.[158] Many people grew up in this era of activism, but the Smith sisters remained especially dedicated to challenging marginalization and oppression. Barbara Smith attributed this to "the profound injustice of losing my mother" at a young age.[159] She continued,

> And from that, because it was such an injustice, I think that I went into the other direction of feeling like, OK, I'm going to commit my life to trying to make things better, and to fight injustice. Even though the injustice that I'm talking about was personal and cosmic, under no one's real control, it was just a profound sense of like, that wasn't right, you know, that's not right.[160]

She channeled the immense loss she felt into actively challenging injustices beyond her own personal pain. Smith turned towards concrete activism in high school due to these societal and familial influences, and thus dedicated her life towards combatting systemic racial, gender, and sexual marginalization.

Barbara and Beverly Smith joined a range of political organizations when they were in high school and remain involved in some to the present day. The sisters were first involved with the Cleveland chapter of the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) while in high school.[161] The sisters were very committed to their educations and pursued higher education at renowned universities. Barbara Smith attended Mount Holyoke College in Massachusetts and Beverly attended University of Chicago for their undergraduate degrees.[162] While in college, Barbara Smith was involved with several anti-Vietnam war groups such as the Civil Actions group, explaining that "the coolest black women on campus, as far as I was concerned, were in the Civil

[158] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 6.
[159] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 42.
[160] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 42-43.
[161] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 44.
[162] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 11-13.

Actions Group."[163] After graduating with undergraduate degrees, both sisters pursued advanced degrees. Smith went to University of Pittsburgh immediately after Mount Holyoke and later studied at the University of Connecticut for her doctorate.[164] Beverly earner her Master's of Public Health from Yale and her Masters of Human Development and Psychology from Harvard, in which she focused on black women's health in honor of her mother.[165]

The twin sisters then heard of the National Black Feminist Organization and saw opportunities for further activism.[166] Barbara explained, "having something called the National Black Feminist Organization made it possible for me to be a black feminist because I just couldn't imagine being involved in a white woman's group."[167] Barbara and Beverly moved to Boston and became increasingly involved with other black feminists in the area. The Smith sisters, along with Demita Frazier, formed a local chapter of the NBFO and began to grow their chapter through consciousness-raising efforts.[168] The three women, with the help of their growing chapter, soon decided to split from the NBFO and to "become an independent collective since we had serious disagreements with NBFO's bourgeois-feminist stance and their lack of a clear political focus."[169] Their major complaints against the NBFO was that it was simply not radical enough. The Smith sisters and Frazier wanted systemic upheaval, but felt that the NBFO believed in more conventional methods. Barbara Smith explained,

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[163] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 46.
[164] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 27.
[165] Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "A Conversation with Beverly and Barbara Smith", Video Interview, May 20, 2021, https://youtu.be/xbw3eAYpqbQ.
[166] Barbara Smith described the complex relationships between the twin sisters in her oral history interview with Loretta Ross. Barbara explained that "Bev's and my relationship, although extremely close and extremely loving, has always been a very difficult relationship." Though the sisters worked together politically, they went through years of not speaking in the 1990s which Barbara attributed to Beverly's mental health struggles. The sisters repaired their relationship but do not collaborate in their work as much in the present day. Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 31.
[167] Barbara Smith, quoted in Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 57.
[168] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 40.
[169] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 370. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

> We were not interested in fixing the system. We basically wanted a revolution. And that's what I still want, you know. Nobody says that very much anymore. But the thing is I think we saw ourselves as revolutionaries who were also bringing forth a new kind of political understanding, which was black feminism. And I think that we began to see NBFO as not necessarily having those kinds of radical goals.[170]

Though they started the Boston chapter of the NBFO, the women who would create the Combahee realized that the NBFO could not help them reach their goals due to their moderate stance. Smith further explained that there was "frustration at how much we could get—as far as just communication, supplies, materials, support—from a fledgling organization that itself was not funded."[171] Additionally, the NBFO had few resources, thus these women did not achieve much by aligning themselves with this organization. Since they were not getting resources and materials from the NBFO and did not agree wholeheartedly with its politics, they instead thought about creating a group of their own that aligned better with their views.

The Smith sisters and Frazier, along with other collective members, decided to call their group the Combahee River Collective in 1974. This name was inspired by a guerilla action on June 2, 1863 led by Harriet Tubman in South Carolina. Tubman freed at least 750 enslaved people and this action is known as the only military campaign in U.S. history organized and led by a woman.[172] With this radical black activism in mind, the Boston-based group developed unique, intersectional activism that would be mirrored in other organizations for years to come. Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier were at times the most available and eager out of the group, and as a result were remembered as the core of the group.[173] There is little data on the group's exact membership but some women closely involved with the group and who were likely members were Cheryl Clarke, Akasha Hull, Margo Okazawa-Rey, Chirlane McCray,

[170] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 56.
[171] Smith, "Barbara Smith Oral History," 56.
[172] "Combahee River Collective," *Off Our Backs,* June 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[173] Springer, *Living for the Revolution,* 73-74.

Cessie Alfonso, Eleanor Johnson, Lorraine Bethel, Sharon Paige Richie, and Mercedes Thompson.[174] The organization also collaborated with notable feminist figures such as Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich.

Women in the group aimed to create a space for black feminist voices and bring intersectionality into feminism. Members of the Combahee described their initial intentions in organizing in stating:

> When we first started meeting early in 1974 after the NBFO first eastern regional conference, we did not have a strategy for organizing, or even a focus. We just wanted to see what we had. After a period of months of not meeting, we began to meet again late in the year and started doing an intense variety of consciousness-raising. The overwhelming feeling that we had is that after years and years we had finally found each other.[175]

The women involved with the CRC developed a close bond of sisterhood from the start, especially considering how hard each woman struggled to find a place to express their radical black feminist ideas. Much of the power of the Combahee was that the organization provided a space for black feminists to gather, collaborate, and understand one another. The Combahee advocated for feminist issues, as well as issues specifically impacting women of color. The first actions of the Combahee included work on lesbian politics, sterilization abuse, and the trials of figures such as Kenneth Edelin and Joan Little.[176] They also worked with groups such as the Abortion Action Coalition in 1976 and against the Doyle-Flynn Bill, among other actions.[177] The

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[174] Springer, *Living for the Revolution,* 181.
[175] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 369. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[176] Kenneth Edelin, an African American man, was a physician who performed an abortion on a seventeen-year-old girl in 1975. As a result, he was tried and convicted for providing an abortion, facing up to twenty years in prison. Due to the diligent work of activists and the court system, his sentence was overturned, and he was acquitted in 1976. Joan Little was charged with the 1974 murder of Clarence Alligood, a white prison guard who attempted to rape her. Civil rights and feminist activists galvanized around her case and she was acquitted in arguing that it was self-defense in resisting a sexual assault. The Doyle-Flynn Bill, sponsored by state representatives Ray Flynn and Charles Doyle, was introduced in 1977 after a Supreme Court Ruling. In Massachusetts, this law proposed that the state would not provide Medicaid funds to women who had abortions. The Combahee, along with other groups, challenged this bill in Massachusetts. Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 370. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[177] "Combahee River Collective Press Statement," Sept. 6, 1976, Box 3, Folder 2, *Cambridge Women's Center Records, 1938-1997,* MC994, Schlesinger Library.

women involved "were more preoccupied with issues of sexual orientation and economic development" and their group "came to define itself as anti-capitalist, socialist, and revolutionary."[178] This new organization would use the organizing tactics of civil rights groups like CORE, the antiwar movement, and feminist organizations like the NBFO, but sought much more radical ends.[179]

The Combahee developed a collectivist leadership structure, informal decision making, and considered itself a collective during its existence from 1974 to 1980. The group had very little money and covered organizing costs with donations and dues.[180] Springer explained that the group had few resources because "their constituents, black women, had a few material resources to give."[181] The Combahee "did not have an articulated definition of collectivity," but "Smith aspired for Combahee to observe lessons from other civil rights and women's movement organizations and made an effort to organize non-hierarchically."[182]

Other members disagreed with this notion of collectivity and found that the core group members (the Smith sisters and Frazier) held the most power in the ostensibly structureless organization. After interviewing Mercedes Tompkins and Margo Okazawa-Rey, Springer explained that they "both experienced hierarchy within the group, and they contest the use of the term *collective* when applied to Combahee."[183] Though the group aimed to be collective, they never explicitly defined this collectivity and the decision-making process for the group was informal. As described by Joreen in "The Tyranny of Structurelessness," she believed that the women's movement could only progress if it accepted the struggles with structure as something

[178] Duchess Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective," 292.
[179] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 115.
[180] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 83-84.
[181] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 85.
[182] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 73.
[183] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 74.

of a necessary evil.[184] It was unknown if this problematic egalitarianism was purposeful or simply a delineation of the organization. However, Springer explained that the "Combahee encountered internal and external difficulties in devising a leaderless strategy that was truly egalitarian."[185] As explained by Tompkins and Okazawa-Rey, there was a hierarchy in the organization and thus factionalism between the leaders and other members. Due to their roles in crafting the statement and founding the group, "Barbara Smith, Demita Frazier, and Beverly Smith are remembered as the central leaders in their organization."[186] This idea has been perpetuated throughout the historiography as well, with few scholars examining the roles of other members to the extent that they examined Frazier and the Smith sisters.

Much of this contention had to do with who founded the organization and who served as the most public representatives of the organization in itself. Through their academics, writing, relationships, and activism, both Barbara and Beverly became well-known as the faces of the Combahee. Additionally, Frazier became well known for her role in crafting the famous *Combahee River Collective Statement* with the Smith sisters and in writing for various publications. The Combahee soon used publishing and the feminist media as important tools in their organizing. Their involvement with publications included their renowned *Combahee River Collective Statement* in 1977 (published and reprinted in many sources), contributing to other feminist publications via articles and reviews, holding black feminist writing retreats, and creating newsworthy activism that inspired others. Though the Combahee did not have a feminist newspaper or magazine of their own, they developed a close relationship with the feminist media

[184] Joreen, "Tyranny of Structurelessness," *The Second Wave* 2, no 1, Spring 1972, 20.
[185] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 160.
[186] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 73.

and created feminist documents that altered movement theory by introducing topics such as identity politics and making their black feminist principles well-known.

2.2 "We are All Damaged People Merely by Virtue of Being Black Women": The Combahee River Collective Statement and its Legacies

The Combahee River Collective built a strong legacy in their seven-year tenure due to their bold activism, consciousness-raising efforts, and especially their collective statement, written in April 1977 and published in 1978.[187] This statement identified the specific brand of politics of the organization, detailed the interlocking systems of oppression black women faced, and paved the way for a new black feminism that was intersectional in its scope and advocated for the radical annihilation of social and political structures. It was the first statement of its kind to highlight emerging black feminism and offer a class, race, gender, and sexuality-based analysis of oppression. The statement came to fruition when Zillah Einstein and Barbara Smith met through a mutual friend.[188] Einstein then invited members of the Combahee River Collective to contribute to her new anthology titled *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*.[189] Einstein was a professor at Ithaca College and encouraged Smith to write about black feminist politics. Beverly Smith remembered that Einstein asked her sister Barbara if Combahee members, which consisted mostly of the Smith sisters and Frazier at the time, would write a statement about their politics.[190] The three women were eager to pursue this opportunity and finished crafting their statement by Spring 1977.

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[187] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 362. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[188] Barbara Smith, interview by Loretta Ross, transcript of video recording, May 7, 2003, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, 70.
[189] Keisha N. Blain, "The Ms. Q&A: Barbara Smith Looks Back on a Lifetime of Black Feminist Struggle," *Ms.*, December 16, 2019, https://msmagazine.com/2019/12/16/the-ms-qa-barbara-smith-looks-back-on-a-lifetime-of-black-feminist-struggle/.
[190] Beverly Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 99.

In order to write the statement, Barbara, Beverly, and Demita relied on their knowledge of feminist and black activism, as well as their own experiences as black women. Beverly explained that "when we sat down to write the statement, there was a lot of material ideally that we had already covered in terms of discussion, in terms of experience, and in terms of reading or studying, that put us in a position to develop our own politics."[191] The Combahee women had experienced alienation and isolation from the white feminist movement and black nationalist movements, thus identifying their own unique politics became essential and transformational for those involved. Frazier explained that,

> It became important for us to establish what we considered to be our Black feminist theory because we did a lot of coalition work and believed deeply in building coalitions to do the work necessary to destroy white supremacy. We wanted to speak in our own voice, as Black feminists.[192]

The opportunity to speak for themselves and develop black feminism independently was incredibly significant to the Combahee. In addition to their goal of articulating black feminist politics, the Smith sisters and Frazier hoped that this statement would be a form of consciousness-raising in itself. There were few black feminist organizations at the time and few black women considered themselves to be feminists.[193] Frazier explained that it was significant for them to "put out to the larger Black women's world who we were and what we were about" and "to see if other women would cohere and agree."[194]

Barbara, Beverly, and Demita used the collective statement to inform other feminists about their politics and to identify the specific oppressions black women faced. In the statement,

[191] Beverly Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 101.
[192] Demita Frazier in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 128.
[193] Beverly Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 105.
[194] Frazier in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 128.

Combahee members delved in depth into their politics, but first identified a brief statement to encapsulate their beliefs and mission. They wrote,

> The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives. As black women we see black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.[195]

The Combahee explained that their activism was largely intended to be theoretically informed and based on consciousness-raising. They highlighted the impact of interlocking systems of oppression and the unique combination of these systems in black women's lives. Additionally, they also express a desire to challenge white male supremacy and instate a completely new system based on principles of socialism. The Combahee identified the significance of black feminism in itself as a liberatory force and a challenge to the heterosexist and racist system.

The Smith sisters and Frazier divided their work into four distinct sections. Combahee members articulated the historical context of black feminism, thus paying homage to black female activists of the past. They describe the "historical reality of Afro-American women's continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation."[196] The Combahee praise the activism of women before them, from Sojourner Truth to Harriet Tubman to Ida B. Wells.[197] They believed that the activism of the above women and others made way for current black feminism and the contemporary radical theories of the Combahee. They described this as a "personal genesis for black feminism, that is, the political realization that comes from the seemingly personal experiences of individual black women's lives."[198] The Combahee relied

[195] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 362. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[196] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 362. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[197] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 363. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[198] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 364. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

closely on theory in their activism and became most well-known for their theoretical contributions; but they also engaged in a wider range of activism as well.

One of the statement's most lasting contributions was in highlighting the concept of identity politics, which was later adopted by numerous other social justice movements. Once again, they also highlighted the historical treatment of black women. They ultimately explained that,

> This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else's oppression. In the case of black women this is a particularly repugnant, dangerous, threatening, and therefore revolutionary concept because it is obvious from looking at all the political movements that have preceded us that anyone is more worthy of liberation than ourselves.[199]

This statement indicated Combahee's commitment to identity politics and explained that they simply wanted black women to be treated as equally human to other people, especially due to the oppression and relegation of black women to the margins of history. They also explained that black women were the only people who care enough about their own oppression in order to institute real change.

Additionally, the Combahee also experienced many difficulties in bringing black women across the country together in a sort of feminist consensus. They explained that they had early ideological conflicts in the organization, which echoed many of the themes that white feminists dealt with as well. The Combahee "experienced several months of comparative inactivity and internal disagreements which were first conceptualized as a lesbian-straight split but which were also the result of class and political differences."[200] These internal differences limited the ability of the organization to act collectively and impact change in the Boston community. The Smith

[199] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 365. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[200] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 370. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

sisters and Frazier also explained that it was very difficult to connect with women across the country, especially as black feminism remained largely overlooked. They wrote,

> The fact that individual black feminists are living in isolation all over the country, that our own numbers are small, and that we have some skills in writing, printing, and publishing makes us want to carry out these kinds of projects as a means of organizing black feminists as we continue to do political work in coalition with other groups.[201]

Though they faced an uphill battle, the Combahee aimed to use their intelligence and writing skills to introduce a black feminist consciousness to black women across the country. The Combahee worked on the local level in Boston, but also relied heavily on printing and publishing to reach more women. In this manner, they closely engaged with the feminist media and highlighted it as one of the most useful tools in their organizational arsenal. The Combahee aimed to connect with women across the country and had numerous goals to share with black feminists and allies.

Subsequently, the Smith sisters and Frazier addressed the racism inherent in the white feminist movement. They articulated their frustration with the inability of many white women to acknowledge racism or white privilege in their activism. The Combahee explained that "eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue."[202] This alienation and sense of futility many black women experienced can be encapsulated by a statement from an early group member who said, "we are all damaged people merely by virtue of being black women."[203] As a result of being alienated from and left out of the white women's movement, the Combahee aimed to address the racism of this movement head on and incite meaningful change.

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[201] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 371. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[202] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 371-372. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[203] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 368. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

In challenging the homogeneity of the white women's movement, the Smith sisters and Frazier fundamentally altered the view of this movement for many and offered a possible avenue for change. The *Combahee River Collective Statement* became much bigger than itself because the statement acknowledged and pushed for the advent of black feminism while also acknowledging the necessary analysis of interlocking systems of oppression by all social justice movements. It was and continues to be widely read since it was published in 1978.

As referenced previously, the *Combahee River Collective Statement* was first published in *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism,* a collection edited by Zillah Einstein in 1978. This allowed the statement, and their theory of black feminism, to be widely read, bringing attention to the work of the Combahee. The Combahee River Collective made subsequent efforts to publish the statement in other sources. In 1979 Barbara Smith sent the *Combahee River Collective Statement* in a letter to the editors of *off our backs*, a Washington D.C. based feminist publication. *Off our backs* was publishing a "Wimmin of Color" issue and Smith explained that "we have wanted to send [the Collective statement] to Off Our Backs for some time so that many more women could have a chance to read it and we feel excited that the statement might appear in a special issue just for women of color."[204] Smith highlighted the importance of the feminist press to spread black feminist ideas to women across the country. Without a publication of their own, Combahee members wrote to and advertised their statements in other publications to support their consciousness raising efforts. The feminist press in itself played an important role for the Combahee in engaging with a wider range of women of color and making their voices heard against the forces of heterosexism and racism that surrounded them.

[204] "Combahee River Collective," *Off Our Backs,* June 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

Off our backs included Smith's letter, a foreword, and the statement in a spread titled "Combahee River Collective" in its June 1979 issue. Smith explained in the foreword the impact of the statement itself and the changes the collective would make now almost two years after first writing the statement. She wrote,

> If we were writing a statement now, it would reflect the changes we've experienced and we would expand upon many of our original ideas. We would particularly want to say more about our identities as Black Lesbians, how our identities affect our politics and the dangerous reality of homophobia in the Black community.[205]

Smith explained that she would have liked to pay more close attention to sexuality and the nuances to identifying as a black lesbian in the 1970s. These discussions, especially of homophobia in the black community and in mainstream feminism, would contribute greatly to the Combahee's intersectional approach. In a 2003 interview, Smith explained:

> The hardest thing to me about being a lesbian is being rejected by my black brothers and sisters. That's the hardest thing. I mean without any doubt. Because white people were never down with me as a group, you know. So I never expected anything from white people as a group, as far as acceptance, caring, love, support. I expect absolutely those things from other black people and people of color but particularly from African Americans, because that's the group that I come from. So the hardest thing to me is to feel like I don't belong, that that I don't deserve to be respected, that I'm ostracized.[206]

Smith expected members of the black community to accept her; thus, their rejection hurt her much more than being rejected from white spaces.

