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Karissa Ann Haugeberg  
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THE VIOLENT TRANSFORMATION OF A SOCIAL MOVEMENT: WOMEN AND  
ANTI-ABORTION ACTIVISM

by

Karissa Ann Haugeberg

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in History  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

July 2011

Thesis Supervisors: Associate Professor Johanna Schoen  
Professor Linda K. Kerber

## ABSTRACT

My dissertation explores women's activism in the anti-abortion movement in the United States, from the 1960s through the close of the twentieth century. I study the transformation of the movement, from its origins in the Catholic Church in the 1960s, to the influx of evangelical Christians into the movement in the early 1980s. My primary sources include organizational records, personal papers, newspapers, legal documents, and oral histories. I analyze women's roles within the movement and the religious contexts that influenced their ideology and informed their choice of tactics.

Anti-abortion activism provided a forum for many religiously conservative women to engage in public debates, shape public policy, and protest publicly. First, I examine the relationships between women who established national anti-abortion organizations with those women who participated in grassroots activism. I suggest that evangelical Protestant women were more likely to hold leadership positions in the mainstream movement because most leaders in the evangelical grassroots wing of the movement enforced a patriarchal organizational structure. On the other hand, progressive Catholic women had considerably more influence in the grassroots organizations they formed apart from the Roman Catholic Church.

Second, I address how women responded to the rise of the New Right and the subsequent influx of evangelical Christians into the movement. I trace the history of violence in the history and suggest that women had prepared the movement to accept the radicalism of evangelical Christians by the 1980s. By focusing on women, I seek to reveal

the contradictions between religiously conservative ideas about proper gender roles that many women in the movement espoused and the actual work they performed as activists.

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Graduate College  
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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS  
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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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Myrna Shaneyfelt and Monica Migliorino Miller kindly agreed to be interviewed for this dissertation. I thank them for helping me to understand the types of work they performed as the movement grew over the course of the twentieth century. I am grateful to Juli Loesch Wiley for granting me permission to use her image in this dissertation. I would also like to thank Ann Scheidler from the Pro-Life Action Network for scanning several dozen photographs and giving me permission to include them in this dissertation.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACCL	American Citizens Concerned for Life
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
AGI	Alan Guttmacher Institute
AMA	American Medical Association
AOG	Army of God
ALI	American Law Institute
CCS	Clergy Consultation Service
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FFL	Feminists for Life
HLA	Human Life Amendment
NFRPHA	National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association
NRLC	The National Right to Life Committee
NRLN	<i>National Right to Life News</i>
OR	Operation Rescue
PAC	Political Action Committee
PLAN	Pro-Life Action Network
PPFA	Planned Parenthood Federation of America
PS	Prolifers for Survival

## INTRODUCTION

INSERTING WOMEN INTO THE HISTORY OF THE  
U.S. ANTI-ABORTION MOVEMENT

“Well, I thank you for . . . put[ting] this important piece of history together for us,” long-time activist Myrna Shaneyfelt wrote a few days after we’d discussed her work in the anti-abortion movement. “Because the Media, and the population controllers, wanted only their story told and accepted.”<sup>1</sup> Shaneyfelt expressed a frustration shared by many of her colleagues: observers have generally overlooked the work of women in the anti-abortion movement. Many women in the pro-life movement, including Shaneyfelt, suggest that the movement is portrayed as male-dominated because such a configuration makes it easy to dismiss.

Women—conservative and progressive, Catholic, evangelical Protestant, and not-particularly-religious—not only served as rank-and-file members, but also as organizers and leaders of what would become the largest moral reform movement of the twentieth century. By identifying the women who founded the first anti-abortion groups, the women who developed tactics that would later become commonplace techniques for protesting abortion, and the women who articulated the political and moral dimensions of the movement, I hope to deepen our understanding of the social, legal, and political history of the movement. The study of women in the anti-abortion movement clarifies historical changes that have been poorly understood: how religious convictions fused with partisan politics, how activists rationalized the use of violent tactics, and how women claimed space within a disciplined, patriarchal movement.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Myrna Shaneyfelt to Karissa Haugeberg, E-mail, December 8, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> For example, historians have been slow to consider how religious movements, institutions, and doctrines shaped U.S. political, economic, and social life during the twentieth century. This is particularly surprising, given that Americans were the most devout practitioners of evangelical Christianity in the West. See David A. Hollinger, “The ‘Secularization’ Question and the United States in the Twentieth Century,” *Church History* 70, no. 1 (March 2001): 132-143. A notable exception was James Kennelly’s *American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration* (New York: Macmillan, 1989). This has begun to change. Recent scholarship on Catholic women’s political and social work of the twentieth century includes Maureen Fitzgerald, *Habits of*

Social scientists have examined how opposition to abortion is rooted in larger anxieties about the changing economic, political, and social status of women in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Sociologist Kristen Luker used regional studies of activists to argue that most women who were attracted to the pro-life movement in the 1980s worried that legal abortion signaled a devaluation of the role of motherhood in American society. Luker's work focused on the motivation and meaning of activism for various types of anti-abortion activists.<sup>4</sup> The women who joined non-violent organizations, she maintained, were not the beneficiaries of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s; most were less well-educated, had a lower annual income and more children than their pro-choice activist counterparts.<sup>5</sup> Ethnographic studies of women who joined the anti-abortion movement in the 1990s have yielded surprising results: women who joined groups that endorsed direct action protest tended to be wealthier and better educated than women who remained committed to legal forms of protest. Like their male counterparts, many of the new generation of activists were Protestant evangelicals, and most were younger than their

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*Compassion: Irish Catholic Nuns and the Origins of New York's Welfare System, 1830-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Mary J. Henold, *Catholic and Feminist: The Surprising History of the American Catholic Feminist Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Kathleen Sprows Cummings, *New Women of the Old Faith: Gender and American Catholicism in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). While scholars have examined Protestant women's participation in the Temperance movement, very few have considered how the political and economic transformations of American life after the 1930s were experienced and affected by Protestant women.

<sup>3</sup> Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 176-177. In her analysis of women who joined anti-abortion activist groups in California during the 1970s and 1980s, Luker found that activist women associated legalized abortion with larger social reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the feminist movement. Concerns about the devaluation of traditional gender roles fueled women's participation in the anti-abortion movement.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 194-197. In Faye Ginsburg's study of pro-choice and anti-abortion activists in Fargo, North Dakota in the 1980s, she found that activists on both sides had remarkably similar demographic characteristics (education levels, income, number of children). Ginsburg, *Contested Lives*.



Catholic predecessors in the movement.<sup>6</sup> While scholars have contemplated what motivates women to hold anti-abortion sentiments and the demographic characteristics of those who became activists in from the 1970s through the early 1990s, little is known about the individual women who shaped the movement, the particular types of work they performed, or the gendered implications of the religious reconfiguration of the movement.

Scholars have long considered how policy debates about reproduction, including abortion, sterilization, birth control, and childcare speak to the limits of liberalism. Rosalind Petchesky has written about the paradox of choice-based reproductive policies: on one hand, choice would seem to offer all women opportunities to accept or reject reproductive technologies. However, in practice, religious customs, sexual preference, class, and race affect women's access to information, costly devices, and economic resources to support young families.<sup>7</sup> Further, liberalism, with its emphasis on equality, struggles to account for the very real differences pregnant bodies demand from employers, partners, and the government. P. Lealle Ruhl suggests that scholars are looking for something that just isn't there when they contemplate reproduction and the limits of liberalism because "Liberalism has *never* considered pregnant women legitimate subjects."<sup>8</sup> Women who

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<sup>6</sup> Faye D. Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community*, 2nd (orig. pub. 1989) ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Carol J. C Maxwell, *Pro-Life Activists in America: Meaning, Motivation, and Direct Action* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14 and 24. Maxwell defines direct action activism as protest that includes the possibility of being arrested. Examples include damaging physicians' equipment, persuading landlords not to renew leases for abortion providers, picketing, vandalism, and contaminating clinics with chemicals. Carol Mason, a noted scholar of anti-abortion violence, laments that historians have been slow to study the pro-life movement. While feminist scholars have considered the legal, rhetorical, and visual significance of anti-abortion propaganda and tactics, little has been done to contextualize anti-abortion activism, and violence in particular, within the social landscape. Carol Mason, *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> Rosalind P. Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom*, Longman Series in Feminist Theory (New York: Longman, 1984), 159-160.

<sup>8</sup> P. Lealle Ruhl, "Disarticulating Liberal Subjectivities: Abortion and Fetal Protection," *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 1 (2002): 37-38.

opposed abortion confronted this tension directly: while many contested laws that they perceived devalued their roles as mothers, they did so in terms that were oftentimes bombastic, competitive, and intimidating. Indeed, the anti-abortion movement simultaneously championed and restricted opportunities for women: while leaders advocated conservative ideas about proper gender roles, the very success of the movement depended upon large numbers of men and women staging public demonstrations and risking arrest.

Conservative women's participation in grassroots and national political activism has encouraged scholars to consider the ways in which religion and concerns about morality provided opportunities for women to become politically active. The prominence of women at both the grassroots and institutional levels of conservative reform movements has garnered the attention of sociologists and historians.<sup>9</sup> Scholars are divided in their interpretation of women's power within contemporary conservative movements. Some argue that the influx of evangelical Christians into institutional and grassroots political groups reduced opportunities for women to be highly influential.<sup>10</sup> Religiously conservative women, they concluded, ultimately applied their patriarchal religious beliefs to their political work by deferring to male authority, thereby limiting the possibility to affect change. Other scholars have argued that religious conservative women who emphasized their womanly or maternal natures have wielded significant political power. They point to women who were highly influential in political movements ranging from the anti-suffrage

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<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Klatch, *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987); Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, 2nd ed. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Elinor Burkett, *The Right Women: A Journey Through the Heart of Conservative America* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1998); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Klatch, "Coalition and Conflict among Women of the New Right," *Signs* 13, no. 4 (Summer 1988): 676-677.

movement of the 1890s to the anti-ERA campaigns of the 1970s, in large part, because of their claims to uphold womanhood. More recently, scholars have argued that women within conservative movements have divided over the treatment of gender, often in surprising ways. For example, secular Republican women who championed gender equity were often willing to defer to male authority if it affirmed their role within the party. However, socially conservative women who emphasized gender differences, including Phyllis Schlafly, pulled up their stakes within the formal institution of the GOP when the party did not move quickly enough to adopt a firm anti-ERA stance in the 1970s, and formed their own grassroots organization, The Eagle Forum.<sup>11</sup> My project is indebted to this scholarship, which demonstrates that women's support for patriarchy does not necessarily diminish their opportunities to lead organizations or prevent them from influencing the trajectory of partisan politics.

#### A Note about Terminology: Anti-Abortion and Pro-Life

There is a lively debate about the use of the term “pro-life” to describe people who oppose abortion. Some object to the term because many self-identified pro-life activists support issues that might be termed “anti-life,” including the death penalty and the expansion of the military. Others maintain that identifying anti-abortion activists as “pro-life” suggests that supporters of abortion rights are opposed to life.<sup>12</sup> I will primarily use the term “anti-abortion,” which describes the issue that unites the women I examine in this dissertation. However, I will occasionally use the term “pro-life,” a term abortion opponents prefer, to avoid repetition.

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<sup>11</sup> See Donald T. Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman's Crusade*, Politics and society in twentieth-century America (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> For a useful discussion about terminology, see Andrea L. Press and Elizabeth R. Cole, “Reconciling Faith and Fact: Pro-Life Women Discuss Media, Science, and the Abortion Debate,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 12 (1995): 396.

### The Criminalization of Abortion in the Nineteenth Century

Abortion emerged as a political issue in the United States between 1850 and 1890.<sup>13</sup> Legal arguments about a woman's right to control her body or medical arguments about the relationship between abortion and women's physical and mental health—arguments that would be central to the twentieth-century debate about abortion—were largely absent from the nineteenth-century debate about abortion. Instead, several groups, including the American Medical Association (AMA), the Catholic Church, and Protestant moral reformers articulated their opposition to abortion, not as part of an organized social movement, but as individual factions, each with particular concerns and objectives.

Until the mid-nineteenth century, the practice of contraception, which included abortion, was legal and unregulated until quickening, the moment a woman first feels the fetus move, which usually occurs around the fourth month of pregnancy.<sup>14</sup> Common law regarded pregnancy and human development as a process marked by physical transitions rather than discrete developmental moments marked by weeks or trimesters. Well in to the nineteenth century, most Europeans and white Americans believed in the theories of personhood expressed by Thomas Aquinas, who held that “ensoulment” occurred forty days after conception for male embryos and ninety days after conception for female

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<sup>13</sup> It would be anachronistic to describe the first efforts to prevent, prosecute, and decry abortion as a social movement. Sociologists Jeff Goodwin and James M. Jasper have described social movements as “conscious, concerted, and sustained efforts by ordinary people to change some aspect of their society by using extra-institutional means.” While the first people to articulate their opposition to abortion deployed “concerted” efforts to wrest the practice away from midwives, their battle was primarily about ensuring that physicians gained a foothold in providing women's health services. *The Social Movements Reader: Cases and Concepts* (Oxford: John Wiley and Sons, 2009), 3; See also David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg, “Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (May 1996): 1628-1660; and Aldon D. Morris, “Reflections on Social Movement Theory: Criticisms and Proposals,” *Contemporary Sociology* 29, no. 3 (2000): 445-454.

<sup>14</sup> James C. Mohr, *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Janet Farrell Brodie, *Contraception and Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Andrea Tone, *Devices and Desires: A History of Contraceptives in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

embryos.<sup>15</sup> In turn, this influenced how Americans defined “abortions.” Until the nineteenth century, miscarriages were so commonplace during the first few months of pregnancy that most people attached little emotional significance to a woman’s “restored” menses.<sup>16</sup> Before the AMA’s campaign to enact criminal abortion laws in the 1850s, physicians, midwives, and women routinely induced abortions prior to quickening. It is revealing that the word “abortion” was synonymous with miscarriage and the term “criminal abortion” was reserved for induced miscarriages that occurred after quickening until the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup>

Several related developments prompted politicians and moral authorities to take an interest in Americans’ reproductive decisions with unprecedented zeal in the mid-nineteenth century. Beginning in the 1840s, editors of pulp newspapers seized upon improvements in printing technologies. Weekly newspapers featured sensational reports about “butchers” and “botch jobs,” ironically, alongside advertisements for abortifacients.<sup>18</sup> Abortion, which had once been the province of women and midwives, became an integral part of the commercial penny newspaper industry in the urban United States.

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<sup>15</sup> See Eric Goldscheider, “Fetal Positions,” *Boston Globe Magazine*, August 10, 2003, <http://cache.boston.com/globe/magazine/2003/0810/fetuses.htm> for a wonderful overview of the history of ideas about fetal personhood in the United States.

<sup>16</sup> Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>17</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America*, (New York: Knopf, 1985), 219.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 225. Carole Joffe notes that the popularity of these sensational stories fostered a perception that most women fell prey to ruthless abortionists who operated in unsanitary conditions. In reality, most women obtained abortions from reputable providers who operated at great risk to their personal and professional lives. *Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion Before and After “Roe v. Wade”* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 70-107. Ann Trow, better known by her pseudonym, Madame Restell, was the most notorious abortionist of the 1830s. Based in New York City, Restell advertised abortifacients widely, amassing a small fortune that would later be scrutinized in the press. See Clifford Browder, *The Wickedest Woman in New York: Madame Restell, the Abortionist* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1988); Lawrence Lader, *Abortion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 85.

Stories about illicit abortions humiliated women (if they survived) and the families of women (when they did not). Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has noted that pulp newspapers, which were read most widely in working-class neighborhoods, featured well-heeled women who could have afforded to have children but ‘selfishly’ chose to have abortions. “The papers then refined the well-dressed . . . aborter into a metaphor for the commercialized city itself. She was urbane, she was affluent,” Smith-Rosenberg explained. “She rejected God’s and nature’s command that she bear and multiply. She, not the men in her life, threatened social order and the future well-being of the race.”<sup>19</sup> In turn, tales about “monstrous” women who died from botched abortions warned all women that the procedure could scar their reputations, whether they survived or not. Leslie Reagan has emphasized the disciplining power of these accounts, “Publicity warned all women that those who strayed from marriage and motherhood would suffer death and shameful publicity.”<sup>20</sup>

As these stories became commonplace, many Americans started to believe that the abortion rate was skyrocketing. People who may have previously associated the procedure with the experiences of women whom they knew personally began to think of abortion in the aggregate and lamented the seeming ubiquity of the procedure. Moral reformers seized upon this perception. Politicians warned that regulation was necessary to curtail the declining birth rate of white, American-born Protestants. Physicians submitted sensational, extraordinary cases as evidence that stricter regulations supplemented with serious enforcement were needed to protect women.

The private nature of abortion began to change in the mid-nineteenth century, when physicians, eager to secure professional legitimacy, began to question the safety and moral consequences of the unregulated procedure. University-trained physicians lacked the

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<sup>19</sup> Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct*, 227.

<sup>20</sup> Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 115.

authority to regulate the scattershot healthcare system, which was populated by quacks, herbalists, midwives, phrenologists, and occultists.<sup>21</sup> Physicians turned to state regulators to enact educational standards and mandate licensing. Unsurprisingly, these regulations favored university-trained physicians and drove apprentice-trained practitioners out-of-business or underground. Beginning in 1845, a handful of states in the northeastern United States criminalized induced abortions that occurred before quickening. Despite the lackluster enforcement of state abortion laws, the American Medical Association, formed in 1847, prodded state legislators to adopt strict abortion laws for the next four decades.<sup>22</sup> University-educated obstetricians and gynecologists were aggressive lobbyists as they sought to wrest control over women's healthcare from apprentice-trained midwives.<sup>23</sup> Dr. Hugh Hodge, in a lecture before medical students at the University of Pennsylvania, in 1854, spoke of the need to regulate abortion with missionary-zeal:

[Physicians] now call upon the legislators of our land, upon the ecclesiastical profession, and upon every one whose mind and conscience are open to conviction, to stay the progress of this destructive evil of criminal abortion; that care be taken that the ignorant be instructed, that the vicious be reprov'd, and . . . punished for the violation of the laws of God and Man.<sup>24</sup>

Physicians appealed to the moral, gendered, and racial anxieties of the mid-nineteenth century. Decades before Catholic priests routinely decried abortion as a mortal sin, physicians described abortion as “murder...prevalent among the most intelligent, refined,

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<sup>21</sup> John S. Haller, *Kindly Medicine: Physio-Medicalism in America, 1836-1911* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1997), 3. On the history of medicine in nineteenth-century America, see Paul Starr, *The Social Transformation of American Medicine: The Rise of a Sovereign Profession and the Making of a Vast Industry* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 79-145; Kenneth M. Ludmerer, *Time to Heal: American Medical Education from the Turn of the Century to the Era of Managed Care* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 3-25.

<sup>22</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 14-39.

<sup>23</sup> Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 46-118.

<sup>24</sup> Hugh Lenox Hodge, “Foeticide or Criminal Abortion: A Lecture Introductory to the Course on Obstetrics and Diseases of Women and Children” (University of Pennsylvania, 1869), 5. Reprint of 1854 lecture in *Abortion in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Arno Press, 1974).

moral, and Christian communities.”<sup>25</sup> Physicians maintained that abortion was a murderous, yet sometimes necessary procedure, and that it took a physician to determine when indeed the procedure was “necessary.” Kristen Luker has observed that this “ideological sleight of hand” enabled physicians to “create and control a moral problem at the same time.”<sup>26</sup>

Physicians fixed their attention on married, middle-class women, arguing that permissive abortion policies appealed to women’s selfish tendencies. “Married women . . . from the fear of labor, from indisposition to have the care, the expense, or the trouble of children, or some other motive equally trifling and degrading,” explained Dr. Hodge, “have solicited that the embryo should be destroyed by their medical attendant.” Women, even mothers, he maintained, were often incapable of feeling an appropriate level of guilt for undergoing the procedure. “Educated, refined, and fashionable women . . . women whose moral character is, in other respects, without reproach; mothers who are devoted . . . to [their] children . . . are perfectly indifferent respecting the foetus in utero.”<sup>27</sup> By characterizing women as cold, ignorant, and out-of-control, physicians tapped into larger anxieties about gender and sexuality in the nineteenth-century United States. Industrialization, urbanization, and the suffrage and abolition movements were destabilizing notions about men’s and women’s proper roles. Historian James Mohr explains the tactical significance of physicians’ paternalistic characterization of abortion. By positing that women could not be trusted to weigh the moral consequences of their decisions, physicians convinced legislators that “women had to be saved from themselves.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 32 and 39.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>28</sup> Mohr, *Abortion in America*, 128.



Legislators, physicians, and Protestant moralists exploited Anglo-Saxon Americans' anxieties about the massive waves of immigration, in particular, Catholics from Ireland and Italy.<sup>29</sup> Supporters of restrictive abortion laws emphasized xenophobic fears about the high birth rate of poor immigrant communities and the declining birth rate in U.S.-born, white, Protestant communities. Physicians warned that the "fashionability" of abortion among middle-class women might ultimately jeopardize Anglo-Saxons' control over American political and social institutions. In 1867, Dr. Horatio Storer, the president of the AMA, asked, "Shall the [U.S.] be filled by our own children or by those of aliens? This is a question that our own women must answer; upon their loins depends the future destiny of the nation."<sup>30</sup>

Physicians' desire to shore up control over abortion services coincided with a popular moral reform movement, driven in large part by anxieties over the declining birth rate among middle-class, white, American-born married couples. The Comstock Act, passed by the U.S. Congress in 1873, forbade the transport of "obscene" art, literature, and related materials. Additionally, companies and individuals could no longer send through the U.S. postal system or across state lines any "article of an immoral nature, or any drug or medicine, or any article whatever for the prevention of conception."<sup>31</sup> Postmasters were free to inspect mail if they suspected the contents included birth control devices or advice manuals.

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<sup>29</sup> While Irish immigrants were classified as "white" in the U.S. Census, Anglo-Saxons considered them to be "*low-browed and savage, groveling and bestial, lazy and wild, simian and sensual.*" Popular periodicals and political cartoons frequently compared Irish Catholics to African Americans. David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), 113.

<sup>30</sup> Horatio R. Storer, *Is It I? A Book for Every Man* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1867), 85. See Nicola Beisel and Tamara Kay, "Abortion, Race, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century America," *American Sociological Review* 69, no. 4 (August 2004): 498-518.

<sup>31</sup> Comstock Act, chap. 258, 17 Stat. 598 (1873) qtd. in Tone, *Devices and Desires*, 4; For a history of nineteenth and twentieth century birth control movements, see James Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue: The Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830* (New York: Basic Books, 1978).

The advent of anti-abortion statutes and the watchful eyes of postmasters, politicians, journalists, and physicians did not stop women from seeking out birth control devices and abortion services. During the nineteenth century, the birth rate declined steadily, as women found illicit abortions and better forms of birth control, many of which were advertised obliquely in women's periodicals. Although it is difficult to gauge the abortion rate when the procedure was performed illicitly, scholars who have examined reports of botched abortions, legal actions against abortionists, and hospital reports about legal therapeutic abortions from 1867 to 1973 estimate that between twenty and twenty-five percent of pregnancies ended by abortion.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 51.

Table 1. Total Fertility of White American Women, 1800-1900, 2002.

Year	Average Number of Children
1800	>7
1825	<6
1850	5.42
1880	4.24
1900	3.54
(2002)	(1.86)

Sources: John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed., Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1998, 139-201) and Martin, Joyce A., Brady E. Hamilton, Paul D. Sutton, Stephanie J. Ventura, Fay Menacker, and Martha L. Munson. "Births: Final Data for 2002." *Centers for Disease Control National Vital Statistics Report* 52, no. 10 (December 17, 2003), 4.

The nineteenth-century effort to criminalize abortion lacked the religious character that would infuse the twentieth-century anti-abortion movement. The Catholic Church was not a significant institutional force in the first effort to implement restrictive abortion laws. In the fourth century, St. Augustine decreed that women could receive abortions up to 80 days for a female fetus and 40 days for a male fetus. In the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III decreed that abortion was not homicide prior to quickening. The Church's now-familiar anti-abortion stance was not articulated until 1869, when Pope Pius IX explicitly condemned the procedure, just as anxiety about abortion hit a fevered pitch in

the United States.<sup>33</sup> Protestant clergy generally supported state abortion statutes, which permitted abortion when childbirth threatened a woman's life. Jewish tradition, instructed by the Mishnah, a code of ancient Jewish law, viewed the woman's life as the primary concern, and supported abortion when pregnancy threatened the well being of the pregnant woman.<sup>34</sup>

Historian Leslie Reagan provides a useful periodization of illegal abortion in the United States. Between 1880 and 1930, abortion, which was technically illegal, was nonetheless commonplace. Women obtained abortions with little fanfare in their homes and in the offices of physicians and midwives.<sup>35</sup> The secrecy that shrouded abortion enabled millions of women to obtain the procedure unnoticed even though it was illegal. Only when the procedure went awry did abortion become a public—and a legal—matter.

From the 1890s through the 1930s, states required physicians to obtain so-called 'dying declarations,' from women who entered hospitals for assistance following a botched abortion.<sup>36</sup> If a woman refused to name who administered the abortion, the amount paid, and location where the illicit procedure was performed, the hospital physician was not legally permitted to assist her. Physicians who ignored state law risked losing their license, and occasionally, criminal prosecution.

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<sup>33</sup> Louis J. Palmer, Jr. *Encyclopedia of Abortion in the United States* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2002), 315.

<sup>34</sup> Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> See F.W. Draper, "Criminal Abortion, With a 'Dying Declaration'," *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* 141, no. 19 (1899): 461-463. For a flavor of the use of dying declarations in criminal court proceedings throughout the western United States, see California. Superior Courts et al., *The Pacific Reporter*, vol. 182 (St. Paul, Minn.: West Publishing Company, 1919), [http://books.google.com/books?id=XMqZAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA953&lpg=PA953&dq=dying+declaration+abortion&source=bl&ots=RBEz6P0Jg4&sig=iLu9IHZj3seFCzAZihFAfybLrKE&hl=en&ei=X2ZcTYz\\_Gc7pgQe7h7CpDQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=dying%20declaration%20abortion&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=XMqZAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA953&lpg=PA953&dq=dying+declaration+abortion&source=bl&ots=RBEz6P0Jg4&sig=iLu9IHZj3seFCzAZihFAfybLrKE&hl=en&ei=X2ZcTYz_Gc7pgQe7h7CpDQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=4&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAw#v=onepage&q=dying%20declaration%20abortion&f=false) [accessed August 18, 2010].