Smith continued to contribute to the feminist press via the *Combahee River Collective Statement* for decades. In the letter to *off our backs,* Smith also highlighted the current activism and actions of the Combahee, such as their Black feminist retreats collective concert in fall 1978.[207] Smith described the wide reach of the statement in a few years and its place in the ever-changing world of social justice activism. She wrote, "although our statement is already in some

[205] "Combahee River Collective," *Off Our Backs,* June 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[206] Smith, Barbara Smith Oral History, 30.
[207] "Combahee River Collective," Off Our Backs, June 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

ways a herstorical document, we feel that it is still an important articulation of Black feminist theory."[208] Smith acknowledged the support the statement had already received and also indicated a desire for more women to read it, especially with the few updates she provided in the foreword. Additionally, in her letter Smith included recommendations for other black feminist writings, thus supporting black feminists and the feminist media in the process.[209] In 1987, the October issue of *New Directions for Women* included an advertisement for Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, which was Smith's venture into publishing after the Combahee.[210] Though the Combahee had officially disbanded years earlier, the first work published by Kitchen Table was the *Combahee River Collective Statement.* Smith and other women of color acknowledged the transformative nature of the statement for years to come.[211] The Smith sisters and Frazier continue to push their Collective Statement and to acknowledge its wide impact, through feminist publications and interviews decades after it was written.

The legacy of the Combahee is largely the *Combahee River Collective Statement* itself because it was and continues to be referenced consistently. The statement is also indicative of one of the earliest iterations of radical black feminism, especially one of the first to have black women use the term "feminist" in describing their radical activism. Springer identified the statement as "widely read and anthologized today as a definitive work on black socialist lesbian feminism."[212] The statement itself presented many transformational ideas, but its existence as a

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[208] "Combahee River Collective," Off Our Backs, June 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[209] "Combahee River Collective," Off Our Backs, June 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[210] "Kitchen Table Press," *New Directions for Women*, October 1987, 16.
[211] More recently, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor edited *How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective,* which included historical background, the entire Collective Statement, and interviews from members Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier.[211] It also included an interview on the impact of the Combahee with Alicia Garza. This monograph was published in 2017 and continues to be circulated in the study of black feminism.
[212] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 73.

statement of black feminist politics was monumental. Beverly Smith highlighted the novelty and impact of the statement in saying:

> And what I think the Combahee River [Collective] Statement did, and I sort of want to go back to when it was newer, is that I think it must have given a lot of Black women literally like a handhold. Something that exists in reality, in black and white literally, that they could read, hold on to, and say 'Oh, yes, I experienced that too. I've had these kinds of issues and difficulties too.'[213]

The statement allowed black women to identify their own oppression and find a sense of commonality with other black women. Many of the experiences the Combahee described were universal and affected all women of color in one manner or another. Beverly also explained that the statement indicated that it was possible to be black and feminist. She said, "we were proof positive that there was such a thing as a Black woman who was committed to feminism."[214] As black women had been alienated from mainstream feminism, many women felt antagonistic towards the term feminist in itself and did not want to be associated with the word. The Combahee made it possible for women of color to see feminism in a different light and as a possible liberatory source for all women.

The *Combahee River Collective Statement* highlighted a diverse and intersectional feminism that had not been articulated before. Springer explained that for many, the statement "was possibly the first time they were forced to recognize *publicly* black lesbian existence, the daily oppression black lesbians face, and the considerable sexual diversity within black communities."[215] In acknowledging each of these facets of oppression, the Combahee altered the course of second wave feminism by asserting the necessity of women of color in the movement in order to achieve true liberation. Black women experienced oppression on numerous levels,

[213] Beverly Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 105.
[214] Beverly Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 101.
[215] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 130.

including class, race, and gender, as well as sexuality for some. The *Combahee River Collective Statement* still exists as part of the Combahee's largest legacy in black feminism, but the collective engaged in alternative activism as well. Barbara Smith highlighted the diversity of activism in stating, "Combahee, because of the statement, had a much wider impact…but we were still a grassroots collective."[216] This activism took many forms, but the Combahee largely focused on a series of local murders in 1979 in order to address systemic inequality and seek justice for women of color.

2.3 "Why Did They Die?": Combahee Activism and the 1979 Murders of Twelve Black Women

In part as a result of the notoriety of the *Combahee River Collective Statement*, the Combahee became well known as a major black feminist organization in Boston and in the United States. Springer explained that "as the only black lesbian, socialist, feminist organization in the Boston area, Combahee was at the Vanguard of articulating the parameters of black feminism."[217] As the sole organization of its kind, the Combahee emerged as a leader in the Boston area in the late 1970s. In addition to their other work, the Combahee responded to a string of murders that occurred in the Boston neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and the South End in Boston. The Combahee utilized the politics they presented in their collective statement when "two years later when the dead bodies of black women began turning up in Boston."[218]

[216] Barbara Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 54.
[217] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 146.
[218] Terrion L. Williamson, "Why Did They Die? On Combahee and the Serialization of Black Death," *Souls* 19, no. 3 (2017): 338.

This violence occurred in 1979 and resulted in twelve murders between January and May. Eleven of the twelve women killed were black and lived in impoverished, predominantly black neighborhoods. The first murder victims were Christina Ricketts and Andrea Faye on January 29, followed by Gwendolyn (Yvette) Stinson on January 30, Caron Prater on February 2, Daryl Ann Hargett on February 21, Desiree Ethridge on March 14, Darlene Rodgers on April 14, Lois Hood Nesbitt on April 27, Faye Polner on April 28, Valyric Holland on May 4, Sandra Boulware on May 5, Bobbie Jean Graham on May 7, and Lilly Mae Nesbitt on May 29. Each woman was a victim of a violent murder and each crime filled black communities with fear. Boston itself had a long history of racial strife and violence with one reporter stating, "Boston is a divided city… Boston is a fearful city."[219] From the Boston busing protests to the segregation of numerous Boston neighborhoods, white communities in the city were known for being openly antagonistic towards people of color.[220]

Much of the outage from feminists and black communities was targeted at the *Boston Globe* for lacking media coverage and the Boston police for inaction. The *Boston Globe* did reported on the murders, even within a matter of days of the first few, but feminists and black communities were still outraged with this press. The coverage of these murders was relegated to the interior of the paper, not receiving front page acknowledgement. In the *New Women's Times,* Karen Hagberg explained that "even in Boston, the press has not given the murders significant coverage…stories about them have frequently been buried on back pages."[221] Additionally, the

[219] Anita Diamant, "Of borders and Blood: Fear and Hatred in the City," Box 1, Folder 25, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers, M093, Northeastern Archives and Special Collections.
[220] For more on racism in Boston, see Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Zebulon Vance Miletsky, *Before Busing; A History of Boston's Long Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2022).
[221] Karen A. Hagberg, "Rash of Murders Stirs Feminist Outrage," *New Women's Times*, July 22, 1979, Box 9, Folder 19, Tia Cross Papers.

articles on the murders supported the negligent police investigation and even placed a degree of blame on the young murder victims. People were outraged by this coverage because they felt that if the victims were white women, people would have paid much closer attention.

The *Boston Globe* published a few articles on the murders, but many in the black community believed that these articles were insufficient. On February 23, 1979, journalist Ben Bradlee covered the fifth murder of Daryl Ann Hargett, summarizing some of the previous police investigations to explain that the police believe that only two of the five murders were connected.[222] Bradlee heavily relied on police statements, but still provided a small perspective from the black community to say that some "have accused police of not providing blacks with sufficient protection."[223] While this small statement itself was not insignificant, the *Boston Globe* failed to pay attention to the factors of race and gender in the murders and thus the inadequate police investigations. Many feminists and members of the black community disagreed with this statement and believed that police were using this technique to downplay the horrific reality of the murders.

In an article in *Equal Times,* a woman interviewed explained that the press "wrote about the women as though some deserved what they got and some didn't…the women who were killed got no respect."[224] Two of the twelve women killed were sex workers and the media coverage of their deaths focused on this aspect of their lives above all others. The victims were scrutinized by the media, in many ways more harshly than the murderers were. After the death of Lois Hood Nesbitt, the *Boston Globe* quoted the Boston mayor as saying, "clearly this is not a

[222] Ben Bradlee, "S. End Death Not Linked to Earlier Cases," *Boston Globe*, February 23, 1979, Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.
[223] Bradlee, "S. End Death Not Linked."
[224] Margaret Neville, "Why? A Question of Rights," *Equal Times*, May 13, 1979, Tia Cross Papers.

Son-of-Sam situation."[225] In referencing the tragic and horrific Son-of-Sam serial murders of the 1970s, the mayor used this reference as a rhetorical device to downplay the fears in the black community and defend the inadequate police investigations. Ultimately, many of the *Boston Globe* articles simply cited police investigations and downplayed the horrific nature of these murders. Certain remarks by the police and press provided substance to these claims. Sergeant Stephen Murphy of the Boston Police was quoted in the *Boston Globe* in describing the murders as isolated "crimes of passion."[226] This statement in turn diminished the racist and sexist capacity of the murders and in some ways justified the horrific violence against women. Lilly Mae Nesbitt was murdered in May and police found and arrested her killer. They were quick to explain that her murder was not connected to other murders in the community. Police were even quick to defend and diminish the cruelty of Nesbitt's murder. In the *Boston Phoenix* Sgt. Murphy also said of the murderer of Lilly Mae Nesbitt, "He's not a nut… He's just an average person who got a little carried away."[227] Instead of expressing sympathy for Nesbitt and the loss her family and friends experienced, Murphy rhetorically condoned the acts of a murderer by describing his horrific acts as those of an "average person." The police also did not investigate Nesbitt's murderer in connection with the other homicides.[228] These statements from Murphy, published by several sources, fueled the rage and indignation towards police and the murderers.

The murders themselves, while shocking to some, highlighted the discrimination and cruelty black communities, and specifically women, faced in their daily lives. In another Boston Globe article, the author quoted Margo Ret, a moderator of a Roxbury safety meeting, as saying

[225] Douglas S. Crockett, "Eighth Black Woman Is Slain: Strangled with Cord," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1979, Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.
[226] *Boston Globe*, May 7, 1979.
[227] *Boston Phoenix*, June 5, 1979.
[228] Neville, "Boston: No Woman's Land," *Equal Times,* June 24, 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

"the six murders are only real extreme cases of what goes on daily as far as women and violence are concerned."[229] Though this violence against women of color was somewhat common, many feminists and members of the black community expressed outrage at the murders themselves and their treatment by police and the media. One of the overarching feelings as a result of these murders was that "the institutions of society, particularly the police and the press are not paying enough or the right kind of attention to these crimes."[230]

Feminists made numerous statements about the murders and articulated important gender analyses essential to understanding the series of seemingly senseless crimes. Members of the Committee for Women's Safety and the Mass Coalition of Battered Women Services shared these views in a report by *Equal Times.* They stated that "the recent outbreak of the killing of women was not simple homicide, but a brutal indication of violence against women on all levels in our society, from petty harassment on the streets to the extremes of grotesque murder and mutilation."[231] The Committee explained that the violence against women was systemic and much more than a string of unfortunate incidents as the police described. They also protested the idea that Nesbitt's murder in her own apartment was characterized as a "domestic incident" by police, rather than a cold-blooded murder.[232] This rhetoric downplayed the violence and cruelty of the murder itself. These women, and other feminists, believed that the murders were connected by several factors, though police refuted that idea. Ultimately, this group believed that the greatest connection in the murders was that "that the victims were all women."[233] This analysis in itself was true but missed an important connection: race. Second-wave feminist

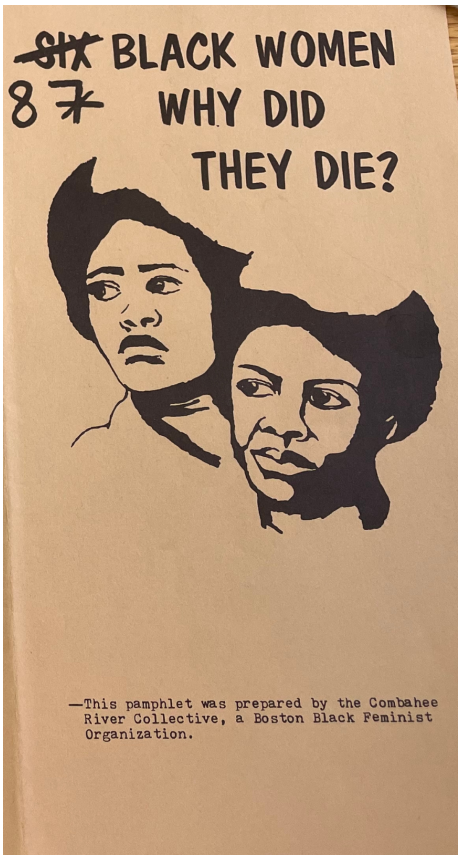
[229] "Roxbury Meeting Discusses Safety," *Boston Globe*, March 29, 1979, sec. Massachusetts News in Brief, Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.
[230] Cheryl Devall and Margaret Tarter, "Multiple Murders Provoke Shock, Fear in Community," *Bay State Banner*, February 8, 1979, Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.
[231] Neville, "Boston: No Woman's Land."
[232] Neville, "Boston: No Woman's Land."
[233] Neville, "Boston: No Woman's Land."

organizations in the Boston area, via the example in *Equal Times,* acknowledged the role of gender in these murders but had a blind spot when it came to race. The Combahee would reiterate that these murders were inextricably tied to the gender, race, and socio-economic status of the victims. Members of the Combahee advocated for an intersectional approach in activism surrounding the murders, as they believed that the numerous facets of the victims' identities were inextricably connected. As a result of interlocking systems of oppression, the gender, class, and race of the victims played a large role in their deaths and the halfhearted police investigations that followed.

As a result, racism not only impacted the treatment of victims, but prevented justice in these cases due to biases. Sarah Small, an aunt of one of the victims and Roxbury resident, stated "the police are looking for the murderer in Roxbury. When they don't find him there, they just stop looking."[234] She believed that the police were hesitant to look into the possibility that a white man was the perpetrator of the crime but would be much quicker to investigate black men. Race and gender biases prevented many of these women from getting justice. Nancy McMillan wrote in the *Boston Phoenix* that "black residents charged [that the Roxbury murders] would have been treated as the second coming of the Boston Strangler if it had happened elsewhere."[235] This statement highlights the racism and classism inherent in media coverage and police response to the crimes, especially in saying that people would have cared more about the murders if they happened in another neighborhood. Elizabeth Muse, Yvette Stinson's mother, "pointed out that the media seemed to have riveted their attention on the rapes of white women across town in Allston-Brighton."[236] Muse's example highlights that race and class played large

[234] W.S., "My Body Aches From Unseen Beating," *Off Our Backs*, May 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[235] Nancy McMillan, "The Murders in Roxbury: Fear and Grieving Shroud a Community," *The Boston Phoenix*, March 27, 1979, Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.
[236] McMillan, "The Murders in Roxbury."

factors in whether or not the media would pay close attention to the murders. It is not to say that the media didn't cover the murders at all, but that it evidently focused more closely on the victims in Allston-Brighton, near college campuses, than in historically black neighborhoods. A community member Byron Rickets wrote to Police Commissioner Joseph Jordan to say, "I implore the community not to let the deaths of [these] young women fade from memory as it has faded from the pages of the local newspaper."[237] The murders of black women in Roxbury, Dorchester, and the South End completely rocked black communities, but white communities paid little attention to the murders. The women of the Combahee noticed the lack of attention on these terrifying crimes and decided to use their press savvy to incite political change.



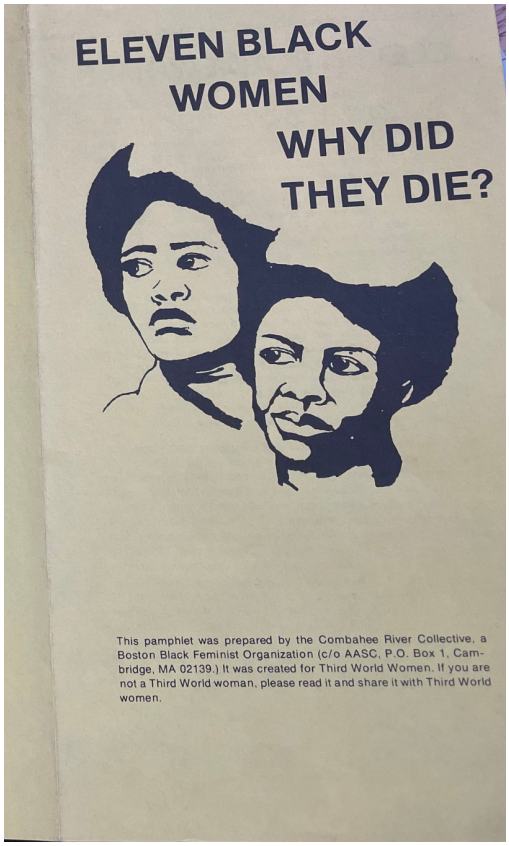


Fig. 6, 7, 8. Three iterations of the Combahee pamphlets, in which members updated the number of women killed with each reprint. The cover and content remained similar.

[237] Nancy McMillan, "The Murders in Roxbury: Fear and Grieving Shroud a Community."

In 1979, the Combahee published a series of pamphlets to raise awareness about the murders, express indignation at the press and police, and provide safety tips for women of color. The first iteration of this pamphlet was titled "Six Black Women: Why Did They Die?" Beverly Smith explained that "every time we put out that pamphlet, we had to increase the number of black women who had died."[238] Instead of completely redesigning the pamphlet, the Combahee decided to cross out the original number and rewrite the new number of women killed. After a few iterations of the pamphlet, the cover would include several numbers crossed out, indicating the poignant and indignant reactions of black feminists. Smith decided against changing the number in the title for each reprinting and refused to "make it all nice and shit."[239]

The pamphlets highlighted a sense of injustice that black women faced in Boston. In her article "Why Did They Die?" scholar Terrion Williamson identified the pamphlet as a "material artifact of the escalating terror to which black women were being subjected."[240] The publication itself was meant to be read specifically by women of color, as well as any allies of the movement.[241] Duchess Harris argued that the Combahee's "most significant organizing effort [was] the mobilization of individuals and groups in the Boston area to protest the murders of twelve black women."[242] This movement altered activist spaces in Boston and introduced black feminism to a wider audience. To begin the statement, the Combahee wrote:

> Recently 6 young Black women have been murdered in Roxbury, Dorchester and the S. End. The entire Black community continues to mourn their cruel and brutal deaths. In the face of police indifference and media lies and despite our grief and anger, we have begun to organize ourselves in order to figure out ways to protect ourselves and our sisters, to make the streets safe for women.[243]

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[238] Beverly Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 108.
[239] Williamson, "Why Did They Die?" 329-330.
[240] Williamson, "Why Did They Die?" 329-330.
[241] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?," 1979, Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[242] Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective," 293.
[243] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"

The women of the Combahee expressed a desire to organize against this violence, but first aimed to emphasize the root of the violence itself.

As seen in previous newspaper accounts, activists often either focused solely on the gender or the race of victims but failed to identify the interlocking systems of oppression that contributed to this systemic violence. The Combahee highlighted that the victims were vulnerable to this cruelty precisely because of their gender AND race. In the statement they wrote: "It's true that the victims were all Black and that Black people have always been the targets of racist violence in society, but they were also all women. Our sisters died because they were women just as surely as they died because they were Black."[244] This sentiment closely mirrored their analysis of interlocking systems of oppression in the *Combahee River Collective Statement.* They expressed anger at members of the black community who were quick to reference the race of the victims, thus reinforcing a narrative that obscured the unique marginalization of black women. Subsequently, the Combahee emphasized that all women were affected by this violence regardless of their race, age, and class. The Collective shared a series of statistics that emphasized the violence against women that was ubiquitous across the United States, such as "1 out of 3 women will be raped in their lifetimes or 1/3 of all the women in this country; at least 1 woman is beaten by her husband or boyfriend every 18 seconds."[245] These statements indicated that violence affected all women, though it affected women of color and those in poverty differently. They wrote, "we've got to understand that violence against us as women cuts across all racial, ethnic, and class lines."[246] The Combahee hoped for all women to empathize with the victims, express outrage, and rally to protect their Boston sisters.