Ideally, from the perspective of hospital administrators, local police officers conducted the interrogations. Officers instructed hospital staff to tell women they were dying—and this was often true—before pressuring women to divulge the details of their illicit abortions. Abortionists were more likely to be prosecuted after single women died from a botched procedure even though more married women sought abortions during this period. These declarations were admissible in court, even if women died before charges were filed or court proceedings began.<sup>37</sup> While abortionists were rarely found guilty of violating state abortion laws or of committing murder, the publicity surrounding such cases drove the practice further underground.

States' ability to enforce anti-abortion laws was wedded to physicians' willingness to report violations of the law. Whereas the obstetricians and gynecologists of the mid-nineteenth century had much to gain by shoring up their control over women's reproductive health care services, general practitioners and emergency room physicians of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries saw first-hand the consequences of illegal abortion. American women who wanted an abortion but did not qualify for a legal, therapeutic abortion used a variety of methods to end unwanted pregnancies. Many tried to induce abortion by taking drugs, digesting poison, inserting catheters, throwing themselves down stairwells, and punching themselves in the stomach.<sup>38</sup> When these methods failed, they turned to underground networks of midwives, physicians, and quacks. This informal, unregulated system left some women, especially immigrant, African

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<sup>37</sup> Leslie Reagan explains the unusual role of dying declarations in common law practice. "Legally, a dying declaration is an exception to the hearsay rule, which excludes the courtroom use of information that has been received second-hand." Courts assumed that a dying woman had no incentive to lie, and in turn, treated dying declarations given under great duress in hospitals as if they were given under oath. *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 118.

<sup>38</sup> See *Ibid.*, 1945. Dr. Ely Van De Warker described treating women who suffered from hemorrhaging after "probing themselves," usually after the third month of pregnancy (likely after other, less invasive methods had failed.) "The Detection of Criminal Abortion and a Study of Foeticidal Drugs" (Boston: James Campbell, Publisher, 1872), 9, in *Abortion in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Arno Press, 1974).

American, and rural women who traveled to unfamiliar cities vulnerable to unsavory abortionists. These women risked rape, infections, sterilization, and death in their quest to end their pregnancies.<sup>39</sup> The attending physicians who encountered dying women in emergency rooms would later become some of the most vocal proponents for overturning abortion laws.

The movement of the procedure into hospitals and the consequences of the Depression on attitudes about reproductive health mark the second period of illegal abortion, from 1930 to 1940. The centralization of abortion services rendered the practice more visible. Turbulent economic times offered physicians and women greater autonomy. During the 1930s, abortion was more commonly practiced and more widely available than it had been during the 1920s. It is impossible to understand the increased availability and relative acceptability of abortion during this time without considering the dire economic circumstances of the 1930s. Legal authorities' reluctance to prosecute illegal abortion probably reflected the public mood of the decade: a 1937 poll revealed that nearly 80 percent of American women approved of birth control use.<sup>40</sup> Faced with staggering rates of unemployment, homelessness, and hunger, Americans were more supportive of welfare programs and government-sponsored birth control programs.<sup>41</sup> Even the AMA reversed its long-time opposition to birth control and urged judges to overturn the Comstock Act.

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<sup>39</sup> Arlene Carmen and Howard Moody, *Abortion Counseling and Social Change from Illegal Act to Medical Practice; the Story of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973), 15-17. According to the "Clergy Statement on Abortion Law Reform and Consultation Service," reprinted in *Ibid.*, 30, "A 1965 report shows that 94% of abortion deaths in New York City occurred among Negroes and Puerto Ricans."

<sup>40</sup> Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 134.

<sup>41</sup> Molly Ladd-Taylor, "Saving Babies and Sterilizing Mothers: Eugenics and Welfare Politics in the Interwar United States," *Social Politics* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1997): 136-153. It is instructive to study how economic conditions, patriarchal traditions, religious doctrine, and conservative and nationalist movements shape the regulation of abortion globally. For example, see Tiana Norgren, *Abortion Before Birth Control: The Politics of Reproduction in Postwar Japan*, Studies of the East Asian Institute (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001); Paula A. Michaels, "Motherhood, Patriotism, and Ethnicity: Soviet Kazakhstan and the 1936 Abortion Ban," *Feminist Studies* 27, no. 2 (July 1, 2001): 307-333; Mala Htun, *Sex and the State: Abortion, Divorce, and the*

The third period, from 1940 through 1973, was marked by conflicting impulses. As many states made it more difficult for women to obtain abortions, groups of physicians, clergy, and feminists agitated for the reform and repeal of abortion laws. During the politically conservative, economically vibrant post-World War II period, physicians and lay abortion providers were more vulnerable to prosecution than they had been during economically bleak times. In 1953, the Iowa Supreme Court upheld the conviction of Dr. J.A. Snyder, an elderly physician accused of performing abortions. The case hinged upon the testimony of one person. According to historian James C. Mohr, "Because Snyder had the woman return to his office after dark, and because he did not give her a general physical examination, the court reasoned that he was merely providing an abortion, and was not really concerned about her health, much less fearful for her life."<sup>42</sup> Mohr suggests that the resurgent domesticity and political conservatism of the 1950s made physicians and women who sought to obtain abortions more vulnerable to prosecution. By the 1960s, clergy, physicians, attorneys, and feminists, frustrated by the disproportionate affects of the legal crackdown on abortion for poor, young, and minority women as well as for the physicians who treated them, began to challenge state laws that prohibited abortion. When the laws that had made abortion a crime for over a century appeared vulnerable to change, thousands of women and men organized what would become the largest movement of civil disobedience of the twentieth century in the United States.

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*Family Under Latin American Dictatorships and Democracies* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>42</sup> James C. Mohr, "Iowa's Abortion Battles of the Late 1960s and Early 1970s: Long-term Perspectives and Short-term Analyses," *The Annals of Iowa* 50 (Summer 1989): 69.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN ANTI-ABORTION MOVEMENT

Opponents of abortion organized when it became clear that the institutions that had upheld anti-abortion laws for over a century were crumbling under the weight of legislative, legal, and popular support for reform. When state legislators began to debate abortion reform in the late 1960s, the Catholic Church inaugurated an impassioned campaign to stem the movement for legalization. As members of the only institution to be explicitly opposed to abortion and contraception throughout the twentieth century, ecclesiastical authorities were poised to provide organizational strength to an increasingly mobilized anti-abortion constituency.

The Catholic Church's influence in national and state politics during the 1950s and 1960s—particularly its involvement in anticommunism campaigns—helped it to achieve political clout on the abortion issue in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>1</sup> Much of the strength of the Catholic Church's response to the legalization of abortion lay in its institution-building efforts of the post-World War II period. The expansion of religious institutions, in particular, parochial schools, combined with increased membership in denominational religions in the post-World War II period, provided the framework for religious-based special issue activism in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Catholic Church and the Politics of Abortion: A View from the States* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 1-13. By 1957, the median income of Catholic households was ten percent higher than Protestant households. Margaret Ross Sammon, "The Politics of the U.S. Catholic Bishops: The Centrality of Abortion," in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith & Power*, ed. Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 12.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *The Struggle for America's Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1989), 54-70 and 94. For Catholic opposition to birth control and abortion in the twentieth century, see Mary L. Dudziak, "Just Say No: Birth Control in the Connecticut Supreme Court before *Griswold v. Connecticut*," in *Toward a Usable Past: Liberty Under State Constitutions*, ed. Paul Finkelman and Stephen E. Gottlieb (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 316; Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 40-47; Jim Risen and Judy L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 7-22.



Small coalitions of bishops, priests, and Catholic professionals, often financed by the Vatican, were the first to respond to the legalization of abortion on the state level.<sup>3</sup> They drew upon the Church's institutional structure, which included the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, theologians, activist clergy, and congregants to provide an organized response against abortion rights. Pro-life priests took to the pulpits and told their parishioners about the moral dimensions of the procedure, which they equated to murder.<sup>4</sup> Historian Daniel T. Rodgers has remarked that the Catholic Church's ferocious condemnation of abortion signaled a shift in the history of U.S. Catholicism: previous generations of Catholics had generally shied away from overtly political issues, due in no small part to rampant anti-Catholicism. "The determination of the Catholic Church to propel itself into a national political fight over abortion reflected, in part, a socially more secure Church," explained Rodgers, "with a membership that was, for the first time, on average better educated, wealthier, and more politically engaged than the average American Protestant."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, by 1957, the median income of Catholic households was ten-percent higher than Protestant households.<sup>6</sup>

Opposition to abortion was not universal within the Church. In particular, progressive priests who had championed the social justice objectives outlined in the Second

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Merton, *Enemies of Choice: The Right-To-Life Movement & Its Threat to Abortion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 41, 45. See also Rosalind P. Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice: The State, Sexuality, and Reproductive Freedom*, Longman Series in Feminist Theory (New York: Longman, 1984), 241-242.

<sup>4</sup> The Iowa Catholic Conference of Bishops to The Catholic Community of Iowa, "Pastoral Letter Concerning 'Right to Life,'" October 25, 1970, Charlene Conklin Papers [hereafter CC Papers], box 1, Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa [hereafter IWA]. Iowa's five bishops explained that the Catholic Church had taken the position that abortion violated the fifth commandment, "Thou shall not kill."

<sup>5</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 167. See also David R Farber, *The Rise and Fall of Modern American Conservatism: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 157.

<sup>6</sup> Sammon, "The Politics of the U.S. Catholic Bishops," 12.

Vatican Council (1962-1965) were more inclined to support anti-poverty projects rather than agitate against contraception or abortion.<sup>7</sup> The Second Vatican Council, or Vatican II, as it was commonly called, modernized the Church. Vatican II revised the liturgy to allow for more lay participation in Church ceremonies and permitted Mass to be celebrated in vernacular languages, rather than strictly in Latin. The Church encouraged priests, nuns, and the laity to become more involved in international affairs as part of its effort to remain relevant in the post-World War II era. Young priests and nuns were particularly supportive of these reforms. Many subscribed to liberation theology, which identified social justice as a moral imperative. This progressive strain of Catholic ideology inspired thousands of priests, nuns, and lay Catholics to engage in campaigns to end poverty globally and to protest against oppressive authoritarian regimes in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> Vatican II also granted more power and status to bishops, who were generally older and more conservative than priests. Bishops' authority over Church policy would prove crucial to American political fights about abortion.

American Catholics were not particularly outraged by the advent of legal, mass-marketed contraception or the effort to liberalize abortion laws on the state level. This made American bishops anxious. Margaret Ross Sammon has observed that the laity's lax attitude about changing sexual mores led bishops to believe that the Catholic Church itself was in danger. Instead of urging local priests to push congregants to consider the moral dimensions of state-sanctioned abortion, the National Council of Bishops organized a national campaign to speak out forcefully against what they believed was the largest threat to the sanctity of the church: abortion.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See Timothy I. Kelly's fascinating account of the implementation of Vatican II in the Pittsburgh diocese, *The Transformation of American Catholicism: The Pittsburgh Laity and the Second Vatican Council, 1950-1972* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Ian Linden, *Global Catholicism: Diversity and Change since Vatican II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 118-120.

<sup>9</sup> Sammon, "The Politics of the U.S. Catholic Bishops," 13.

Conservative Catholics who had harbored reservations about the progressive reforms inspired by the Second Vatican Council heralded the American Council of Bishop's decision to object forcefully to legal abortion in the late 1960s.<sup>10</sup> Under the direction of pro-life bishops, parochial school teachers assigned students to write their state legislators to urge them to reject pro-choice legislation. Bishops urged priests to meet with parishioners in their homes to educate them about the Church's position on abortion and to encourage them to sign petitions opposing bills that would legalize the procedure.<sup>11</sup>

Very few women led the early campaign against abortion. Those who did were most typically Catholic mothers who entered the movement in partnership with their husbands. A small, but vocal minority of American Catholics rejected the Vatican Council's emphasis on social justice. For these folks, changing sexual mores threatened to undermine the stability of American families. Dr. Jack Willke, and his wife, Barbara, who was trained as a nurse, began speaking against sex education in public schools in 1953. The Willkes, who were devout, conservative Catholics, were dynamic public speakers. The couple delivered entertaining lectures on premarital counseling, how to educate one's children about sex, and, in the 1960s, the evils of the birth control pill to Catholic church groups across the United States. Jack led the presentations with folksy, refrained charm. He was fond of saying, "Listen, guys and gals . . ." Barbara punctuated the speeches by offering jokes and commentary about the couple's experiences with their six children.<sup>12</sup> They distributed

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<sup>10</sup> Shaneyfelt referred to Vatican II as "a takeover by the leftists." Myrna Shaneyfelt, interview by Karissa Haugeberg, telephone, December 3, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> "An Evaluation of the Defeat of the Abortion Issue in the Iowa House of Representatives," Iowa Association for Medical Control of Abortion, February 11, 1971, 1, Arlene Jens Papers [hereafter AJ Papers], box 1, IWA.

<sup>12</sup> Merton, *Enemies of Choice*, 12-13. On the history of sex education in the United States, see Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002); Susan Kathleen Freeman, *Sex Goes to School: Girls and Sex Education Before the 1960s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Jeffrey P. Moran, *Teaching Sex: The Shaping of Adolescence in the 20th Century* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2002); Robin E. Jensen, *Dirty Words: The Rhetoric of Public Sex Education, 1870-1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

manuals, flyers, and pamphlets that decried premarital sex, encouraged parents to monitor their children's social lives, and provided parents with advice for discussing sex with their children. "When the time seems opportune, face up to the fact that in the early teens most boys begin to masturbate. This again is not for mother to talk about—it is for dad," wrote the Willkes in *How to Teach Children the Wonders of Sex* (1964). "You should explain that sex powers are most holy and beautiful, and are not to be misused. The strong, mature man will learn to reserve these powers as his gift to his wife when he marries," they advised.<sup>13</sup> When individual states began to legalize abortion in the late 1960s, the Willkes were prepared to add the issue to their agenda. Already plugged in to a network of sympathetic, conservative Catholics, the couple soon began showing filmstrips and photographs that purported to depict aborted fetuses to horrified audiences.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Catholics who wanted to protest abortion but lacked the support of young, progressive local priests established groups independently of their local parishes. Myrna Shaneyfelt, frustrated by local priests' refusal to address Oregon's liberalized abortion law, organized a Right to Life chapter in Grants Pass, Oregon, in 1970. She recruited members by showing a slide show about fetal development to church groups. She also distributed literature, most famously *The Handbook on Abortion*, which was co-written by the Willkes, who had helped her to organize the Grants Pass Right to Life chapter. Between 1970 and 1973, Shaneyfelt persuaded Catholic men and women to join her group (with "no help from the priests"), and struggled to make inroads with non-Catholics. Protestant clergy, she explained, were generally reluctant to let her speak to their congregations.<sup>14</sup> These early activists lacked a coherent, organized national organization that was distinct from the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, the social, legal, and

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Merton, *Enemies of Choice*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview.

political momentum for reform overwhelmed the small band of Catholic men and women who spoke against abortion in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

### Religious Support for Abortion Reform

While the hierarchy of the Catholic Church took a firm stance against abortion and local priests split on the issue, clergy in other denominations began to organize nationally in support of abortion reform. In 1967, twenty-one ministers and rabbis, many of whom had been assisting women with unwanted pregnancies for decades, organized the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion (CCS) to assist women seeking abortions. The CCS helped to place women seeking abortions in touch with reputable physicians in states where the procedure was legal.<sup>15</sup> The timing was not a coincidence: Lawrence Lader, a journalist and an early abortion rights activist, encouraged clergy to form the group, believing that it might make abortion reform more palatable to state legislators.<sup>16</sup> “To be against abortion laws in [the mid-1960s],” Lader explained, “involved one in a dirty business. It not only [placed] one against the Catholic Church . . . but conflicted with the deepest sex taboos of our culture.”<sup>17</sup>

The CCS, led by the Baptist Rev. Howard Moody, had a dual mission: to convince Americans that support for abortion rights was ethical and to coordinate safe abortion services for women. CCS members drew upon the expertise of physicians, attorneys, and feminists to compile lists of reputable abortion providers, raise money to assist poor

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<sup>15</sup> Lawrence Lader, *Abortion* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1966), 42-55.

<sup>16</sup> Arlene Carmen and Howard Moody, *Abortion Counseling and Social Change from Illegal Act to Medical Practice; the Story of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973), 21. Lader, who was a co-founder of the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws in 1969, later opened a plant to manufacture RU-486 in the United States. Patricia Sullivan, “Lawrence Lader, 86; Crucial Voice of Abortion Rights Vanguard,” *washingtonpost.com*, May 11, 2006, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/10/AR2006051002319.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Lader, *Abortion II: Making the Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), viii.

women who wanted abortions, and advertise their services to young women. A member of a feminist women's group at the University of Iowa recalled "set[ing] up tables with a coffee can collection to try to collect money for women who needed abortion services...in New York [or] California."<sup>18</sup> The university feminist group referred women who wanted abortions to CCS members, who then arranged travel to states where procedure was legal.<sup>19</sup>

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, pro-choice clergy framed the moral discourse about abortion. In its official statement on abortion law reform, the CCS declared, "A truly human society is one in which the birth of a child is an occasion for genuine celebration, not the imposition of a penalty or punishment of the mother."<sup>20</sup> They refuted the Catholic Church's powerful claim—that abortion is murder—by making a distinction between embryos and living children. Because abortions were performed on embryos, they reasoned, "the crime of murder" was not being committed. They challenged common assumptions about women used in anti-abortion propaganda. Pro-choice clergy noted that most women who died after receiving illicit abortions were married, between the ages of 35 and 39, and already had five or six children. Finally, CCS members turned a skeptical eye

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<sup>18</sup> Gayle Sand, interview by Melissa Williams, transcript, March 1, 2004, 4, WRAC Records, box 22, folder Gayle Sand, IWA. Feminists engaged in similar activities throughout the U.S. See Laura Kaplan, *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>19</sup> These groups also offered theological and moral arguments to support the legalization of abortion. See "Statement on Abortion" Board of Directors of the Iowa Council of Churches, September 20, 1968, Minnette Doderer Papers [hereafter MDP], box 1, folder 1967-1968, IWA. For information about abortion provision before *Roe*, see *Ibid.*; Carole E. Joffe, *Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion Before and After "Roe v. Wade"* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995); and Ellen Messer and Kathryn May, *Back Rooms: Voices from the Illegal Abortion Era* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988). In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminist health activists taught women how to extract fetuses during the first few weeks of pregnancy with Del-Em, a tool initially used to extract menstrual blood from the uterus. Chris Bobel, *New Blood: Third-Wave Feminism and the Politics of Menstruation* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 43.

<sup>20</sup> "Clergy Statement on Abortion Law Reform," reprinted in Carmen and Moody, *Abortion and Social Change*, 30-31.

to moral reasoning that emphasized fetuses yet ignored women and children. “Belief in the sanctity of human life . . . demands helpfulness and sympathy to women in trouble and concern for [their] living children, many of whom . . . are deprived of their mothers, who die following self-induced abortions or those performed under sub-medical standards.”

By offering pragmatic moral arguments in support of abortion rights, the CCS emboldened religious denominations to support publicly the abortion reform movement. In 1970, the CCS operated in twenty-six states and helped an estimated 150,000 women per year.<sup>21</sup> Within two years, at least seventeen Protestant and Jewish organizations, including the American Baptist Convention, the Lutheran Church of America, the American Jewish Congress, and the National Council of Jewish Women had endorsed a call to legalize abortion nationally.<sup>22</sup> Non-Catholic clerical support for abortion reform reflected the American public’s increased acceptance for revising state abortion laws. Meanwhile, anti-abortion activists would not form a significant ecumenical movement until the 1980s.

### Changing Public Attitudes about Abortion Laws

Opponents of abortion were generally unprepared to respond to well-publicized cases of individual women who were harmed by restrictive abortion laws. One of the moments that crystalized the public sentiment about abortion in the 1960s was the case of Sherri Finkbine. For supporters of abortion reform, the ordeal of Sherri Finkbine, host of *Romper Room*, a children’s television program in Phoenix, provided a compelling example of how restrictive abortion laws imperiled married, respectable, middle-class white women

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<sup>21</sup> Linda Greenhouse and Reva Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices that Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court’s Ruling* (New York: Kaplan Publishing, 2010), 29.

<sup>22</sup> “What You Can Do,” *Iowans for Medical Control of Abortion Newsletter*, vol. 3, no. 5, December 1972, 2, MD Papers, box 4, folder: Research material, 1968-1981 and Louis H. Valbracht, “Let the Woman, Under God, Decide” St. John’s Lutheran Church (Des Moines, Iowa), February 23, 1969, 5, MDP, box 4, folder: Printed materials, 1969-1982.

with troubled pregnancies. For opponents of abortion, however, Finkbine's ordeal signaled an unraveling of protections for fetal life and motherhood.

On July 19, 1962, thirty-year-old Sherri Finkbine, pregnant with her fifth child, opened *The Arizona Republic*, Phoenix's daily newspaper, and read that Thalidomide, a tranquilizer commonly prescribed in Europe, had been linked to serious birth defects. Babies exposed to the drug in utero were born without limbs or with flipper-like appendages. Others suffered internal defects and were born with displaced or missing organs. Finkbine turned her attention to Divistal, the medication she had been taking to soothe chest pains she experienced during the first few months of the pregnancy. Her husband, Robert, a Scottsdale high school teacher, had purchased the pills in the U.K., where he had suffered sleepless nights supervising a school trip.

Sherri Finkbine called her obstetrician and admitted that she had taken a prescription tranquilizer that had been prescribed to her husband. She told her doctor that she was concerned the drug contained Thalidomide. He cabled the London pharmacy where Finkbine's husband had purchased the tranquilizer to determine whether it contained Thalidomide. A few hours later, he relayed grim news to Sherri Finkbine. Finkbine had taken the strongest possible dosage of the drug when she was two months pregnant, a period when the fetus was most vulnerable to damage.<sup>23</sup>

In order to receive a hospital abortion in the early 1960s, women had to petition hospital boards, which decided whether each case complied with state abortion laws. This was a radical departure from the policies of the 1940s, when "therapeutic" hospital abortions were generally approved after two physicians signed off on the procedure. Starting in the mid-1950s, U.S. hospitals began to embed the approval process within a

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<sup>23</sup> "Abortion and Human Dignity," Society for Humane Abortion" (San Francisco, CA, January 9, 1966), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Society for Humane Abortion Collection, MC 281, box 1, folder 21. Reprinted in Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade*, 13.



bureaucratic committee framework. Hospital abortion committees typically consisted of five senior staff, including two specialists, and were usually chaired by the chief of obstetrics.<sup>24</sup> The effect of this change was staggering: when U.S. hospitals installed abortion committees, the approval rate declined by up to sixty-six percent. Lawrence Lader noted the heavy-handed, burdensome nature of the approval process: “No other medical procedure, including a lobotomy . . . demands the sanctity of committee approval.”<sup>25</sup> As hospital abortions became more difficult to obtain in the United States, women who could afford it traveled to Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Japan in search of trained abortionists.<sup>26</sup> Those who could not afford to travel abroad and those who could not convince a hospital committee to approve an abortion had to navigate an unpredictable, unregulated, and sometimes-dangerous underground network of abortionists with varying degrees of training and commitment to the health and safety of women.

All state abortion laws made provisions to allow abortion in cases where the woman’s *life* was in jeopardy. However, only a few states allowed physicians to petition for an abortion when the mental or physical *health* of the woman was threatened by a pregnancy. Arizona did not have a health provision. Nonetheless, Finkbine’s doctor, along with a handful of physician colleagues, petitioned the three-doctor committee of Phoenix’s Good Samaritan Hospital. They were confident that theirs would be one of the 8,000

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<sup>24</sup> Lader, *Abortion*, 24-25.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 27. At New York’s Sloane Hospital for Women, one abortion was performed for every sixty-nine live births between 1950 and 1955. Between 1955 and 1960, one abortion was performed for every two hundred twenty-five live births. At Los Angeles County Hospital, one abortion was performed for every one-hundred-six live births in 1931; by 1951, one abortion was performed for every 8,383 live births.

<sup>26</sup> Lawrence Lader, *Abortion* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1966), 56-58. During the early 1960s, as many as 10,000 U.S. women traveled to Puerto Rico each year for abortions. Puerto Rican legal officials generally refused to prosecute midwives who violated the commonwealth’s prohibition on abortion.

requests approved at hospitals across the U.S. each year.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that the physicians recommended Finkbine's abortion on psychiatric grounds even though Arizona's abortion law did not make an exemption for women's health.<sup>28</sup>

The approval process was burdensome: most women had to undergo a battery of physical and psychological tests before a board would consider the merits of a request for a therapeutic abortion. Because abortion laws did not define "health" clearly in those states that permitted health exemptions, hospital committees took seriously the consequences they might face if hospitals were perceived to flout abortion laws routinely. Further, while boards did grant abortions in cases that did not comply with state laws, hospitals were careful to avoid publicizing such operations. Consequently, most of the women who received permission to have hospital-based abortions were middle-class or affluent white women and always had the support of a physician willing to vouch that the abortion would be performed for "therapeutic" reasons. Between 1960 and 1962, New York City hospital boards approved five times as many "therapeutic" abortion petitions for white women than for women of color. The disparity between white and Puerto Rican women was particularly stark: thirty times as many white women received approval for hospital-based abortions than Puerto Rican women.<sup>29</sup>

After physicians submitted an abortion petition on Sherri Finkbine's behalf, she made a fateful decision to speak to a local reporter about the hazards of Thalidomide. This

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<sup>27</sup> David J. Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of "Roe v. Wade"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 285-290; Kristin Luker explains that hospital boards often favored the judgment of physicians over a strict interpretation of state abortion laws. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 55-58.

<sup>28</sup> If a woman's physical health was not jeopardized by the pregnancy (as in the case of women with diabetes or cancer), physicians typically argued that a woman was likely to commit suicide or suffer a mental breakdown if she continued with an unwanted pregnancy. Lader, *Abortion*, 12 and 32.

<sup>29</sup> Lader, *Abortion II*, 13. Women who could afford private hospitals were far more likely to have their abortion petitions approved than those who relied on municipal hospitals. See Lader, *Abortion*, 29.

report would derail her attempt to secure a hospital abortion in the United States. Upon learning that she had taken the tranquilizer linked to birth defects, Finkbine called *The Republic's* managing editor, who was a family friend, and suggested he assign a reporter to write about the drug's potential side-effects. "I thought I was being very noble," she explained. "I thought my story might save other expectant mothers the same experience."<sup>30</sup> Although Thalidomide was not licensed for sale in the United States, the drug found its way into American medicine cabinets by way of vacationers, military envoys, and business travelers to Europe. By 1962, four babies with birth defects linked to Thalidomide had been reported in the U.S.<sup>31</sup> A Phoenix-area Air National Guard unit had recently been deployed to Germany, and Finkbine worried that troops might bring the tranquilizer home with them.<sup>32</sup>

Finkbine stipulated that she did not want to be named in the story. The newspaper's medical editor agreed to her request. But what Finkbine had intended to be a human interest piece embedded within a Phoenix newspaper instead received top-billing on the July 22, 1962 edition of *The Arizona Republic*—the very day Finkbine was scheduled to have her abortion. The story was picked up by the wires and ran in newspapers across the country.