[244] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"
[245] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"
[246] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"

Many community members suggested that black men must protect black women from the murders, an idea which the Combahee thus used to identify sexism within the black community. Instead, the Combahee aimed to empower women to protect themselves. In the pamphlet, the Combahee refuted the ideas presented by many black men that women should stay in their homes to stay safe and that black women needed to seek protection from men. The women of the Combahee found the idea that "Black women should be under house arrest" both unrealistic and offensive.[247] They believed that women should be able to protect themselves and not have to disrupt their lives completely as a result of this violence. Additionally, they refuted the idea that women should rely on men to protect them at all costs. They wanted black women to learn to defend themselves and saw this as the best strategy to prevent further murders. Members of the organization refuted the idea that black women needed to rely on men for protection. The Combahee explained:

> Needing to be protected assumes that we are weak, helpless and dependent, that we are victims who need men to protect us from other men. As women in this society we are definitely at risk as far as violence is concerned but WE HAVE TO LEARN TO PROTECT OURSELVES.[248]

They stated that not all women had men in their lives to protect them. Moreover, even if a woman did, it would be impossible for her to be protected 24/7. The Combahee advocated for women to learn to protect themselves and for men to alter their behaviors to make women feel safe. The women of the Combahee wrote "What men can do to 'protect' us is to check out the ways in which they put down and intimidate women in the streets and at home, to stop being verbally and physically abusive to us and to tell men they know who mistreat women to stop it and stop it quick."[249]

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[247] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"
[248] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"
[249] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"

At the end of their statement, the Combahee included a series of safety tips that would allow women to protect themselves in order to prevent more murders. By placing the power to stop this violence in black women themselves instead of relying on black men, the Combahee recognized the targeted nature of these attacks and provided women with a sense of agency. In their advocacy for self-protection, the Combahee included tips like "do not accept rides from strangers," "vary your route to and from home," and "learn some simple self-defense."[250] While it is disheartening that women had to learn to defend themselves against violence in Boston, these tips armed women with knowledge of how to protect themselves amidst these horrific murders. The Combahee also included a series of outside resources in the pamphlet including a list of community organizations providing aid and services for women experiencing violence. The pamphlet offered a comprehensive feminist critique of the violence itself, police and media reactions, and reactions from the black community. The Combahee identified the systemic patterns of violence that allowed these murders to continue, and the countless other murders of women of color. Towards the end of the pamphlet, they stated:

> We decided to write this pamphlet because of our outrage at what has happened to 6 Black women and to 1000s and 1000s of women whose names we don't even know. As Black women who are feminists we are struggling against all racist, sexist, heterosexist and class oppression. We know that we have no hopes of ending this particular violence against women in our community until we identify <u>all</u> of its causes, including sexual oppression.[251]

In identifying the multifaceted nature of this marginalization and violence, the Combahee connected to their Collective Statement and brought the concept of intersectional feminism to wider audiences. The pamphlet itself was distributed across Boston and even reprinted in other feminist publications, such as *Aegis*.[252] It was hugely popular, as the Combahee first printed

[250] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"
[251] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?"
[252] Combahee River Collective, "Six Black Women- Why Did They Die?" reprinted in *Aegis,* May 1979.

2,000 copies but quickly had to print more due to a positive community response, resulting in about 30,000 being distributed in different versions, including one in Spanish.[253]

In addition to the coalition building evident in the pamphlet, the Combahee partnered with other organizations to raise awareness and stop this violence. The women of the Combahee River Collective collaborated with other local organizations such as Massachusetts Human Rights Committee, First, Inc., and Community Programs Against Sexual Assault and Rape Prevention (CPASA) to craft a letter to the members of the Boston's Black Caucus in 1979 They wrote, "we are profoundly disturbed by your failure to respond publicly to the murder of the seven young black women of our community."[254] The Combahee, as part of this coalition, worked with the resources of other organizations to acknowledge this widespread violence and the inaction by members of the Black Caucus. The coalition realized that no one else would protect women's safety, stating "increasingly, we have realized that it is up to us to figure out ways to protect ourselves and our sisters, to make the streets safe for all women."[255] Coalition building also played a role in the pamphlet as well, especially when it came to providing a list of alternative resources for women. This sense of community proved important for the Combahee in organizing around the Roxbury/Dorchester murders. The Combahee was a small organization but was able to reach more audiences and engage in more powerful protesting by utilizing the resources of other organizations as well.

They also organized several marches and demonstrations to force white communities in Boston to recognize these injustices. They played a significant role in organizing an April 1, 1979 protest, as well as a subsequent demonstration in late April. During the April 1 protest,

[253] Williamson, "Why Did They Die?," 329.
[254] "Letter to Members of the Black Caucus," Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.
[255] "Letter to Members of the Black Caucus," Box 2, Folder 2, Sondra Gayle Stein Papers.

more than 1,000 Boston residents gathered "for a memorial march meant to protest and mourn the lives of, at the time, six similarly situated black girls and women who had been murdered within a two-mile radius of each other over."[256] The Combahee were heavily involved with this protest and aimed to shed light on these injustices. This protest in Boston Common became well-known and incited further outrage at the violence. Activist Sarah Small was quoted as shouting "Who is killing us?" to the crowd, encapsulating the outrage the activists felt, as well as the desire to seek a sense of justice for Boston's women of color.[257] This protest became one of many in which the Combahee and other women expressed their outrage at this injustice.

Fig. 9. Barbara Smith, center, at protest on April 29, 1979 against the Dorchester/Roxbury murders. Photo Taken by Tia Cross.

The Combahee were involved in another protest on April 29, 1970. The *Harvard Crimson* reported that around 500 women gathered as a reaction to two additional victims being

[256] Williamson, "Why Did They Die?" 328.
[257] Williamson, "Why Did They Die?," 337-338.

discovered that week.[258] The Combahee joined another organization CRISIS, a group that emerged out of the concerns of these murders, in this demonstration.[259] The crowd consisted of mostly women and they "marched from the [Boston] Common to Mayor Kevin White's home in Mount Vernon Square off Charles St."[260] The crowd used several chants, such as "No More Murders." The Combahee were closely involved in this protest. Barbara Smith, in a photograph captured by Tia Cross, was pictured carrying a sign with three other women that read "3RD WORLD WOMEN WE CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT OUR LIVES."[261] The Combahee focused on the racial and gender marginalization leading to these murders, thus this sign closely aligned with their politics by advocating for Third World women. Additionally, a Combahee member who wished to be unidentified by the media shouted at the rally, "we don't have to fight this battle in ones and tens, but in thousands and tens of thousands. We will fight back!"[262] This statement highlighted the power in mass organizing of black women and also encapsulated the interlocking systems of oppression the Combahee included throughout their politics. In addition to this powerful protest, the Combahee participated in numerous meetings with other feminist organizations to address further activism.[263]

The horrific murders of twelve black women in Boston in 1979 inspired Combahee activism and encouraged the group to contribute to the feminist media once again through their successful pamphlet. The Combahee used the killings as a rallying point from which to acknowledge interlocking systems of oppression and the unique marginalization of black women. Duchess Harris concluded that "the Collective was most cohesive and active when it organized around the

[258] Cheryl Devall, "Women March in Boston, Protest Roxbury Killings," *The Harvard Crimson*, April 30, 1979.
[259] W.S., "My Body Aches From Unseen Beating."
[260] Devall, "Women March in Boston."
[261] Tia Cross, photograph, April 29, 1979.
[262] Cheryl Devall, ""500 March in Anger over Recent Slayings," *Bay State Banner,* May 3, 1979, Box 11, Box 17, Tia Cross Papers.
[263] "No More Murders! Flyer," n.d., Adrienne Rich Papers, Box 35, Folder 38, Schlesinger Library.

issue of the murders in Boston."[264] These injustices fueled the anger and outrage of the women in the organization and encouraged them to rally in honor of the victims. In their activism, the Combahee used similar rhetoric to the Combahee River Collective Statement and furthered their intersectional politics. They also continued to use the feminist press as a tool from which to connect black feminisms and fight against the marginalization of black women. The pamphlet, in conjunction with their coalition work and demonstrations, allowed the Combahee to reach tens of thousands of women. The Combahee continued to engage with the feminist media in many junctures throughout their activism, including getting their work published in other feminist circles.

2.4 Disproving "the 'non-existence' of Black Feminist and Black Lesbian Writers": Combahee Black Feminist Retreats and Contributions to the Feminist Press

In addition to their work on the *Combahee River Collective Statement* and the pamphlet about the Roxbury/Dorchester murders, the Combahee also made numerous other efforts to contribute to the feminist media by getting their writings published in feminist alternative press publications. Barbara Smith encouraged women in the Combahee to get their work published and also connected with black female writers such as Audre Lorde. The Combahee ultimately valued the power of the written word, as evident by their influential Collective Statement and "Why Did They Die?" pamphlet. As many members of the Combahee had higher education degrees, the group itself was predisposed to writing and publishing. Smith wanted the Combahee to use this to their advantage and to use these skills to bring black feminists together.

The Combahee held these retreats from 1977 to 1980. Members of the Combahee invited politically active black women to "assess the state of our [black feminist] movement, to share

[264] Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective," 300.

information with each other about our political work and to talk about possibilities and issues for organizing black women."[265] Barbara Smith came up with the idea for the retreats and intended them to be a place for black feminists to connect. She explained that she loved going to conventions where she could meet other black women "and I just thought, we need to kind of organize and institutionalize this."[266] Smith presented this idea to other members of the Combahee and they were thrilled. The Combahee worked hard logistically to implement the retreats and even borrowed a friend's home for the first one. Prior to each retreat, the Combahee would send out a questionnaire for women to fill out that would inform the topics of discussion and the overall theme of the retreat itself. Springer argued that "the Combahee Black Women's Network Retreats were clearly about more than consciousness-raising."[267] The Combahee hoped for these retreats to be intellectually productive but also "a time for healing and spirituality."[268] In creating the retreats, there was an element of cultivating a space for black women to collaborate and furthermore to lift the voices of marginalized women.

As Daphne Spain argued in *Constructive Feminism*, second-wave feminists constructed spaces to exist and collaborate outside the world of hegemonic masculinity.[269] The retreat served as a similar space for black feminists, to allow them to collaborate and even just enjoy themselves amongst women who understood each other's identities and experiences. Barbara Smith enthusiastically explained to Taylor how the food at these events, in addition to books and feminist discussions, brought women together. She explained that "there was food of a level you could not even imagine…because my sister and I, we loved to cook…Demita is one of the best

[265] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 106.
[266] Barbara Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 57.
[267] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 106-107.
[268] Barbara Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 59.
[269] Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women's Spaces and Women's Rights in the American City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt18kr5mx, 153.

cooks on the planet…so we would throw down."[270] The retreats served more than a political purpose—the women who attended were able to have fun together, eat, and bond as black feminists. During the time, black feminists faced every possible obstacle in coming together, thus the retreats represented a small, yet significant victory of black sisterhood. Barbara Smith described the greater purpose of the retreats and stated:

> It was really about—first of all—to get Black feminists together so we could talk about what it was we were trying to do. It was to address the isolation we faced as black feminists. So it was to get us together in one place. It was to have serious political discussion. It was to have cultural and social opportunities and outlets. It was everything. It was multipurpose, three days of everything.[271]

Smith's retreats serve as an example of Spain's arguments about feminist space, with Smith explaining that the retreats served to bring black feminists together, whether they were discussing feminist theory or making a meal.

The first retreat took place in South Hadley, Massachusetts in July 1977. This retreat "focused on exploring participants' experience with formal black feminist organizing."[272] A small group of women attended the first retreat, namely Cheryl Clarke, Audre Lorde, and Linda Powell. In addition to the fun and bonding of the retreats, the Combahee encouraged women to bring their own writing for discussion and collaboration. As Springer explained:

> The Retreat organizers encouraged participants to bring written material, including their own creative Works, relevant to Black feminism. Such an invitation encompassed the idea that black women create theory in many forms– from position papers to magazine articles to prose and poetry– and now further consciousness-raising would grow from concentrated interaction.[273]

[270] Barbara Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 59.
[271] Barbara Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 55.
[272] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 107.
[273] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 106-107.

In this manner, the Combahee highlighted the feminist press and elevated black voices. They believed that more black voices needed to be included in the feminist media and thus encouraged each other by sharing and critiquing each other's work.

The Combahee hosted at least seven retreats sporadically between 1977 and 1980.[274] Each retreat had a different group of guests but centered black feminist voices overall. The fifth retreat in July 1979 focused closely on black women in publishing. During this retreat, the Combahee emphasized the importance of publishing and encouraged the group to contribute to lesbian feminist theory.[275] This emphasis on the press was evident in the Combahee River Collective as a whole, as well as in these retreats. The Combahee remained committed to the feminist media because they saw it as a way to bring black feminists together via consciousness raising and as a way to make their voices heard. The retreats ultimately helped the Combahee form a collective network with other black feminists, thus reinforcing their commitment to coalition building. Barbara Smith explained that

> The retreats resulted in an ongoing network among those who participated in them, when we weren't at a retreat. All of the sudden, as a result of having our retreats, we suddenly had people, sometimes in our own geographic location, sometimes elsewhere, who we could reach out to, plan things with, do projects with…[276]

The Combahee created a black feminist network out of the retreats that allowed for further organizing and community. The retreats encouraged the Combahee to engage with other black feminists, develop theory, and contribute to the feminist press that they had long been excluded from. These events solidified the Combahee's interest in the feminist press and their belief that by contributing to the media, they could inspire more black feminists.

[274] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 110.
[275] Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective," 296.
[276] Barbara Smith in Taylor, *How We Get Free*, 57.

In part resulting from the discussions at the feminist retreats, the Smith sisters and other members of the Combahee made many efforts to contribute to the feminist media via alternative press newspapers. The Combahee contributed to numerous publications during their active years and continued long after the group disbanded. In the fall of 1979, Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel, a Combahee member, co-edited the Black Woman's Issue of *Conditions* magazine. *Conditions* magazine was a magazine of women's writing, focusing on the works of lesbians, and published in Brooklyn, New York from 1976 to 1990. The publication considered itself a literary magazine and featured work from women all over the country. The *Conditions* staff asked Smith to edit the Black Women's issue of the magazine and she agreed to do it in collaboration with Bethel, spending over a year creating the issue.[277]

The Black Women's edition of the magazine proved to be another lasting contribution of the Combahee to the alternative press, as Smith and Bethel privileged the voices of black women in the issue and even addressed the problems black women faced in the media and society. In their introduction to the issue, Smith and Bethel highlighted the gaps in the feminist media. They explained that women of color had been silenced for far too long; thus, this Black women's issue represented a new opportunity. This issue made space for black women in the feminist press, as "so often women's publications, presses, and organizations have claimed they could not find any women of color as an excuse for their all-whiteness."[278] Smith and Bethel used this issue to refute the notion that women of color simply did not want to contribute to the feminist press. They stated that the Black Women edition of *Conditions* "clearly disproves the 'non-existence' of Black feminist and Black lesbian writers and challenges forever our invisibility, particularly in

[277] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 11.
[278] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 11.

the feminist press."[279] Just like the feminist retreats, this special issue of *Conditions* provided a place for black feminists to write, share their work, and collaborate with other black feminists. This opportunity was unprecedented in numerous ways and made the feminist press much more inclusive.

In this introduction, Smith and Bethel explained how they went about finding black feminists willing to publish their work. They sent out flyers and messages through publications throughout the country to solicit black feminist work, including work from "many new Black women writers [who] are being published in a feminist publication for the first time."[280] They relied on feminist networks to make this possible and also made efforts to seek women who had been pushed to the margins of feminism. Smith and Bethel wrote "we and the ongoing editors of *CONDITIONS* made a huge effort to locate Black women outside of usual 'feminist' networks."[281] Due to the fact that many supposedly feminist networks alienated women who were not white and middle class, this step was necessary and went hand in hand with empowering black feminists to contribute to the media more than ever.

Smith and Bethel only accepted pieces for this issue that were about the experiences of being black and female and they sought out black women who had never been published before.[282] The co-editors valued this because they saw the issue as an unparalleled opportunity for women of color. They wrote:

> We felt that for many Black lesbian/feminist writers *CONDITIONS* represented a rare chance for them to share their work in public. It seemed crucial to us that, given the racial/sexual politics of publishing, if we had to choose between giving space to a lesbian/feminist expression of the Black female experience and a less overtly radical treatment of this

[279] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 11.
[280] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 11.
[281] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 11.
[282] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 12.

> experience that would have a good chance of publication elsewhere, we should place a premium on providing a voice for the less publishable work.[283]

Without a recurring feminist magazine of their own, Smith and Bethel seized the rare opportunity to edit *Conditions* and aimed to use it to alter the face of the feminist press.

Their main strategy included centering the voices of marginalized women and defying the status quo previously established by the feminist press that was overtly white and middle-class. Ultimately, Smith and Bethel described this issue as "herstoric" due to its rarity and unprecedented nature.[284] They discussed that the issue was significant, as

> Its uniqueness suggests how it may be used at a time when Black feminist and Black lesbian materials are still discouragingly scarce. Not only will it function as a resource for exposing individual women to Black feminist thought; we also suggest that it will be considered and used as a text in a range of women's studies courses.[285]

The Black Woman's edition of *Conditions* encouraged a wider black feminist consciousness, found a place for black women in the feminist press, and supported a small alternative press issue. The co-editors also encouraged white women to read this issue and share it with women of color.[286] Smith and Bethel offered unique perspectives as the editors of this publication because they privileged the perspectives of women of color while also highlighting specific issues that impacted women of color and queer women. The two editors drew attention to the Roxbury/Dorchester murders in their introduction as well, as they worked on editing this publication while also mobilizing for the victims of the murders. Smith and Bethel highlighted this poignant duality by stating, "while we were working to create a place for celebration of Black women's lives, our sisters were dying."[287] This statement in itself, by recognizing both the

[283] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 12.
[284] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 13.
[285] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 13-14.
[286] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 14.
[287] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 14.

beauty and tragedy of black womanhood, serves as a keen representation of black feminism in the 1970s. Black feminists, including the Combahee, fought for a series of issues that paralleled white feminist motivations. However, at the same time, Black feminists also had to cope with horrific issues coinciding with their marginalized identities and the nature of interlocking systems of oppression. As white women struggled for abortion rights and equal wages, black feminists had to find ways to rally against atrocities like coercive sterilizations, violence against black women, and the murders of their Boston sisters.

While coping with the atrocities omnipresent in Boston in 1979, Smith and Bethel were able to use the Black Women's issue of *Conditions* as a beacon of hope for black feminists. In creating this unique feminist space, black women could share ideas and learn from each other. The writing in this issue ranged from poetry, prose, fiction, songs, and reviews. Other Combahee members contributed to the publication including Chirlane McCray, Beverly Smith, and Eleanor Johnson. Bethel shared a poem titled "What Chou Mean *We*, White Girl," encapsulating the ironies of olive branches and empty promises from white feminists. She described her frustrations in moments "like these that make me want to cry/kill/roll my eyes suck my teeth hand on my hip scream at so-called white lesbian/feminist(s) 'WHAT CHOU MEAN WE, WHITE GIRL?'"[288] In her piece "Reflections: on Black Feminist Therapy," Eleanor Johnson described why black women sought therapy, largely pointing out feelings of self-hatred and racial/sexual oppression. She concluded, "we seek our grandmothers' strengths, our great-grandmothers' strategies…we discover/recover ourselves."[289] Cheryl Clarke reviewed *nappy edges* by Ntozake Shange, calling her poetry "vibrant, visceral, sometimes brilliant, rarely

[288] Bethel, "Preface: What Chou Mean *We*, White Girl," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 86.
[289] Eleanor Johnson, "Reflections: on Black Feminist Therapy," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 117.

frivolous, occasionally self-indulgent, abundantly magnanimous."[290] Barbara Smith detailed interlocking systems of oppression in her essay "Notes for Yet Another Paper on Black Feminism, Or Will the real Enemy Please Stand Up." She described the triple oppression of black women and argued that "the fact that we, as Third World women, face oppression specific to our combined racial, sexual, and class status means that we will also develop specific theory and practice in order to fight our oppression."[291] This analysis echoes many elements of the Combahee's politics and the Combahee River Collective Statement. Beverly Smith described her mixed emotions about marriage in "The Wedding." She described feeling "out of place" at weddings and critiqued the "heterosexual assumption of it all."[292] In her post-note, she also acknowledged being reluctant to publish this piece, but "as a result of the support and inspiration of being with the women the first evening of the [Black Feminist] retreat I got up the courage to read what I had written the next morning."[293] Even for established women like Beverly, the power of sisterhood and camaraderie inspired her to publish her work. This issue of *Conditions* had a similar impact of Combahee's Black Feminist Retreats in bringing black women together, providing a necessary creative outlet, and encouraging black feminist voices to be heard. In all the above examples, plus the additional pieces published in the Black Women's issue of *Conditions,* there was untapped power to be found in sisterhood and black feminist presence in the feminist media.

Combahee members contributed to a variety of other feminist publications as well, writing articles, reviews, and profiles. As emphasized in their retreats, members of the group

[290] Cheryl Clarke, "Review of *nappy edges* by Ntozake Shange," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 163.
[291] Barbara Smith, "Notes for Yet Another Paper on Black Feminism, Or Will the real Enemy Please Stand Up," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 123-4.
[292] Beverly Smith, "The Wedding," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 108.
[293] Smith, "The Wedding," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 108.

believed that black feminists needed to contribute to the feminist media however they could, especially as they did not have an outlet of their own. Before Barbara Smith and Bethel edited *Conditions* 5, Beverly and Barbara Smith wrote a piece titled "'I am Not Meant to be Alone and Without You Who Understand': Letters from Black Feminists, 1972-1978" in *Conditions* 4. In this article, the Smith sisters compiled letters from themselves and other black feminists who consented to highlight the significance of letter writing in black feminist activism. In the preface, they explain that letter writing served to connect black feminists with each other, to share ideas, and to find commonalities. The Smith sisters explained that as black feminists did not have official publications to share their ideas and had few opportunities to find one another. They explained that the letters were diverse in content as a result. "One reason for the rich variety of the letters' contents is that we have so few places as Black feminists to send our creations and to share ourselves." They continued, "When these letters were written we didn't have a single publication of our own. We still don't have our own *off our backs* or even our own *Ms.*"[294] The letters enclosed highlighted a variety of themes, such as feelings of isolation, experiences with homophobia, and alienation from white women. They argued that black feminist correspondence served as a way of connection and helped break the isolation that so many women experienced. This example of Combahee contributions to other forms of feminist media closely highlighted their vision of building a black feminist community and sharing their voices whenever possible.

Other Combahee members including Cheryl Clarke, Lorraine Bethel, along with Beverly Smith made numerous contributions to other feminist publications. Beverly Smith wrote an article for *Aegis*, a feminist publication dedicated to ending violence against women, in 1979 titled "Some Thoughts on Racism," in which she described her experiences as a Black lesbian

[294] Barbara Smith and Beverly Smith, "'I am Not Meant to be Alone and Without You Who Understand': Letters from Black Feminists, 1972-1978," *Conditions* 2, No. 1, January 1979, 63.

feminist. In one example, she described the feeling of being tokenized by white feminists when speak at a panel and being the only woman of color out of twelve feminists.

> I am furious that white women think they've dealt Black women and with racism by giving me the total responsibility of speaking for and about Black women. It's overwhelming to me and it's tokenism. What I want white women to do is to *include* Black women and other Third World women, explicitly, *by name* in their work whether it be on medical abuse, lesbian artists or quiltmakers. What I want is that white women include Black women in their psyches, minds, hearts, political analyses and political work.[295]

Smith expressed many unjust experiences she had in her life, but her focus on white women within the movement was especially compelling. She expressed outright anger at being tokenized and used to educate white feminists on racism. This article represented many interests reflected in the Combahee Collective Statement as well, including the ways in which Smith's gender, race, and sexuality impacted the way she was treated by black and white communities.

In another example, Lorraine Bethel wrote a profile on Audre Lorde for *Sojourner* titled "Audre Lorde: Giving Name to the Nameless." In addition to admiring Lorde's recent works, she described what it felt like as a black feminist to read poetry written by a black feminist. "It is therefore always incredibly affirming when I, as a Black woman-identified [woman], can enjoy and experience works created from a cultural sensibility specific to my political and emotional realities." She continues, "these things are not luxuries but necessities of my life, crucial for the survival of my identity as a self-identified Black woman."[296] Similar to other articles written by Combahee women, she explained how affirming reading Lorde's work as she could find a sense of connection and understanding through it. Many Combahee members wrote reviews of topical works as contributions to the feminist media in a wide range of publications, including *Conditions* and *Sinister Wisdom.* Cheryl Clarke, Lorraine Bethel, and Barbara Smith all wrote

[295] Beverly Smith, "Some Thoughts on Racism," *Aegis*, March 1979, 35.
[296] "Audre Lorde: Giving Name to the Nameless." Lorraine Bethel, pg 5, 5/1978, Sojourner, Volume 3, Number 9

numerous reviews on black feminist writings for various issues of *Conditions*.[297] In their own ways, each of these women made efforts to contribute to the feminist media.

2.5 Conclusion

Members of the Combahee River Collective found ways to contribute and forge a space for themselves in the feminist media without a recurring publication of their own. They created physical and mental spaces of collaboration and consciousness-raising in the Black Feminist Retreats, while also inspiring further writing. The Combahee also created metaphorical space for black feminists within the white feminist media by elevating the work of black feminists in these previously limited spaces. These contributions to the feminist press, as well as the *Combahee River Collective Statement* and mass organizing around the Roxbury/Dorchester murders, paved the way for more involvement of women of color in the feminist press. Smith and Bethel even imagined what this future could look like in stating, "we feel strongly that all women of color need autonomous publications that embody their particular identity; however, there is also a need for publications that encompass the experiences of all Third World women."[298] For Smith and Bethel, the future of the feminist media centered women of color.

The Combahee River Collective was active from 1974 to 1980. The group disbanded in 1980 largely because the few women still involved decided to pursue activism elsewhere. They held their final Black Feminist Retreat in 1980 and disbanded sometime that year. Smith explained that though elements of Combahee's activism are still used today, the organization was not fated to last forever. In a 2003 interview with Loretta Ross, she retrospectively explained,

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[297] Barbara Smith, "Pat Parker Review," *Conditions* 1, no. 3, Spring 1978, 99; Lorraine Bethel, "Review of *Dogmoon* by Rikki Lights," Conditions 1, no. 3, Spring 1978, 121; Cheryl Clarke, "Review of *nappy edges* by Ntozake Shange," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 159.
[298] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 12.

> The kind of grassroots political organizing that both the National Black Feminist Organization and the Combahee River Collective represent—they're not necessarily groups that last, you know, for decades. Because, for one thing, they're radical organizations, and the very nature of anything that's radical—it's a dialectic, it's going to change.[299]

She claimed that in order for a group to last long term, they would have to be much more conventional in terms of ideology and structure. Though the Combahee River Collective was active for six years, it has an immense legacy and can only be viewed as a successful organization. The women of the Combahee largely remained involved in activism after the end of the organization. Beverly Smith shifted more closely towards academia and is currently teaching women's health at University of Massachusetts Boston. Demita Frazier continued to write and lecture about black feminism at colleges across the United States. As soon as Combahee dissolved, Barbara Smith continued on to work closely with Audre Lorde. Springer summarized the end of Combahee in stating, "eventually, Combahee's historic statement on black feminism and Smith's published work with Kitchen Table Women of Color Press defined Combahee's lasting legacy."[300]

After the Combahee formally disbanded, Barbara Smith became a lasting part of this legacy with her role in founding, along with Audre Lorde, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Kitchen Table was based in New York and "carried out the group's dreams of self-publishing" discussed during the Black Feminist Retreats.[301] The Combahee made numerous gains in publishing for black women, thus achieving their dream of having black women's voices heard. Kitchen Table Press was active from 1980 to 1992, publishing many well-known books by women of color. These books included *I Am Your Sister* by Audre Lorde, *Cuentos: Stories by*

[299] Smith, Barbara Smith Oral History, 56.
[300] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 160.
[301] Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 111.

Latinas edited by Alma Gómez and Cherríe Moraga, and Angela Davis's *Violence Against Women and the Ongoing Challenge to Racism.* Notably, Kitchen Table Press bought several books from Persephone Press when they closed in 1983, including Cherríe Moraga's and Gloria Anzaldúa's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and the soon to be published *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* by Barbara Smith. She explained that "Kitchen Table was the first press for women of color in the United States that reached a wide national audience." Smith continued, "From the very beginning we made a commitment to be a press for all women of color. Latina, Asian American, Indigenous and Black women formed the core group that got the press underway."[302] The press eventually disbanded after Lorde's death in 1992, but Smith continued to be a significant activist for black lesbian feminists in her work. In the Black women's issue of *Conditions,* Smith and Bethel highlighted a sense of hope for black women in publishing when she stated: "We hope that this issue gives a sense of what is possible for Black women writers now, as well as what is necessary for our future."[303]

Barbara Smith and Lorraine Bethel were indeed correct—there was a significant future in the feminist press for women of color. Though the Combahee is not often described as an influential organization in the feminist press, this chapter argues that even without their own recurring feminist publication, the Combahee used their writing skills and complex theory to make space for black feminists in the feminist media. The group contributed to the feminist press in both overt and subtle ways, which ultimately resulted in a strong legacy continuing beyond the organization's demise. The Combahee Collective Statement radically altered black feminist and social justice theory. It was also seen as one of the organization's greatest legacies and

[302] Blain, "Barbara Smith Looks Back."
[303] Bethel and Smith, "Introduction," *Conditions* 2, No. 2, Autumn 1979, 14.

contributions to the feminist press. However, the Combahee were instrumental in situating black feminist voices in the feminist media through their "Why Did They Die?" pamphlets, Black Feminist retreats, and member's submissions to a range of feminist publications. The Combahee contributed to the feminist press in numerous ways and members saw the written word as a valuable activist technique. The Combahee River Collective itself, as a second wave feminist organization, dealt with internal divisions and the group also had to fight to make their voices heard. The women of the Combahee saw a gap in the feminist movement, made space for black feminist voices, and ensure that future black feminists could contribute to the movement.

CHAPTER THREE

"Persephone Press: A Lesbian Strategy": The Herstory of Persephone Press and the Impact of Lesbian-Feminism in Publishing, 1976-1983

In a letter to *Ms.* Magazine in 1979, Gloria Greenfield highlighted the necessity of feminist publishing, stating that "I believe that feminist-thinking women are the only possible hope for saving both the human species and our environment." She continued, "In building a strong communications network, such as lesbian-feminist publishing, we will encourage the articulation and ensure the delivery of these thoughts."[304] Greenfield imagined feminist publishing as a means of creating a powerful feminist communications network. She believed that if women were able to share their voices through this network, they would ultimately change the world for the better. Feminist publishing has been a useful ideological and consciousness-raising tool even before the emergence of the second wave in the 1960s.

The field of feminist publishing grew to be formidable, reinforced by influential and bestselling books such as Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), and the edited collection, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). The second wave of feminism revitalized a new feminist consciousness, with women contributing to the emerging feminist media through various methods. Publications such as magazines and newsletters proved essential, however, as feminists also gained a foothold in the

[304] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to *Ms.* via Jill Story and Ellen Sweet," Oct 28, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

book publishing industry. The field was complex and divided by a debate on publishing between big corporate publishing houses versus small, feminist presses. Scholar Kathryn Flannery argued that "publishing is left out of historical studies of feminism because practices of literacy, particularly book publishing, are tainted by their relationship to the power structure."[305] In turn, feminist presses emerged as an alternative to the patriarchal power structure and aimed to empower authors through publishing, rather than take advantage of them. Scholar Jennifer Gilley described a period of revitalization at this time, as "the feminist print movement, whether for-profit or nonprofit in intent, was considered to be crucial to the publication of feminism for a host of political and material reasons."[306]

Andi Zeisler examined the different types of feminist publishing in her book *Feminism and Pop Culture* and identified two main categories: "the publishing of feminism, referring to books written by feminists but published by corporate presses; and feminist publishing, referring to pamphlets, newsletters, and books both written and published by feminists themselves."[307] Feminists debated about which vehicle was better, but in reality most feminists had little choice in terms of publishing as there were very few feminist presses. Even ones that existed, like Persephone, lacked the resources to publish books as frequently as big presses. Feminist authors regularly engaged in debates about whether or not to publish with feminist presses or mainstream presses. However, due to the feminist publishing movement, feminist, alternative, and specialty presses such as Diana Press, Luna Press, and Persephone Press proliferated during the 1970s, Motivated by her desire to create a feminist communications network, Greenfield, along with Pat

[305] Kathryn Thoms Flannery, *Feminist Literacies, 1968-1975* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 2. Quoted in Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 23.
[306] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 26.
[307] Andi Zeisler, *Feminism and Pop Culture* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 64.

McGloin and Marianne Rubenstein, established Pomegranate Productions, which would eventually be renamed Persephone Press.

Persephone Press became well-known and successful as one of the first lesbian feminist publishing houses in the United States due to its unique, distinctly political business and editorial model. This chapter argues that the women of Persephone were committed to publishing innovative, radical feminist books and standing up against corporate publishing houses but struggled to balance their strong political positions with the difficulties of running a small feminist press. Persephone owed much of its success to support from the feminist community and worked hard to build a strong feminist communications network; however, it still experienced tensions and schisms with other feminists. The press ultimately closed due to lack of funds, dwindling support from the feminist community, and the inability of the press to balance politics and business. However, Persephone Press established a legacy of lesbian-feminism in the male-dominated publishing industry and created space for marginalized voices in the feminist media. As a catalyst in the feminist press movement, the women of Persephone proved that there was an unopened market seeking feminist titles and a feminist consciousness to incite a feminist revolution.

3.1 "More than Just a Lesbian Feminist Publishing House": The Inception of Persephone Press and a New Kind of Feminist Publishing

Persephone Press was founded amidst the proliferation of feminist presses in the mid-1970s and emerged with a strong ideological stance and commitment to lesbian-feminism. In an article in *Equal Times*, Marilyn Weller explained that the founders "realized that the women's movement had to have its own media if it was to communicate effectively and soon they shifted their efforts to Persephone, using the pomegranate as their symbol."[308] Persephone Press was established in April 1976 by Gloria Z. Greenfield, Pat (Patricia) McGloin, and Marianne Rubenstein.[309] The three women set up shop in

Fig. 10. Persephone Press Brochure Cover, 1976. [310]

Watertown, Massachusetts, a small suburb about ten miles outside of Boston. The press published and distributed fifteen books during its active years from 1976 to 1983. Some of these books were reprints or redistributions, but the majority were originally published with

[308] Weller, "Women's Own Media."
[309] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Dr. Naomi Stephan and Dr. Jeanette Clausen," Aug 2, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[310] "Persephone Press Brochure," 1976, Box 5, Folder 19, Persephone Press Records. Photo taken by Carmen Harris on January 31, 2023

Persephone. By the time of their closure in 1983, Persephone Press was also under contract to publish *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* edited by Barbara Smith, *Law of Return* by Alice Bloch, and *Abeng* by Michelle Cliff, which all were contracted to different publishers after their closure. For each of these publications, Persephone sold books to feminist bookstores by using a feminist communication network and organizing events for the authors to promote their work.

The name for the press was inspired by the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter, in which Persephone was kidnapped by Hades and could only reunite with her mother for half of the year. The founders explained that "Persephone Press sees the reuniting of mother and daughter as a powerful union symbolic of women's enduring strength. Our logo, the pomegranate, is Persephone's fruit. With its many succulent seeds, the pomegranate is a symbol of unity and fertility."[311] The press aimed to honor women's persistence and determination by creating a space for feminist publishing. The original goal of the press "was to build an autonomous lesbian-feminist publishing network to encourage and ensure global communication among women, without patriarchal censorship."[312] Greenfield, McGloin, and Rubenstein, as well as later members, were zealous about creating a space for feminism and lesbian-feminism outside of traditionally masculine spaces. They witnessed the potential of feminist publishing and also observed the limiting nature of the male-centric power structure of publishing. Persephone Press served as a direct challenge to corporate publishing and aimed to center a variety of female voices, in the spirit of feminist community and women's connections, as symbolized by the poignant example of Persephone and Demeter.

[311] Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin, "Persephone Press Book Club," n.d., Box 5, Folder 8, Persephone Press Records. This was featured in their stationary for the first few years of operation.
[312] "About the Publishing House," 1980, Box 1, Folder 1, Persephone Press Records.

Greenfield, McGloin, and Rubenstein were originally involved with Pomegranate Productions, a lesbian-feminist collective. This organization sponsored women's cultural events including feminist conferences such as the Through the Looking Glass Conference and the National Women's Spirituality Conference in 1976.[313] They dabbled with many different forays into the feminist media and business, with projects such as Siren's Song and Ms. Clean respectively. Siren's Song was a branch of Pomegranate Productions focused on music and record distribution, while Ms. Clean was a professional cleaning business the women used to create extra income.[314] The women originally intended for the various businesses of Pomegranate Production to be feminist in ideology and to earn money to support other branches of the company. Persephone Press was originally a branch of Pomegranate Productions, but by January 1977 the founders decided to focus their attention solely on Persephone Press. Greenfield wrote a letter to lawyer Bonnie Strunk indicating that "we have decided not to spread our energies into many branches, but rather to maintain one branch: Persephone Press."[315] Prior to founding Persephone Press, each of the founders had experience with feminist organizing and "became increasingly aware of the extreme censorship of women's material especially radical feminist."[316] The group originally called themselves Persephone Press: A Branch of Pomegranate Productions, but by February became simply Persephone Press, keeping their pomegranate logo.[317] Greenfield and McGloin were the only people to stay with Persephone from its birth to

[313] Marilyn Weller, "Women's Own Media," *Equal Times* 5, no. 98, Oct 13-26, 1980, n.d., Box 1, Folder 1, Persephone Press Records,; Kelly McRae and Diane Nettles, "Persephone Perseveres," *Plexus*, October 1979 Box 1, Folder 1, Persephone Press Records.
[314] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Bonnie Strunk," January 23, 1977, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[315] Greenfield, "Letter to Bonnie Strunk."
[316] Weller, "Women's Own Media."
[317] In a letter to Pomegranate Press in Corte Madera, Louisiana, Deborah Snow explained that Persephone Press dropped "a branch of Pomegranate productions" from their name in order to stop being confused with Pomegranate Press. Deborah Snow, "Letter to Pomegranate Press," November 20, 1979, Persephone Press Records, Box 13, Folder 2, Schlesinger Library.

its closure. They had two partners at respective times, Marianne Rubenstein and Deborah Snow. They accepted the help of many volunteers and editors who sent correspondence, read manuscripts, and helped with administrative matters. The founders of Persephone Press had experience in feminist organizing and used this knowledge in their business.[318]

Gloria Greenfield was introduced to the world of feminist activism through her student organizing while attending the State University College at Oswego in New York from the fall of 1968 to the spring of 1974.[319] During her first year in Oswego, she was involved in the "Seneca Hall Protest," in which students demanded that discriminatory curfews for women be repealed. She was also a campus leader during a student strike in 1970 and founded "the first radical feminist organization (Women For A New World) on campus" with Katie Allen (Becker).[320] This group, with help from Greenfield, fought to get funds for a women's center on campus that opened in February 1974. She also was involved with a survey to demand full-time gynecological care for women at the Mary Walker clinic, which was implemented by the fall of 1972.[321] After graduating, Greenfield obtained her graduate degree in the History of Women in the United States from the Goddard-Cambridge Graduate Program for Social Change in 1975.[322] She worked as a teacher for Boston Public Schools from 1975 to 1979. Between 1977 and 1980, she also contributed to the feminist press during this time through her role as a News Editor for *Sojourner,* a Cambridge based paper, and *Chrysalis: A Magazine for Women's Culture*.[323] In her resume, she listed herself as a founder of Pomegranate Productions, Financial Administrator for

[318] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union," 1981, Box 1, Folder 27, Persephone Press Records,
[319] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Denise Harrigan," October 29, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[320] Greenfield, "Letter to Denise Harrigan."
[321] Greenfield, "Letter to Denise Harrigan."
[322] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[323] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."