The article, titled "Baby-Deforming Drug May Cost Woman Her Child Here," explained that the unnamed subject of the story would be receiving an abortion in a Phoenix-area hospital. The publicity petrified administrators at Good Samaritan. They were already reluctant to approve cases like Finkbine's because they did not comply with a strict interpretation of Arizona law. Sherri Finkbine, her physician, and all parties involved

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<sup>30</sup> "Finkbines Didn't Seek Publicity," *Denton Record-Chronicle* (Denton, Texas), August 2, 1962, 11.

<sup>31</sup> "Medicine: Abortion & the Law," *Time*, August 3, 1962. In Germany, Britain, and Belgium, at least 6,000 so-called "Thalidomide babies" had been born.

<sup>32</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 30.

in the approval of the abortion could have faced up to five years in prison if they were found guilty of violating the state's abortion law.<sup>33</sup> Hours before it was scheduled to begin, the hospital canceled the procedure.

Three days later, the hospital, at great risk to its own reputation, filed a petition for a declaratory judgment in Maricopa County Superior Court, requesting the court to confirm that the hospital's decision to approve Sherri Finkbine's abortion complied with state law. An Arizona Superior Court judge denied the request. Subsequently, the hospital cancelled Finkbine's rescheduled abortion procedure. The risk of litigation against the hospital was too great for the board to bear: it was likely that Finkbine could have carried the pregnancy to term without risk to her own health. The hospital did not abandon Finkbine after cancelling the abortion. Instead, they continued petitioning courts in the hope of adding an exemption for fetal deformities to the state's abortion law.<sup>34</sup>

Sherri Finkbine's anonymity, which had been preserved when her story was printed in newspapers across the country, was compromised when her case was pleaded before the courts and she was identified in public records. She soon began to receive hateful letters. Some of the letters contained death threats, most named her, and some threatened the entire family. At one point, the FBI guarded the household.<sup>35</sup> "We received pictures of me . . . and there'd be an ice pick or a dagger with blood spewing," Finkbine recalled. "We'd receive manure in the mail. I was called a baby killer and . . . a Jezebel and a murderess . . . We had to change our phone number dozens of times."<sup>36</sup>

Finkbine chose to participate in the media storm that had descended upon her family's Scottsdale home. Journalists followed Sherri and Robert's every move, as they

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<sup>33</sup> "Medicine: Abortion & the Law."

<sup>34</sup> Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality*, 287.

<sup>35</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 64.

<sup>36</sup> Sherri Chessen Finkbine qtd. in Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 13.

petitioned Japan, Denmark, and Sweden to approve their request for an abortion. At a press conference, Sherri explained how the red tape she was encountering placed her own health at risk. As the Finkbines waited to hear from foreign countries, the pregnancy continued and Sherri worried that doctors would have to perform a risky caesarian operation to extract the fetus. She noted that it would be an economic hardship for her to travel abroad for an abortion. "The trip will cost a fortune wherever we go," she said. "We will get a loan if we must. I think it would be easier to live with monthly payments for the rest of our lives than with the misfortune of a terribly malformed baby."<sup>37</sup> For the Finkbines, the long-term consequences of having to give birth to a dead or dying baby outweighed the consequences of financial debt.

In August 1962, Sweden granted the Finkbines permission to visit the country in order for Sherri to obtain an abortion.<sup>38</sup> She had to be evaluated by physicians and approved by a hospital board that considered the social, economic, and medical circumstances of the pregnancy. The board granted Finkbine, then thirteen weeks pregnant, permission to have the abortion.<sup>39</sup> After the procedure, an autopsy of the embryo revealed that it was so seriously deformed that it would not have survived outside the womb.<sup>40</sup> The Finkbines spent \$4,000 to travel to Sweden for the procedure (the abortion would have cost approximately \$500 in the United States.)<sup>41</sup> They could not

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<sup>37</sup> "Phoenix Woman May Go to Denmark," *The Independent* (Pasadena, California), August 2, 1962, 36.

<sup>38</sup> "Sweden Abortion Seen for Sherri," *Charleston Daily Mail* (Charleston, West Virginia), August 2, 1962), 4.

<sup>39</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 64.

<sup>40</sup> Robert K. Walker, "Sherri Finkbine Says Fifth Child Expected," *The Yuma Daily Sun* (Yuma, Arizona) July 9, 1964, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Carmen and Moody, *Abortion Counseling and Social Change from Illegal Act to Medical Practice; the Story of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion*, 14. "Under the table" abortions performed at U.S. hospitals usually cost between \$1,500 and \$2,000.

afford to purchase their airplane tickets outright, but found a travel agent who agreed to let them purchase them on a “travel-now-pay-later basis.”<sup>42</sup> As they prepared to return to the U.S., the Vatican released a statement condemning Sherri Finkbine’s decision. “Crime is the only possible definition of what happened . . . in Sweden,” the Church declared.<sup>43</sup>

The white, university-educated, photogenic, married mother of four children became the national face of the nascent movement to overturn anti-abortion laws in the United States.<sup>44</sup> In the process, she directed public attention away from abortion opponents’ emphasis on fetal life. Finkbine made her story relatable to ordinary Americans by emphasizing how unexpected circumstances brought the abortion debate into her life. “For weeks we lived in the eye of a hurricane,” she reflected one year after the abortion, “a hurricane of publicity we never sought and a controversy we tried to avoid.”<sup>45</sup> Finkbine’s quest to terminate her pregnancy demonstrated how difficult it was for women to obtain abortions, even after physicians agreed the fetus would not survive outside the womb.<sup>46</sup>

Finkbine’s ordeal was bittersweet. The vice president of the NBC affiliate that produced *Romper Room* declared Finkbine to be “unfit to handle children” once her story became national news.<sup>47</sup> Her supervisor, however, refused to fire her and kept her on the station’s payroll. Frustrated by her lack of reproductive rights and appalled by the way she

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<sup>42</sup> Sherri Finkbine and Joseph Stocker, “The Baby We Didn’t Dare to Have,” *Redbook*, January 1963, 102.

<sup>43</sup> “Vatican Sees ‘Crime’ In Abortion,” *The New York Times*, August 20, 1962, 9.

<sup>44</sup> “Phoenix Woman May Go to Denmark,” 36.

<sup>45</sup> Finkbine and Stocker, “The Baby We Didn’t Dare to Have,” 99.

<sup>46</sup> Sherri Chessen Finkbine, “Abortion and Human Dignity,” presented before the Society for Humane Abortion (San Francisco, CA, January 9, 1966), Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, Society for Humane Abortion Collection, MC 281, box 1, folder 21; reprinted in Linda Greenhouse and Reva Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade: Voices that Shaped the Abortion Debate Before the Supreme Court’s Ruling* (New York: Kaplan Publishing, 2010), 12-18.

<sup>47</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 14; Finkbine and Stocker, “The Baby We Didn’t Dare to Have,” 104.

was ultimately penalized in the workforce, Finkbine chose to become a steadfast advocate for liberalizing state abortion laws. She testified before state legislative committees, emphasizing how American women could not find relief in the vague health exemptions attached to anti-abortion statutes.

Much to abortion opponents' chagrin, a slim majority of the American public sympathized with Finkbine's plight. In 1962, a national Gallup poll asked whether respondents thought Finkbine "did the right thing or the wrong thing" in having the abortion. Fifty-two percent of respondents supported Finkbine.<sup>48</sup> During the mid-1960s, outbreaks of rubella and German measles, both of which caused birth defects in tens of thousands of babies, tipped public opinion in favor of liberalizing state abortion laws.<sup>49</sup> U.S. hospital boards approved more abortion petitions to accommodate the epidemics, but demand for abortion outstripped administrators' willingness to approve them. For the rest of the decade, Americans became increasingly supportive of a woman's right to secure legal abortion in cases when the pregnant woman's life was in jeopardy, where the fetus was deformed, or when the pregnancy was the result of rape. While Americans supported legal abortion when the health of the woman or fetus was in jeopardy, they did not support women's basic right to abortion. A 1965 National Opinion Research Center poll revealed that only 16% of respondents supported legal abortion in cases where married women did

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<sup>48</sup> George Horace Gallup, *The Gallup Poll; Public Opinion, 1935-1971* (New York: Random House, 1972), 1784. Overall, 52% of respondents replied "right," 32% replied "wrong," and 16% had "no opinion." Among Catholics, 33% supported the abortion, 49% opposed it, and 18% had no opinion. For Protestants, 56% supported Finkbine's decision, 27% opposed it, and 17% had no opinion. Slightly more women (54%) were supportive of her choice than men (50%).

<sup>49</sup> During the 1963-64 rubella epidemic, 2,000,000 women of child-bearing age contracted the virus in New York City alone. Of those, 82,000 were in the first trimester of pregnancy. Between 15,000 and 20,000 infants were subsequently born with birth defects see Lader, *Abortion*, 36-39. See also Leslie J. Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies: Mothers, Disabilities, and Abortion in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

not want more children and 22% supported legal abortion when a family's income was low.<sup>50</sup>

Professional medical and legal organizations, which had been prodding state legislative bodies to relax abortion laws since the late 1950s, seized upon the openings created by stories such as Sherri Finkbine's ordeal and began to offer arguments for the legalization of abortion. In 1962, the American Law Institute (ALI) proposed a series of recommendations to state legislators, advising them to extend protections to physicians who found abortions "therapeutically" necessary. The ALI guidelines were intended to protect physicians who believed that a pregnancy jeopardized the physical or mental health of the mother or that the child would be born with "grave physical or mental defect," or if the pregnancy was the result of rape or incest.<sup>51</sup>

Five years after the ALI recommended that states evaluate their abortion laws, the AMA passed a similar resolution supporting the liberalization of abortion laws. By the late 1960s, most U.S. physicians supported the repeal of abortion laws. Obstetricians and gynecologists, the primary supporters of nineteenth-century anti-abortion laws, had shored up control of women's health care services decades earlier. General practitioners' uncomfortable role in the enforcement of abortion laws in the 1930s, obstetricians' dependence on the judgments of hospital boards in the 1950s and 1960s, and decades of treating women who had suffered from botched abortions had changed physicians' opinions about abortion regulations. In 1964, New York municipal hospital emergency

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<sup>50</sup>. Rosemary Nossiff, *Before Roe: Abortion Policy in the States* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), 37. In a 1965 Gallup Poll, 77% of respondents favored legalizing abortion in cases when the mother's health was in danger, 54% of supported abortion when the child might be deformed, and only 18% supported abortion when the family could not support additional children. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll; Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, 1985.

<sup>51</sup> Model Penal Code, American Law Institute Abortion Policy, 1962. Reprinted in Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade*, 25.



room physicians treated 10,000 women suffering from “incomplete” abortions.<sup>52</sup> The ALI and the AMA sought to maintain physicians’ authoritative role in abortion decisions. The laws needed to be reformed, they maintained, because physicians and hospital boards lived under a near-constant specter of litigation for exercising their professional judgment. By the late 1960s, physicians and attorneys, who emphasized the professional consequences of illegal abortion were joined by progressive clergy and feminists, who engaged the ethical and social dimensions of restrictive abortion laws.

In the late 1960s, the organized feminist movement identified legal abortion as a key to women’s economic and social equality. Changing labor patterns and social mores created a demand for accessible and affordable contraception and abortion.<sup>53</sup> Fertility rates had been declining. Increasing numbers of women were going to college. More women were participating in the paid workforce. Divorce rates were increasing, and a record number of single women headed households. Although women’s relationships with work, education, and family had been undergoing a significant transformation for at least a decade, social policy and expectations of women in the household failed to change accordingly. The burdens of parenting and household labor continued to rest disproportionately on women’s shoulders.

The addition of new interest groups changed the dynamics of the movement to liberalize state abortion laws. Physicians, attorneys, and clergy had argued that abortion laws needed to be *reformed* to protect physicians’ professional judgment from over-reaching laws. Feminists reframed the discourse, arguing that restrictive abortion laws needed to be *repealed* in order for women to gain control over their reproductive lives, and by extension,

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<sup>52</sup> Lader, *Abortion*, 66. See also Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade*, 75. In 1972, the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reported that 586,760 legal abortions were reported in the twenty-eight states that had liberalized their abortion laws. Frederick S. Jaffe, Barbara L. Lindheim, and Philip R. Lee, *Abortion Politics: Private Morality and Public Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), 132.

<sup>53</sup> Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman’s Choice*, 111 and 132.

achieve economic and social equality. The availability of an effective birth control pill also transformed the way Americans regarded women's reproductive rights. The Pill, which came onto the market in 1960, gave women an unprecedented ability to control their fertility and began to change the way many Americans regarded unintended pregnancies. Conversations about women's sexual licentiousness were gradually replaced with declarations that the new technology had failed. Lamentations about the menace of premarital sex gave way to frank discussions about married, and eventually, unmarried women's access to birth control options.<sup>54</sup> The concerted efforts of religious leaders, physicians, attorneys, and feminists prompted state legislators to take up the task of revising restrictive abortion laws.

#### Case Study: The Fight against Abortion Reform in Iowa

Between 1967 and 1970, twelve states liberalized their abortion laws, beginning with Colorado, North Carolina, and California. Most of the new laws permitted abortion to preserve the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or in cases of rape or incest. State legislators were responding to popular public support for (limited) abortion legal reform: in 1969, sixty-four percent of Americans believed that abortion should be a private decision between a woman and her physician.<sup>55</sup> In 1970, the New York General Assembly passed the nation's most permissive abortion law, enabling an adult woman to obtain a legal abortion as a matter of choice, in consultation with her physician.<sup>56</sup>

Reformers and repealers attracted diverse and sometimes contradictory supporters, including those who deferred to physicians' authority and those who questioned male

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<sup>54</sup> Rickie Solinger, *Wake Up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Elaine Tyler May, *America and the Pill: A History of Promise, Peril, and Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>55</sup> Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, 113.

<sup>56</sup> Katie Monagle, "How We Got Here," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 7, no. 3 (1995): 378.

physicians' authority over women's healthcare. Support for legal abortion was highest among college-educated, young, Protestants and lowest for older Catholic women who had not obtained high school diplomas.<sup>57</sup> In 1969 alone, forty-nine abortion reform measures were presented in state legislatures across the country, including the Iowa General Assembly.<sup>58</sup>

When the Iowa General Assembly first considered liberalizing the state's abortion law in 1969, Iowans used the ideas and language of feminism to articulate their support for reform. Many supporters of legislative reform had themselves obtained illegal abortions or knew people who had done so and wanted to reduce the stigma and danger of the procedure. Others, including an Iowa City woman, believed that reproductive freedom reflected a commitment to equality. "I urge you to vote for the passage of the abortion reform bill now being considered," she wrote to her state senator. "The wealthy can and have been able to arrange for abortions . . . but the woman with less resources is driven to desperate measures to [obtain an abortion]. Does not each child have a right to be wanted?"<sup>59</sup> Another resident, who identified herself as a Republican, noted, "I am amused at men determining this female problem that wouldn't be a problem if it weren't for a man!"<sup>60</sup> One constituent understood abortion as a key to women's autonomy. "I personally resent the male-dominated legislature telling me what to do with my body," she

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<sup>57</sup> In a November 1969 Gallup Poll, respondents were asked: "Would you favor or oppose a law that would permit a woman to go to a doctor to end pregnancy at any time during the first three months?" Note how the question uses the trimester framework, which would later be adopted by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Roe v. Wade* (1973). Gallup, *The Gallup Poll; Public Opinion, 1935-1971*, 2225-2226.

<sup>58</sup> Jimmie Kimmey, "Abortion Law Reform in the United States" (presented at the California Conference on Abortion, San Francisco, CA, May 1969). Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, NARAL Collection, MC 313, box 6, reprinted in Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> [Name withheld] to Minnette Doderer, February 12, 1969, MDP, box 2.

<sup>60</sup> [Name withheld] to Minnette Doderer, February 19, 1969, MDP, box 2.

wrote. “They seem to be following the old practice of keeping a wife barefoot and pregnant to control her.”<sup>61</sup> A farmer from Waukee asked, “Just who are these old men in the legislature to tell women what kind of operation a woman can’t have? It’s none of their business!”<sup>62</sup> Republican Governor Robert Ray supported abortion reform, noting that most Iowans favored efforts to liberalize the state’s abortion law.<sup>63</sup>

The 1969 and 1971 efforts to liberalize Iowa’s abortion laws demonstrated how powerful an organized anti-abortion coalition could be, even when a majority of the public supported abortion legal reform. In Iowa, as in most states, efforts to promote women’s legal equality were taken up by feminist Republicans and Democrats. Legislators from both sides of the aisle supported and opposed pro-choice legislation, just as legislators from both parties had supported and opposed bills to promote women’s economic and political rights.<sup>64</sup> Democratic state senator Minnette Doderer, Republican state senator Charlene Conklin, and Republican state representative Joan Lipsky were prominent supporters of the 1969 and 1971 efforts to liberalize the state’s abortion law.<sup>65</sup> Senator Doderer

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<sup>61</sup> [Name withheld] to Minnette Doderer, April 1, 1969, MDP, box 2.

<sup>62</sup> [Name withheld] to Minnette Doderer, April 8, 1969, MDP, box 2.

<sup>63</sup> “Editorial Comment: The Campaign for Abortion,” *The Witness* (The Catholic Diocese of Davenport, Iowa) January 30, 1969, 4, CCP, box 3. In January 1969, 52% of Iowa state legislators favored enacting a more liberal abortion law. Twenty-two percent of legislators opposed liberalizing the state’s law and thirty-percent did not respond to the poll. See also “Iowa Opinion on Abortion Law,” *Des Moines Register* February 28, 1969 in CCP, box 3. An October 1967 poll of 600 adult Iowans found that 68% favored legalizing abortion in the state “when the mental or physical health of the mother is in danger,” and that 66% of Iowans favored abortion “when the pregnancy resulted from a crime committed against the mother.” Even Catholics were more inclined to favor (46%) than oppose (41%) liberalizing the state’s abortion law.

<sup>64</sup> See Lader, *Abortion*, 56-70. On the history of feminism and anti-feminism in the Republican Party, see Catherine E. Rymph, *Republican Women: Feminism and Conservatism from Suffrage Through the Rise of the New Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 225-226 and 245-246.

<sup>65</sup> Harry Mauck, Jr., “Abortion Should Be Matter between Woman, Physician,” *Council Bluffs Daily Nonpareil* (Council Bluffs, Iowa), February 15, 1970, CCP, box 3, folder 5.

estimated that she received twenty-five letters of support for each letter opposing her efforts; almost all of the letter-writers were women.<sup>66</sup>

Critics of the proposed legislation included men and women who expressed their opposition in both religious and secular terms. Senator Conlin received a letter from a constituent who wrote: “Shame on you, as the wife of a physician I would think you should be aware of the dire complications of trying to abort a 20 weeks fetus. I’m a nurse married to a physician and I am well aware of the complications. Why not read some of your husband’s textbooks or current medical magazines to keep abreast of the times?”<sup>67</sup> Senator Doderer received an unsigned note that read: “I understand your son went through quite an ordeal in a snowstorm in Colorado. Did you pray that he would be found alive? . . . I understand you are in favor of abortion—murder . . . of babies who have no chance to be heard but are killed. God have mercy on you and your kind.”<sup>68</sup>

Abortion opponents deployed explicitly anti-feminist arguments that revealed a deep mistrust for a woman’s ability to make moral choices. A married Iowa couple asked Senator Doderer, “How can you as a wife and mother (I assume you are a mother) be for the abortion bill. We cannot have laws that makes murder legal [sic].” They continued, “As far as rape is concerned the only time you hear about rape is when the girl plays around and then finds herself pregnant and only then does she holler rape.”<sup>69</sup> A thirty-four-year-old woman understood Doderer’s support for abortion rights to be an affront to womanhood, “I saw. . . your little stand for the abortion bill. I was disgusted with your defense of it and felt sorry for you, that you seem sorry to be a woman. I am ashamed to be

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<sup>66</sup> “Can Iowa’s Abortion Law Be Liberalized?” *Planned Parenthood of Iowa Newsletter*, April 1969, 2. MDP, box 1. See Correspondence files, MDP, boxes 1 and 2.

<sup>67</sup> [Name withheld] to Charlene Conklin, January 31, 1971. CCP, box 1.

<sup>68</sup> Unsigned to Minnette Doderer, ca. 1968. MDP, box 1, folder: Abortion, 1967-1968.

<sup>69</sup> [Names withheld] to Minnette Doderer, February 21, 1969, MDP, box 2.

a member of your same sex!” Women who became pregnant as a result of rape should find adoptive parents, she maintained. If the pregnancy was the result of incest, “she should know better anyway and why give her the law to help her have her little fun with her relatives!”<sup>70</sup> Another woman expressed her dissatisfaction with Doderer’s advocacy of legal abortion: “It’s too bad your mother didn’t have an abortion when she was carrying you.”<sup>71</sup>

The real strength of the early anti-abortion movement lay in the institutional power of the Catholic Church. The financial resources of the Catholic Church overwhelmed the fundraising capabilities of Iowa’s loosely organized pro-choice movement. For example, the Iowa Association for Medical Control of Abortion, which had 2,000 chapters, raised only \$2,200 to support the 1971 bill. Meanwhile, the Catholic Church spent \$50,000 to defeat the bill.<sup>72</sup> On February 11, 1971, the day the Iowa General Assembly debated a pro-choice bill, the Catholic Church bussed “blind, mentally retarded, and physically handicapped children and adults” to the Capitol to protest against the legislation.<sup>73</sup>

When legislators presented bills to liberalize state abortion laws, anti-abortion activists, with the support of the Roman Catholic Church, mobilized an effective campaign to call, write, and visit state legislators. During the 1960s, Catholics began participating in weekly writing campaigns to encourage politicians to oppose pro-choice legislation. In

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<sup>70</sup> [Name withheld] to Minnette Doderer, February 24, 1969, 1-2, MDP, box 2.

<sup>71</sup> [Name withheld] to Minnette Doderer, February 25, 1969, MDP, box 2. In subsequent years, many letter writers stopped signing their names when they wrote hostile letters to physicians and legislators. See MDP, box 1, folder: Abortion correspondence, 1974-1982 and Takey Crist Papers (Duke University Special Collections, Durham, N. Carolina), box 17, Hate mail, 1974-1983 folder.

<sup>72</sup> “Right to Life Activity in Iowa,” *Iowans for Medical Control of Abortion Newsletter* December 1972, vol. 3, no. 5, 2, MDP, box 4, folder: Research material, 1968-1981. The Catholic Church spent millions of dollars nationwide to defeat abortion liberalization efforts on the state level. See “Abortion Referenda Defeated in Michigan and North Dakota,” *Iowans for Medical Control*, 1.

<sup>73</sup> “Right to Life Activity in Iowa,” 1.

1971, Iowa priests urged congregants to lobby state legislators against reforming abortion laws.<sup>74</sup>

Both times Iowa legislators sought to liberalize the state's abortion law they failed, even though a majority of Iowans favored legalizing the procedure. Pro-choice legislators offered an explanation that would become commonplace in the post-Roe period: opponents of abortion were better-organized and more assertive lobbyists than supporters of abortion rights. Senator Doderer believed that the emotional, personal nature of abortion prompted legislators to rely on their constituents' testimonials more than medical or legal reports, which seemed abstract. Supporters of pro-choice legislation, in contrast, had failed to prepare "their own memberships for the successful sponsorship and necessary lobbying that a bill of this nature requires," Senator Doderer concluded.<sup>75</sup> "All the records of deaths of women who obtained illegal abortions in the past never persuaded votes in the legislative halls." Instead, "The statistics on how many letters were received by law makers for and against were the statistics that counted. The number of voters who showed up at meetings and demanded to know how the candidate would vote on legalizing abortion was what counted."<sup>76</sup> On the eve of *Roe v. Wade*, twelve states and Washington, D.C., had

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<sup>74</sup> MariAnn Fernando to Legislator Elizabeth Shaw, January 9, 1973. Elizabeth Shaw Papers, box 1, IWA. In this letter, Fernando notes a 1971 sermon delivered at her West Des Moines, Iowa, church. She concludes the letter by telling her state legislator, "Catholic beliefs should not be forced on others by the sword or by the law." See also "House File 134" February 3, 1971, AJ Papers, box 1, IWA. While the Catholic leadership and select priests urged congregants to oppose abortion rights, many ordinary Catholics in Iowa believed that the state should not regulate such a private matter. Some Catholic women observed that anti-abortion measures were inherently discriminatory because they regulated the decisions and behavior of women. "I am Catholic and know there are many other Catholics for this bill," and Iowa Catholic woman wrote to her legislator. "The women of Iowa aren't a bunch of stooges like some senators make them out to be. I think the decision should be strictly a personal thing." "An Iowa Woman" to Minnette Doderer, February 24, 1969, MDP, box 2.

<sup>75</sup> Minnette Doderer, "In My Opinion . . ." *Planned Parenthood of Iowa Newsletter*, April 1969, 2, MDP, box 1, abortion, 1967-1968.

<sup>76</sup> Minnette Doderer, Speech before Planned Parenthood of Southeast Iowa, ca. 1968, 2, MDP, box 1, abortion, 1967-1968.

liberalized or repealed their abortion laws.<sup>77</sup> The successes of Iowa's Catholic anti-abortion coalition demonstrated that popular support for reform was not enough to ensure state legislatures would reform abortion laws. Some supporters of abortion rights grew frustrated with the piecemeal, state-by-state approach of liberalizing abortion laws and turned their attention to the Supreme Court, which had the authority to articulate the right to abortion for all American women.

### Litigating Abortion Rights

By the early 1970s, the nascent anti-abortion movement was still quite small. Abortion opponents concentrated their efforts on legislative proposals to liberalize state abortion laws. As state legislative abortion battles raged, pro-choice coalitions mobilized to challenge restrictive abortion laws in the courts. Abortion opponents were unprepared and too poorly organized to mount an effective defense of anti-abortion laws that had shaped Americans' experiences with the procedure for over a century.

The U.S. Supreme Court was first asked to consider abortion in 1971, in *United States v. Vuitch*.<sup>78</sup> Dr. Milan M. Vuitch, an émigré from Serbia, performed thousands of abortions in the U.S. after he arrived in 1957. While most physicians who provided illicit abortions did so quietly, Vuitch advertised his services openly and refused to offer local law enforcement officials hush money.<sup>79</sup> Vuitch understood the vulnerability of the District of Columbia abortion law, which allowed physicians to perform abortions when a woman's life or health was in jeopardy. He chose to operate as though he were performing a legitimate surgical procedure. During the 1960s, abortion referral networks sent thousands

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<sup>77</sup> Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman's Choice*, 103. In 1967, the Colorado General Assembly passed the first abortion reform law in the nation. Lader, *Abortion II*, xi.

<sup>78</sup> 402 U.S. 62 (1972)

<sup>79</sup> Dr. Vuitch was noted for his brash demeanor. "The medical brass always says I'm five-foot-ten-inches tall, but got a six-foot mouth," he liked to tell supporters. "I'm a tough guy, an old fox. I'm breaking the way...getting rid of medical absurdities." Quoted in Lader, *Abortion II*, 8.



of women to Dr. Vuitch's clinic, located a few blocks from the White House. "It was the boldness of [his] approach, the refusal to pander to the old abortion system with secrecy and police payoffs, that assured his eventual arrest," explained abortion reform activist Lawrence Lader.<sup>80</sup> On May 1, 1968, the fifty-three year-old surgeon was arrested at his clinic, after a disgruntled husband of a patient served as an undercover informant to the police. In 1969, Vuitch was indicted for violating the District of Columbia's abortion law, enacted by Congress in 1901, which made it a crime for physicians to perform abortions except when maternal life or health was in jeopardy.<sup>81</sup>

Flanked by civil liberties attorneys, Dr. Vuitch filed a motion to dismiss the indictment on the grounds that the Washington, D.C. law was unconstitutionally vague. Unlike Sherri Finkbine's experience in Arizona, where physicians were permitted to perform an abortion only if it was necessary to save a pregnant woman's life, physicians in Washington, D.C. had more discretion to determine when it was appropriate to perform the procedure. A handful of jurisdictions, including the District of Columbia, permitted abortion to preserve women's health.<sup>82</sup> According to Vuitch, the law did not define *health* clearly. It was difficult, if not impossible, for physicians to determine whether they were complying with the law as they assessed the short-term and long-term dangers individual women faced when confronted with unwanted pregnancies.<sup>83</sup>

Supporters of abortion law reform were delighted when Federal District Judge Gerhard A. Gesell dismissed the indictment on November 10, 1969, ruling that the vague

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>81</sup> Linda Greenhouse, *Becoming Justice Blackmun: Harry Blackmun's Supreme Court Journey* (New York: Times Books, 2005), 75.

<sup>82</sup> Greenhouse and Siegel, *Before Roe v. Wade*, 3.

<sup>83</sup> For example, in the late 1960s, two Stanford University researchers submitted eleven petitions requesting therapeutic abortions to twenty-six California hospitals. Not one petition was approved or rejected unanimously. Lader, *Abortion II*, 14.

health standard of the D.C. statute violated Dr. Vuitch's right to due process of law. Vuitch resumed his surgical practice, which included providing abortions, and became a cause célèbre in the national pro-choice movement. The Department of Justice responded to Judge Gesell's ruling—the first federal court decision to declare an abortion law unconstitutional—by appealing directly to the Supreme Court. *Vuitch* was first—and the only—abortion case presented before the Supreme Court before *Roe* and *Doe*.

On April 21, 1971, the Supreme Court issued its decision in *United States v. Vuitch*. Justice Hugo L. Black wrote the two-part majority opinion. The first part overturned the federal district court's decision, ruling that the D.C. statute was not void for vagueness. This meant that the government's prosecution of Dr. Vuitch could proceed. However, the second part of the decision gave supporters of abortion rights reason to be hopeful. At the insistence of Justice Harry Blackmun, Justice Black directed lower courts to interpret the meaning of *health* broadly. This gave physicians the latitude to consider both the physical and mental health of women seeking to terminate their pregnancies. The day after issuing the *Vuitch* decision, the justices voted to hear the two cases that would transform the abortion law in the United States: *Doe v. Bolton* and *Roe v. Wade*.

*Doe* and *Roe* arose from lawsuits spearheaded by abortion-rights advocates who wanted to test state laws that outlawed abortion except in rare circumstances. *Roe v. Wade* challenged a Texas law, enacted in 1854 and amended in 1911, which made it a crime for physicians to perform abortions except “for the purpose of saving the life of the mother.”<sup>84</sup> By 1972, four states and the District of Columbia permitted abortion for any reason (commonly referred to as “abortion on demand”). Thirteen states permitted abortion to protect a woman's physical and mental health (physicians did not need to demonstrate that a woman would die without the procedure.) Mississippi permitted abortions in cases of rape or when the life of the mother was threatened. Twenty-nine states, including Texas,

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<sup>84</sup> Greenhouse, *Becoming Justice Blackmun*, 78.

permitted abortion only if it was necessary to save a woman's life. Three states—Louisiana, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania—prohibited all abortions.<sup>85</sup>

“Jane Roe,” the plaintiff in the case, was Norma McCorvey. In 1969, McCorvey, a divorced, twenty-one year-old high school dropout, became pregnant and wanted an abortion. “No legitimate doctor in Texas would touch me,” she later recalled. “I found only one doctor who offered to abort me for \$500. Only he didn't have a license, and I was scared to turn my body over to him. So there I was—pregnant, unmarried, unemployed, alone, and stuck.”<sup>86</sup> McCorvey carried the pregnancy to term and gave up the baby for adoption.

In 1970, three women from Austin, Texas, approached Sarah Weddington, who had recently graduated from the University of Texas School of Law, and explained that they wanted to organize a problem pregnancy center. They feared they might be charged with violating Texas's abortion law if they helped women find abortion services. Weddington concurred with the women's concern that they were vulnerable to prosecution, and she agreed to help them challenge the state's abortion law. Next, Weddington called her good friend and former classmate, Linda Coffee, who lived in Dallas. Coffee had just been approached by a colleague who had assisted Norma McCorvey in her search for adoptive parents for her baby. That colleague introduced McCorvey to Coffee. McCorvey agreed to sign on to the case, using the pseudonym Jane Roe. On March 3, 1970, Weddington and Coffee filed suit in a federal district court against Henry Wade, the criminal district attorney for Dallas County, Texas. They claimed the Texas abortion

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<sup>85</sup> Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1993), 75.

<sup>86</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 5. In the mid-1990s, McCorvey became an evangelical Christian and an anti-abortion activist. See her memoir, Norma McCorvey and Gary Thomas, *Won by Love: Norma McCorvey, Jane Roe of Roe v. Wade, Speaks Out for the Unborn as She Shares Her New Conviction for Life* (Nashville, Tenn.: T. Nelson Publishers, 1997).

law had violated Jane Roe's Constitutional right to privacy and caused her to suffer a legal injury.<sup>87</sup> Three years later, Weddington reflected on their undertaking:

...[Linda Coffee and I] were new lawyers, we had been out of school about a year and a half or so, and in law school you are taught that when something is wrong, you go out and file a suit. And so we really filed it without ever . . . thinking about the possibility of going all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. We were optimistic about our chances of winning, but I don't think either of us fully understood the implications of what we were doing.<sup>88</sup>

While *Roe v. Wade* made its way through the federal court system in Texas, a case in Georgia was raising similar questions about the constitutionality of state laws that restricted a woman's right to abortion. The Georgia law, passed in 1968, was similar to abortion reform laws passed in several states during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It reformed the previous anti-abortion law by permitting abortion only after a woman had been examined by three independent physicians who agreed a pregnancy would likely to endanger a woman's health or that the fetus would likely be born with grave physical or mental disabilities. The 1968 law also permitted abortion if the pregnancy resulted from rape. Abortion rights advocates sought to expand the limited rights the Georgia General Assembly had offered women and secure legal recognition for a woman's basic right to abortion.

The federal district court in Texas and the district court in Georgia declared their state anti-abortion laws unconstitutional. The three-judge court in Texas ruled that the

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<sup>87</sup> The "right to privacy" was a recent and controversial legal doctrine when *Roe* was filed. The ruling in *Griswold v. Connecticut* struck down the Connecticut law that prohibited the dissemination of information about contraception on the grounds that it violated the marital right to privacy. Justice William O. Douglas explained that although the Bill of Rights does not explicitly mention the word "privacy," a constitutional right to privacy existed in the "penumbras," or shadows, of the First, Third, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments. Concurring opinions pointed to the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Ninth Amendment's provision for unenumerated rights "retained by the people." *Griswold v. Connecticut* 381 U.S. 479 (1965). See Dudziak, "Just Say No.,"; John W. Johnson, *Griswold v. Connecticut: Birth Control and the Constitutional Right of Privacy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005).

<sup>88</sup> Sarah Weddington, "Oral Memoirs of Sarah Weddington," interview by Patricia Duke, transcript, March 30, 1973, 2, Baylor University Institute for Oral History (Waco, Texas).

Texas law was vague because physicians could not determine when and under what circumstances they might be prosecuted.<sup>89</sup> Both courts invoked the right to privacy outlined in *Griswold v. Connecticut*, which held that married couples have a constitutional right to use contraception.<sup>90</sup> The courts reasoned that the Ninth Amendment extends a right to marital privacy, and that abortion should join birth control as a private, marital right. Both courts struck down their state's restrictive laws, but neither issued an injunction to forbid the state from enforcing the anti-abortion laws. As a result, the attorneys who challenged their states' laws appealed directly to the Supreme Court.<sup>91</sup>

On January 22, 1973, the Supreme Court handed down decisions in *Roe v. Wade* and *Doe v. Bolton*. In between the time the cases were first heard before the Court in 1971 and were decided two years later, the Court determined that *Roe* would become the lead case, and that the principles of *Roe* would guide *Doe*.<sup>92</sup> Writing for the majority in the *Roe* decision, Justice Blackmun affirmed a woman's right to abortion in consultation with her physician during the first trimester of pregnancy.<sup>93</sup> The right to privacy, he explained, extended to women's decisions about whether to terminate pregnancies. Blackmun, who conducted extensive research at the Mayo Clinic's medical library in Rochester, Minnesota, in preparation for the decision, clarified the standards that physicians should use to interpret the "health" risks associated with pregnancy. (Recall that debates over the meaning of "health" had figured prominently in the majority opinion in *United States v. Vuitch*, and in hospital abortion petitions like Sherri Finkibine's.) Doctors should consider

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<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> 381 U.S. 479 (1965). That right was extended to unmarried persons in 1972, with *Eisenstadt v. Baird* 405 U.S. 438 (1972). See Patricia Baird-Windle and Eleanor J Bader, *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin's Press, 2001).

<sup>91</sup> Greenhouse, *Becoming Justice Blackmun*, 78-79.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>93</sup> *Roe v. Wade*, 410 U.S. 113 (1973).

the effects of an unwanted pregnancy on a woman's health, including direct physical and psychological harm and the long-term stresses of caring for unwanted children.

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Roe v. Wade* did not prohibit states from regulating abortion altogether. During the first trimester of pregnancy (the first thirteen weeks after conception), the state could not regulate abortion except to require that physicians perform the procedure. Blackmun pinpointed the end of the first trimester as the moment when the state's interests in a fetus might take precedence over a woman's right to privacy. During the second trimester (weeks thirteen to twenty-six), states could regulate where the procedure was performed, and during the final trimester, states could limit the procedure provided that they allow for abortion in cases where a woman's health was in jeopardy. According to the decision, "This is so because of the now-established medical fact . . . that until the end of the first trimester mortality in abortion may be less than mortality in normal childbirth. It follows that, from and after this point, a State may regulate the abortion procedure to the extent that the regulation reasonably relates to the preservation and protection of maternal health."<sup>94</sup>

Many were surprised by the precision of the ruling, which initially, seemed to make clear when the state's interests in protecting the health of pregnant women begins. Sarah Weddington recalled, "I really had not expected so comprehensive an opinion. Justice Blackmun went at great length into the medical history, social standards ... [and] opinions of medical profession . . ." She continued, ". . . I, in some ways, had not expected that much to be in the opinion."<sup>95</sup>

By tying the moment when states may regulate abortion to viability, the Court left plenty of room for pro-choice and anti-abortion activists to make claims about the role of the state in affirming or preventing a woman's right to abortion during the final six

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Weddington, "Oral Memoirs of Sarah Weddington," 8.

months of a pregnancy. Weddington reflected that the decision meant that women had a *fundamental* right to abortion, but not an *absolute* right—“there are some bounds,” she remarked.<sup>96</sup> The decision took seriously the need to reform abortion laws, but did not guarantee a woman’s right to have access to the procedure. In other words, hospitals were free to make their own judgments about if or when they would allow physicians to perform the procedure, physicians were permitted to refuse to provide abortions, and states and insurance companies had no obligation to subsidize the procedure.

When Kristin Luker conducted groundbreaking research on women in the anti-abortion movement in the mid-1980s, she found that for many, *Roe* came like a “bolt out of the blue”<sup>97</sup> For the small coalition of Catholic men and women who had been agitating against legal abortion since the 1960s, however, the decision was hardly shocking. Myrna Shaneyfelt reflected on *Roe*: “For those of us involved, this was the direction [where the courts were headed.] It was not a surprise.”<sup>98</sup> When legislatures, and later, the court legalized abortion, thousands of Catholics and Protestants who opposed abortion yet remained on the sidelines of the movement became engaged in the movement. A member of a Right-to-Life chapter formed in New York in 1970, just as the legislature liberalized the state’s abortion law reflected, “I remember that someone said that they had seen something on the TV about the move to legalize abortion. We never felt like we were going to be involved . . . We thought our legislators would take care of it. But they didn’t.”<sup>99</sup> Indeed,

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>97</sup> Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 126.

<sup>98</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Craig and O’Brien, *Abortion and American Politics*, 42. According to Kristen Luker, “Perhaps the most important reason why pro-life activists were not well prepared to resist abortion reform was that they simply couldn’t believe such a [pro-choice] movement could get very far. They tacitly assumed that the unsavory connotation of abortion rested on a deep belief in the sacredness of embryonic life, and they found it hard to understand how such a belief could be changed so quickly. They counted on public opinion to be outraged and were stunned when most of the public was either unaware or unconcerned.” *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, 130.

just as efforts to liberalize abortion laws in individual states prompted local church groups to begin organizing, *Roe* prompted casual opponents of legal abortion to join in a national effort to combat legal abortion. Just months after *Roe* was handed down, Myrna Shaneyfelt organized a Love Life Convention in Oregon to develop strategies for protesting the ruling. She expected to see the same dozen or so people who'd been attending pro-life meetings in the region for several years. Instead, over one hundred people, mostly Catholics, showed up, eager to agitate against abortion. Thousands of women would soon organize and lead national, state, and local professional and grassroots anti-abortion organizations, making the anti-abortion movement the largest moral reform movement of the twentieth century.



## CHAPTER TWO

MARJORY MECKLENBURG: ORGANIZING THE NATIONAL ANTI-  
ABORTION MOVEMENT, 1968-1982

Marjory Mecklenburg was a pragmatic opponent to legal abortion. Described by one journalist as “statuesque, five feet, eight and a half inches, with blondish-brown hair and amber-brown eyes, [with] a broad Grace Kelly-like face” Mecklenburg became a minor celebrity within the anti-abortion movement during its formative years, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>1</sup> She was widely recognized as a calm, articulate opponent of abortion when she spoke before crowds gathered at political rallies and church meetings across the U.S. She represented the national anti-abortion movement on the television programs *The Today Show* and *The Mike Douglas Show* and in televised debates against Betty Friedan, Lawrence Lader and John D. Rockefeller, III.<sup>2</sup> Her career in the movement spanned nearly two decades. During that time, her position on birth control and her attitude about the relationship between the government and anti-abortion activism changed, as social conservatives became legitimate, powerful figures in U.S. politics. A savvy rhetorician whose opportunism sometimes opened doors and often shut them, Marjory Mecklenburg was ever the pragmatist.

Marjory Malo was born in 1935 in Duluth, Minnesota.<sup>3</sup> As a high school student in suburban Minneapolis the 1950s, Malo was active in church organizations and student

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” *The Catholic Digest* June 1973. Another journalist described her as “a tall, slim woman with brown eyes and light brown hair.” Kathryn Boardman, “Chance Meeting Led to Anti-Abortion Drive,” *St. Louis Dispatch* July 4, 1973, 4. A reporter for the *Washington Times* described her as a “tall, handsome, Nordic-looking doctor’s wife cum activist cum bureaucrat [who] is a conciliatory reformer.” Sue Mullin, “The Lady Behind the Squeal,” *The Washington Times*, December 28, 1982, 1B. Pro-choice activist Lawrence Lader said that Mecklenburg represented “perhaps our most dangerous opponent, a good-looking woman.” David J. Garrow, *Liberty and Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of “Roe v. Wade”* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 579.

<sup>2</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life.”

<sup>3</sup> Joan Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” and Ann Baker, “Mecklenburg Family ‘Almost Perfect,’” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 10, 1983, C1.

government. Through her work with 4-H, she became the Minnesota Health Queen. She also received prizes for oratory on the high school debate team, where she met her future husband, Fred Mecklenburg.<sup>4</sup> After graduation, Marjory and Fred attended the University of Minnesota and Marjory majored in home economics. In 1957, Marjory graduated from the University of Minnesota, Fred and Marjory married, Fred entered medical school, and Marjory gave birth to the first of four children. For the next five years, Mecklenburg taught junior and senior high school courses on home economics, family life, and child development. She said of her experiences, “When you’re that kind of teacher, girls who have problems come to you. I had a lot of firsthand experience with some of the heartaches of the unwed, pregnant teenager.”<sup>5</sup> While her husband served as a physician in the Army during the Vietnam War, Marjory served as president of a cooperative nursery school and was involved in the PTA. She later recalled, “[I was] just a housewife. Oh, and I played tennis a lot.”<sup>6</sup>

Mecklenburg credited her husband for helping her to understand that abortion was wrong. She explained that she first learned of abortion by reading one of Fred’s medical journals. Initially, she thought women should have the right to choose whether to have an abortion, a belief that Fred Mecklenburg did not share. “And then because Fred and I were old debaters, we debated this issue point by point.”<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, she trusted Fred’s expert knowledge of the medical dimensions of the procedure more than her own limited

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<sup>4</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life.” Some accounts state that Marjory and Fred met at a Presbyterian Sunday school. See Ann Baker, “Mecklenburg Family ‘Almost Perfect,’” C1.

<sup>5</sup> Marilyn Gardner, “Abortion Foe Sees the Human Side,” *The Milwaukee Journal* May 5, 1976, and Joan Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” ACCL, box 35, “ACCL Administrative File: M. Mecklenburg, 1973-1976 (1). See also Patricia Ohmans, “Obsession: Enough About Me. What About You?” *Machete*, 1980, ACCL, box 35, Marjory Mecklenburg.

<sup>6</sup> Marilyn Gardner, “Abortion Foe Sees the Human Side,” and Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life.”

<sup>7</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life.”

knowledge of women who did not wish to continue with their pregnancies. “I discovered he was against permissive abortion and that as an obstetrician he knew exactly what abortion was all about. Fred understood that it was the taking of what was indisputably a human life.” Once she defined abortion as an immoral act, Marjory Mecklenburg felt obliged to act. “I began to reject the violent, destructive solution, and to search for better solutions to the very real problem that exists,” she explained.<sup>8</sup>

### Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life

In 1968, Marjory and Fred attended their first anti-abortion meeting at the home of their neighbor, Alice Hartle. Hartle had been inspired to begin organizing an anti-abortion group after she watched a woman who had contracted German measles while pregnant testify before a committee at the Minnesota State Legislature. The woman explained that her daughter was born with severe birth defects and that she wished she could have exercised the right to obtain a legal abortion. Alice Hartle told the group assembled in her living room that she, too, had contracted German measles while pregnant and that her daughter, Mary, was born blind. Mary went on to attend college and brought immeasurable joy to her family. Hartle maintained that her daughter was living proof that the justifications used to legalize abortion were wrong. She convinced the group of twenty-five, five of whom were male physicians, that they needed to organize to fight against attempts to liberalize state abortion laws. That evening, Fred Mecklenburg was elected the first president of Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life (MCCL).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” n.p. and Gardner, “Abortion Foe Sees the Human Side” n.p. and Gloria Ford, “Marjory Mecklenburg: Mrs. ‘Alternatives to Abortion,” *NRLN* May 26, 1983, special supplement. Alice Hartle would later become the first editor of the *NRLN*. Dave Andrusko, “Alice Hartle, Pro-Life ‘Founding Mother,’ Dies at 70,” *NRLN* December 5, 1985, 1.

Some have questioned Mecklenburg's characterization of the grassroots origins of MCCL. Scholars Frederick S. Jaffe, Barbara L. Lindheim, and Philip R. Lee contend that the Minnesota Catholic Church, hoping to recruit non-Catholics to the movement, created MCCL. According to the trio, "A review of the records shows, however, that the Minnesota [Catholic] Church in fact *did* invent MCCL—which has been cited as the model for the independent, congressional-district prolife groups in the *Pastoral Plan*."<sup>10</sup>

Although MCCL members described the organization as ecumenical, the financial, organizational, and membership ties to established Catholic anti-abortion networks provided an important foundation for the group. Conservative Catholic priests welcomed MCCL leaders into their churches to recruit members. In 1977, the Minnesota dioceses contributed \$12,000 to the organization. Reverend James Hahn, a pastor of Holy Spirit Catholic Church explained why MCCL leaders described the organization as non-sectarian: "A lay person has more credibility. When people see a guy coming up in a clerical collar, they think he's just carrying the party line."<sup>11</sup> If indeed the Catholic Church were looking for non-Catholic spokespeople to promote the new anti-abortion organization, Methodists Fred and Marjory Mecklenburg fit the bill.

The legalization of abortion nationally prompted activists to transfer their local and statewide efforts to end abortion to the national scene. Shortly after *Roe v. Wade* was handed down in January 1973, Fred resigned his post with MCCL to serve as the first chair of the board of the National Right to Life Committee. Marjory succeeded him as president of MCCL, which by then included 17,000 dues-paying members from 13,000 families

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<sup>10</sup> Frederick S. Jaffe, Barbara L. Lindheim, and Philip R. Lee, *Abortion Politics: Private Morality and Public Policy* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1981), 80.

<sup>11</sup> James Hahn, qt. in Sturdevant, "Anti-Abortion Activist in St. Cloud was 'Tested' with Her Fifteenth Child," *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 17, 1978, in Jaffe, Lindheim, and Lee, *Abortion Politics*, 81.

organized in 115 chapters.<sup>12</sup> During her tenure as president, MCCL was considered one of the best-organized, efficient anti-abortion organizations both nationally and internationally.<sup>13</sup> MCCL chapters raised money by organizing bake sales, polka dances, and parties. Historian Keith Cassidy has noted, “an astonishing number of later national figure in the pro-life movement came out of [Minnesota]” due to the strength of pro-life organizing during the late 1960s and 1970s in the state.<sup>14</sup>

The Mecklenburgs were part of a small contingent of anti-abortion activists who supported government-funded programs that provided birth control. As individual states began to liberalize abortion laws in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Mecklenburg decried women’s legal right to abortion but defended the use of birth control. Speaking before an audience of 1,000 assembled for the North Dakota Right to Life Association Interfaith Clergy Conference in 1972, Mecklenburg told the crowd of priests, ministers, and lay religious figures in clear terms that women had the right to use birth control devices.<sup>15</sup> Later that year, she delivered a similar message to the Republican National Convention Platform Committee.<sup>16</sup> Women with access to effective, affordable forms of contraceptives would be less likely to have unwanted pregnancies, Mecklenburg predicted. In 1974, she explained, “In most states there is a need for additional help in providing low cost, effective family planning. It is the right of men and women to use [birth control]. There

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<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Boardman, “Chance Meeting Led to Anti-Abortion Drive,” *St. Paul Dispatch* July 4, 1973, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Anonymous to Marjory Mecklenburg, February 19, 1975, ACCL Records, box 35, Mecklenburg.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Cassidy, “The Right to Life Movement: Sources, Development, and Strategies,” in *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 140.

<sup>15</sup> “Conference on Abortion Attracts 1,000 Persons,” *Morning Pioneer* April 18, 1972, 3, ACCL Records, box 35, Administrative File: M. Mecklenburg 1973-76 (1).

<sup>16</sup> Gloria Ford, “Marjory Mecklenburg,” *NRLN* May 26, 1983, special supplement, np.

are proper ways to reduce unwanted pregnancies without destroying living human offspring.”<sup>17</sup> She believed that it was short-sighted to call for an end to abortions without providing a means for preventing unwanted pregnancies, “We can’t just cut off all abortions and have nothing else to offer.”<sup>18</sup>

### History of the NRLC

In the weeks following Fred’s 1973 appointment to the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), Marjory Mecklenburg became a member of the executive committee of the NRLC and was charged with establishing a liaison office in Washington, D.C. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops had been speaking out against state efforts to liberalize abortion laws since 1966. They appointed Monsignor James McHugh, the head of the Family Life Bureau, to monitor statewide abortion initiatives. McHugh formed an advisory committee, which, in 1968, became the National Right to Life Committee. During the first few years of operation, the NRLC served as a clearinghouse for information about abortion law, policy, and funding. In 1970, the membership held its first annual convention.<sup>19</sup> The appointment of the Mecklenburgs helped to transform the NRLC into a professional organization, complete with a permanent staff and a mission to lobby Congress for a constitutional amendment to prohibit legal abortion in the United States.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> “We, the People’ Can End Abortions” *Catholic Universe Bulletin*, May 24, 1974, ACCL Records, box 35, Administrative File: M. Mecklenburg 1973-76 (1).

<sup>18</sup> Baker, “Mecklenburg Family ‘Almost Perfect,’” 1C.

<sup>19</sup> Cassidy, “The Right to Life Movement,” 140.

<sup>20</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” n.p. See Claudia Koonz’s analysis of post-Cold War conservative women activists in Europe, the former Soviet bloc, and the United States, “Motherhood and Politics on the Far Right,” in *The Politics of Motherhood: Activist Voices from Left to Right*, eds. Alexis Jetter, Annelise Orleck, and Diana Taylor (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997): 229-246. Koonz observes that women Christian activists who advocated a return to a real or imagined past were some of the most effective users of modern technologies and forms of communication, including “direct mail, electronic mail, videocassette, toll-free numbers, televangelism, and radio talk shows.” 235.

Just as Marjory Mecklenburg had succeeded her husband as president of Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, so too did she become the chair of the board of directors for the NRLC after his tenure. In the summer of 1973, 1,300 delegates from forty states met in Detroit, Michigan, to elect the thirty-seven year-old Marjory Mecklenburg as chair of the largest anti-abortion organization in the nation.<sup>21</sup> Mildred Jefferson was the keynote speaker. Other founding members included Dr. John C. Willke and his wife, Barbara; Keith Vanderhoef, an attorney from Seattle; Edward Golden; and Judith Fink.<sup>22</sup> Eunice Shriver, a devout Catholic, wife of Sargent Shriver, and daughter of Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr., sent a letter of support, which strongly condemned the recent national legalization of abortion and commended the NRLC “for leading a righteous battle to restore the sacred meaning of life to our laws and institutions.”<sup>23</sup> In her acceptance speech, Mecklenburg promised that her first priority as chair of the NRLC board would be to push Congress to adopt a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion and euthanasia—a promise that she would soon regret making.