Persephone Press from 1976-1980, and the Treasurer/ Assistant Clerk for Persephone Press since 1980. Greenfield met Pat McGloin while at the State University at Oswego.

McGloin had a similar background to Greenfield but focused more closely on mathematics and business. Pat McGloin attended the State University of New York at Oswego from 1972 to 1974 pursuing a degree in Biology and Mathematics.[324] She also studied for her degree in Physical Education at Northeastern University from 1977 to 1979. In her resume, she also cited her role as Treasurer for the Oswego Women's Center from 1973 to 1974, as well as her work as a Junior Accountant at Royal Globe Insurance Company from 1971 to 1972 and as a Fund-raiser for the Cambridge Women's Center in 1974. McGloin served as a founding member of Pomegranate Productions from 1975 to 1980, the Director of Marketing/ Partner for Persephone Press from 1976 to 1980, and then President of Persephone Press beginning in 1980.[325] Much like Greenfield, McGloin expressed an interest in feminism and lesbian-feminism specifically during her years in Oswego. United by the Oswego Women's Center, Greenfield, McGloin, and Rubenstein came together under a broad mission of creating a space for feminism in media and publishing. By late 1979, Marianne Rubenstein was no longer associated with Persephone Press or Pomegranate Productions but stayed in contact with Greenfield and McGloin in the following years.[326] Deborah Snow had plans to join Persephone Press as a partner by early 1977, according to a letter from Greenfield to Sally Gearhart and Susan Rennie.[327] Snow remained a partner for several years but was not prevalent in the history of

[324] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[325] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[326] In a letter on December 3, 1979, Greenfield responded to a letter from Rubenstein to keep her updated with new books being published. The letter appeared friendly despite Rubenstein leaving the press. Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Marianne Rubsenstein," December 3, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[327] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Sally Gearhart and Susan Rennie," January 23, 1977, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

Persephone Press. Greenfield explained that Snow graduated from Ohio State University with a degree Art History and worked in artistic directing for Persephone Press.[328]

When Greenfield graduated in 1974 and decided to attend the Goddard-Cambridge Graduate Program, she said that McGloin, the treasurer of the Women's Center, made the move with her. Marianne Rubenstein, the Director of Public Relations for the Women's Center, joined them in 1974 to start Pomegranate Productions. These three women built a strong bond at the university, with Greenfield and McGloin becoming business partners and remaining friends for decades.[329]

Persephone Press began as a very small-scale organization, with the founders relying on their own finances and seeking funding from a variety of places. Greenfield and McGloin both worked full-time jobs when they started Persephone Press.[330] Initially, Persephone relied on personal funds from Greenfield, McGloin, and Rubenstein. As the press was not lucrative in its first few years, Persephone could only publish a few titles and its founders found themselves stretched thin trying to survive. In a letter to Luna Publications in November 1976, Greenfield highlighted the precarious economic situation of the press. She wrote, "Persephone Press is not yet self-sufficient (I am NOT even referring to salaries) …all costs for advertising, production and litigation come out of our own pockets, and our pockets are not full."[331] The founders urgently wanted Persephone Press to be able to stand on its own. Greenfield reiterated this idea in saying, "we find it of utmost priority to either get Persephone to a self-sufficient level, or

[328] Greenfield, "Letter to Denise Harrigan."
[329] Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell, eds., *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 160.
[330] Weller, "Women's Own Media."
[331] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Luna Publications," November 30, 1976, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

return her underground."[332] She viewed Persephone's future in black and white: either the organization would flourish or she would quit Persephone and the press would cease to exist.

Greenfield pointed to 1979 as a turning point for the organization, in terms of popularity, finances, and overall success. The first few years of the press were relatively slow, with Persephone publishing three books in three years, but business soon increased. In a letter to J.R. Roberts and Barbara Smith, she explained:

> This past year has been a turning point for us, as we have taken more risks (= more loans) and have acquired some financial backers. The backers include friends and parents of friends. In addition, we each have become more financially stable, which permits personal loans and investments.[333]

She explained that in the next year, Persephone had plans to release about six titles. The press began to hit its stride and also received additional funding that served as a tailwind towards further success. The founders also reached out to investors and banks to obtain loans to fund the business. In 1980, the press received a loan of $100,000 from Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union, which allowed Greenfield and McGloin to move into publishing full-time and pay their own salaries.[334] In terms of the business itself, Greenfield and McGloin (as well as their partners at respective times) did the work of acquiring manuscripts, reading and editing them, corresponding with authors, and organizing press and media coverage. At times, Persephone worked with volunteers and interns to help with correspondence and the editing process itself. In the *Equal Times* article, Weller explained that "Greenfield and McGloin handle everything but the printing—all the way from tracking down the manuscripts to distributing the books when they're finally printed.[335]

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[332] Greenfield, "Letter to Luna Publications."
[333] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to JR Roberts and Barbara Smith," July 10, 1979, Persephone Press Records, Box 13, Folder 2, Schlesinger Library.
[334] Weller, "Women's Own Media."
[335] Weller, "Women's Own Media."

Persephone Press emerged during a period of revitalization for the feminist press in the 1970s. As a lesbian-feminist publishing house, the press aimed to fill in gaps for the feminist community and stand against big corporate presses. With their perspectives on feminism developed during university and time at the Oswego Women's Center, Greenfield and McGloin, along with their initial partners, worked to revolutionize the publishing business by advocating for lesbian-feminism and alternative presses. They considered Persephone Press to be "more than just a lesbian feminist publishing house" by indicating that the press was "also part of their strategy to bring about social change."[336] The owners combined a zeal for publishing with lesbian-feminist ideology that encapsulated this period of revival and shaped the world of small press publishing. For Greenfield and McGloin, lesbian-feminist publishing represented much more than simply putting out books: it was a gateway to a women's revolution.

3.2 "We Combine the Feminist Ethic with Business": Making Publishing Political through Editorial Policies

As one of the first lesbian feminist presses in the United States, Persephone Press paved the way for other publishing houses in terms of their commitment to a specific feminist ethic and realizing this ethos within the politics of publishing. At times, its founders' commitment to feminism and desire to succeed as a business were at odds with one another. The collective established editorial policies that reflected this strain between business and feminist commitment. Greenfield and McGloin incorporated their feminist ethos into editorial policies and publishing decisions in numerous ways, including in their refusal to publish works by men. Persephone Press also intended to challenge big presses, which were reluctant to publish feminist

[336] Pat Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing," *Washington Blade*, March 6, 1981, Box 1, Folder 1, Persephone Press Records.

works of any kind. Greenfield and McGloin created the press as they observed gaps in the publishing industry and the struggles women faced when dealing with big corporate presses. Facing corporate presses proved to be a challenge due to financing and resources, but Persephone Press worked to build a strong feminist network and numerous coalitions to unite feminists together in their endeavor. Persephone's founders stayed true to their ideological commitment, sometimes putting their business in crisis in order to adhere to their ideals. Persephone Press remained committed to feminist principles at all costs, thus highlighting the necessity of the feminist press and feminist publishing during the 1970s.

Greenfield and McGloin had a strong feminist ethic that sometimes was at odds with conventional business models. When they first founded Persephone Press with Rubenstein in 1976, they built off their feminist beliefs developed at the Oswego Women's Center to create a unique political perspective for their press. In their packet of editorial procedures, the founders of the Press wrote:

> Persephone Press is a lesbian-feminist publishing house which intends to have an impact on society. We see our books as organizing tools for social change, and seek strongly woman-identified work with the potential to both confront oppressive (i.e. sexist, homophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, classist) structures, and to move people into action.[337]

The women of Persephone highlighted their political stance to confront oppressive and patriarchal systems. They saw feminist books as useful consciousness raising tools that could bring women into a feminist consciousness and thus political action. Greenfield explained that "we are using publishing as a strategy for the building of a women's revolution… that's the goal—and it's not taken lightly."[338] The founders aspired to build a strong feminist publishing network to stand against corporate presses and bring lesbian-feminists together.

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[337] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines," n.d., Box 1, Folder 22, Persephone Press Records.
[338] Weller, "Women's Own Media."

Persephone Press highlighted their goals in a variety of ways, including through a slogan on one of its t-shirt designs. The press's founders explained:

> Our t-shirts say 'Persephone Press: a Lesbian Strategy.' We decided to use publishing as the strategy to build a women's revolution because we think global communication among women, especially Lesbian feminists, is what is going to move us. That is going to build the revolution.[339]

The simple slogan of 'Persephone Press: A Lesbian Strategy' exemplified the way that Persephone aimed to use identity politics in its attempt to challenge the mainstream publishing

Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, sch01189c00642

Fig. 11. 1980 Persephone Press t-shirt reading "Persephone Press: A Lesbian Strategy."[340]

system. To the founders, the most powerful tool at their disposal was coalition building and connecting women with one another through their books. This strategy of building a feminist media network proved essential for publications in all forms, as community and shared consciousness to inspire women to actively initiate societal change. The 'revolution' the

[339] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[340] "Persephone Press: A Lesbian Strategy T-shirt," 1980, Photograph, Persephone Press Records, https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/ids:494888244.

founders referred to would incite "overthrow of the patriarchal system and patriarchal values, which we see as sexist, racist, classist, and homophobic qualities."[341] They saw the feminist communications network as the most significant way to initiate this change, as opening the minds of women across the country would be practically liberatory.

Additionally, Persephone Press maintained a specific commitment to creating a space for lesbians in the publishing world. Greenfield explained that their method was "to publish innovative and provocative writings to foster a Lesbian sensibility."[342] Lesbians had been continuously alienated from mainstream feminism. Even as some feminist authors found success with corporate presses, these presses were extremely unlikely to publish any lesbian-feminist writings, as they prioritized profitability over political statements. In her chapter on "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," Jennifer Gilley highlighted the alienation of lesbian women from both publishing and feminist circles. She explained, "lesbians were a marginalized group even within feminism and considered too marginal and controversial to ever get picked up by commercial presses."[343] Gilley explained that large publishers were reluctant to publish lesbians until works like *Rubyfruit Jungle* by Rita Mae Brown became well known. Within Persephone Press, Greenfield and McGloin engaged in identity politics in their publishing work, a term coined by Barbara Smith.[344] They used their identities as lesbian feminists to inform and inspire their work, which largely consisted of uplifting the world of other lesbian feminists. They aimed to bridge the gap highlighted by Gilley and bring lesbians to the forefront of feminist writings.

[341] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[342] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[343] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 26.
[344] Frazier, Smith, and Smith, "Combahee River Collective Statement," 365. Box 11, Folder 17, Tia Cross Papers.

Through their identities as lesbians and involvement in the women's movement, Greenfield and McGloin knew what gaps needed to be filled.[345] Both women experienced marginalization from greater society and feminist circles because of their identities, so were aware about how their identities could impact their success. In 1979, Denise Harrigan, an editor of the Oswego college newsletter, asked Greenfield to share her experiences during her time at the college and afterwards. Greenfield told the editor about her experiences with activism on campus and beyond but was aware of how her identity could affect her being featured in the newspaper or mentioned at all. She wrote to Harrigan, the editor, to say "if my identity as a lesbian-feminist causes any hesitation in writing the article, I would appreciate your calling me so that we can discuss it."[346] Greenfield explained that she could change her label to radical-feminist if needed but wished to avoid this. Greenfield strongly identified with lesbian-feminism but knew that those in the heterosexual mainstream may react unfavorably to her sexuality. She advocated for her identity but was also willing to compromise and change terminology if required. Though they aimed to be overtly political, Greenfield and McGloin were always aware of omnipresent homophobia and sexism. For Persephone, politics and a strong conceptual backbone proved essential to their growth and success. In advocating for voices so rarely highlighted by mainstream publishing houses, Persephone Press represented a radical incursion into the male dominated publishing industry.

Greenfield and McGloin's commitment to lesbian-feminism and their stringent political stance was strikingly evident in their editorial policies and business model. Persephone Press sought manuscripts from feminist women, largely using classified ads in feminist publications and interpersonal connections within the broader feminist network. Generally, they explained

[345] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[346] Greenfield, "Letter to Denise Harrigan." It's unknown what Harrigan's editorial decision was.

that "Persephone Press is actively seeking innovative and provocative manuscripts…It is not necessary that a woman be lesbian to publish with Persephone, merely clearly woman identified and willing to publish with a lesbian press."[347] Persephone aimed to create a space to elevate lesbian-feminist writings, though the publishers did not reject works by heterosexual feminist women. They aimed to highlight and speak to liberated, feminist women, but explained that "at times [women] may be liberated without being lesbian; the two need not go hand in hand, so to speak."[348] The books they published needed to reflect their greater political philosophy. The women of Persephone had to be very choosy in terms of what to publish due to the limited resources they had as a publishing house. It was incredibly difficult for feminist writers to find publishers as a result because they had to find specialty publishing houses like Persephone and then find a press "who agrees that your book *is worthy of being one of the few they're able to publish.*"[349] Due to Persephone's lack of finances, they could only publish a very limited number of books and thus had a strict editorial process.

Persephone developed many criteria for reading manuscripts and choosing which books to publish. Greenfield and McGloin used the work of volunteers and interns to read the mass of manuscripts they received. In their pamphlet of editorial procedures, they outlined the general process of reading and rejecting or accepting manuscripts. First, the author would submit a query to Persephone's P.O. box. If the press volunteers were interested after reading the query, they would ask for a manuscript. From this point, multiple readers representing Persephone would read the manuscript and have the chance to reject or accept it. If readers enjoyed the book,

[347] McRae and Nettles, "Persephone Perseveres."
[348] "Persephone Press Serves Its Audience: (Gasp) Lesbians and Feminists!" *West Coast Review of Books* 7, no. 1, February 1981, Box 1, Folder 1, Persephone Press Records.
[349] Weller, "Women's Own Media."

Greenfield and McGloin would then read the manuscript and make the final decision.[350] Authors could be rejected at any of these steps for a multitude of reasons. The role of readers was to make comments on manuscripts and submit these to Greenfield and McGloin. If a work was rejected, the volunteer staff sent a rejection letter with editorial comments and names of other possible publishers. Manuscripts were rejected for a variety of reasons, but most of the reasons were related to how the book fit into Greenfield and McGloin's greater political scheme.

When actively accepting manuscripts, the publishers outlined the specifics of books they would be interested in. In their editorial procedures, they wrote:

> Persephone books are not restricted to particular modes or genres…We are looking for high-quality writing, and feel we are publishing works by some of the finest lesbian-feminist writers in the country. We will not accept a manuscript solely on its literary merit, nor are we interested in publishing second-rate literature by first-rate writers. Since we use our books as organizing tools and are promoting ideas rather than solely books, we have found that the best working relationships develop with authors who are activists.[351]

The founders highlighted their commitment to their political stance in this passage and stressed the importance of the political perspectives of their writers. Persephone was very well-known in feminist publishing circles for cultivating strong, collaborative relationships with authors. Greenfield explained that this positive relationship was essential as their "authors participate in a good deal of the decision making and they need to understand what Persephone is about; that we aren't just a regular publishing house, that we are a very intentional publishing house."[352] For this reason, Persephone valued the identities and activist roles of its authors, seeking to highlight the perspectives of women with similar revolutionary politics. The founders explained that promotional tours for their books served as "catalysts in various communities," thus they only

[350] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines."
[351] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines."
[352] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."

wanted to work with authors involved in the women's movement and other radical activism.[353] These close relationships with authors sometimes turned into friendships, with authors staying at Greenfield or McGloin's homes when in the Boston area or sharing numerous details about their personal lives. The two women developed closer relationships with some authors over others. The founders were close with Sally Gearhart, who wrote *A Feminist Tarot* and *The Wanderground*, and often signed her letters "With Love" or "Hugs and Kisses."[354] Some relationships remained more professional than personal and numerous disagreements emerged between Persephone and its authors, which will be examined later. Persephone's emphasis on feminist politics played a role in all their editorial decisions, from which authors to publish to how they engaged with the feminist media.

The press also highlighted its commitment to challenging oppression such as racism, anti-Semitism homophobia, classism, and ageism. The founders explained that they would not publish works that supported with any of these social structures.[355] They acknowledged that women may not always be aware of their privilege or biases and could work around this fact through revisions in some cases. Elly Bulkin, a collaborator of the press, wrote a series of guidelines for the Persephone reader to use when examining works by white women.[356] She asked questions like "Are women of color represented by work dealing with race and racism as well as topics not primarily focused on race?" and "Does she give equal value to the work of women of color and white women?"[357] Bulkin shared dozens of questions for readers to engage with during the evaluation process to examine representation, intended audience, assumptions,

[353] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[354] Marianne Rubenstein, "Letter to Sally Gearhart," January 13, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[355] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines."
[356] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines."
[357] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines."

and how white authors engaged with race. She concluded by saying, "in reviewing all manuscripts, it is essential that appropriate readers be found to avoid judgement of a work based on cultural or racist biases."[358] Persephone's political commitments were instituted in every aspect of the reading process. Manuscripts could be rejected for a multitude of reasons, such as expressing racist attitudes or Persephone's production schedule being too full.