NRLC leaders wanted to unite hundreds of regional and local grassroots organizations into one streamlined, disciplined and hierarchical structure. Over the course of 1973, they transformed the NRLC into a professional, bureaucratic organization. By September 1973, the organization was composed of nine committees that tackled issues including education, state organizing, education, medical and legal advising, media relations, finance, and public policy.<sup>24</sup> Judith Fink, a consultant to the executive

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<sup>21</sup> “City Woman to Head National Right to Life,” *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 12, 1973, 3B.

<sup>22</sup> These members did not know one another prior to the organization of the NRLC. Laura R. Woliver, “National Right to Life Committee,” in *U.S. Women’s Interest Groups: Institutional Profiles*, ed. Sarah Slavin, (Westport, Connecticut: Westport Press, 1995), 417-418.

<sup>23</sup> Eunice Shriver to NRLC, June 1973; and Itinerary, National Right to Life Convention June 6-8 1973, ACCL Records, box 6, 1973.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Fink to Intergroup Liaison Committee, NRLC Inc., September 7, 1973, ACCL Records, box 4, NRLC 1973(5).

committee, envisioned the NRLC as the centerpiece of a broad, populist movement. In 1973, NRLC executive committee members circulated a memorandum that outlined the characteristics of an ideal director for the organization. The missive warned, “don’t hire someone you have to ‘hide’ because he is elderly, single, Roman Catholic, hates children, a member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and a ‘Bircher’ who thinks birth control is murder. Some smart reporter is going to flush out these newsworthy items.”<sup>25</sup> The director, the writer advised, should have an impressive vocabulary, be collegial, flexible, and able to mingle with a wide variety of people, from “sociologists and professors, [to] lawyers [and] politicians, [to] housewives.”<sup>26</sup>

One of the ways NRLC leaders increased the profile of the organization was to undertake projects that made the group a clearinghouse for information. In 1973, the NRLC began to compile and review of books, sermons, and articles written about abortion. College interns organized the NRLC’s first library and a committee was formed to review anti-abortion literature for the *National Right to Life News*. By establishing a systematic method for evaluating and storing information related to abortion, the NRLC amassed an in-house research base for the organization’s political action and press relations divisions.

NRLC leaders identified people who opposed abortion rights, whether they were affiliated with an anti-abortion grassroots organization or not, and persuaded them to join the organization.<sup>27</sup> By welcoming all groups that opposed abortion, the NRLC established itself as the largest anti-abortion organization in the United States, and the first organization to have a nationwide membership base. In exchange, the NRLC helped

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<sup>25</sup> W.A.S. Jr. to NRLC leaders, June 20, 1973, 1, ACCL Records, box 5, NRLC—Board and Executive Committee—1973(3).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Judith Fink, memo, September 7, 1973, ACCL Records, box 4.



affiliates to establish tax-exempt status with the Internal Revenue Service and supplied local groups with recruitment videos and literature.<sup>28</sup> By 1976, the NRLC claimed to have over one million members.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the decade, fifty board members provided directives to state chapters across the United States.<sup>30</sup>

The nationwide anti-abortion organizations that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s aimed to make the issue one of broad religious, not just Catholic, concern. Mecklenburg, a Protestant, challenged the image of the typical anti-abortion activists. She stated that her decision to join the movement had little to do with any direct encounters with ecclesiastical authorities in the Catholic Church, “I never even knew a priest or sister before [I joined the anti-abortion movement.]”<sup>31</sup> She argued that abortion needed to be addressed as a human rights, not strictly a religious, issue. “To me the crux of the issue is that abortion is the killing of a human who can’t protect himself. Obviously, Christians and all humanitarians should help those who can’t defend themselves.” For Mecklenburg, involvement in the anti-abortion movement was motivated by her desire for social justice, not as a fulfillment of religious doctrine. “It is only if you feel that you have no responsibility, one for another, that you can stand by and let another human life be attacked.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Mecklenburg was atypical of most anti-abortion activists during this period. In the years immediately following *Roe*, most large Protestant organizations,

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<sup>28</sup> Clyde Wilcox, “Feminists for Life,” in *U.S. Women’s Interest Groups: Institutional Profiles*, ed. Sarah Slavin (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 196.

<sup>29</sup> “Why New Uproar Over Abortions,” *US News & World Report*, March 1, 1976, 15. In 1975, the *National Right to Life News* mailing list had 10,000-12,000 names. Americans United for Life had a mailing list of 19,000 persons. Marjory Mecklenburg to Paul Ramsey, March 14, 1975, in Paul Ramsey Papers, hereafter PRP, box 1, Duke University Special Collections (Durham, North Carolina).

<sup>30</sup> Jeanne Miller, “Human Life Amendment Passage by 1983,” *National Right to Life News* July 21, 1980, 4.

<sup>31</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” n.p.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

publications, and notable figureheads, including The Southern Baptist Convention, *Christianity Today*, and Billy Graham expressed mild support for or ambivalence about legal abortion.<sup>33</sup>

Shortly after she was elected chair of the NRLC in 1973, Mecklenburg addressed the stereotype that the anti-abortion movement was primarily a male-dominated, Catholic-fueled movement. She explained, “Most people think abortion opponents are mostly Catholics, but five of our six national board members are Protestant women.”<sup>34</sup> When she spoke before the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. in 1974, Mecklenburg reiterated her disapproval of the press’ portrayal of the anti-abortion movement as a Catholic one: “We need to let the press see the kind of people working on this issue. We’re very concerned about our image in the press. I don’t feel it’s a religious issue.”<sup>35</sup> Mecklenburg chose her words carefully when she criticized the image of the anti-abortion movement as a Catholic movement. She wanted people of all religious stripes to join the movement and she did not want to alienate the thousands of Catholic volunteers who had served as the base of the movement since the late 1960s.

Mecklenburg emphasized that her growing list of leadership posts in the anti-abortion movement did not diminish her commitment to motherhood. When she was nominated to chair the NRLC in June 1973, Mecklenburg’s four children were sixteen, twelve, nine, and five years old. She balanced her personal and professional obligations, she explained, because her sixteen-year-old daughter, her mother-in-law, and a neighbor assisted with childcare. Mecklenburg was careful to note that she prioritized the needs of

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<sup>33</sup> Milton Gaither, *Homeschool: An American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 106.

<sup>34</sup> “City Woman to Head National Right to Life,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, June 12, 1973, 3B.

<sup>35</sup> David Kuhn, “Anti-abortion Lobby Seeks New Image,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, February 22, 1974, 5B.

her family over the success of her career. She promised to quit her activist work if her family needed her to return to the home. Her work in the anti-abortion movement, she announced, was fueled by her desire to make her children's futures more secure: "The kind of society they are going to live in will be determined by the decisions we make on this issue.... I just can't sit by and see human life being denigrated without fearing what the future holds for my children."<sup>36</sup>

Speaking to a local reporter from the from her comfortable home near Lake Harriet in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Mecklenburg demonstrated how she balanced her work in the anti-abortion movement with the demands of motherhood. In between washing barrels of freshly picked strawberries from her family's lake home near Red Wing, Minnesota, Mecklenburg spoke of the need to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. She described her work history and explained that she was not "the crusader type," but an issue-oriented activist. When asked what she had planned for the freshly washed strawberries lining her countertops, Mecklenburg replied, "Some for jam, some for short cake and some to eat with ice cream and sugar."<sup>37</sup>

Mecklenburg described herself as "a very independent woman" who objected to the way second-wave feminists linked abortion rights to the larger battle for gender equity. She explained, "Women want equality and fine, they should have equal opportunity, but it does not mean they should have equality at the expense of children. That's not equality; that's just a new tyranny!"<sup>38</sup> Women who supported abortion rights, she explained, were replicating the same unequal power dynamics that enabled patriarchy to flourish. Pro-choice feminists were supporting "the very thing that they're objecting to, they are turning

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<sup>36</sup> Mahowald, "Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life," n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Kathryn Boardman, "Chance Meeting Led to Anti-Abortion Drive," *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 4, 1973, 4.

<sup>38</sup> Bobbi Reiste, "Claims Pro-Abortion Issue Pushed by White, Upper-Class Males," circa 1972, ACCL Records, box 35, Marjory Mecklenburg, 1973-1976 (1).

around and aiming at a weaker member of society that cannot protect itself. They are gaining their liberty at the expense of the right of somebody else!”<sup>39</sup>

Legalized abortion was symptomatic of a cultural shift toward sexual permissiveness and apathy, according to Mecklenburg. She described a meeting with a church youth group, where she was disappointed to learn that a number of the young congregants were pro-choice. The young people “blandly discussed the survival of the fittest and letting the weak go to the wall. There was no sense of responsibility for the less fortunate.” For Mecklenburg, this apathy about social justice translated into a permissive attitude about abortion, “They agreed that abortion took a life but felt that if you did not want the baby and if it might be a hardship you could get rid of it.”<sup>40</sup>

Mecklenburg credited *Roe v. Wade* for jarring a complacent society awake. “Before the Supreme Court decision to legalize abortion, society as a whole had a lackadaisical attitude.” The decision forced ordinary Americans to consider how they felt about abortion and how legal abortion affected their interpretation of citizenship. “It took the conflict of the decision for people to see that something must be done to erase that decision which has come to be a perversion of our freedom as citizens of the United States.”<sup>41</sup> According to Mecklenburg, the Supreme Court’s decision thrust the nation in a direction that most people did not want to be flung, “Society as a whole is stunned by the callousness of the Supreme Court decision and see [it] as an usurpation of their legislative prerogative.”<sup>42</sup> It was not just the substance of *Roe* that offended her, but also the role the Court played in shaping social policy.

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> “We, the People’ Can End Abortions,” *Catholic Universe Bulletin* May 24, 1974.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

Work in the anti-abortion movement provided Mecklenburg with the opportunity to combat what she perceived to be the destructive, dehumanizing characteristics of modern American society. “I am personally very hopeful, that out of all this abortion debate, as painful, emotional, and draining as it sometimes is, will come a society that really cares, is more sensitive to human life and to all human life whether it is young or old, black or white, perfect or defective, wanted or unwanted.”<sup>43</sup> She believed that the anti-abortion movement would have to transform young people’s cynicism in order to succeed. “Everyone must help fight this antipeople, abortion mentality. It is not just the baby we are fighting for, it is all of our lives.” She also pressed people to consider how a society that supports abortion rights might treat other life issues. “The baby, because it is weak and ‘unwanted,’ is the first to go. But if we allow this mentality to take over, then someone else may be unwanted at some other time and for some other reason. The law may not protect their lives either.”<sup>44</sup>

Abortion, Mecklenburg believed, exacerbated gender inequality. In a lecture at Concordia College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1976, the forty-year-old explained that young people were encouraged to subscribe to “the Playboy philosophy of women as sex objects.” As a result, there is no “long term commitment, no real concern, no caring. When the woman becomes pregnant, the male’s solution is abortion.” Women also paid the higher price for non-monogamous, extramarital sex, she contended. “[Women] become jaded, they have no lasting relationships with anyone. They don’t trust men and they don’t feel good about themselves. Sex loses its beauty, the enriching quality it can bring to life and, instead, becomes destructive.”<sup>45</sup> Mecklenburg discussed public opinion polls that revealed that white, affluent men were most likely to favor legal abortion. She warned the

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<sup>43</sup> Mahowald, “Marjory Mecklenburg Is For Life,” n.p.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

group, “We had better take a good look at ourselves. We have a long way to go before we have a society that can deal with the woman and the child in an accepting, positive way.”<sup>46</sup>

Shortly after she became chair of the NRLC in 1973, the board, under the guidance of New Right politicians, pushed Mecklenburg to become the chief lobbyist for the proposed Human Life Amendment.<sup>47</sup> The Amendment would extend Constitutional protections to persons at the moment of fertilization. Supporters needed a two-thirds majority in both the House and Senate before submitting it to states for ratification.<sup>48</sup>

Although Mecklenburg supported legislative tactics for ending abortion, she was not enthusiastic about the proposed Amendment, contending that the time was not right for the NRLC to push such a bold initiative. The general public did not want the government to further regulate abortion. The HLA was devised by the National Council of Bishops, which funneled money into its political action committee, the National Committee for the Human Life Amendment.<sup>49</sup> If the NRLC wanted to be regarded as an ecumenical organization, Mecklenburg reasoned, it needed to offer legislative strategies that originated within professional, not religious circles. In December 1973, the NRLC

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<sup>46</sup> Gardner “Abortion Foe Sees the Human Side” *The Milwaukee Journal* n.p.

<sup>47</sup> Jane Sherron De Hart explains that in the mid-1970s, political pundit Kevin Phillips popularized the term “New Right” to refer to “the influx of new leaders and the strategy and networks of organizations they created to reach new constituencies which they mobilized around social issues such as abortion, the Equal Rights Amendment, pornography, and busing.” The New Right, like the Old Right, was allied with the Republican Party and conservative religious groups. Jane Sherron De Hart, “Gender on the Right: Meanings Behind the Existential Scream,” *Gender & History* 3, no. 3 (1991): 262.

<sup>48</sup> For an analysis of NRLC leaders’ support for the Human Life Amendment, see Anne V. Higgins, “Constitutional Convention: Idea Rooted in American History,” *NRLN* July 1979, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Victoria L. Johnson, “The Strategic Determinants of a Countermovement: The Emergence and Impact of Operation Rescue Blockades,” in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, ed. Jo Freeman and Victoria L. Johnson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 243; Margaret Ross Sammon, “The Politics of the U.S. Catholic Bishops: The Centrality of Abortion,” in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith & Power*, ed. Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 14.

board affirmed that it would make passage of the HLA the “first program priority,” Mecklenburg resigned and formed a new national anti-abortion group, American Citizens Concerned for Life.<sup>50</sup> Her tenure as chair of the NRLC lasted less than a year.

Marjory Mecklenburg launched The American Citizens Concerned for Life (ACCL) on August 21, 1974, a year and a half after the *Roe v. Wade* decision, and six months after she relinquished her post with the NRLC. A five-member board of directors and twenty area representatives led the organization during the first year. By 1975, ACCL, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota, added an advisory board composed of U.S. Congressmen who opposed abortion rights. Two years later, the organization’s board of directors expanded to include sixteen members.<sup>51</sup> According to Mecklenburg, the priorities of ACCL were largely guided by the will of ordinary members. Regular referenda allowed the membership to put forward initiatives they supported; a governing board selected initiatives for the organization to pursue based upon the results of the referenda.<sup>52</sup>

During its formative years, the organization focused on three areas: anti-abortion legislation, support services for pregnant women, and public education. ACCL distinguished itself from the NRLC by addressing the needs of pregnant women directly. While local Right-to-Life chapters counseled pregnant women independently, the NRLC refrained from providing services to pregnant women.<sup>53</sup> The first ACCL members had been active in the NRLC, but had grown frustrated with the organization’s emphasis on fetal protection. In an internal communiqué, two ACCL members advised, “It is crucially important to project [ACCL’s] image as one of advocacy rather than one of protection.

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<sup>50</sup> Cassidy, “The Right to Life Movement,” 144.

<sup>51</sup> “American Citizens Concerned for Life,” news release, November 30, 1977, ACCL Records, box 28.

<sup>52</sup> Marjory Mecklenburg to ACCL membership, 1976, ACCL Records, box 28, Mailing to Minnesota Non-Donors.

<sup>53</sup> Woliver, “National Right to Life Committee” 418.

Our society is responsive to questions of rights but less inclined to protection . . . We have to find a way to put fetal rights along side of civil rights, women’s rights, and minority rights.”<sup>54</sup> The ACCL leaders encouraged the fledgling organization to address concerns about modernity, technology, poverty, out-of wedlock birth, venereal disease, and the women’s liberation movement.

The leaders of national anti-abortion organizations rarely criticized one another publicly. Rather, subtle critiques of strategies, tactics, and goals of rival groups must be gleaned by paying careful attention to the memos, mass letters, and personal communiqués of leaders and ordinary members of national anti-abortion organizations. In a letter to prospective members of ACCL, Marjory Mecklenburg wrote, “You probably have wondered if anyone would ever pay attention to your ideas about respect for life. ACCL is paying attention. We exist because people like you asked for a new kind of pro-life organization,” describing ACCL as an organization “that shows consistent for human life, is ecumenical, bipartisan...and works just as hard to improve the quality of life as it does to protect the existence of life.”<sup>55</sup> The *National Catholic Reporter* described ACCL as an organization that was better prepared to address anti-abortion issues than organizations that focused solely on politics and legislation. Although the newspaper applauded ACCL’s support of the Human Life Amendment, the editors also appreciated ACCL’s realistic approach to ending abortion. The editors wrote, “ACCL’s position is that such an amendment is years away from reality and will not become a reality until public attitudes change and supportive services are widely available to women with problem pregnancies.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> William C. Hunt and Joseph A. Lange, “Strategy Considerations for ACCL Involvement in Abortion and Related Issues,” ca. 1977, ACCL Records, box 18, ACCL administrative file: organizational planning.

<sup>55</sup> Marjory Mecklenburg to prospective ACCL members, ca. 1980, ACCL Records, box 27, NCR America and Commonwealth Prospect Mailing June 1980.

<sup>56</sup> *National Catholic Reporter* May 25, 1979.



Mecklenburg sought to bolster ACCL's credibility on matters of public policy by reaching out to pro-life professionals rather than religious authorities. In ACCL's official publication, *Update*, staff writers featured professional, secular voices in the anti-abortion movement, including lawyers, physicians, and psychologists. ACCL leaders were eager to capitalize on the credibility these professional authorities might confer upon the debate over abortion as they sought to shift the discourse away from religion. In an article titled, "Psychiatrists: Abortion More Risky Than Childbirth," published in the March 1979 edition of *Update*, a staff writer summarized the findings of separate studies on the causes and effects of abortion conducted by nine physicians and psychologists.<sup>57</sup> Drawing upon discussions with patients in his private practice, one psychiatrist argued that women were rarely impregnated when raped by relatives. He contended: "while incest seems to be increasing, pregnancies resulting from incest are rare."<sup>58</sup> Another psychiatrist proposed that women who seek abortions do so as a result of mental illness, explaining, "abortion can be a symptom of underlying emotional disturbance in the woman and of a marital problem. Abortion would seem to be a symbol of failure."<sup>59</sup> A psychiatrist presented data that suggested a correlation between the legalization of abortion and increased rates of child abuse.<sup>60</sup> Another psychiatrist argued that physicians who perform abortions on

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<sup>57</sup> All of the physicians and psychologists had presented their findings at a symposium titled, "The Psychiatric Aspect of Abortion," sponsored by Americans United for Life, an anti-abortion legal organization based in Chicago, in the fall of 1978. Victor Rosenblum, a professor of law and political science at Northwestern University, founded Americans United for Life (AUL) in 1971. Journalist Cynthia Gorney observed that the early AUL was "the quieter, more genteel cousin to the unruly National Right to Life Committee." Rosenblum, like Jefferson, pointed to civil rights legislation and court rulings of the 1950s and 1960s as a basis for arguing for fetal rights. Gorney, *Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars*, (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 107 and 435-442.

<sup>58</sup> George E. Maloof, MD, qtd. in "Psychiatrists: Abortion More Risky Than Childbirth," ACCL *Update* March 1979, p. 3, ACCL Records, box 28, NCEA Membership Letter 7/12/1979.

<sup>59</sup> Howard Fisher, MD, qtd. in "Psychiatrists," 3.

<sup>60</sup> Philip G. Ney, MD presented this theory in a paper titled "Abortion and Child Abuse: Which Is Cause, Which Is Effect?" His findings were summarized in the article, "Psychiatrists," 3.

mentally ill women do more harm than good to women. In their study of one hundred fourteen cases, Dr. Myre Sim and Dr. Robert Neisser concluded “abortion is bad treatment for mental illness and for its prevention, and doctors who refuse to use it for such purposes are acting in their patients’ best interest.”<sup>61</sup> Marjory Mecklenburg forged relationships with academics and politicians in order to advance her vision of a comprehensive anti-abortion movement. Princeton University theologian Paul Ramsey and Eunice Shriver spoke at ACCL events during the mid-1970s.<sup>62</sup>

ACCL produced manuals that encouraged anti-abortion activists to engage directly with pregnant women seeking abortions. They explained how pro-life clinic counseling set them apart from other anti-abortion groups. “We do not demonstrate, picket, use signs, buttons, etc. This frightens them [pregnant women] off. We do not even state we are Right To Lifers. Right To Life = only out to save the baby.”<sup>63</sup> An important part of ACCL’s strategy was to make the organization relevant to pregnant women. “The only way you are going to save the child is through the mother. She is there for one motivating reason—HERSELF... You are there to answer her needs. Now this is one of the keys to our effectiveness. Listening to her and telling her you are primarily there for her and you want to help HER.”<sup>64</sup>

Crisis pregnancy centers offered anti-abortion activists a defense against pro-choice critics who charged that pro-lifers’ interest in life ended after women gave birth. As anti-abortion policies became more intertwined with the Republican agenda, the objectives of crisis pregnancy centers—to provide comprehensive care to women and children—

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<sup>61</sup> Myre Sim, MD and Robert Neisser, MD, qtd. in “Psychiatrists,” 3.

<sup>62</sup> Marjory Mecklenburg to Paul Ramsey, November 27, 1974, PRP, box 1.

<sup>63</sup> *Pro-Life Clinic Counseling: What Is It? The Most Fulfilling Pro-Life Work Conceivable*, ca. 1980, 1, ACCL Records, box 25, Counseling-Revision, 1980.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 1-2.

sometimes clashed with the objectives of fiscally conservative Republicans. Sociologist Carole Joffe has suggested that the best-kept secrets of the anti-abortion movement are the tactics deployed inside pro-life “pregnancy help” clinics. While most anti-abortion help clinics purport to provide adoption referral services, only three percent of unmarried pregnant women who receive counseling at pro-life clinics choose to give up their babies for adoption. Instead, until 1996, clinic staff spent much of their time helping women to enroll in the federal program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).<sup>65</sup>

By focusing on public policy and service-based solutions to end abortion, ACCL at times alienated its base, which was more accustomed to the tactics endorsed by traditional grassroots groups. In a letter to an ACCL administrator, Mary Senander wrote, “I want to take a few minutes of your time to express some concerns about the ACCL structure—certainly not to criticize, but because I see a basic problem that can be corrected.”<sup>66</sup> Senander explained that volunteers at the local level were frustrated by the lack of attention and support they received from ACCL administrators. “As you know, [we] are willing to produce materials for the ACCL...in return for our many hundreds of hours [of work], we expect a reasonable amount of help and support.”<sup>67</sup> She was frustrated that it took an inordinate amount of time for small projects to be approved by “people at the top.”

It is not entirely surprising that activists who wanted to continue to work on the types of projects other grassroots organizations supported were frustrated by ACCL. ACCL did not want to be a typical grassroots anti-abortion organization. In 1979,

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<sup>65</sup> Carole Joffe, “Welfare and Reproductive Politics on a Collision Course: Contradictions in the Conservative Agenda,” in *Social Policy and the Conservative Agenda*, ed. Clarence Y.H. Lo and Michael Schwartz (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 296.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Senander to Judy [no last name], January 6 [no year], ACCL Records, box 35, This’ll Kill Ya’ Project.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

Mecklenburg articulated the difference between her organization and its counterparts, “Unlike NRLC, ACCL is a relatively small organization of about 3,000 persons. It has no local affiliates and does not have the ‘grassroots’ structure of other pro-life groups.”<sup>68</sup>

Going on Record: The Human Life Amendment and  
Partisan Politics

Once Mecklenburg left the NRLC, the organization’s leaders were eager to begin chipping away at the laws and public policies that sustained a woman’s right to abortion. The NRLC made abortion a political issue by forcing individual politicians to go on record about their position on the Human Life Amendment. But making inroads into partisan politics was an uphill battle. Both Republicans and Democrats were reluctant to embrace an issue that had long been relegated to legal and medical authorities. When Vice President Gerald Ford was invited to meet with Alice L. Hartle, the editor of the *National Right to Life News* and co-founder of Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, to discuss the Human Life Amendment, an advisor to the Office of the Vice President cautioned, “This is a ‘no-win’ issue which V.P. should avoid being involved in.”<sup>69</sup> The Office of the Vice President took seriously the razor thin margin that separated supporters from those who opposed legal abortion. A Gallup Poll of 1,582 voting age adults conducted in March 1974 revealed that forty-seven percent of Americans supported legal abortion and 44 opposed it. College educated, white-collar workers and people under thirty years of age were most likely to support legal abortion. Fifty-one percent of men and forty-three percent of women

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<sup>68</sup> Mary Bader Papa, “Federal Officials Reject Pro-Life Leader for Post,” *National Catholic Reporter*, May 25, 1979.