In addition to prioritizing anti-racism in their editorial policies, Greenfield and McGloin made many efforts to challenge anti-Semitism within the feminist movement. As a Jewish lesbian-feminist, Greenfield was committed to uplifting other Jewish feminist through Persephone Press and by speaking out against anti-Semitism. One notable example occurred when Jan Clausen, co-editor of *Conditions* magazine, submitted her book *Sinking Stealing* to Persephone Press. Clausen had been in contact with the editors for over a year and received both mailed and verbal acceptance of her book by Persephone Press in 1981.[359] By 1982, Greenfield and McGloin characterized the book as anti-Semitic and ended their contract. Additionally, Pat McGloin wrote a scathing response analyzing the anti-Semitic content of the book. She pointed out one of the main characters of the book, Daniel, was represented as both privileged and inhuman. Clausen chose to make this character Jewish, thus McGloin explained that "the characterization is based upon anti-Semitism, based on a false notion of Jews: Jews as evil, Jews without integrity, Jews as inhuman."[360] McGloin quoted numerous passages from the book to show the ways that Clausen's writing was anti-Semitic, from Daniel and Rhea's characters in the book to Clausen's references to the "Jewish conspiracy" in which Jewish people were alleged to

[358] Persephone Press, "Editorial Guidelines."
[359] Jan Clausen, "Letter to Pat McGloin and Gloria Greenfield," January 11, 1982, Box 18, Folder 28, Persephone Press Records.
[360] Pat McGloin, "An Analysis of the Anti-Semitic Content in Sinking Stealing (Jan Clausen)," Box 18, Folder 28, Persephone Press Records.

having designs to take over the world. McGloin described that when she and Greenfield criticized Clausen for her work, "various lesbian-feminist writers… condemned Persephone's judgement of *Sinking, Stealing*, accusing us of 'stifling the creativity' of the writer."[361] McGloin refuted this statement and urged other feminist writers and readers to recognize anti-Semitism in lesbian literature.

Clausen furiously responded to Greenfield and McGloin in a letter on January 11, 1982. She wrote, "I consider this a violation of your promise [to publish *Sinking Stealing*], as well as of the most basic principles of feminist publishing." Clausen continued, "I urge you to refrain from further such quotations, and from damaging characterizations of my work and motives."[362] She claimed that McGloin's statements distorted her work and violated the publishing agreement. This example ultimately emphasized that McGloin and Greenfield were committed to combatting anti-Semitism in their editorial policies. It is not clear why they entered into a contract with Clausen in the first place given these concerns, but after almost of a year of work with Clausen, Persephone's publishers chose their beliefs over finances. Even outside of their publishing, Greenfield and McGloin criticized anti-Semitism when they witnessed it in the movement. McGloin wrote a complaint letter to the *Feminist Bookstore Newsletter* when one of the featured authors expressed anti-Semitic views.[363] In addition to pointing out such biases, they also aimed to highlight the work of Jewish feminists, which was evident when they published *Nice Jewish Girls* and *Keeper of Accounts.*

As highlighted above, Persephone had many parameters when choosing books to publish. In examining rejection letters from Persephone's outgoing correspondence, the reasons for

[361] McGloin, "An Analysis of the Anti-Semitic Content in Sinking Stealing (Jan Clausen)."
[362] Clausen, "Letter to Pat McGloin and Gloria Greenfield."
[363] Carol Seajay, "Letter to Pat McGloin," December 23, 1981, Box 20, Folder 60, Persephone Press Records.

declining a manuscript were numerous. As mentioned previously, Persephone Press was women aligned and thus would not publish work by men, even if they were merely contributors and not authors. This principle was evident in many rejection letters, including a 1978 letter to Dorothy L. Riddle about her manuscript *Our Birth Charts: Thoughts on Personal Astrology Interpretation*. Greenfield told Riddle that "the problem we have is that Persephone Press is a lesbian-feminist publishing house; we do not publish works by men."[364] She suggested that Riddle rework the texts to exclude male writings. This letter was not an outright rejection but highlighted their female-centric vision. Deborah Snow also wrote several letters echoing the same sentiment, declaring that "we are a Lesbian publishing house publishing only the writings of women that are woman identified."[365] This editorial policy also extended to the works that had male protagonists or heavily featured men too much, even if the work was written by a woman. Greenfield wrote to Susan Beach Vaughn in 1978 to explain that "Persephone's editors have decided that they are not interested in *The Fish With The Broken Tail*, since it is a story about a man."[366] The editors at Persephone highly valued their female-centric approach and would not deviate from this idea under any circumstances.

Persephone Press also rejected books for not aligning with radical feminist perspectives. In a 1979 letter Deborah Snow explained that the press would not publish a book titled *Women's Voices from the 70's* because "Persephone has a strong lesbian identity and focus; this anthology has a basic general feminist focus."[367] This letter is especially interesting, as the book was clearly aligned to women's perspectives yet still did not meet Persephone's criteria. They wanted their

[364] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Dorothy L. Riddle," February 26, 1978, Box 13, Folder 2,Persephone Press Records. Persephone did not publish this book.
[365] Deborah Snow, "Letter to Edward Morris Robbins," October 24, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[366] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Susan Beach Vaughn," April 10, 1978, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[367] Deborah Snow, "Letter to Jeanette Clausen and Naomi Stephen," November 27, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

books to share politics similar to their own, which included a more radical approach to feminism over the mainstream beliefs of organizations like the NOW. The press also rejected a book in 1978, explaining that they felt misled by the author and believed that the author's beliefs did not align with their publishing goals. Snow wrote to Mary Beth Edelson in 1978 about the book *Their 5,000 Years Are Up.* Snow explained, "Apparently, your main reason for choosing Persephone was based on the Through the Looking Glass Conference and not on our recent work as publishers."[368] Persephone expressed issues with this, because they believed that Edelson was choosing them for their past work from several years earlier, not their continually evolving political perspective. Snow concluded:

> Publishing is a creative art taking an idea or form and producing another entity. We feel you [do] not see publishing as an art equal to visual art and thus, do not respect us as artists; rather viewing us as publishers of artists or as a tool for the artists. This feeling creates a very tense and tenuous working situation.[369]

They believed that Edelson did not understand or respect their creative process and the work they put into publishing. This rejection appears to be both an ideological and interpersonal issue, as the women of Persephone were offended by Edelson's entire approach. Persephone rejected books for many reasons, including author's perspectives not aligning with their own.

At times, financial considerations influenced the founders' editorial decisions. Persephone published a collection of poems as one of its first books in 1977 but refused to publish single-author poetry afterwards. They subsequently published the *Fourteenth Witch* by Shelley Blue Grabel in 1977, but the book did not sell well. In a rejection letter to Diane Stein in 1979, Greenfield explained Persephone's perspective,

> While we see poetry as a vital part of women's/lesbian writing and publishing, it is not a very good "seller," which means that we would be typing up approximately 8,000 dollars into a book which might not sell (read break even)—doing that would threaten

[368] Deborah Snow, "Letter to Mary Beth Edelson," July 9, 1978, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[369] Snow, "Letter to Mary Beth Edelson."

> Persephone with bankruptcy. Therefore, we have decided to wait until we are in a strong financial situation to take on such risks. Our experience with publishing poetry comes from THE FOURTEENTH WITCH, which we released in 1977. We had 1000 copies printed, and so far only 800 copies have sold.[370]

The *Fourteenth Witch* also included photography, which Persephone also determined to not be profitable.[371] Greenfield's statement highlighted how the press had to balance their commitment to feminism with their need to survive as a business. Members of the collective sent many similar rejection letters highlighting their adamant decision to avoid publishing poetry.[372] In this example, the women of Persephone chose the well-being of their business over their commitment to publishing all aspects of feminist work. The publishers found themselves in this situation quite often and dealt with how to reconcile their politics with the realities of business.

From the beginning of Persephone Press, Greenfield and McGloin constantly reiterated their commitment to feminist politics as well as their desire to succeed as a small press. They articulated this commitment in stating that "we combine the feminist ethic with business…It takes longer to succeed when it is involved with our principles, but too often feminist ethic is thrown aside. We need to do more than survive. We need to succeed in reaching as many women as possible."[373] Greenfield and McGloin expressed their desire to be prosperous and influential but would put their success at risk when it came down to highlighting their feminist politics. In addition to this factor, they highlighted the importance of their work and the necessity of their survival. Persephone's success was tied to their consciousness raising goals, as they believed success meant reaching as many women as possible with their work. Whenever asked, the two

[370] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Diane Stein," December 17, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[371] Deborah Snow, "Letter to Aya," November 29, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[372] Deborah Snow, "Letter to Alice Tingle Russel," September 28, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2 Persephone Press Records; Deborah Snow, "Letter to Chocolate Waters," November 27, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.
[373] "Persephone Press Serves Its Audience: (Gasp) Lesbians and Feminists!" *West Coast Review of Books.*

women, along with other staff members, constantly highlighted their political perspective. This political commitment did not come easy, as Greenfield and McGloin continuously felt conflicted between choosing between their business and politics.[374] The founders claimed to always choose the side of protecting their politics. Amidst these business decisions, a debate was brewing in feminist communities about the politics of choosing corporate or small presses.

As mentioned in Persephone's mission statements, one of the main goals of the press was to stand up against big corporate presses. However, the feminist community was incredibly divided on this issue. For some, getting published by big presses seemed to be the only viable and somewhat lucrative option. Others saw this as supporting a patriarchal system and a political statement against small feminist presses. Gilley explained that the central arguments were that feminist presses were most likely to publish more radical or innovative material, and "there was also an ethos surrounding the feminist presses that suggested they would be more committed to supporting the work and its author according to feminist principles rather than purely economic ones."[375] This commitment to feminist principles meant that feminist presses were dedicated to keeping their books in print, whether or not they were bestsellers. June Arnold, a lesbian author and contributor to *Sinister Wisdom* and other feminist publications, became well-known for her strong perspective on the debate between alternative and corporate presses. She explained that corporate presses "will publish some of us—the least threatening, the most saleable, the most easily controlled or a few who cannot be ignored—until they cease publishing us because to be a woman is no longer in style."[376] She described these presses as impermanent and evidently interested in economic success over political progress. She boldly stated, "it is time to stop

[374] Jill Clark, "Persephone Press Folds, Some Titles Purchased," *Gay Community News*, August 6, 1983, 1.
[375] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 26.
[376] Arnold, Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics, 19

giving *any* favorable attention to the books or journals put out by the finishing press" and even encouraged readers to "withdraw support from any woman who is still trying to make her name by selling out our movement."[377] Arnold's radical statement identified the male-dominated press as the enemy and expressed an "us versus them" sentiment, specifically towards women publishing with large presses. Arnold's strong statement and vilification of big presses was not shared by all, as many women saw big presses as the most practical publishing option.

The most common arguments against small presses were tied to economics and accessibility. In her chapter on "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," Gilley highlighted this problem in stating "there is no economic wealth" with small presses.[378] Jan Clausen, the editor of *The Feminist Review of Books,* argued in favor of corporate presses, especially the women who published with them. She agreed that all publishing decisions were inherently political, but disliked Arnold's brash argument.[379] She described a situation at a New York City Lesbian Conference in New York City in May 1976 in which Arnold argued vehemently in favor of feminist presses. Clausen explained:

> While painting what seemed to me an overly rosy picture of the feminist publishing alternatives, June Arnold, Parke Bowman, and Bertha Harris took such a strong stand against publishing with the male-controlled presses under any circumstances that some who disagreed with various points they made (myself included) felt reluctant to speak up.[380]

She found Arnold, Bowman, and Harris' arguments to be unrealistic and overpowering during the conference. Clausen alluded to the realities of feminist presses, which consisted of little money and little longevity of the presses themselves. While publishing with a corporate press was not always ideal, for some it was the most practical solution. Additionally, small feminist

[377] Arnold, "Feminist Presses & Feminist Politics," 26
[378] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 37-38.
[379] Jan Clausen, "The Politics of Publishing and the Lesbian Community," *Sinister Wisdom*, Fall 1976, 95.
[380] Clausen, "The Politics of Publishing," 97.

presses were hard to come by and could only publish a few books a year at best. For this reason, it would be nearly impossible for small presses to succeed.

In terms of the big versus small press debate, Persephone clearly sided with alternative presses, but presented their argument in a different way than Arnold. Featured in a *Ms. Magazine* article on the "80 Women to Watch in the Eighties," Greenfield reiterated Persephone's goals as a small publisher in her blurb. Her goal for Persephone Press was "for women to view feminist presses *not* as an alternative but as their most logical option."[381] The women of Persephone clearly favored feminist presses as they created one in 1976 with the goals of challenging the male-dominated industry. In addition to their personal investment in feminist presses, Greenfield and McGloin saw feminist presses as a way to uphold the free press. Male-dominated publishers would only publish what was lucrative and would not publish any feminist works deemed too radical. In a letter to loyal supporters, the women of Persephone explained,

> Multi-national corporations are presently buying up the publishing trade. Both independent publishers and booksellers are fighting these conglomerate monsters; without our survival, no aspect of "freedom of the press" can be ensured. As an outspoken lesbian-feminist publishing house, our access to working capital for book production is even more limited than mainstream independents.[382]

This letter included a plea for help to ensure Persephone's survival as well. They argued that feminist presses upheld the free press and the radical feminist movement. If publishers like Persephone continued to fall, there would be no freedom of the press. Other feminists at the time used the slogan "the freedom of the press belongs to those who own the press," which closely aligns with Persephone's goals to create space for marginalized women within publishing.[383]

[381] "80 Women to Watch in the 80s," *Ms, Magazine.*
[382] Greenfield and McGloin, "Persephone Press Book Club."
[383] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 26.

The women of Persephone often used harsh rhetoric when describing corporate presses. In a letter to the editor of *Plexus*, Greenfield, McGloin, and Snow used this kind of language to express their fear of the corporate press. They wrote, "it is our contention that patriarchal publishing is one of the more frightening tools used by men in power to control and censor 'other' groups."[384] This tangible fear of corporate presses was present amongst many feminist presses. In addition to writing to take a stand against the male-dominated publishing industry, Persephone also implemented policies in their own publishing to make this statement. Their take was less radical and absolutist than Arnold's, but they favored small presses above corporate presses.

Persephone's rhetoric of standing up to patriarchal presses was far from hollow, as they had many policies to protect feminist authors and their work. One of the main factors that differentiated Persephone from large presses was the fact that they shared profits equally with their authors, while corporate presses typically shared 10-15% of profits.[385] This policy could hurt Persephone financially but privileged the needs of authors over the company. Additionally, Persephone had its own distribution network that tended "to reflect Persephone's basic philosophy and dedication to the movement for social change."[386] Persephone favored small bookstores and women they met through their feminist network, but they also remained true to their ultimate goal of disseminating a feminist consciousness across the nation. In a pragmatic approach, Greenfield explained that "we encourage our community to buy from the women's bookstore or the Gay bookstore or the alternative bookstore, but we also want to make our books accessible to the people who only go into the chain bookstores or the larger bookstores so they

[384] Gloria Greenfield, Pat McGloin, and Deborah Snow, "Letter to *Plexus* Editor," Box 13, Folder 2, December 18, 1979.
[385] McRae and Nettles, "Persephone Perseveres."
[386] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."

will buy our books and they will have an impact on them."[387] Persephone would be most successful if they made their books accessible to women who may not even identify as feminist as well. They sold to small and large bookstores in order to reach more women and build the feminist revolution so to speak. Persephone's editorial policies reflected their stance in the big versus small press debate, as well as their greater commitment to building a feminist consciousness and network through publishing and distribution of books.

Persephone continually dealt with the conflict between their commitment to feminist politics and desire to succeed as a small feminist press. Balancing both these ideals proved difficult, but Greenfield and McGloin typically privileged their political goals over financial ones. The press had a strong desire to create a place for feminist thought in the publishing industry and wanted to share this perspective with as many women as possible. Ultimately, the press was a lesbian strategy to create a feminist revolution. The women of Persephone aimed to use their books to inspire a new feminist consciousness across the globe. In doing so, Persephone also developed a powerful reputation in feminist spaces which was at times exhalatory and complimentary, but at other times very critical.

3.3 "Persephone is a Life Commitment": Varying Impacts of Persephone Press on the Feminist Community

Persephone Press had numerous different impacts on the feminist community through its releases of fifteen books between 1976 and 1983. Greenfield and McGloin both became figures in the local feminist movement in Boston, with varying levels of national recognition as well. Not every book from Persephone was a bestseller, but its diverse books reached audiences and

[387] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."

represented marginalized communities rarely recognized in literature before. Persephone largely relied on building connections and a strong feminist network to share news of books and to seek new manuscripts. When reading their correspondence throughout their active years, it is evident that the second wave feminist community was much closer and connected than it may seem.

The women at Persephone communicated with big names in the movement like Adrienne Rich, Robin Morgan, and Audre Lorde, as well as familiar figures like Barbara Smith and the women of *The Second Wave.*[388] The feminist community empowered and bolstered Persephone's success, but also had the power to do the opposite. As Persephone fell into debt and decline, Greenfield spoke of receiving little help from the feminist community despite the lauds and positive relationships they cultivated previously. Additionally, Greenfield and McGloin were involved in numerous arguments with fellow feminists during Persephone's active years. The press received criticisms for being run by two white women who had the power to choose what would be published. Ultimately, Persephone was met with mixed reactions but undeniably made a significant imprint on the feminist media and the feminist community.

Numerous feminist presses emerged around the same time as Persephone, yet Persephone was often lauded and appreciated as one of the most influential presses at the time for several reasons. As a lesbian-feminist press based in the greater Boston area, Persephone filled a niche that few publishing houses had before. The timing of the press's founding was also at a pivotal point in the feminist movement. Consciousness raising had been prevalent for years prior and feminism was more well-known in mainstream culture. Had Persephone opened years earlier,

[388] Persephone Press exchanged a few letters with *The Second Wave* but did not communicate extensively. The women of *The Second Wave* reached out to Persephone on April 6, 1979 with the idea of creating a feminist writing conference together. In a letter to Carol A. Trowbridge on November 21, 1979, Gloria Greenfield wrote that this conference would not happen because "due to understaffing, Second Wave had to pull out of the planning and the idea was abandoned since Persephone did not have the time to produce it alone." Marty for the *Second Wave*, "Letter to Persephone Press," April 6, 1979, Box 20, Folder 69, Persephone Press Records; Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Carol A. Trowbridge," November 21, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

"they would have been stopped at the door [of many booksellers] with their unorthodox literature."[389] At the time the press emerged, it was unconventional and made waves in the publishing industry. But ultimately people were interested in the books Persephone Press published and the numerous perspectives they represented. In a 1983 edition of *Feminist Collections*, the editors chimed in on the specificity and success of Persephone's timing. They wrote, "Persephone developed into one of the most influential of the feminist small presses, known for its almost uncanny ability to bring out the right book at the right time."[390] Their strict editorial process helped ensure that Persephone was publishing books that fit their goals and that were relevant to feminist audiences.

Persephone's ability to make waves and shock people also led to its success. As one of the few feminist presses at the time, Persephone was willing to push boundaries and publish texts that shocked and appealed to readers. By 1981, the editors of *Sinister Wisdom,* a feminist magazine, explained that "in four short years, Persephone Press is becoming more and more visible as a publishing house that combines integrity, risk-taking, and also notable success in making lesbian feminist work widely available."[391] One of the main goals of the collective was to publish books and provide space for women to share ideas previously rejected by corporate presses. Many women were silenced by these presses or even other feminist presses. Marilyn Weller in *Equal Times* reiterated the uniqueness and ingenuity of Persephone in stating, "they're publishing books no one else will, and building a women's revolution at the same time."[392] Persephone became well known for representing marginalized writers within the feminist

[389] "Persephone Press Serves Its Audience: (Gasp) Lesbians and Feminists!" *West Coast Review of Books.*
[390] "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections*, Fall 1983, 3.
[391] Quote from Sinister Wisdom, Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[392] Weller, "Women's Own Media."

movement, including lesbians, Jewish feminists, and women of color. Persephone stood out from other presses at the time "because their books aren't likely to be duplicated by anyone else."[393] By 1976, more diverse groups of women were becoming involved in second wave feminism and Persephone provided an outlet for women to share their unique identities and experiences. The editors of *Feminist Collections* also explained that "books published by Persephone Press have been pivotal in giving voice to this new movement within feminism."[394] In publishing books and authors previously alienated from the publishing industry, the women of Persephone made a name for themselves as a pioneering force in the field.