<sup>69</sup> Alice L. Hartle to Sally Quenneville, February 21, 1974, and Sally Quenneville to Bill Casselman and Gwen Anderson, March 1, 1974, Gerald R. Ford Vice Presidential Records, box 175, Invitations/Visits Anti-Abortion Groups (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.) Alice Hartle was referred to as the “Founding Mother” of the MCCL and later, the NRLC. When she died of cancer in 1985, the editor of the *NRLN* credited Hartle for helping to put anti-abortion policies at the forefront of the Republican agenda. Dave Andrusko, “Alice Hartle, Pro-Life ‘Founding Mother,’ Dies at 70,” *NRLN* December 5, 1985, 1.

supported legal abortion. Vice President Ford probably focused his attention on the finding that forty-nine percent of Republicans favored the *Roe v. Wade* decision while forty-nine percent of Democrats opposed it.<sup>70</sup> In other words, Ford and other politicians had little incentive to take a firm position on abortion rights.<sup>71</sup>

Abortion opponents received an unexpected boost in 1976, when Republican Congressman Henry Hyde of Illinois quietly attached an amendment to the budget appropriation bill for the Department of Health, and Welfare that prohibited the use of federal Medicaid money for abortion “except where the life of the mother would be

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<sup>70</sup> Untitled analysis of Gallup Poll March 8-11 and March 15-18, 1974, Patricia Lind and Jeanne Holm Files, box 6, abortion-general (1), (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

<sup>71</sup> In 1972, President Richard Nixon had received similar advice. Nixon’s pollster, Robert M. Teeter, determined that Democratic presidential candidate Senator George McGovern’s support for the legalization of abortion was closer to the position supported by both Democrats and Republicans than Nixon’s more conservative stance. Teeter advised Nixon to “avoid this issue if possible unless it becomes absolutely necessary. If it does become necessary, I think he should take the position that it is a matter to be decided by each state and not reiterate his personal position” Robert M. Teeter to H.R. Teeter, memo, August 1972, Robert M. Teeter Papers, box 65, folder 11 (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.) However, not everyone believed that the topic of abortion should be avoided at all costs. Patrick Buchanan recommended that Nixon endorse Senator James Buckley’s anti-abortion Constitutional amendment after learning that the President had received 150,000 letters between January and September 1973, nearly all of them expressing opposition to *Roe v. Wade*. According to Buchanan, Nixon had little to lose by supporting an anti-abortion amendment, “Unquestionably, the women’s libbers would moan and groan about this—but, this group we never had, and never will have.” Patrick J. Buchanan to President Richard Nixon, September 6, 1973 America Since Hoover Collection, 1929-1980, box 9, Nixon Presidential Materials Project Folder, (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.) In 1971, when abortion was legal in a handful of states, President Nixon authorized a Defense Department policy establishing that “Although Service medical practice is not subject to regulation under State law, it has been determined, as a matter of policy, that in those States where the State criteria on termination of pregnancies are more restrictive...procedures in military facilities in those States shall be in accordance with the more restrictive criteria.” Memorandum for the Secretaries of the Military Departments, March 31, 1971, John G. Carlson Files, box 1 (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.) In 1979, the Department of Defense, with the support of the Carter Administration, requested federal funding for abortion due to the high volume of children born with birth defects due to soldiers’ exposure to Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. According to Dr. Gilbert Bogen, the president of Vetline, “Our . . . office cannot keep pace with the letters and calls in regard to dioxin poisoning . . . Children are born with birth defects . . . The tragedy is immeasurable.” “Defense Dept. Wants More Abortions Funded,” NRLN May 1979, 4.

endangered if the fetus were carried to term.”<sup>72</sup> Although the Hyde Amendment was subsequently altered to provide federal Medicaid funding for abortions due to rape, incest, or potential long-term health complications from pregnancy, the goal of the amendment—to curb financial support for women needing abortions—was achieved. After 1976, poor women who wanted abortions depended on a hodgepodge of state, local, and private sources of financial support. The effect of the amendment was staggering. In 1977, the year before the Hyde Amendment went into effect, 295,000 women received federal assistance to pay for abortions. In 1979, fewer than 2,000 women received federal money for abortions.<sup>73</sup> Historian Keith Cassidy has suggested that the radicalism of the proposed HLA (which called for a near-total ban on abortion) made the Hyde Amendment seem conservative in comparison, which may explain why it was enacted without much fanfare.<sup>74</sup>

Despite the successful implementation of the Hyde Amendment, anti-abortion activists had reason to be concerned about the chances that the Human Life Amendment would be enacted. In 1976, President Ford began to discuss the abortion controversy more frequently, almost always with great unease and usually by repeating his support for states’ rights. In an interview with CBS journalist Walter Cronkite, Ford backed away from his earlier support for *Roe v. Wade* but expressed his opposition to the proposed Human Life Amendment, saying, “I think we should have to recognize that there are instances when abortion should be permitted—the illness of the mother, rape or any of the other unfortunate things that might happen—so there has to be some flexibility.” He continued,

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<sup>72</sup> Ellen Warren, “The Politics of Abortion—A Big Business,” *NRLN* February 1979, 34 and 40. In 1979, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) split into two departments: the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education.

<sup>73</sup> Bill Peterson, “Abortion Aid Faces Further Cut,” *The Washington Post*, March 20, 1981, A14.

<sup>74</sup> Cassidy, “The Right to Life Movement,” 145.

“I think the court decision [*Roe v. Wade*] went too far. I think a Constitutional amendment goes too far.”<sup>75</sup> A January 1976 Knight-Ridder poll revealed that 81% of Americans believed that the government should not interfere with women and their physicians’ decisions regarding abortion.<sup>76</sup> Americans’ responses to public opinion polls on the question of abortion are heavily influenced by the way the question is posed. When asked if they support abortion, most Americans state they do not; when asked if the government should interfere with a woman’s right to abortion, most Americans state they do not.

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<sup>75</sup> The Cronkite interview occurred on February 3, 1975. See also Transcript from Visit to the University of New Hampshire, February 8, 1976. Patricia Lindh and Jeanne Holm Files 1974-1975, box 6, Abortion general (3) (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.).

<sup>76</sup> Joel N. Shurkin “81% In Poll Feel Abortion Not Up to Government,” *Boston Globe*, February 8, 1976. On the vagaries of abortion polling data, see William Saletan, *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 14.

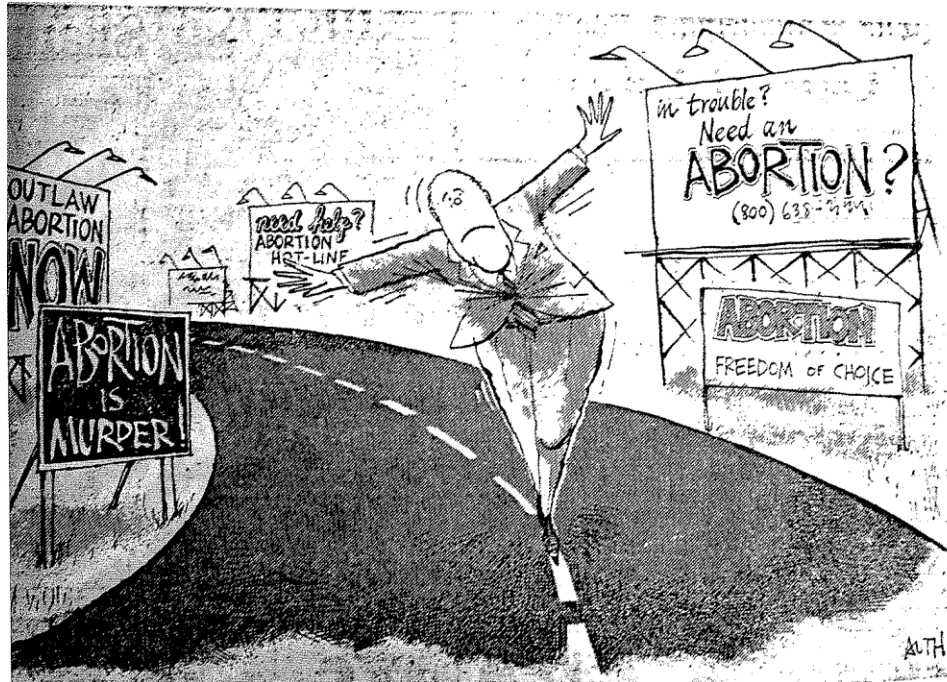


Figure 2.1 President Gerald Ford tried his best to avoid making abortion a federal issue. Tony Auth, "Presidency: Comment," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 5, 1976, A6. (Courtesy Tony Auth.)

The push to transform the Republican Party into the party of "life" appalled many prominent Republicans. On CBS's *60 Minutes* in 1975, First Lady Betty Ford declared, "I feel very strongly that it was the best thing in the world when the Supreme Court voted to legalize abortion, and in my words, bring it out of the backwoods and put it into the hospitals where it belonged. I thought it was a great, great decision."<sup>77</sup> Meanwhile, philanthropist John D. Rockefeller III urged President Ford to assert his support for

<sup>77</sup> "The First Lady: A Conversation with Betty Ford with CBS News Correspondent Morley Safer," Transcript. *60 Minutes*, August 10, 1975, 8, box 36, Sheila Weidenfield Files, 1974-1977, (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.). Twenty years later, First Lady Barbara Bush voiced her support for abortion rights during an interview on ABC's *20/20*. "Barbara Bush Says She's Pro-Choice" *The Forum* (Fargo, ND) August 12, 1994.



abortion rights: “What I am saying is that the issue we are facing today in this country as elsewhere is not whether abortion will be eliminated but whether it will be safe.”

Rockefeller cautioned, “If we make the mistake of reverting back to illegal status for abortions, we will be forcing poor people to seek unsafe abortions while the wealthy have the means to obtain expert medical attention.”<sup>78</sup>

Although Ford kept the anti-abortion movement at bay during the first two years of his presidency, the movement to add a Human Life Amendment to the U.S. Constitution entrenched the debate about abortion into the fabric of partisan politics. Democrats responded first by adopting a pro-choice plank at the Party’s national convention in July 1976.<sup>79</sup> One month later, the Republican Party followed suit by adopting an anti-abortion plank—against the objection of President Ford.<sup>80</sup>

American Catholic leaders condemned the Democratic Party for affirming a woman’s right to abortion. Archbishop Joseph L. Bernardin, the president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, said of the Democrats’ pro-choice plank, “This is morally offensive in the extreme.”<sup>81</sup> The Conference started preparing its first voting guide, which identified politicians’ positions on key social and public policy issues, in preparation of the November elections.<sup>82</sup> Ford’s advisors urged the president to exploit the Democrats’ pro-

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<sup>78</sup> John D. Rockefeller III to President Gerald R. Ford, August 31, 1976, 2, box 1, James M. Cannon Files, 1975-1977, (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.) Rockefeller outlined his support for abortion rights and his concerns about the anti-abortion in an editorial published in “My Turn: No Retreat on Abortion,” *Newsweek*, June 21, 1976, 11.

<sup>79</sup> Suzanne Staggenborg, *The Pro-Choice Movement: Organization and Activism in the Abortion Conflict* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 82.

<sup>80</sup> Patrick G. Coy, *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 224.

<sup>81</sup> Qtd. in “Catholic Bishops Assail Democrats,” *The Washington Post*, June 27, 1976.

<sup>82</sup> Mark M. Gray and Mary E. Bendyna, “Between Church, Party, and Conscience: Protecting Life and Promoting Social Justice among U.S. Catholics,” in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith & Power*, ed. Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 76.

choice plank in order to win over Catholics who had long voted for Democrats. One of Ford's assistants, Thomas Patrick Melady advised, "We should make every effort to assure that we have a more acceptable plank as it will give us a real opportunity to exploit the Democrats' weakness on this issue."<sup>83</sup>

President Ford's advisors pushed him to replace his tepid opposition to abortion rights with an aggressive campaign to expose Democrats' "pro-abortion" philosophy. During his presidential campaign, an advisor urged the President to emphasize Governor Jimmy Carter's "pro-abortion" positions, including his opposition to the Human Life Amendments submitted to Congress and his recent public support for *Roe v. Wade*. Ford was encouraged to adopt terminology that would be familiar to anti-abortion activists, including replacing the word "fetus" with "unborn baby," "embryo" with "unborn child," "terminate pregnancy" with "kill the unborn," and "a religious issue" with "a civil rights issue." In an internal campaign communiqué, titled "The Crucial Analogy," advisors encouraged Ford to compare abortion to slavery, arguing that just as the Republican Party championed the abolition of slavery, so too should it fight for "the civil rights of the smallest, most innocent, most defenseless Americans, the unborn."<sup>84</sup>

By September 1976, Ford was meeting personally with anti-abortion leaders, something that he had been strongly advised against doing only two years earlier. After a meeting with leaders of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ford wrote to Cardinal Joseph L. Bernadin to assure him that he had "consistently opposed the 1973 decision of the Supreme Court." He explained his support for a Constitutional amendment that would allow individual states to regulate abortion, a position he had held

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas Patrick Melady to William J. Baroody, Jr. June 28, 1976, David Gergen Files, 1974-1976, box 1 (Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.)

<sup>84</sup> Strategy memorandum, no author, circa 1976, Sarah C. Massengale Files, box 1.

since his days as a US Congressman.<sup>85</sup> In other words, Ford's actual position on abortion had not changed. His proximity to key anti-abortion factions had.

NRLC leaders rewarded the GOP for sponsoring the HLA and adopting an anti-abortion plank by endorsing Republican candidates in the November 1976 elections. Four prominent national anti-abortion organizations, including the NRLC, issued the following statement: "The platform of the Democratic Party is unacceptable. If the candidates of the Republican Party honor the plank in their platform that supports the enactment of a right-to-life amendment, the Republican Party will constitute the Party of Life."<sup>86</sup>

The presence of pro-life Democratic candidates made the alliance between the NRLC and the GOP decidedly untidy. Democrat Ellen McCormack of New York ran two unsuccessful presidential campaigns in 1976 and 1980. Her campaigns resembled the early grassroots anti-abortion movement, existing on a shoestring budget and the support of committed volunteers. In 1976, the McCormack for President campaign ran on a single issue—overturning *Roe v. Wade*. She presented herself as the only anti-abortion Democratic candidate able to challenge Governor Jimmy Carter. McCormack received enough votes in the primary to qualify for federal matching campaign funds, but dropped out of the race after competing unsuccessfully in twenty primaries and caucuses.<sup>87</sup> In 1979, McCormack announced her bid to run once again for the Democratic nomination for president. This

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<sup>85</sup> President Gerald R. Ford to Joseph L. Bernadin, September 10, 1976, Sarah C. Massengale Files, box 1. During this period, The National Conference of Catholic Bishops established a lay lobbying organization, the National committee for a Human Life Amendment, funded almost entirely by contributions from dioceses and archdioceses, with an annual budget of \$300,000 per year by the late 1970s. Ellen Warren, "The Politics of Abortion—A Big Business," *National Right to Life News*, February 1979, 34.

<sup>86</sup> Dan Lyons, "Summit Conference Called" September 9, 1976, ACCL Records, box 10, folder NRLC-1976(3). The four groups were the NRLC, the Christian Action Council, Americans Against Abortion, and the National Youth Pro-Life Coalition. See also John P. Doyle, "Should Prolifers Get Into Politics?" 1976, ACCL Records, box 44, political strategy.

<sup>87</sup> Fran Watson, "Committee Organized: Ellen McCormack for President in '80," *NRLN* May 1979, 4.

time, she emphasized her commitment to ensuring the enactment of the Human Life Amendment. McCormack's single-issue campaign, coupled with her limited abilities as a fundraiser (in 1976, she raised only \$250,000, which was matched by the federal government) placed the NRLC in a precarious position. Shortly after McCormack announced her intention to run for president in 1980, another pro-life Democrat, and former lobbyist for the NRLC, Sean Morton Downey, Jr., announced his presidential campaign. Morton Downey, Jr., never taken seriously by the Democratic Party, eventually ran as an Independent.<sup>88</sup> In order to achieve even modest legislative victories, mainstream anti-abortion leaders knew the NRLC needed to back a candidate with a good shot of winning a party's nomination; neither McCormack nor Morton Downey fit the bill. Some Catholics accused Marjory Mecklenburg of discouraging pro-lifers from contributing to McCormack's campaign.<sup>89</sup>

The American public's increased identification of the anti-abortion movement with the GOP distressed some abortion opponents, particularly those who supported progressive Catholic social justice campaigns. In 1980, Monsignor George G. Higgins, a retired member of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United Catholic Conference, questioned the motives of New Right operatives who worked to secure their support for Republican candidates. According to Higgins, "The New Right is superimposed on the traditional conservative networks, but in contrast to the Old Right's emphasis on free market economics, the New Right is characterized by a sharp focus on a narrow range of 'social' issues that are intended to appeal to broad constituencies." The New Right did not share many of the concerns of the "old guard" of Catholic anti-abortion

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<sup>88</sup> Sean Morton Downey, Jr. later hosted a television show, where he gained notoriety for his combative style, which included Downey shouting "Zip it fathead!" and "Pablum puking liberal!" in between puffs of his cigarette. Wolfgang Saxon, "Morton Downey, Jr., 67, Combative TV Host," *New York Times* March 14, 2001, B9.

<sup>89</sup> Connie Paige, *The Right to Lifers: Who They Are, How They Operate, and Where They Get Their Money* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 113.

activists, such as civil rights, disarmament, the death penalty, or welfare reform. Opposition to pornography, the Equal Rights Amendment, gay rights, gun control and feminism, and support for capital punishment, military spending and prayer in schools were the centerpieces of the New Right strategy to appeal to conservative religious Americans of all faiths.

Higgins was skeptical of the reasons why certain members of the GOP were eager to reach out to Americans who opposed abortion. He speculated that the New Right championed socially conservative issues in order to cultivate a new base of Republican supporters and to mask unpopular conservative economic programs. He explained,

In its essence, this strategy is simply to establish a New Right political apparatus that conceals the political economic program of the right wing and focuses on social issues that have an emotional appeal to groups that have traditionally voted for more progressive candidates. Abortion, with a strong emotional appeal among Catholics, who have generally voted for Democratic candidates, appeared to be tailor-made of the New Right. This new strategy is a hybrid of the tactics used in the Richard Nixon and George Wallace Presidential campaigns.<sup>90</sup>

The financial ties between the New Right and national anti-abortion organizations gave Higgins pause. For example, political operatives trained NRLC members to lobby members of Congress. According to Higgins, “These linkages to the New Right are relatively well known in the leadership circles of right-to-life groups. Many pro-life activists welcome any sort of help, regardless of the source, and are reluctant to ask questions about the direction in which the right wing is taking the pro-life political effort. This attitude results from frustration, political inexperience, and perhaps a bit of naïveté.”<sup>91</sup> Although

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<sup>90</sup> George G. Higgins, “The Pro-life Movement and the New Right,” *America*, September 13, 1980, 108. On the history of the New Right, see Gillian Peele, *Revival and Reaction: The Right in Contemporary America* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984); Thomas Ferguson and Joel Rogers, *Right Turn: The Decline of the Democrats and the Future of American Politics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987); Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>91</sup> Higgins, “The Pro-life Movement and the New Right,” 108.

leaders within large anti-abortion organizations were aware of the growing financial and political ties between their groups and the New Right, Higgins worried that activists at the local level were largely ignorant of the top-level alliances. He explained, “This is in no way to suggest the existence of a full-blown conspiracy enveloping the entire pro-life movement.... Rather, what I am posing is the possibility that in a subtle and sophisticated way parts of the pro-life movement are being used as a vehicle to promote a much broader right-wing agenda.”<sup>92</sup>

NRLC leaders generally ignored pleas of progressive abortion activists who worried about the unintended consequences of allying with New Right legislators in order to secure passage of the HLA. Instead, they used the organization’s official newspaper, *National Right to Life News (NRLN)*, with a circulation of nearly 80,000, to tout the NRLC’s work on behalf of the amendment.<sup>93</sup> The NRLC endorsed the presidential nomination of Governor Reagan because he was the only viable candidate who supported the HLA. Occasionally, the editor of the *NRLN* published letters to the editor that indicated that not everyone in the movement supported a strong alliance with the New Right. The October 1980 edition of the *NRLN* included a letter from Bill Mangin, a member of the Right to Life Committee in North Dakota. Mangin cautioned NRLC members not to be fooled by the efforts of the New Right: “the New Right is not discriminating on the basis of whether a congressman is prolife or not—the New Right is swinging the axe at some prolife people in Congress simply because they are liberals.”<sup>94</sup> Mangin believed that New Right political operatives emphasized the defeat of pro-choice congressmen by anti-abortion congressmen in order to appeal to a new constituency. Instead of supporting the full agenda of the anti-

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>93</sup> “National Right to Life Committee Programs,” *NRLN* February 3, 1983, 10.

<sup>94</sup> Bill Mangin, letter to the editor, “Urges RTL Distance from ‘New Right,’” *NRLN*, October 13, 1980, 6.

abortion movement, Mangin warned, most politicians who identified themselves with the new ideology of the Republican Party had little interest in helping poor and vulnerable people. He was critical of pro-lifers' passive response to the NRLC's alliance with the New Right, "If we do not want to destroy the RTL we had better move fast to make that clear. RTL is getting a lot of people angry because RTL remains silent when the news media lump us together with the National Conservative Political Action Committee and the New Right."

Criticism of the New Right was tempered by many more articles and letters of support for the GOP in the pages of the *NRLN*. Right to Life member Robert E. Joyce defended the growing partisanship of the anti-abortion movement. Comparing abortion to My Lai, which Joyce described as "incidents of combatants slaughtering non-combatants" he argued that the anti-abortion movement had to take a hard line against political candidates—and political parties—that refused to take an unequivocal stand against legal abortion.<sup>95</sup> Joyce argued that the electorate should support unqualified candidates who opposed abortion rather than competent politicians who supported legal abortion, "As regrettable as it may be, it is better to have in office someone less qualified...than to perjure ourselves as a humane society by electing a person who is blind to the most basic right of all, the sacred and most personal right to life."

By adopting a narrow agenda—the adoption of a Human Life Amendment to the U.S. Constitution—the NRLC became intractably bound to the GOP. At the NRLC's annual convention in 1979, President Dr. Carolyn F. Gerster announced that the organization would soon adopt a Three-Year Plan to secure passage of the HLA by 1983. Beginning in 1980, the leadership of the NRLC poured nearly all of the organization's resources into lobbying on behalf of the HLA. Just as Mecklenburg had feared, the NRLC's

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<sup>95</sup> Robert E. Joyce, "Prolife Movement Isn't Just Single Issue Politics," *NRLN*, October 27, 1980, 2. State legislators were slower to adopt pro-choice or anti-abortion. See Saleton, *Bearing Right* 36

narrow focus on the HLA left the organization dependent upon the only party willing to support the amendment. The politicians who supported the HLA most vociferously were among the new generation of Republicans who embraced Christian conservatism and vowed to dismantle the welfare state. With the help of funding from the newly formed National Pro-Life Political Action Committee (NPL-PAC), pro-life Republican candidates defeated pro-choice Democratic incumbent senators in Iowa, Minnesota, and New Hampshire in 1978. Father Charles Fiore, the founder and chair of the NPL-PAC, said of the pro-life political victories, "Friend and foe alike admit the momentum is with the right to life cause, and NPL-PAC intends to continue to build the political pressure until a Human Life Amendment is enacted."<sup>96</sup> The NRLC formed its own political action committee to support anti-abortion candidates in June 1979; a few months later, the organization strengthened its presence in Washington, DC. The NRLC moved its publications division to the city and relocated the group's educational committee with its administrative committee into the same office space to streamline organization so that all branches would focus on the passage of the HLA in Congress.<sup>97</sup>

The HLA campaign was part of a larger strategy to make the NRLC a relevant force in American politics. Shortly after President Dr. Gersten announced the Three-Year Plan to enact the HLA, Vice-President Ann O'Donnell encouraged members of the NRLC to wear red rose lapel pins, which were already well-known symbols of pro-life support within the movement, to demonstrate their support for HLA. She hoped that the pins would prompt friends and colleagues to inquire about their symbolic significance while pro-lifers socialized at parties, PTA meetings, and churches. O'Donnell emphasized how important it was for men to wear the pins and identify themselves publicly as members of the anti-

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<sup>96</sup> "Prolife Activists Will Play Major Role in Elections," *NRLN* September/October 1979, 4.

<sup>97</sup> "Political Action Committee Formed," *NRLN* September/October 1979, 4, and Carolyn Gerster, "NRL News Now in Nation's Capitol," *NRLN* September/October 1979, 8.



abortion movement. If men would wear the roses “in factories, at board meetings, and in the office,” O’Donnell contended, the movement could counter the “*ad hominem* argument that only ‘old ladies in tennis shoes’ are concerned about abortion.”<sup>98</sup> She praised entertainer Bob Hope, who wore a red rose lapel pin to show his support for the HLA when he appeared on the national television program *Dinah and Friends* in February 1980.

The HLA campaign failed to gain traction in Congress. By the end of 1979, it was clear that the amendment did not have enough support to be brought to a vote.<sup>99</sup> The NRLC, which had tied its mission to the HLA, was not the political force its leaders had envisioned. Instead of changing its approach and supporting more targeted measures to restrict legal abortion, the NRLC continued to use the HLA as a litmus test for supporting candidates. This made it relatively easy for Republican politicians to pledge support for the HLA, knowing that the Amendment had little chance of becoming a serious political issue. In the race for the 1980 presidential election, Governor Ronald Reagan was the only serious presidential contender who articulated his support for the HLA in his campaign speeches. In January 1980, the National Right to Life Political Action Committee endorsed Reagan, specifically because of his support for the HLA.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> “Rose Appliqué,” *NRLN* March 1980, 18.

<sup>99</sup> “Funding 1979,” *NRLN* November 1979, 10.

<sup>100</sup> Senator Dole and Congressman Philip Crane received special commendation by Dr. Carolyn Gerster for their anti-abortion voting records. “Reagan Endorsed by NRL PAC,” *NRLN* February 1980, 18. Even Republican candidate John B. Connally, former Governor of Texas and Secretary of the Treasury, who opposed legal abortion and state funding for abortion, refused to endorse the HLA. “Connally: No to HLA,” *NRLN* November 1979, 6. Reagan had supported the HLA since 1975, and reaffirmed his support for the amendment throughout his presidential campaign. Carolyn F. Gerster, “An Open Letter on Ronald Reagan,” *NRLN* April 1980, 9, and “Reagan Meets with NRLC Presidents,” *NRLN* July 7, 1980, 3.

The NRLC's unwavering support for the HLA, and by extension, for presidential candidate Governor Ronald Reagan, created division within the right-to-life movement.<sup>101</sup> In January 1980, Dr. Carolyn F. Gerster, the president of the NRLC, declared that the HLA was the only way to overturn legal abortion in the United States. When Federal Judge John Dooling, Jr. overturned the Hyde Amendment in 1980, Gerster declared: "There is only one way to halt this display of 'raw judicial power'—through the enactment of the Human Life Amendment." The solution, according to Gerster, was straightforward; "There is only one way to enact a Human Life Amendment—by electing the men and women to Congress who will vote for us. The fate of this nation and the fate of its children will be decided in the 1980 and 1982 elections."<sup>102</sup> Gerster implied that only practical solution for ending legal abortion rested with the strategy adopted by the NRLC. Although most anti-abortion activists identified as Democrats in 1980, the HLA litmus test and growing politicization of the NRLC threatened to upset a movement that had previously been remarkably nonpartisan.

NRLC President Carolyn F. Gerster lashed out at pro-life candidate Ellen McCormack when she continued with her presidential bid as an Independent candidate, after dropping out of the Democratic primaries in the spring of 1980. She was critical of McCormack's decision to take out full-page advertisements in several New England newspapers that questioned Governor Reagan's commitment to the anti-abortion movement. Gerster responded to McCormack's attack by stating that Reagan had

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<sup>101</sup> Joan Andrews, a leader in the grassroots 'rescue' movement declared that the Human Life Amendment would not end abortion, but would merely drive it underground. Joan Andrews to Bernard and Adelle Nathanson, July 3, 1987, in *You Reject Them, You Reject Me: The Prison Letters of Joan Andrews*, ed. Richard Cowden Guido (Manassas, Virginia: Trinity Communications, 1988): 166.

<sup>102</sup> Carolyn Gerster, "From the President's Desk," *NRLN* January 1980, 13. Following Dooling's order to resume federal funding for abortions, the US Supreme Court permitted a temporary suspension of the Hyde Amendment. "NRLC President Decries S.C. Ruling," *NRLN* February 1980, 5. See also Douglas Johnson and Janet B. Carrol, "Pro-abortion Filibuster Succeed: Senate Kills Helms Amendment," *NRLN* September 30, 1982, 1.

supported the HLA since 1975, and that he had affirmed his commitment to supporting anti-abortion legislation in numerous private meetings with NRLC leaders. Gerster was unequivocal in her support—and the NRLC’s continued endorsement of Reagan—“Governor Reagan is thus far the only presidential candidate endorsed by the National Right to Life Pac [and he] deserves the support of every prolife voter.”<sup>103</sup> Mary Meehan, a long-time activist in progressive anti-abortion organizations, including Feminists for Life, responded to Gerster’s criticism of McCormack by questioning the motives of NRLC leaders who demonstrated unwavering support of Reagan. “If Reagan is really sincere and really firm on the abortion issue, he has little to fear from McCormack’s presence on the ballot,” noted Meehan. “So why all the fuss?”<sup>104</sup>

In July 1980, Dr. Jack Willke, a founding member of the NRLC, succeeded Gerster as the president of the organization, whose membership was estimated to be thirteen million, two-thirds of whom were women.<sup>105</sup> He continued Gerster’s initiatives to make the NRLC a force in American partisan politics. Willke contended that history was repeating itself, with the Democratic Party reverting to supporting the discriminatory policies it held in the nineteenth century, “Remember back then the Democratic Party was the party that supported slavery.”<sup>106</sup> Referring to the Democratic Party’s pro-choice plank

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<sup>103</sup> Carolyn Gerster, “An Open Letter on Ronald Reagan,” *NRLN* April 1980, 9.

<sup>104</sup> Mary Meehan, letter to the editor, “Reagan Pressured by McCormack,” *NRLN* June 2, 1980, 6.

<sup>105</sup> John Cavanaugh O’Keefe, “News Magazines Focus on Abortion Fight,” *NRLN* April 13, 1981, 2. In 1982, Willke claimed that the NRLC oversaw fifty affiliates and 2,000 chapters. Jack Willke, “From the President’s Desk: Right to Life Unity,” *NRLN* February 8, 1982, 4. For a discussion of the demographics of the anti-abortion movement, see Raymond J. Adamek, “Abortion Activists: Characteristics, Attitudes and Behavior,” *NRLN* January 31, 1985, 7-8 and 10; Marilyn Falk, *Ideology and Abortion Policy Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1983); and Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>106</sup> Jack Willke, “From the President’s Desk: Decline of the Party?” *NRLN* August 18, 1980, 9. Former President Richard Nixon opposed the HLA. Speaking on the NBC Today Show on September 9, 1980, Nixon stated that an amendment to ban abortions does not “belong in the constitution.” “Nixon Against HLA,” *NRLN* September 15, 1980, 8. However, in 1972, Nixon had

as the “Gloria Steinam amendment,” Willke maintained that the party had become “the party of violent death, through support of that most evil of all discrimination, abortion.” By contrast, the Republican Party’s support of the HLA affirmed its support for civil rights, “Once again, the Republicans have seized the flag of freedom, concerned for those unable to protect themselves...” Willke predicted that the Democratic Party’s support for abortion rights signaled its pending demise, and that the Republican Party, with the support of key anti-abortion groups like the NRLC, would prosper in the coming decades.

Whatever divisions over partisanship existed in the anti-abortion movement—whether to ally with a political party or whether to make abortion a partisan political issue at all—were all but ignored by Dr. Jack Willke. After throwing his support behind the HLA and the Republican Party, he wrote an unapologetic defense of the efforts by the New Right to court anti-abortion activists. In the fall of 1981, Willke, a Catholic, attended a New Right convention in Dallas, Texas, where speakers included Jerry Falwell, Paul Weyrich, Phyllis Schlafly, and former NRLC presidents Drs. Carolyn Gerster and Mildred Jefferson. Describing the convention as “unashamedly Christian,” Willke explained how attendees were unified in their opposition to pre- and extra-marital sex and agreed that abortion was the “diabolical evil” of their time.<sup>107</sup> The mantle, he contended, had passed from Catholic priests to Protestant Christians, who were more “actively pro-life” because they denounced abortion as a matter of course in their sermons and activism. If all clergy would follow the lead of Protestant Christian ministers from the New Right, Willke contended, “we’d have this battle won in no time.”

Shortly after the tenth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* in 1983, Jack Willke reflected on the history of the National Right to Life Committee. He believed that the success of the

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supported the effort to repeal the New York law that permitted abortion. Cassidy, “The Right to Life Movement,” 147.

<sup>107</sup> Jack Willke, “From the President’s Desk: Roundtable Meeting...An Experience,” *NRLN* September 7, 1981, 5.

organization, the largest anti-abortion group in the United States, was due in part to its commitment to championing a single issue, abortion. He described the organization as non-partisan and non-sectarian, and stated that women comprised the majority of rank-and-file members and held the majority of leadership posts.<sup>108</sup>

The month before the November 1980 U.S. presidential election, Governor Ronald Reagan formed the Family Policy Advisory Board to help him identify the “pro-family” issues he would support if he were to be elected President. The committee was comprised of NRLC founders and ardent HLA supporters, including former presidents Mildred Jefferson and Carolyn Gerster, and then-president Jack Willke’s wife, Barbara Willke.<sup>109</sup> In order to strengthen American families, Reagan wanted the advisory board to develop policies to curb alcohol and drug use, promote marriage, and protect “life and the rights of the born and unborn.” Reagan hoped to transform the role of the government in people’s personal lives; “There are [currently] few incentives for the survival of a family in the traditional sense.”

NRLC leaders were thrilled with the outcome of the November 1980 elections. Governor Reagan defeated President Carter and anti-abortion challengers defeated two incumbent Democratic pro-choice senators, Birch Bayh of Indiana, and John Culver of Iowa.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps riding the momentum of conservative Republicans’ success in the election, HLA supporters revealed their teeth when Congressional strategists suggested the

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<sup>108</sup> Jack C. Willke, “Why So Many Pro-Life Groups? What Makes NRLC Unique?” *NRLN* February 3, 1983, 12.

<sup>109</sup> “Reagan Announces Formation of Family Board,” *NRLN* October 13, 1980, 1. The Republican Party’s pro-family agenda differed from many other policies, including environmental protection and gun rights during this period. In his analysis of GOP anti-environmental initiatives in the West from the 1960s, through the early 2000s, James Morton Turner contends that conservative political ideology turned “away from a reactionary antifederal politics . . . [and] toward a positive politics emphasizing individual rights.” 148. Turner, “The Specter of Environmentalism’: Wilderness, Environmentalism, and the Evolution of the New Right,” *The Journal of American History* vo. 96, no. 1, June 2009, 123-148.

<sup>110</sup> “Net Gain of 10 in U.S. Senate,” *NRLN* November 10, 1980, 2.

organization should prepare to weigh in on a compromise version of the amendment. Having died in the Senate Judiciary Committee dozens of times since 1973, some HLA supporters suggested altering the amendment to allow exceptions for women who were victims of incest or rape and women whose lives would be jeopardized by continuing with a pregnancy in order to make the amendment more palatable to moderate Republicans. Dr. Willke was infuriated by the proposed changes to the amendment. He dismissed the notion that women should have the right to abortion if the pregnancy threatened their lives: “the problem of the ‘life of the mother’ must be resolved. As I perceive it, there is no fundamental difference in value systems here in the prolife movement. We all agree that the day of killing the baby to save the mother (by direct induced abortion) is past history.”<sup>111</sup> Within the nation’s largest anti-abortion organization, the strategy to end abortion had become intractably bound to a hopelessly narrow public policy prescription. From her position outside the NRLC, Mecklenburg and other social conservatives would offer new directions for curbing women’s access to abortion.

### The Transformation of Federal Family Planning Policy

During the Reagan Administration, Marjory Mecklenburg helped transform the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) from a public health-driven model of operation to a partisan political bureaucracy. Under the guise of saving money, reducing the size of the federal government, and increasing parental rights, DHHS administrators,

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<sup>111</sup> Jack Willke, “From the President’s Desk: Watch Out!” *NRLN* December 8, 1980, 5. Several leaders of the NRLC—and later, administrators in the DHSS—were critical of clauses that permitted abortion when the life of the mother was at risk. In addition to Willke, Charles Donovan, the legislative director of the NRLC and David Winston, the special assistant to HHS Secretary Richard Schweiker, believed that states interpreted “life of the mother” too broadly and permitted federal funds to be used on women who would not die as a result of continuing with a pregnancy. “Abortion Funding Cuts Sought by HHS,” *NRLN* March 23, 1981, 1. Willke reiterated his opposition to abortion under all circumstances, including rape and incest, again in 1985, after Rev. Jerry Falwell indicated that he would support legislation that included exceptions for rape and incest. Douglas Johnson, “Pro-Life Leaders React to Falwell Statement,” *NRLN* February 14, 1985, 5.

aided by newly-powerful anti-abortion lobbyists, sought to divest reproductive healthcare programs of funding, require parents to consent to children's reproductive health care decisions, and revamp sexual education.<sup>112</sup> One month after he was inaugurated, President Reagan met personally with representatives from the American Life Lobby (a spin-off of the NRLC) and the Life Amendment Political Action Committee. These lobbyists outlined a plan, cryptically called the "white paper," that promised to save the federal government \$3.9 billion per year by cutting small, obscure programs that provided reproductive healthcare services and information. Reagan, impressed by the proposal, asked Office of Management and Budget Director David Stockman to join him for a second meeting with the anti-abortion lobbyists a few weeks later.<sup>113</sup> The cuts outlined in the "white paper" appeased two key constituencies: fiscal conservatives who supported Reagan's promises to reduce spending and ensure efficiency and moral conservatives who opposed contraception.

In 1981, President Reagan appointed Richard S. Schweiker to serve as Secretary of the DHHS. During his tenure as U.S. Senator from Pennsylvania, Schweiker had sponsored anti-abortion legislation, including the Human Life Amendment.<sup>114</sup> On January 22, 1981, the eighth anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, he spoke to a crowd of 50,000 gathered in front of the White House to mark the annual March for Life. Schweiker assured the crowd, "You have a friend at Health and Human Services and in the Reagan Administration."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Robert Pear, "Planned Parenthood Groups Investigated On Use of U.S. Funds," *The New York Times*, December 6, 1981.

<sup>113</sup> Bill Peterson, "Abortion Foes Gain Key Federal Posts," *The Washington Post*, March 6, 1981, A1.

<sup>114</sup> Douglas Johnson, "Heckler Replaces Schweiker at DHHS," *NRLN* February 3, 1983, 8. Schweiker served as a US senator from 1968 to 1970. During this period, he sponsored the Human Life Amendment and opposed federal funding to clinics that provided abortions.

<sup>115</sup> John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe, "Washington Thaws for Eighth March for Life," *NRLN* January 27, 1981, 4. He spoke on behalf of President Reagan again at the annual march in 1982.

Shortly after he was appointed Secretary of the DHHS, Robert Schweiker urged President Regan to appoint Marjory Mecklenburg to serve as the deputy assistant secretary for population affairs, the director of family planning, and the head of the newly created Office of Adolescent Pregnancy, all divisions within the DHHS. Her nomination, which coincided with the nomination of C. Everett Koop for attorney general, rankled both supporters and opponents of legal abortion.<sup>116</sup> That so many well-known moral conservatives were selected for key federal administrative posts was not lost on political observers. *The Washington Post* noted “anti-abortionists have quietly won several key positions in the Reagan administration and launched an effort to alter federal policy not just on abortion, but sex education, family planning and world population control.”<sup>117</sup> Positions that had been filled by career bureaucrats were soon held by abortion-rights opponents who were not well-known in Washington, D.C. Meanwhile, some abortion

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“25,000 Hear Call for Legal Protection,” *NRLN* February 8, 1982, 6. Jane De Hart has observed that by the mid-1980s, the New Right could “no longer be dismissed as irrational, peripheral, or episodic.” De Hart, “Gender on the Right,” 246. The additional appointments of Mecklenburg and Koop, who was named assistant secretary for health and U.S. Surgeon general in the DHHS, signaled a sea change in the composition of the department. Shortly after he was nominated, Dr. Koop stated that he would move away from his predecessor’s initiatives, which according to Koop, a former board member of the NRLC, included support for eugenic abortions. Michele McKeegan, *Abortion Politics: Mutiny in the Ranks of the Right* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 66. Koop, who believed that abortion was permissible because society had taken a “headlong march toward a lifestyle of hedonism,” promised to work to restore pro-family values in his post. “Pro-life Surgeon Designated for HHS Position,” *NRLN* February 23, 1981, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Koop had a long history of support for the anti-abortion movement. His book, *The Right to Live, the Right to Die*, first published in 1976, along with a film seminar he co-produced with Francis Schaeffer, one of the intellectual forces that drove evangelical Christians into the movement, in 1979, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, were popular within the anti-abortion movement. Koop toured the nation, speaking to anti-abortion groups about the “infanticide” of legal abortion. He also lectured at NRLC national conventions “Dr. Koop on Infanticide,” *NRLN* July 1979, 5, and W. Douglas Badger, “Francis A. Schaeffer, 1912-1984,” *NRLN* June 21, 1984, 5. On December 30, 1980, just a month and a half after Reagan was elected President of the U.S., the Christian Action Council spent over \$30,000 to air *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* on a Washington, D.C. ABC affiliate. “Media’s Ire Aroused by Whatever Happened to the Human Race,” *NRLN*, January 12, 1981, 3.

<sup>117</sup> Bill Peterson, “Foes of Abortion Taking Over Key Federal Positions *Honolulu Advertiser* (*Washington Post Service*), March 6, 1981.



opponents worried that Mecklenburg would refrain from taking controversial, partisan stands just as she had during her tenure at the NRLC.<sup>118</sup> They would be pleasantly surprised. When asked about her new post, Mecklenburg made her intentions clear: “[this gives me] a soapbox, a great opportunity to affect people’s ideas.”<sup>119</sup>

This was not Mecklenburg’s first nomination for a post in the federal government. In 1979, she had been nominated to serve as a consultant to the newly formed teenage pregnancy program in the DHHS. Dr. Julius Richmond, the assistant secretary for health, refused to endorse her nomination on the grounds that the Department would be better served by a trained medical professional than by a leader of a special interest group. Decisions regarding reproductive health policy, he reasoned, should be left to healthcare experts.<sup>120</sup> While Mecklenburg’s work in the anti-abortion movement limited her opportunities in the Carter Administration, it provided her with credentials that appealed to the Reagan Administration.

At the DHHS, Mecklenburg had the authority to shape public policy in accord with her personal belief that abortion was one issue among many that needed reform in order to change permissive sexual mores. She was eager to support conservative reproductive health policies, but concerned about the way the public perceived how those policies were developed. In particular, she worried that the political naïveté of NRLC leaders might undermine the credibility of moral conservatives in the federal government. Four years before she assumed her post at the DHHS, she had become upset with NRLC leaders after

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<sup>118</sup> Some NRLC members believed Mecklenburg was too liberal because of her support for contraception. Connie Paige, *The Right to Lifers: Who They Are, How They Operate, Where They Get Their Money* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 223.

<sup>119</sup> Susanna McBee “When Outsiders Take Over the Bureaucracy,” *US News & World Report*, July 13, 1981, 38.

<sup>120</sup> “Guest Editorial: Mecklenburg Rejected,” *NRLN* June 1979, 4. The Inspector General Act of 1978 requires the office to hire employees based upon their professional merits rather than their partisan political affiliations. See <http://www.oig.hhs.gov/organization.asp>.

the Federal Elections Committee censured the organization for soliciting non-members to fund the Right-to-Life Political Action Committee (PAC) in violation of federal campaign laws. Mecklenburg expressed her concerns to Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party Congressman Richard Nolan: “The pro-life activists associated with this [PAC controversy] are very conservative. This is the third or fourth national pro-life PAC, which does not make me happy.” She continued, “It would seem to me increasingly important that a constituency with a moderate approach to this issue become stronger to keep the right from usurping the entire bloc of pro-life votes. The advancement of the pro-life cause is only harmed, in our eyes, as this occurs.”<sup>121</sup> From her post in the federal government, Mecklenburg would have the opportunity to engage NRLC members by folding abortion into comprehensive sexual and reproductive health policies. In the process, she enabled members to consider how legal protections for abortion might be eroded separately from the Human Life Amendment.

Despite her hasty exit from the NRLC and her subsequent pointed criticisms of the leadership’s political naïveté, Mecklenburg was eager to capitalize on the close relationship between the Administration and the nation’s largest anti-abortion organization. At the annual NRLC Convention in July 1982, Mecklenburg supervised a workshop titled “Government Response to Adolescent Pregnancy.”<sup>122</sup> On the final night of the convention, she delivered the keynote address before a packed dining hall.<sup>123</sup> Instead of addressing the *a priori* issue of the NRLC, the HLA, she urged anti-abortion activists to support DHHS initiatives to curb the teenage pregnancy rates, which had nearly doubled between 1973 and 1978. Mecklenburg believed that the key to reducing teenage pregnancy

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<sup>121</sup> Marjory Mecklenburg to Richard M. Nolan, November 16, 1978, ACCL Records, box 24, NRL-PAC folder.

<sup>122</sup> Elizabeth Moore, “Auschwitz Survivor to Headline Rally: NRLC Convention Plans Finalized,” *NRLN* April 22, 1982, 10.

<sup>123</sup> Dan Donehey, “NRLC ’82: A Special Convention,” *NRLN* July 20, 1982, 5.

was to think of teenagers “not as isolated individual[s], but as part[s] of the family unit.”<sup>124</sup> According to Mecklenburg, anti-abortion activists needed to refocus their efforts to the prevention of unwanted pregnancy and support for women who become pregnant. Perhaps to make the comprehensive strategy for reducing abortion more palatable to NRLC members, Mecklenburg had recanted her support for federally-subsidized birth control. Instead, she urged pro-lifers to support parental notification requirements and abstinence-only sex education programs. These goals, she maintained, were politically viable.

#### Target: Title X

Activist administrators at the DHHS embraced the objectives of ushering in new, socially conservative policies and reducing federal spending. Shortly after he assumed his post, Secretary of Health Schweiker fixed his attention on the Title X family planning program. The Title X program was introduced to Congress as part of the Public Health Service Act of 1970, which was co-sponsored by Congressman George H.W. Bush and signed into law by President Richard Nixon. Title X administered grants to clinics in order to provide birth control, breast and cervical cancer screenings, sexually transmitted infection testing, and reproductive health counseling to low-income women. For a decade, the program received bi-partisan support. Republicans generally supported population control programs because they believed they might reduce the fertility rate of poor people, who were more likely to use costly welfare programs.<sup>125</sup> These programs divided Democrats. Some believed they would benefit working mothers, while others worried that poor women were vulnerable to coercion if they relied on health care services that

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<sup>124</sup> Dave Andrusko, “Meklenburg Offers New Challenges,” *NRLN* July 29, 1982, 8.

<sup>125</sup> Carole E. Joffe, “Welfare and Reproductive Politics on a Collision Course: Contradictions in the Conservative Agenda,” in *Social Policy and the Conservative Agenda*, ed. Clarence Y.H. Lo and Michael Schwartz (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1998), 295.

encouraged them to use contraceptives.<sup>126</sup> GOP support for contraception changed in 1981, when the Reagan Administration selected social conservatives to fill key administrative posts.

During Secretary Schweiker's first few months at the DHHS, he proposed cutting the Title X budget, which was \$162 million for fiscal year 1982, to \$100 million for fiscal year 1983—exceeding the Administration's recommended cut for all domestic programs by twenty-seven percent.<sup>127</sup> Nearly 4.5 million women received contraceptive services and advice from federally funded programs annually.<sup>128</sup> Almost all of the women who used Title X-funded services were poor (80-percent had family incomes below 150-percent of the federal poverty level) and nearly one-third were teenagers.<sup>129</sup> Members of Congress used statistics compiled by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI) to demonstrate that the program was already underfunded. They determined that further cuts would be devastating to vulnerable populations and rejected Schweiker's recommended cut.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Until he ran for president in 1988, Rev. Jesse Jackson was an outspoken opponent of legal abortion because he worried that a disproportionate number of poor African Americans received abortions due to federal programs that targeted poor and minority communities. For an account of family planning policies during the Nixon Administration, see Thomas B. Littlewood, *The Politics of Population Control* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977). Before the introduction of Title X in 1970, the federal government mandated AFDC recipients to receive family planning counseling. Scholars have uncovered evidence of widespread sterilization abuse among poor and minority women who sought obstetric care at U.S. hospitals. See Johanna Schoen, *Choice & Coercion: Birth Control, Sterilization, and Abortion in Public Health and Welfare, Gender & American culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>127</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 66. For the next thirty years, socially conservative Republicans would try to decimate the Title X program. See "The War on Women," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2011, sec. Opinion, A18.

<sup>128</sup> Peterson, "Abortion Foes Gain Key Federal Posts," A13.

<sup>129</sup> Marjory Mecklenburg, "AFL: Addressing the Problem of Teenage Pregnancy," *NRLN* January 12, 1983, 5 and Barbara Hinkson Craig and David M. O'Brien, *Abortion and American Politics* (Chatham, N.J: Chatham House Publishers, 1993), 190.

<sup>130</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 69; *Historical Tables Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2009* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2008), 76.

Embarrassed by the way AGI statistics had been used to derail Schweiker's attempt to shrink the Title X program, Mecklenburg retaliated by cutting off funds that the AGI used to compile data related to reproductive health. She assigned one DHHS staff person to gather the data previously conducted by an entire research team at the AGI. Soon, the DHHS employee tasked with collecting the data was transferred to another office. For the rest of the decade, no federal money was used to study the need for family planning services—a coup for socially conservative activist administrators of the DHHS.<sup>131</sup>

As the director of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, Mecklenburg had a tremendous amount of control over federal policy related to reproductive healthcare policy but oversaw a very small budget. The only portion of the Title X budget she supervised directly was \$6 million used to fund service delivery improvement projects. (This accounted for a little more than one-half of one-percent of the total DHHS budget for fiscal year 1982.)<sup>132</sup> Since 1970, the federal government had distributed most of the \$6 million to the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association (NFPRHA), the Planned Parenthood Federation of America (PPFA), and the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI). These organizations maintained statistics and compiled reports that helped career medical professionals at the DHHS determine how best to administer the Title X program.

Social conservatives had identified the NFPRHA, PPFA, and the AGI as “left-leaning” institutions because the medical professionals who worked at these organizations reported that access to comprehensive, safe, and affordable reproductive health care services, including contraception and abortion, generally provided better health outcomes for women and girls.<sup>133</sup> When Schweiker and Mecklenburg assumed their posts, they

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<sup>131</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 69-70.

<sup>132</sup> *Historical Tables Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 2009*, 76.

<sup>133</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 69. For the next thirty years, social conservatives would try to decimate the Title X program. See “The War on Women,” A18.

came to see these three organizations as barriers to enacting socially conservative reproductive health policies.

Mecklenburg used her authority to control Title X policy to decentralize funding decisions for family planning services. Since 1970, career public health professionals at the DHHS had evaluated data collected by the AGI and the NFPRHA and reports generated by the PPFA to determine pregnancy-counseling guidelines. Title X regulations prohibited program money from being used for abortions. However, counselors at health clinics that received Title X grants could discuss a range of reproductive health care options, including abortion, with patients. For over a decade, the DHHS had given Title X bloc grants to clinics that complied with the recommendations of federal health care professionals. Between 1970 and 1981, Planned Parenthood received about twenty-four percent of the Title X bloc grants. In 1982, Mecklenburg changed the way money was distributed to clinics that served Title X patients. She revised the allocation system by allowing only one Title X grant to each state, usually to the state health department.

After the DHHS decentralized the distribution of Title X funds, the type of reproductive healthcare services and healthcare information women received began to vary wildly. In Utah, the state diverted the \$440,000 traditionally used to fund the state's Planned Parenthoods into the Utah Department of Health.<sup>134</sup> The state-administered health clinics required teenagers to obtain parental consent in order to receive contraceptives.

The decentralized funding model was a disaster. Planned Parenthood of Utah sued the DHHS because the state's parental consent requirement violated a Title X regulation that forbade grant recipients from violating patient confidentiality. It quickly became clear that Mecklenburg had opened Pandora's box by wresting control over Title X funding from DHHS staff and into the hands of fifty state agencies that were unfamiliar with the legal

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<sup>134</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 67.

provisions of the federal program. In 1984, having failed to win a single challenge to the funding model, the DHHS abandoned the Title X decentralization project.

### The Transformation of Teenage Sexual Healthcare Policy:

#### The “Squeal” Rule

As the director of the Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs, Mecklenburg sought to regulate the reproductive healthcare choices and information about sex available to teenagers. In February 1982, she announced that her office would require physicians to notify parents when their minor daughters received prescriptions for birth control from federally funded clinics. The policy was referred to as the “squeal rule.”

Mecklenburg also drafted a second proposal, which did not receive much attention. She recommended revising the economic means by which minors could qualify for Title X services. Since the program began in 1970, minors qualified for Title X services if they could demonstrate they had an economic need for financial assistance. Mecklenburg sought to require minors to demonstrate their families could not provide financial assistance for family planning care.<sup>135</sup> Under the pretense of saving money and promoting communication between teenagers and parents, Mecklenburg’s proposal would have regulated the reproductive choices of young, poor women.

The DHHS initiatives to regulate teenagers’ access to reproductive healthcare services were part of a larger project undertaken by the Reagan Administration to direct public attention to individual moral failures rather than larger structural upheavals occurring against the backdrop of massive global economic changes. Americans were barraged with news reports about crack babies and a “crisis” in teenage pregnancy rates at the precise moment that real wages were declining, the government was reducing spending

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<sup>135</sup> Nadine Brozan, “Adolescents, Parents, and Birth Control,” *The New York Times*, March 8, 1982, B6.

on domestic programs, and the wage gap was increasing.<sup>136</sup> Individual failings took center stage while structural assaults to the American middle and working classes were ignored. However, legislators and administrators were not always successful at translating the rhetoric of moral panic into federal policy. During the first two years of the Reagan Administration, socially conservative Republicans were unable to garner enough votes to pass bills championed by the New Right, including prayer in schools and anti-abortion legislation, notably the Human Life Amendment.<sup>137</sup> The Reagan administration was hungry for a victory to satisfy “family values” coalitions, and Mecklenburg’s parental notification proposal fit the bill.

The availability of federally subsidized reproductive health care, Mecklenburg contended, had failed to reduce the high teen pregnancy rates of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Despite the availability of birth control at clinics across the United States, more than one million girls became pregnant in 1981. Pregnancy rates for girls under eighteen years of age increased seventy-five percent between 1969 and 1979.<sup>138</sup> Mecklenburg argued that teens needed the counsel of their parents in order to understand the ramifications of sex and of the potential side effects of birth control pills. She explained, “We can hardly encourage family involvement in family planning by keeping a girl’s own parents in the dark about strong hormones they’ve been prescribed.” She compared the parental notification rule to policies that encourage parents to speak with their children about drugs and nutrition. “Then, the government comes along and buys them a powerful hormone

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<sup>136</sup> Ginna Husting, “When a War Is Not a War: Abortion, Desert Storm, and Representations of Protest in American TV News,” *The Sociological Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (Winter 1999): 161-162.