When the press emerged in 1976, it took a few years for Greenfield and McGloin to acquire enough capital to edit and publish more than one book a year. Greenfield cited 1979 and 1980 as turning point years for the press, as they were able to publish more riveting books and were closely involved with the greater feminist community. By 1981, Persephone distributed books across the globe, including Canada, Israel, Australia, New Zealand, and several European countries.[395] The press also worked with translators to get some of their best-selling books, like *The Wanderground* published in languages such as German, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian.[396] Persephone was becoming well-known within the United States and on a global scale. In 1980, Persephone Press was recognized at the United Nations Conference on Women in Copenhagen as "the leading lesbian feminist publisher in the world."[397] Within their first five years, the women of Persephone built a powerful publishing house from the ground up and were beginning to receive massive acclaim for their work and their contributions to feminist literature.

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[393] "Persephone Press Serves Its Audience: (Gasp) Lesbians and Feminists!" *West Coast Review of Books.*
[394] "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections,* 3.
[395] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[396] Greenfield and McGloin, "Persephone Press Book Club."
[397] "Persephone Press Serves Its Audience: (Gasp) Lesbians and Feminists!" *West Coast Review of Books.*

Greenfield attributed this massive success for a small press to the feminist community, when she stated,

> Without the support that we've gotten from the Lesbian and feminist communities all over the country, we never would've been able to get this far. We've had enormous support, especially in the last year. It's been tremendous; it's what keeps us going. Persephone is a life commitment on the part of Pat and I and we have every intention of succeeding.[398]

Greenfield commended the positive reactions they received from the feminist community and also expressed a lifelong dedication to Persephone on behalf of herself and McGloin. The importance of support from the feminist community cannot be overemphasized here—Greenfield attributed this support to Persephone's success and many other feminist entities did the same. Greenfield and McGloin utilized a feminist communications network to build connections with women across the country and globally, which allowed for their books to be successful and receive enthusiastic acclaim.

Each of Persephone's best-selling books were successful for highlighting previously marginalized voices and representing a bold incursion in the publishing industry. The first book Persephone published in 1976, *The Feminist Tarot,* sold over 10,000 copies by the end of 1980.[399] They cultivated a close relationship with one of the authors, Sally Gearhart, and came to publish her fantasy novel *The Wanderground* in 1979, which proved to be one of Persephone's biggest early successes. Gearhart was known as a feminist activist in the movement, thus she connected with Greenfield and McGloin on the basis of lesbian-feminism. In a promotional letter for Gearhart and *The Wanderground* in 1979, Snow wrote that, "Sally [Gearhart] and her work are very influential and respected in the Lesbian-Feminist Movement."[400]

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[398] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[399] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[400] Deborah Snow, "Letter to Muffy Wheeler," October 27, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

In this novel, Gearhart imagined a science-fiction, fantasy world in which women lived completely without men. Though her book was fictional, it inspired a lesbian-feminist consciousness and was well-received by many in the feminist movement. In a review for the *San Francisco Chronicle* in 1979, Leonard Wolf described *The Wanderground* as "an important, as well as a beautiful, book because of the way in which Gearhart has given mythological power to her vision of an all woman society."[401] Persephone also received praise for publishing Gearhart's work and bringing her vision to life. Shirley Walton-Fischler, the co-owner of Djuna Books, wrote to Persephone to thank them for publishing *The Wanderground.* Walton-Fischler lauded the success of the book and added that, "we cannot keep the book in stock, it sells so fast…women crave intelligent, feminist work—and the area of 'sci-fi' is no exception."[402] Gearhart's novel was in many ways unprecedented, as few feminist writers had delved into the world of science-fiction in the 1970s. Carol Seajay, the editor of the *Feminist Bookstores Newsletter*, explained that *The Wanderground* was "one of the special few of the upsurge of feminist literature that will sell in that quantity" and attributed this success to the ripple effect in which "one person reads it, then passes it on to her friends who pass it on to their friends, etc. etc."[403] Gearhart's second book with Persephone proved to be an immense success, with numerous reprintings and translations.[404] It was largely the book that brought Persephone into the broader feminist community and thus facilitated the press's other bestsellers.

The Coming Out Stories, a lesbian anthology, received similar acclaim and appreciation in 1980. This anthology contained writings from many feminists, including an introduction by

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[401] Leonard Wolf, "Powerful Novel of an Astonishing Civilization," *San Francisco Chronicle,* November 18, 1979. In Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[402] Shirley Walton-Fischler, "Letter to Persephone Press." In Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[403] Carol Seajay, "Letter to Persephone Press" October 4, 1979. In Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[404] "About the Publishing House."

Adrienne Rich, and was edited by Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe. *The Coming Out Stories* was a fast success, selling almost 10,000 copies in its first ten months.[405] This book offered readers a look into numerous lesbian-feminist experiences by providing space for women to tell their own experiences with coming out and identifying as lesbian. This anthology served to normalize coming out stories and to allow readers to connect and find solace with the experiences of other lesbians. The intended audience of the book was lesbians, but it also appealed to heterosexuals attempting to understand and empathize with the lesbian experience. C.K. of the *West Coast Review of Books* described the significance of the book, when they wrote,

> No matter your sexual preferences, this book should open your eyes as to how lesbians perceive themselves and the world around them. It's a compassionate, yet candid book about women from all walks of life who came to grips with themselves, their emotional and sexual needs and, once accepting themselves as they were/are, [learned] to live fully and more fruitfully.[406]

This review argued that the book could appeal to all audiences and offered a wide range of lesbian experiences to appeal to numerous people. The women of Persephone themselves described the necessity of this book in stating that *The Coming Out Stories* "has validated the experience of naming oneself as a lesbian in American society. Our individual and collective courage in confronting and challenging a heterosexist society has been documented, offering strength and support to all women about to take that leap."[407] Very few books existed at the time that offered the same multi-faceted approach to lesbian feminism and very few publishing houses gave lesbian feminists a voice in their writing.

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[405] Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[406] C.K. "West Coast Review of Books: The Coming Out Stories," "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union." Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[407] "About the Publishing House."

Later books from Persephone continued to push similar boundaries and became well-known for the same reasons. The women of Persephone released some of the first books detailing the Jewish lesbian feminist experience through *Choices, Lifetime Guarantee,* and *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology.* Each of these books were written from a Jewish lesbian perspective and examined how these intersecting identities altered women's lives in various ways. A book review from Marcia Pally in *The Advocate* in August 1982 stated that "*NJG* is the first book of its kind and is a rather good start…it has passion, variety and intelligence and tries to give Jewish lesbians reasons to be proud of their Jewishness and their lesbianism."[408] These examinations of Jewish feminism were unprecedented and were thus highly influential in feminist circles. One reviewer described *Choices* by Nancy Toder as "a classic lesbian love story."[409] Others acclaimed Persephone for their work on *Nice Jewish Girls* "which brought the issues of Jewish identity and anti-Semitism in the women's movement info full view."[410] These perspectives coincided with the rise of Jewish feminism and intersectionality in the movement in general. Greenfield herself was a lesbian Jewish feminist, thus her identity and desire for her own identities to be represented likely played a role in Persephone's commitment to publishing Jewish feminist ideas. While the women of Persephone worked hard to publish diverse books, "one of the gaps they [saw was] in the absence of published writings of Third World feminists."[411]

In order to bridge this gap, the women of Persephone developed plans with Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa to publish *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical*

[408] Marcia Pally, "Review of *Nice Jewish Girls*," *The Advocate*, August 5, 1982, Box 7, Folder 44, Persephone Press Records.
[409] J.K.. "Choices: A Novel About Lesbian Love," *off our backs*, Persephone Press, "Financial Presentation to Massachusetts Feminist Federal Credit Union."
[410] Susan Searing and Catherine Loeb, "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections* 5, no. 1, Fall 1983, 3.
[411] Weller, "Women's Own Media."

Women of Color in spring of 1981. *This Bridge Called My Back* became one of the presses' bestselling books and continued to make an impact in feminist circles when it was republished by Kitchen Table Press in 1983. Moraga described *This Bridge* as, "the first collection of writings by women of color which represents all of our various backgrounds and is radical in political perspective."[412] The book featured work from many influential women including Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Paula Gunn Allen, Pat Parker, and Barbara Cameron. The anthology had a huge impact on feminist spaces because "within its pages, Black, Asian-American, Latina and Indian women [joined] hands to discover their collective strength and break through the hegemony of white feminism."[413] In sharing narratives from a wide range of women of color, this book allowed many women to contribute to the feminist movement and took a stand against mainstream white feminism. Persephone maintained a commitment to diverse feminist politics by continuing to publish more diverse books throughout the early 1980s. They published *Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise* in which Michelle Cliff examined her mixed-race identity and her experiences as a lesbian in the United States. In *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* Audre Lorde picked "through the pieces of her past to discover how it was she emerged—and survived—as a Black lesbian-feminist poet."[414] Greenfield and McGloin felt inspired to create a space for women of color to share their work. Women of color faced enormous hurdles in the publishing industry, thus radical small presses like Persephone represented the only real option to be published for many. There were very few presses specifically dedicated to women of color until Barbara Smith created Kitchen Table Women of

[412] Cherríe Moraga, "Letter to Third World Conference People," April 8, 1981, Box 20, Folder 24, Persephone Press Papers.
[413] "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections*, 3.
[414] "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections*, 3.

Color Press and other women followed suit. Persephone made efforts to publish the works of women of color but engaged in numerous arguments and debates about the nature of white feminists publishing the works of women of color.

While publishing each of these books made an important statement in the second wave feminist movement, Persephone Press and its white founders received criticism for the way they interacted with women of colors in business matters. Much of this criticism boiled down to racial insensitivity on behalf of Greenfield and McGloin when working with people of different races and economic classes. In their correspondence with authors of color, Greenfield and McGloin could at times appear ignorant of the unique oppression and problems that women of color faced in society. The two women were focused on identifying homophobia and anti-Semitism; thus, they had a blind spot when it came to recognizing the privileges they had as white lesbians. Neither the women of Persephone nor Moraga had much money, but Greenfield and McGloin had numerous privileges as white feminists. Letters between the women of Persephone Press and Cherríe Moraga highlighted the intentions of Persephone versus the realities of their actions when collaborating with women of color. Gilley explained that Moraga came into contact with Persephone through her advisor, Sally Gearhart, while in graduate school.[415] In her initial letter to Greenfield and McGloin in 1979, Moraga wrote, "I am thrilled by the opportunity to work with your press…all I have heard is raving praise about you all from Sally."[416] She first worked with Persephone when they published her essay "La Güera" in *The Coming Out Stories.* From this point, she collaborated with the women of Persephone for a number of years, most notably

[415] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 36.
[416] Cherríe Moraga, "Letter to Women at Persephone," October 28, 1979, Box 20, Folder 24, Persephone Press Records.

on *This Bridge Called My Back,* edited by Moraga and Anzaldúa. Moraga developed a friendship with Greenfield and McGloin, even staying at their homes while visiting Boston in July 1980.[417]

Some of the most notable problems and miscommunications emerged when Moraga did not receive her checks and royalties for *This Bridge* in a timely manner. In her first few letters to the women of Persephone, her tone was largely friendly and even comedic. In letter to Greenfield and McGloin, Moraga wrote, "Send money immediately, starving in Roxbury!"[418] This statement was intended to be congenial, but Moraga also expressed a sense of urgency. This pattern continued for the several years that Moraga communicated with Persephone, from 1979 to around 1982. Moraga wrote to Greenfield in an undated letter (but likely in 1982) to explain, "I wish we could have a little clearer understanding regarding royalties…in this case, I was told two dates and neither happened."[419] Moraga expressed frustration to Greenfield about receiving royalty checks in a timely manner, a problem which persisted. She continued to say that "things are tight at home. That shouldn't be your problem and I don't relish being in the position of telling you this, but how can I be patient and considerate of your financial needs if you aren't of mine."[420] This letter reflects the fact that feminist presses and feminists in general were constantly struggling with money. Moraga's tone in this letter differed compared to the earlier example, as she appears much more frustrated and less friendly. She explained that the letter was "not intended to be antagonistic," but she needed her royalty check by a certain date and felt disillusioned by the inability of the women of Persephone to send the check when they had promised.[421] Ultimately, the letter was professional, but highlighted the nature of early conflicts

[417] Cherríe Moraga, "Letter to Pat McGloin and Gloria Greenfield," July 28, 1980, Box 20, Folder 24, Persephone Press Records.
[418] Cherríe Moraga, "Letter to Pat McGloin and Gloria Greenfield," Dec 26. (likely 1980), Box 20, Folder 24, Persephone Press Records.
[419] Cherríe Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield," n.d., Box 20, Folder 24, Persephone Press Records.
[420] Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield," n.d.
[421] Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield," n.d.

between Moraga and the women of Persephone. Greenfield and McGloin suffered financially as well, but clearly did not understand or prioritize her economic needs over their own. In this manner, the two women seem ignorant or incapable of understanding the circumstances regarding race and class that would make Moraga so reliant on these royalty checks. If the checks were withheld, Moraga would suffer financially and be unable to meet her basic needs. While Greenfield and McGloin aimed to be allies for women of color, there were specific elements of their privilege and the multi-faceted oppression of women of color that they did not fully understand.

These simmering racial and class tensions came to the surface in August 1981. Barbara Smith worked closely with Moraga, and thus the two often collaborated on their outgoing correspondence, with both women signing numerous letters. On August 4, Greenfield and McGloin sent a harsh letter to Moraga and Smith about being contacted while on vacation. They wrote,

> We were both shocked and upset that you both had people call us for business purposes during our vacation on Long Island. The first call, from Rima Shore, was upsetting. However, the next day, when we received another call from Gloria Anzaldúa (she said you both suggested that she call us to ask us to pay her way to the Michigan Women's Music Festival), we became angry.[422]

They explained that as publishers, they were always on the clock and their vacation was a much-needed break from the stresses of the industry. For women running small presses and publications, burnout was incredibly common and contributed to the demise of many businesses. They were upset about being contacted about business several times on vacation and penned this letter to avoid this problem in the future. Greenfield and McGloin referenced their friendships to Moraga and Smith in explaining, "we were especially shocked because we could never consider

[422] Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin, "Letter to Cherríe Moraga and Barbara Smith," August 4, 1981, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

doing that to either of you, or any other friends…as much as we try to be sensitive to your personal/survival needs, we need you both to be sensitive to ours."[423] They then explained that they hoped to express their emotions and resolve this issue to prevent further anger or resentment. The letter was very mixed in tone, as Greenfield and McGloin attempted to be friendly yet very clearly expressed their frustration.

Smith and Moraga's letter in response highlighted the imbalance in power between the two pairs, as well as the lingering impacts of class and racial differences. On August 15, Smith and Moraga sent a response to Greenfield and McGloin, highlighting their own anger and the racial context of this interaction. Gloria Anzaldúa told Smith and Moraga about her experience with the women of Persephone and even claimed that Greenfield rudely hung up on her.[424] Smith and Moraga expressed shock at this rudeness and explained that they had no idea that Greenfield and McGloin were on vacation, or that the women of Persephone did not want their number to be given out. In the response letter they wrote, "what really bothers us is the attitude of blame for a relatively minor and certainly unmalicious action on our part… you call us your 'friends', but friends don't automatically assume the worst."[425] This statement highlighted the supposedly positive relationship between the four women, but Smith and Moraga then went on to explain the bad behavior they experienced in the past.

In addition to recognizing the evident brash and rude behavior from Greenfield and McGloin, Smith and Moraga cited multiple issues they experienced in their interactions. Moraga explained, "Many months ago you (Gloria) 'reprimanded' me (Cherríe) for suggesting that

[423] Greenfield and McGloin, "Letter to Cherríe Moraga and Barbara Smith."
[424] Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin," August 15, 1981, Box 21, Folder 7, Persephone Press Records.
[425] Smith and Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin."

Melanie Berzon make a call to California at Persephone's expense."[426] After this incident, Moraga expressed that she felt that Greenfield was accusatory and suspicious of Moraga taking advantage of Persephone financially. The women all reconciled after this statement, but the August 4th letter brought this issue that was previously swept under the rug to the surface. Smith and Moraga explained the larger problems with these interactions in writing,

> The worst aspect of this whole mess is its racial ramifications. Whatever your intent, when a white woman is unjustifiably mean to a woman of color, it shows incredible insensitivity and unawareness of a whole history and dynamic of white people being in dominant positions over Third World people and using that domination to excuse individual cruelty. It is not enough to go on record publishing the works of Third World women.[427]

In this letter, the two women called into question Greenfield and McGloin's roles as allies and explained that their behavior needed to match their ideological commitment towards supporting women of color. They explained that this situation would be completely different if it occurred between white women. Ultimately, this experience emphasized the ignorance and lack of intersectionality in the Greenfield and McGloin's feminist practices. Smith and Moraga consistently referenced the idea that Persephone's founders simply did not understand how their actions came across and what their behavior meant in this setting.

On the issue of class, Smith and Moraga also highlighted what this interaction meant in terms of the power dynamic and economic relationship between the four women. As highlighted before, Greenfield and McGloin appeared oblivious to the dire economic situation of many women of color and of Moraga specifically. Working as authors and publishers, there were unequal economic dynamics in their relationship, as well as racial differences. Smith and Moraga emphasized this power structure when they pointed out,

[426] Smith and Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin."
[427] Smith and Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin."

> You hold the purse strings. That's a fact. The two incidents do not reflect an equally exchanged relationship between authors and publisher, but instead depict a relationship [where] the author is dependent upon the good graces and benevolence of her publishers. These two examples, of course, are not commonplace, but have occurred at times when the two of you are feeling emotionally and/or financially pressured.[428]

The two women explained that these situations only occurred occasionally, but also highlighted the need for Greenfield and McGloin to understand these differing power dynamics and how they as white women should interact with the authors of color they published. This entire exchange was representative of many difficulties women of color faced in second wave feminist spaces. If women of color were included at all, they experienced microaggressions and ignorance even by those claiming to be allies. At the end of the letter, Smith and Moraga expressed interest in having a conversation face to face or even by phone to discuss this issue and repair their professional and personal relationships.

These issues, as well as others, continued to simmer and led to a mediated discussion "about issues of anti-Semitism, race, and the control publishers have over authors" between Pat McGloin, Gloria Greenfield, Gloria Anzaldúa, Elly Bulkin, Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, and Barbara Smith on January 30, 1982.[429] The relationships seemed to have improved, as Smith later had plans to publish *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* with Persephone before they closed in 1983. Moraga's correspondence with Persephone slowed down and remained more professional than friendly but continued through 1982. Moraga expressed continued resentment at Greenfield and McGloin, especially as she worked with Kitchen Table Press with Smith. Moraga and Smith worked to get the rights to *This Bridge Called my Back* and eventually *Home Girls* for Kitchen Table and Moraga commented on her relationship with the women of Persephone. On September 15, 1983, she wrote to Anzaldúa to say, "Went up to Boston last

[428] Smith and Moraga, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield and Pat McGloin."
[429] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 38.

week, got back Bridge sin problemas [without problems], only their bad attitudes."[430] Moraga distrusted and did not wish to work with the women of Persephone anymore due to her negative experiences in the past.

Overall, the unequal power dynamics between women in publishing and the women of color they published continued to be a problem. Moraga and Smith both became tired of the unequal power dynamics and in publishing, which inspired the creation of Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. Smith explained, **"**as feminist and lesbian of color writers, we knew that we had no options for getting published, except at the mercy or whim of others, whether in the context of alternative or commercial publishing, since both are white-dominated."[431] Smith's dealings with Persephone Press undeniably inspired this turn, but she clearly experienced similar problems with white feminist publishers and sought to control publishing herself. As a woman of color and a writer, Smith urgently wanted the work of women of color to be shared without dealing with a third party.

These problems and arguments negatively impacted the women of Persephone and likely contributed to their burnout.[432] By 1982 and 1983, Persephone Press was struggling financially and Greenfield and McGloin were overwhelmed by their responsibilities. The two women spent much of their careers building relationships with women in the feminist movement and found the feminist community to be essential for the success they achieved. They established strong communications networks within the community to market their books. Smith even applauded Persephone in 1981 for their successful promotion of *This Bridge* in black and black feminist spaces and wanted similar promotion from her publisher for her edited book *All the Women are*

[430] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 39.
[431] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 26.
[432] Gloria Greenfield, "Letter to Ann Schroeder," December 17, 1979, Box 13, Folder 2, Persephone Press Records.

White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave.[433] Persephone Press received much acclaim and success via their publication of unique feminist books and they owed much of their success to the closeness of the feminist community, despite numerous disagreements and problems.

Persephone's books were most well-known in feminist circles: they were written and published by feminists, were sold by feminist booksellers and read by feminists across the globe. This strong network allowed Persephone to be successful, and Persephone in turn, created space for invaluable books in the feminist movement to be published, discussed, and read. The press met its end in 1983 largely due to financial problems, as most participants in the feminist media experienced. In an article about Persephone's closure, author Mary Kay Lefevour made an interesting statement explaining how the two women lost faith in the feminist community by 1983:

> Greenfield and McGloin felt that lack of support from the feminist community also led to Persephone's demise. Rather than rally to Persephone's defense when their support was needed, the cofounders felt, many women instead reacted with hostility. Nearing bankruptcy, Greenfield and McGloin were even accused of running off to Rio with Persephone's funds. Greenfield and McGloin hope that the feminist community can 'learn from Persephone's demise...that we are all vulnerable, and that none of us can survive without carefully nurtured support systems.'[434]

This argument is both shocking and compelling because Greenfield and McGloin spoke so highly of their community in the majority of their correspondence. They had problems and arguments, as was intrinsic in many second wave organizations, but shockingly found themselves at the outskirts of the community at the end. It is hard to say exactly why they felt this way. It is possible that they alienated themselves from feminist circles through rude behavior and an inability to whole-heartedly support women of color. It is also possible, that like many

[433] Barbara Smith, "Letter to Gloria Greenfield," September 16, 1981, Box 21, Folder 7, Persephone Press Records.
[434] Mary Kay Lefevour, "Persephone Press Folds," *Off Our Backs*, November 30, 1983, 17

other organizations, their financial difficulties caught up to them and the greater feminist community could do little to help them. Whatever the exact reason was, both Greenfield and McGloin pursued careers outside of the feminist movement, leaving Persephone as a distant memory.

3.4 Conclusion

Persephone Press closed in 1983 and Greenfield and McGloin worked with lawyers and presses to sell the rights to their books to other presses to be reprinted. The press faced financial difficulties from its origins that proved to be insurmountable. The press lost $22,000 in each of the last two years even with high book sales.[435] Many found the end of the press to be a complete surprise, as the press was releasing popular and impactful books until the end.[436] Greenfield explained that "the books were constantly back on the press. So as well as the cost of bringing out new titles and overhead, we constantly had $40,000 to $50,000 tied up in printing and other production costs."[437] Persephone's books were so popular that they could not keep up with the demand, and they thus found themselves deeper in debt. Greenfield and McGloin attributed some of their debt to their royalty structure, which "paid authors twice the standard paid by the publishing industry."[438] Ultimately, Greenfield and McGloin stayed dedicated to their feminist morals and would not bend their morals for the sake of business. In *Feminist Collections,* the editors explained that "it was the press's very success, in both feminist and financial terms, which ultimately undermined its survival. For one thing, McGloin and Greenfield's commitment to build a business on a foundation of feminist values was in part a substantial financial

[435] Jill Clark, "Persephone Press Folds," *Gay Community News* 11, no. 4, August 6, 1983, 1.
[436] "Persephone Press Closes," *Feminist Bookstore News,* September 1983, 11.
[437] Clark, "Persephone Press Folds."
[438] Lefevour, "Persephone Press Folds,"; Clark, "Persephone Press Folds."

commitment."[439] However, this ideological commitment only got the press so far. Gilley expanded upon Zeisler's in "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism" in explaining that "the reality that feminist publishing and publishing feminism are not diametrically opposed but part of an interrelated whole."[440] Persephone Press remained closely aligned to small presses, but ultimately several of Persephone's books were sold to corporate presses when Persephone dissolved.

In addition to finances, Greenfield and McGloin both appeared frustrated with second wave feminism in general, especially as both women were not actively involved in the movement after Persephone Press dissolved. Greenfield attributed her leave from Persephone Press and second wave feminism to anti-Semitic incidents. Retrospectively, she described ending Jan Clausen's contract and the response she received from the feminist community. "The last straw occurred in 1983. Persephone Press, the feminist book publishing company I co-founded with Pat McGloin, signed a contract with Jan Clausen, a white lesbian-feminist author for a novel she was in the process of writing." She continued, "The completed manuscript that we received months later turned out to be a novel about a stereotypical Jewish capitalist landlord who was destroying peoples' lives by gentrifying Park Slope."[441] Greenfield continued to explain that she and McGloin quickly ended their contract with Clausen and received backlash from other feminists. She recalled a dialogue between Persephone Press and leading Hispanic and Black lesbian-feminist writers. She explained that

> It became very clear that at worst, anti-Semitism was considered acceptable, and at best anti-Semitism was considered insignificant. I had devoted many years of my life to the

[439] "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections*, Fall 1983, 4.
[440] Gilley, "Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism," 29.
[441] Gloria Greenfield, "The Feminist Revolution: Gloria Greenfield," *Jewish Women's Archive*, accessed March 18, 2023, https://jwa.org/feminism/greenfield-gloria-2.

> radical feminist movement, and at this moment I realized that I no longer wanted to contribute my life's energy to it, nor did I want to remain a part of it.[442]

Greenfield stated that these unnamed women believed Clausen to be an ally to women of color and thus were against Greenfield an McGloin's condemnation of her anti-Semitism. Greenfield has not discussed this incident in other settings, but, in addition to financial problems, seeing feminists condoning anti-Semitism evidently contributed to her decision to close Persephone Press.

During its active years, Persephone Press was a landmark lesbian-feminist publishing house that aimed to bring unvoiced perspectives into the second wave feminist movement. The women of Persephone Press struggled to balance their commitment to business with their commitment to ideals of feminist publishing. Additionally, they struggled with finances throughout the business's tenure and were unable to overcome these problems. McGloin and Greenfield relied on the feminist community to read and share their books, but also dealt with conflicts with other feminists. Most notably, the two women argued with Barbara Smith and Cherríe Moraga over their treatment of women of color and with Jan Clausen over her blatant anti-Semitism. An important legacy of Persephone press was in demonstrating that

> works at the forefront of radical thinking in the women's movement can be published without censorship, can be marketed to a wide audience, and achieve considerable financial success. Persephone's history will continue to inspire feminist presses—and to influence mainstream publishers—for some time to come.[443]

Persephone's success demonstrated the high demand for radical feminist works, thus inspiring future small-scale presses. Many other feminist presses came before and after Persephone,

[442] Greenfield, "The Feminist Revolution."
[443] "From the Editors," *Feminist Collections*, Fall 1983, 4.

including Kitchen Table Women of Color Press in 1980 which worked to provide a specific platform for women of color in the movement.

Persephone Press closed for numerous reasons and there are countless complex explanations to account for its demise. Ultimately, Persephone Press did not fail, as they left a massive legacy as one of the first feminist presses in the United States and published memorable books still enjoyed today. Greenfield and McGloin stated that Persephone was a lifetime commitment.[444] The press did not end up being part of their lives after 1983, but Persephone remained a significant part of the feminist movement through its lesbian-feminist legacy and in showing that radical feminist readings were in high demand. Prior to its inception, it seemed impossible for a lesbian-feminist press to survive in the harsh capitalist world. However, it is important "to remember that Persephone did what once seemed to be impossible."[445]

[444] Hansen, "Persephone Press and the Politics of Publishing."
[445] "Persephone Press Closes," 11.

CONCLUSION:

"A politics of vision based on love and emotion"

The women behind the *Second Wave,* the Combahee River Collective, and Persephone Press all worked immensely hard to make their voices heard across the wide expanse of hegemonic patriarchy. Each Boston-based group had individual motivations, yet endeavored to put an end to sexist oppression, among other specific organizational goals. This thesis argues that the central connection between each of these groups was a commitment to the feminist media above all. For the women of *The Second Wave,* their publication represented a new form of consciousness raising and the possibility of reaching women across national boundaries. The Combahee River Collective, even without a publication of their own, highly valued the written word and created some of the most revolutionary black feminist texts of the second wave, thus bringing black feminism to a wider audience. Persephone Press, as a publishing house in itself, saw the transformative nature of literature and aspired for women all over the world to read lesbian-feminist and Jewish feminist work. The groups had varying specific goals, but each recognized the power of the feminist media as a driving force within the second wave.

Factionalism and ideological strife were largely inherent in second wave feminist groups, and thus were evident among these three groups as well. The *Second Wave* dealt with a series of conflicts, from the Female Liberation/Cell 16 split in 1970, the YSA/SWP infiltration scheme, to internal ideological divisions and membership turnover. In many ways, the *Second Wave* was born out of the Female Liberation/Cell 16 split and thus factionalism followed the women behind the publication through its demise. This factionalism was evident throughout the magazine's

active years, especially through editorial disagreements and attempts to change the vision of the magazine throughout. The Combahee River Collective itself was born out of external divisions with the white feminist community. The founders felt alienated from white feminist organizations and thus sought an organization that empowered black lesbian-feminists with a voice and an outlet for their radical activism. Additionally, the Combahee River Collective faced conflicts and concerns over alleged commitments to structurelessness. Barbara Smith, Beverly Smith, and Demita Frazier, as the authors of the Combahee River Collective Statement, were largely remembered as the central figures of the organization; however, other members argued that the group was actually hierarchical and at times felt they had little control in the self-declared non-hierarchical group. Greenfield and McGloin of Persephone Press created their publishing house because they wanted to stand up against corporate presses and provide a platform for lesbian and Jewish feminists. Greenfield and McGloin dealt with staff turnover, as well as conflicts with other women in the feminist community regarding their treatment of women of color and their overall vision. Each group encountered factionalism and strife in various manners. For some, this factionalism caused immense tension and even the demise of an organization, while for others the sectarianism was simply a setback.

The three groups additionally each dealt with the difficulties of balancing idealistic feminist ideologies with the harsh realities women faced in the mid to late twentieth century. Alternative organizations and publications were constantly plagued with economic problems, lack of resources, and lack of support from larger entities. For the *Second Wave,* the staff worked for free and needed funds via donations and subscriptions to put out each issue of their magazine. The editorial staff also dealt with massive burnout and membership turnover, as few women could devote substantial time to a publication that did not pay them. When interest in the

publication began to decline in the early 1980s, the few women left at the publication could do nothing except put the publication to rest. The *Second Wave* aspired to be a magazine to bring women together but struggled to balance this idyllic vision with the harsh economic realities of running a small-scale, alternative publication. Persephone Press dealt with similar economic issues. Their ideas of building a lesbian-feminist consciousness via publishing innovative books became incredibly difficult as the organization was under immense financial pressure. The founders appealed for donations and loans for much of their tenure, but ultimately their success in publishing coveted books led to an impossibly high demand that could never be met by a press of their size and with their resources. The press also struggled at times to balance their radical feminist commitments to the realities of capitalist society but chose ideology above business. In advocating for Jewish feminists, the women of Persephone Press struggled to get other women to care about their identities and anti-Semitic attacks as well. The Combahee did not attribute their decline to economic difficulties. Instead, members each moved forward to pursue other opportunities. However, the Combahee struggled to connect their desire for a radical black feminist revolution with legitimate systemic change. The women of the Combahee faced extreme social oppression on the basis of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Thus, they had to work harder to be heard within and outside of the feminist movement. The group demanded complete societal upheaval yet struggled to make tangible changes whilst facing multi-faceted oppression.

The *Second Wave,* Combahee River Collective, and Persephone Press each partly owed their success to support from the larger feminist community. Each group used their work to build and contribute to this community and would not have survived for even a year without the aid of other feminists, despite factionalism and strife. Each of these entities did not exist in a vacuum: the women from each group actually knew and talked to one another. These groups each closely

engaged with the feminist community and one another, which emphasized how small the second wave feminist community in Boston truly was. The women of the *Second Wave* and Persephone Press discussed holding a conference together, which eventually did not happen. Barbara Smith befriended Greenfield and McGloin when discussing her anthology, *Home Girls.* The three women cultivated a close relationship, but Smith also called out blatant racism and the cruel way that Greenfield and McGloin treated women of color at times. The women were able to move past this conflict, but it served as a reminder that second wave feminists, no matter how impactful their writing was, were flawed too. Each of these groups appealed specifically to the feminist community, thus relied on this community for support. When this support dwindled or ceased to exist, they could no longer survive, as in the example of the *Second Wave* and Persephone Press. Coalitions amongst groups proved to be an essential lifeline for second wave feminists which allowed them to build community and make each other better.

By the end of 1983, each of these entities disbanded. The *Second Wave,* the Combahee River Collective, and Persephone press were each active for twelve years, six years, and seven years respectively. As I write this, sexist, racist, and classist oppression still prevail, which begs the question of whether or not these groups were successful in their activism. Robin D.B. Kelley, in *Freedom Dreams,* argued that

> Unfortunately, too often our standards for evaluating social movement pivot around whether or not they "succeeded" in realizing their visions rather than on the merits or powers of the visions themselves. By such a measure, virtually every radical movement failed because the basic power relations they sought to change remain pretty much intact. And yet it is precisely these alternative visions and dreams that inspire new generations to continue to struggle for change.[446]

[446] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003). Quoted in Springer, *Living for the Revolution,* 168.

As Kelley explained, almost every social movement or radical organization technically "failed" because they did not create complete societal upheaval or implement massive systemic change.

However, as Kelley argued, the success of social movements and organizations can be better measured by the ideologies shared and the people they inspired. This measurement is far from quantitative, but it begs the question of what the greater legacies of each group was. As a scholar examining each of these groups in detail, I can unequivocally say that each was successful in raising a feminist consciousness in their own right, though they did not "end" sexist oppression. The *Second Wave* reached women across the world, allowed them to engage with new ideas, and develop a radical feminist consciousness. Through its forum-like environment, the publication gave a wide range of women to share their stories, articles, poems, and arts in a rare setting. The Combahee River Collective Statement is still studied by Intro to Gender Studies courses and regarded as a foundational black feminist text. Additionally, the women of the Combahee left behind a legacy of making space for black feminist voices wherever possible and advocating for women who couldn't advocate for themselves with the victims of the Dorchester and Roxbury murders in 1979. Persephone Press, though not studied by many, published many radical and transformative books during its active years. The founders sought to create space for lesbian and Jewish feminists, while also publishing books sharing a wide range of perspectives outside their own. This, all of these above examples, was the power of the feminist media.

When I think of the power of the feminist media in second wave feminism, I imagine women like Kathi Maio, walking into a bookstore and encountering a life changing piece of writing and a powerful community. Other women across the globe clung to radical and inspiring texts like those published in the *Second Wave,* written by the Combahee River Collective, and published by Persephone Press. The legacies of these each of these groups are present in their

written words that still circulate in the present. The feminist media, powered by radical feminists, dramatically altered the second wave feminist movement by bringing more women into a feminist consciousness. Presently, feminists can walk into bookstores and see revolutionary texts lining the shelves. Contemporary feminists still struggle to create a movement that empowers women of color, trans women, lesbians, and all other identities within the feminist movement. People across the country and the world are still seeking equality and civil rights, and even rely on second wave feminist ideologies in their activism. Present activism is impassioned and empowered, with many activists utilizing techniques from past social movements in their activism. In an interview for *Equal Times*, Barbara Smith drew upon connections between the civil rights movement and feminism. She explained, "The civil rights movement was a politics of vision based on love and emotion. And that really is what feminism is, too."[447] The feminist media in the second wave articulated these feelings of love and emotions, along with an ardent commitment to societal upheaval and systematic change. Present day feminists like myself can learn from them, while also embodying intersectionality within our activism.

[447] Laura Sperazi, "Breaking the Silence: A Conversation in Black and White," *Equal Times,* March 26, 1978, Box 35, Folder 38, Adrienne Rich Papers.

APPENDIX

Chart 1: Chart of Books Published by Persephone Press from 1976 to 1983.

Title	Author/ Editor	Year Published by Persephone	Success (Copies Printed/Reprinted, translations if noted by Persephone)	Publisher sold to after Persephone
A Feminist Tarot	Sally Gearhart and Susan Rennie	1976	10,859 (by Dec 1. 1980), 300 copies first edition, 1000 copies second edition, 8,000 copies third edition, 5,000 copies fourth edition	Alyson Books
Fourteenth Witch	Shelley Blue Grabel	1977	Limited success according to Greenfield	Unknown
The Wanderground	Sally Gearhart	1979	Reprinted into German, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian, We are reprinting 15,000 WANDERGROUND (1979) 16,600 (by Dec 1. 1980), 5,000 copies first edition, 15,000 copies second edition	Alyson Books
Choices	Nancy Toder	1980	*Choices* has sold over 3900 copies in its first six weeks, 3,937 copies by Dec 1. 1980, first edition 5,000 copies, second edition 7,500 copies	Kitchen Table Press
Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise	Michelle Cliff	1980	*Claiming an Identity* has sold over 1600 copies in its first two weeks, on Dec 1, 1980 1,625 copies sold, first printing 5,000	Unknown
Coming Out Stories	edited by Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan Wolfe	1980	10,187 copies sold (by Dec 1, 1980), first edition 25,000 copies	Alyson Press
Woman, Church & State	Matilda Jocelyn Gage with a new introduction by Sally Wagner	1980	Reprinted, 2,159 copies sold by Dec 1, 1980, first edition 7,500 copies	Alyson Press
This Bridge Called My Back: Writings	edited by Cherríe Moraga and	1981	Popular when printed, still in print today	Kitchen Table Women of Color Press

by Radical Women of Color	Gloria Anzaldúa			
Lesbian Poetry: An Anthology	edited by Elly Bulkin and Joan Larkin	1981	Unknown	Alyson Press
Lesbian Fiction: An Anthology	edited by Elly Bulkin	1981	Unknown	Alyson Press
Lifetime Guarantee	Alice Bloch	1981	Unknown	Alyson Press
Keeper of Accounts	Irena Klepfisz	1982	Unknown	Unknown
Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology	edited by Evelyn Torton Beck	1982	Unknown	Crossing Press
Zami: A New Spelling of My Name	Audre Lorde	1982	Unknown	Crossing Press
Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology	edited by Barbara Smith	1983*	Unknown	Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983
Law of Return	Alice Bloch	1983*	Unknown	Alyson Press, 1983
Abeng	Michelle Cliff	1983*	Unknown	Crossing Press, 1984

*The publication was originally in talks to be published by Persephone in 1983 or 1984 but its rights sold to other publishers upon Persephone's demise.

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