<sup>137</sup> Sue Mullin, “The Lady Behind the Squeal,” *The Washington Post*, December 28, 1982, B1.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*



[birth control] without telling their parents. In doing so, the government has set up an ambivalence.”<sup>139</sup>

The parental notification policy, supporters maintained, would prevent families from being torn apart. Connaught Marshner, the executive director of the National Pro-Family Coalition (a branch of Paul Weyrich’s Free Congress Foundation) maintained, “if children had more discussion with parents, they would hear their parents’ point of view, and it would inspire them to control their feelings.”<sup>140</sup> Parents, supporters contended, had the power to prevent teenagers from making bad choices. “It is our generation that has created the environment these teen-agers live in. So our generation has to help somehow in giving them the tools to cope,” Mecklenburg said. “We have to help them understand that the choices they make will have implications for the rest of their lives.”<sup>141</sup>

Squeal rule supporters maintained that birth control endangered teenage girls’ health. Marjory Mecklenburg’s lack of medical training did not stop her from making medical pronouncements that contradicted the FDA and legions of healthcare practitioners. She argued that parents needed to be notified when their daughters sought contraception because birth control was dangerous to young women’s health. “Our minimum responsibility is to protect the health, and in some cases, the life of children receiving prescriptions, who may be at risk of embolism, stroke, and permanent sterility,” she maintained.<sup>142</sup>

Medical practitioners were taken aback by Mecklenburg’s pronouncements regarding the safety of contraception. “Pregnancy is five times as risky for teens as is the

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, B2.

<sup>140</sup> Quoted in Brozan, “Adolescents, Parents, and Birth Control,” B6.

<sup>141</sup> Jacqui Banaszynski, “Mecklenburg: Grassroots Work Vital to Abortion Foes,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, May 26, 1980.

<sup>142</sup> Quoted in Brozan, “Adolescents, Parents, and Birth Control,” B6.

pill,” explained Dr. Luella Klein, the project director of the Maternal and Infant Care Clinic of Grady Memorial Hospital in Atlanta.<sup>143</sup> Dr. Adele D. Hoffmann, the director of the adolescent medical unit at New York University Medical Center at Bellevue Hospital, doubted that the parental notification policy would prevent teenagers who were already sexually active from having sex; in 1982, most teens were sexually active for six months to a year before seeking contraception. “You can’t tell me that a letter saying, ‘Dear mother: Your daughter was in my office last week’ will be helpful,” Hoffman said.<sup>144</sup> Others noted that teenagers’ failure to use birth control (only one-third of sexually-active teens used birth control regularly) was likely to contribute to the high teenage pregnancy and abortion rates.<sup>145</sup>

The squeal-rule proposal provoked a harsh reaction from national medical organizations, including the American Medical Association. One hundred members of Congress and thirty-seven state health departments registered their opposition to the policy.<sup>146</sup> Planned Parenthood, which depended on federal subsidies to provide family planning services at 116 of its 188 affiliates, vowed to continue providing confidential services to its 185,000 minor clients even if it meant the organization would have to forgo up to \$30 million of federal funds.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 70.

<sup>146</sup> Other groups that opposed the parental notification policy proposal included the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association of Social Workers, the National Organization for Women, the YWCA, and the Girls Clubs of America. Mullin, “The Lady Behind the Squeal,” B1-B2.

<sup>147</sup> “Contraceptive Clinics Pledge Confidentiality,” *The New York Times*, April 15, 1982, A28.

Kathryn Orley, writing in the progressive monthly *Mother Jones*, excoriated Mecklenburg for seeking to regulate premarital teenage sex when Mecklenburg herself was rumored to have been pregnant when she married her high school sweetheart:

But [Mecklenburg] would just as soon keep quiet about those aspects of her personal history that do not conform to her “Little House on the Prairie” moral creed. Back home in Minnesota, where Mecklenburg was an out-spoken opponent of abortion rights, sources have revealed to us that the chastity crusader was pregnant before she married . . . How does Mecklenburg justify her efforts to impose an official morality on the nation’s young when she herself conceived a child out of wedlock? “No comment,” she told *Mother Jones* through her press secretary. “Ms. Mecklenburg does not comment on anything having to do with her personal life. It’s a family matter.” Unfortunately, Mecklenburg has no such hesitation about commenting on other people’s affairs.<sup>148</sup>

Powerful senators and congressmen from both sides of the aisle, including Republican Senators John Chafee of Rhode Island, Charles Mathias of Maryland, Ted Stevens of Alaska, Lowell Weicker of Connecticut and Democratic Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, resisted the Administration’s push to focus on social issues legislation. A similar parental notification clause had been proposed in 1978, but was soundly rejected on the grounds that teenagers would be more apt to use contraception if their confidentiality would be guaranteed.<sup>149</sup> Senator Chafee bristled at the thought of spending valuable time debating hot-button social issues when the economy was struggling; he warned that Reagan risked losing Republican support for future economic bills if he irritated too many senators and congressmen by making the priorities of the Moral Majority a focus of his term.<sup>150</sup> The Moral Majority, founded by fundamentalist Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell, built political coalitions to support anti-abortion policies and candidates, “pro-traditional family” issues (including opposition to homosexuality and

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<sup>148</sup> Kathryn Olney, “The Nation’s Chaperone,” *Mother Jones*, August 1983, 8.

<sup>149</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 70-71.

<sup>150</sup> “Two GOP Senators Plan to Block HLA,” *NRLN* January 12, 1981, 7.

support for chastity), “pro-moral” laws (with translated to initiatives to ban drugs and pornography), and “pro-American” policies (which included support for the expansion of the military and support for Israel).<sup>151</sup> At a convention for evangelical Christians held in Pensacola, Florida, in March 1983, President Reagan said, “The fight against parental notification is really only one example of many attempts to water down traditional values and even abrogate the original terms of American democracy.”<sup>152</sup>

Public response to the proposed regulation was overwhelmingly negative. In April 1982, the DHHS received 7,000 letters each week. (Planned Parenthood of American estimated that over 100,000 people sent letters to the DHHS during the comment period.) The DHHS had to hire an attorney to read and catalog all of the mail related to the squeal rule. Eighty-percent of letter writers opposed the regulation.<sup>153</sup> A self-identified Republican father of two teenage daughters cautioned that the proposal would “inject the Federal Government more into our lives than less.”<sup>154</sup> Indeed, some of the “pro-family” regulations would have required individuals to engage in intensely personal discussions.

The socially conservative turn in the DHHS illuminated the philosophical divide between traditional laissez-faire Republicans and the new crop of moral conservatives. Secretary Schweiker attempted to bridge the two groups when he said, “I don’t think the

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<sup>151</sup> Cal Thomas, the vice president for communications of the Moral Majority outlined these planks in a speech before the 1981 National Right to Life Convention in Nebraska. “Impact of the New Right on ’80 Election Results,” *NRLN* July 13, 1981, 9. Bill J. Leonard describes the politicization of fundamentalist Christians as a sort of dance. He explains, “Independent Baptists...were pushed toward such rightist political alignments because they were courted by right-wing political action leaders and because they believed that American society was near total moral collapse.” Leonard, “Independent Baptists: From Sectarian Minority to ‘Moral Majority,’” *Church History* 56, no. 4 (December 1987): 514.

<sup>152</sup> Qtd. in Marjorie Hunter, “Court Blocks Rule on Notice By Family Planning Clinics,” *The New York Times*, July 9, 1983, A5.

<sup>153</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 71.

<sup>154</sup> “Spirited Activity: The Mail Vote,” *The New York Times*, April 5, 1982, A22. See also Mullin, “The Lady Behind the Squeal.”

government should be in the sex education business.”<sup>155</sup> However, policies that required women and girls to receive parental or spousal consent in order to receive federally funded reproductive healthcare services reframed the way ordinary people thought about the relationship between individuals and the state. Republicans who believed that the federal government should not regulate intimate, private decisions lost ground to those who believed the government should prevent individuals from making immoral sexual and reproductive choices.

Mecklenburg was optimistic about the fate of the parental notification requirement. Because it was not attached to legislation, but was merely a regulation that would have been added to DHHS policy, the proposal did not require Congressional approval. Once approved by Secretary Schweiker, the only sector of government with the authority to prevent the policy from being enacted was the judiciary. Mecklenburg was confident that any criticism of the parental notification proposal simply reflected a shortcoming in Congress’s consideration of teenage sexuality, “If Congress does not want us to involve families in family planning decisions, it will have to restructure its own law.”<sup>156</sup> Just one week before the parental notification regulation was scheduled to take effect, a federal judge issued an injunction prohibiting the DHHS from enforcing the rule. Referring to the parental notification requirement as “coercive,” Judge Thomas A. Flannery ruled that the regulations were unlawful because they violated “the letter and spirit of the law” that authorized the federal government to use federal money for family planning services. Flannery noted “It is quite clear that, as a result of these regulations, substantial numbers of adolescents will become pregnant and will either elect abortion or

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<sup>155</sup> Peterson, “Abortion Foes Gain Key Federal Posts,” A12.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

suffer the consequences of unwanted pregnancies.”<sup>157</sup> The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia upheld Judge Flannery’s decision, ruling that such regulations “contravene Congressional intent” by requiring family involvement.<sup>158</sup> Both federal courts had agreed that there was no statutory basis for the DHHS to require minors to receive parental consent before obtaining contraceptives.

### Target: Sex Education

While the fight over the squeal rule raged, Mecklenburg quietly expanded the scope of the Adolescent Family Life Program, which was established by Congress in 1978 to “promote self-discipline and other prudent approaches to the problem of adolescent premarital sexual relations.”<sup>159</sup> In 1983, the program had a budget of \$13.5 million. Mecklenburg approved funds to support projects that promoted teenage abstinence.<sup>160</sup> She contended that young people needed alternatives to the sexually suggestive popular culture of the 1980s. “There are messages that are beamed to our young people to become sexually active, that this is glamorous, that this is modern.”<sup>161</sup> It was one of only a handful of public health programs to receive a budget increase during President Ronald Reagan’s first term in office.

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<sup>157</sup> Robert Pear, “Birth Control Rule Is Blocked,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1983, A9. See also “Successor Named to Fill Population Post Left By Mecklenburg,” *Minneapolis Star Tribune* February 28, 1985.

<sup>158</sup> Hunter, “Court Blocks Rule on Notice By Family Planning Clinics,” A5. One judge, Robert H. Bork, of the three-judge panel dissented.

<sup>159</sup> Robert Pear, “Reagan Family Planning Aide Quits,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 1985, A17; David E. Rosenbaum, “Abortion Foe is Chief Candidate to Lead Birth Control Programs,” *The New York Times*, February 18, 1981, A20.

<sup>160</sup> Gloria Ford, “Marjory Mecklenburg: Mrs. ‘Alternatives to Abortion,’” *NRLN Special Supplement* May 26, 1983, n.p.

<sup>161</sup> Michael Isikoff, “Her Foe Is Popular Culture,” *The Washington Post*, March 28, 1983, A9.

Under Mecklenburg, the adolescent life program took a decidedly narrow approach to educating teenagers about sexuality. Of the 500 applications received by the Office of the Adolescent Family Life Program in 1982, only sixty-two were approved.<sup>162</sup> Roman Catholic charities favored well; Catholic hospitals, social services, and agencies that promoted abstinence before marriage and counseled against birth control and abortion received most of the \$23 million distributed during Mecklenburg's tenure at DHHS. Methodist clergy joined the American Jewish Congress to challenge the constitutionality of the program. They contended that under Mecklenburg, the adolescent family life program promoted "excessive entanglement" between the government and religion.<sup>163</sup> Meanwhile, critics from the national Urban League charged that under Mecklenburg, well-established projects intended to help minority and inner-city young people were denied funding in favor of experimental abstinence-only pilot programs. For example, Mecklenburg approved a \$78,000 study to help researchers identify teenagers' strategies for having clandestine sex in their parents' homes.<sup>164</sup>

Mecklenburg's ideological approach to administering federal policy haunted her throughout her tenure with the DHHS. The ACLU subpoenaed her telephone logs from 1981 and 1982, when she was reorganizing the means by which Title X grants were distributed. The logs revealed that she received regular phone calls from Ed Meese, the Counselor to the President for Policy (and future Attorney General) and Senator Jeremiah Denton, a socially conservative Republican from Alabama. Two DHHS employees testified that during this period, Mecklenburg began distributing a list of "left leaning"

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<sup>162</sup> Isikoff, "Her Foe Is Popular Culture," A9. Mecklenburg provided different figures in an article she wrote for the *NRLN*. She wrote that the Adolescent Family Life program awarded \$11.7 million to fund seventy-five research and demonstration projects in 1983. Marjory Mecklenburg, "AFL: Addressing the Problem of Teenage Pregnancy," *NRLN* January 12, 1983, 5.

<sup>163</sup> Pear, "Reagan Family Planning Aide Quits," A17; Robert Pear, "Treating the Nation's Epidemic of Teenage Pregnancy," *The New York Times*, June 3, 1984, E5.

<sup>164</sup> Olney, "The Nation's Chaperone," 8.

organizations and telling staff to recommend that they not receive federal funds.

Mecklenburg testified that she had no recollection of the lists or advising staff not to fund particular groups.<sup>165</sup>

The ACLU warned that the disproportionate number of awards given to religious groups verged on the promotion of religion by the state. This occurred against the backdrop of the gutting of Title X, when the federal government substantially decreased the amount of grant money available to clinics that provided even modest reproductive rights services, including contraceptives.<sup>166</sup> In less than a year, the morally conservative paradigm that shaped sexual and reproductive health funding in the United States would affect developing countries around the world, when the Reagan Administration announced that it would not fund family planning agencies that provided abortions or counseled about abortion, even if abortions were rarely performed at the clinics.<sup>167</sup>

### Conclusion

Marjory Mecklenburg's ability to read the political mood of the nation and her willingness to work across partisan lines helped her to become an instrumental figure in the organization of the national anti-abortion movement. By staying out of the bitter partisan debate over the Human Life Amendment, she became known as a non-polarizing figure during a period when politicians were forced to declare publicly their positions on abortion policies. During the 1980s, her reputation as a conciliatory reformer led to her

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<sup>165</sup> McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 72-73.

<sup>166</sup> Between 1980 and 1994, federal funding for family planning services declined by nearly \$100 million, or twenty-five percent. Joffe, "Welfare and Reproductive Politics," 296.

<sup>167</sup> Diane di Mauro and Carole Joffe, "The Religious Right and the Reshaping of Sexual Policy: An Examination of Reproductive Rights and Sexuality Education," *Sexuality Research Social Policy* 4, no. 1 (March 2007): 71. The Reagan Administration pulled its funding for international agencies that provided abortions occurred at a UN conference on population in Mexico City in 1984. Subsequently, the debate about funding international family-planning agencies that include abortion services come to be known as the "Mexico City policy." President Clinton overturned the Reagan and President George H.W. Bush stance, while President George W. Bush reinstated it.



nomination for a post within the Reagan Administration. Under her direction, the regulation of sexuality and abortion became further intertwined with federal policy. Her ideological approach to administering federal policy had raised the ire of medical, feminist, and civil liberties groups and had raised her profile among powerful social conservatives. When federal courts prevented the squeal rule from taking effect, religious conservatives hailed Mecklenburg for trying to protect traditional family values. Shortly after the regulation collapsed, social conservatives encouraged her to run for U.S. Senate.<sup>168</sup>

Mecklenburg's influence within the federal government peaked at a time when the ideological framework of the mainstream anti-abortion movement was contracting. In the mid-1980s, a number of scholarly analyses of the U.S. debate over abortion caught the attention of leaders of the NRLC.<sup>169</sup> NRLC leaders addressed the scholars' findings and offered their own analysis. Dave Andrusko, the editor of the *National Right to Life News*, worried that scholars were prone to minimize differences between pro-choice and anti-abortion activists because they often studied isolated factors, including attitudes about motherhood, freedom, or individualism. Andrusko rejected the notion that pro-choice and anti-abortion activists existed on any type of continuum and castigated scholars for evaluating two camps with intrinsically different philosophical understandings of life using the same variables. "All we can do," Andrusko explained, "is to carefully demonstrate that waving the flag of compassion, individually, and equality for women while bashing in the heads of defenseless children is blatantly inconsistent."<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Steve Chapple and David Talbot, *Burning Desires: Sex in America: A Report from the Field* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 79.

<sup>169</sup> These included Marilyn Falk, *Ideology and Abortion Policy Politics*, (New York: Praeger, 1983), Kristin Luker: *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), and Donald Granberg, "The Abortion Activists," *Family Planning Perspectives* 13 (July/August 1981): 157-163.

<sup>170</sup> Dave Andrusko, "What Have We Learned?" *NRLN* February 14, 1985, 2.

The differences between pro-choice and anti-abortion activists were too profound for common ground, according to Andrusko. He compared pro-choice activists to sex-crazed adolescents who wanted to experience sexual pleasure but were too immature to grapple with the consequences of human reproduction. “Our pro-abortion sophisticates simply ignore the connection [between sex and reproduction] and deny the responsibility for their own actions. Somebody must pay the piper.”<sup>171</sup> Andrusko was emblematic of the trend of narrowing the terms of abortion. By portraying the issue as one between sinful women and innocent fetuses, the economic and social contexts that contributed to unwanted pregnancies ceased to be relevant.

Leaders in the anti-abortion movement increasingly turned their attention away from the social circumstances that contributed to unwanted pregnancies and instead focused on the morality of destroying fetal life. The NRLC’s narrow approach to fighting abortion, via the HLA, contrasted with the approach of socially conservative federal administrators. In the DHHS, Mecklenburg sought to limit women’s knowledge of and access to abortion by transforming the social programs that addressed teenage sex, birth control, and funding for abortion. Her strategy to decrease abortion rates was tied to a social, often preventative approach, which considered sex education and the availability of birth control, though often from an anti-feminist perspective. The emerging anti-abortion movement, however, was not concerned with the complicated social problems that contributed to unwanted pregnancies.

In 1985, Mecklenburg became the focus of an investigation by the Health and Human Services inspector general’s office for the possible misuse of government funds for

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<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* Wanda Franz, the Vice-President of the NRLC, reiterated Andrusko’s claims in her own analysis of the psychological stages people experience when confronted with moral issues. According to Franz, the stages include egocentrism, socialization, and the development of principles. Successful anti-abortion activists convince women to look beyond their selfish interests and empathize with fetuses, according to Franz. Wanda Franz, “How People Receive the Pro-Life Message,” *NRLN* February 14, 1985, 8.

mixing business with pleasure over the course of her appointment. During one of the seventeen trips under examination, Mecklenburg stayed in Denver an additional day after a DHHS workshop in order to attend a football game between the Denver Broncos and the Minnesota Vikings. Mecklenburg's son, Karl, was the Broncos' pro-bowl linebacker.<sup>172</sup>

Mecklenburg's subordinates at the DHHS had little sympathy for their boss. When she assumed her post, Mecklenburg fostered camaraderie by jogging with employees and attending small office parties. One of Mecklenburg's aides noted, "Marjory used to come into your office and talk to you. At the end, not only did she not come into your office, you could not get in to see her."<sup>173</sup> Her relationship with an aide, Ernie Peterson, had caused a rift within the Department. Peterson, a wildly unpopular career employee, displayed a Bible on his desk and spoke openly about his support for family values after Ronald Reagan was elected president.<sup>174</sup> Peterson and Mecklenburg became inseparable. Peterson, who had a reputation for being unfriendly to women, vetted Mecklenburg's meetings and irritated professionals by whispering questions and comments to Mecklenburg during high-level meetings. Sometimes, Mecklenburg retreated to Peterson's office, where staff would see her lie down beside him on his couch. Most DHHS employees believed they were having an affair. One former aide noted, "Whether or not they were having sex was a moot point. They were constantly together, closer than a married couple, and they were becoming more and more isolated."<sup>175</sup>

As she became further isolated from her staff, DHHS employees responsible for administering the Title X program began to refer to Mecklenburg's style of supervision "the treatment." She assigned staff to complete difficult tasks, only to reassign the same people

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<sup>172</sup> "Successor Named to Fill Population Post Left By Mecklenburg," n.p.

<sup>173</sup> Quoted in McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 73.

<sup>174</sup> Chapple and Talbot, *Burning Desires*, 80.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

to different projects or cancel the assignments altogether. Employees complained that Mecklenburg did assign managers to monitor projects. One employee remarked, “nothing got done. ... You would write reports and nobody would read them. You’d ask for guidance on policy issues and never get an answer.” Another employee said, “You were paid to do nothing. It was an enormous waste—all those Ph.D.’s and you weren’t even allowed to write a letter.” Career employees believed that Mecklenburg was deliberately mismanaging the Title X program in order to render it impotent. “They wanted to weaken family planning until it was ineffective so they could say ‘It’s not working, let’s defund it,’” speculated one employee.<sup>176</sup>

The infamous Colorado trip occurred long after career public health professionals had dismissed Mecklenburg as a right-wing ideologue. In 1985, Title X employees filed a complaint with the inspector general’s office regarding her taxpayer-funded trips that seemed to have little relation to her work for the DHHS. Investigators determined that over a three-year period, Mecklenburg and Peterson had submitted travel vouchers for fourteen trips, costing over \$13,000. During the November 1984 trip to Denver, Mecklenburg and Peterson attended only one session of a three-day workshop, even though they had submitted a voucher for the entire conference. The day before the conference commenced, Mecklenburg and Peterson had attended her son’s football game.

Conservative politicians who had championed “family values” legislation had little incentive to defend Mecklenburg once rumors of an affair began to circulate in Washington, D.C. Republican Senator Jeremiah Denton, who had worked closely with Mecklenburg on abstinence-only sex education initiatives, was infuriated by Mecklenburg’s poor judgment. An Office of Population Affairs staffer recalled, “The rumors were really flying. ...Denton was going to sell her down the river. When you get mired in a sex scandal

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<sup>176</sup> These DHHS employees spoke to Michele McKeegan on the condition that they remain anonymous. McKeegan, *Abortion Politics*, 74.

in Washington, you suddenly have no friends—especially among conservatives. They're so concerned with people not having sex that it becomes a fetish with them.”<sup>177</sup> Although the investigation was dropped due to a lack of evidence of criminal wrongdoing, Mecklenburg's reputation was sullied and, on February 26, 1985, she was forced to resign.

Peterson and Mecklenburg believed the allegations against them were politically motivated. In her letter of resignation, Mecklenburg wrote, “The allegations are unfounded and unfair.... The complaints are nothing more than philosophical differences with this administration.”<sup>178</sup> Garry L. Curran, a spokesperson for the American Life Lobby, believed that Mecklenburg's political agenda ran counter to the non-partisan, medical interests of most DHHS staffers. Halfway through Mecklenburg's tenure at the DHHS, Curran remarked that Mecklenburg and fellow social conservatives who had been appointed to usher in socially conservative policies had gotten “eaten alive by the technically more competent people who were buried in the Civil Service.”<sup>179</sup> Janet B. Carroll, the associate legislative director of the NRLC, hailed Mecklenburg as the “mother of the alternatives to abortion movement” for fusing programs aimed to curtail teenage sex with the federal government's broader reproductive goals.<sup>180</sup> After Mecklenburg resigned from her post, another pro-chastity, anti-contraception leader from the NRLC, Jo Ann Gasper, took her place and followed the course Mecklenburg had charted.

Marjory Mecklenburg's rise and fall within the movement is instructive for understanding the history of the anti-abortion movement from the early 1970s through the mid-1980s. When she helped found the Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, and later,

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<sup>177</sup> Qtd. in Chapple and Talbot, *Burning Desires*, 81.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Robert Pear, “Influence of Sub-Cabinet Conservatives is Mixed,” *The New York Times*, July 6, 1983, B5.

<sup>180</sup> Janet B. Carroll, “Marjory Mecklenburg Leaves Government Post,” *NRLN* March 28, 1985, 3.

the NRLC, Mecklenburg was part of an effort to expand the base of leadership away from Catholic clergy and to focus on policy rather than protest. The single-issue focus of the NRLC eventually bound the objectives of the organization to those policies and those politicians who promised to enact the Human Life Amendment. This approach narrowed the political and philosophical avenues available to reform abortion laws. By the mid-1980s, the NRLC, which had once promised to champion diverse political and philosophical strategies for ending abortion, was fused with the GOP and a near-singular fixation on fetal protection. As a result, those who refused to comply with the narrow terms for ending abortion fell out of the ranks of the mainstream movement.

Although her tenure with the DHHS ended ignominiously, Marjory Mecklenburg's approach to whittling away at abortion piece by piece served as a blueprint to social conservative bureaucrats and legislators for the next thirty years.<sup>181</sup> Opposition to a range of reproductive health issues, including contraception and sex education, became a means to reduce poor women's access to and information about abortion. Over the course of Mecklenburg's fifteen-year career, the anti-abortion movement had become a legitimate, dynamic, and powerful force in U.S. politics.

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<sup>181</sup> Erik Eckholm, "Planned Parenthood Funding Is Caught in Budget Feud," *The New York Times*, February 17, 2011, A16.

## CHAPTER THREE

“WE RANGE FROM MARXIST TO MORAL MAJORITY:”  
GRASSROOTS CATHOLIC ACTIVISM AND THE POLITICS OF  
ABORTION, 1979-1987

In the winter of 1980, a group of Catholic women, led by Juli Loesch, assembled in front of the Pentagon and staged an abortion—replete with fake blood—which they poured on the ground for special effect.<sup>1</sup> The participants in the theatrical demonstration wanted to bring attention to their organization, Prolifers for Survival (PS), which opposed the proliferation of nuclear weapons and abortion. PS was one of several anti-abortion organizations composed primarily of socially progressive Catholic women who shaped the early grassroots fight against abortion.<sup>2</sup>

The choreographed demonstration at the Pentagon occurred at a time when the anti-abortion movement was divided—philosophically, politically, and strategically. Elites, including the leaders of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC) and the American Life League, were seeking to gain a toehold in American politics, where they hoped to influence abortion-related laws and policies. These abortion opponents were becoming entrenched with the Republican Party, whose leaders promised to sponsor legislation to restrict legal abortion. No major organization spoke directly to grassroots activists, who were overwhelmingly female and Catholic, and were generally most interested in educating the public about abortion and counseling pregnant women against having abortion. In this milieu, Juli Loesch sought to organize a grassroots movement devoted to transforming Americans’ attitudes about life and death.

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<sup>1</sup> Juli Loesch, “Prolifers for Survival Handbook,” ca. 1980, 3, Juli Loesch Wiley Papers, Archival Collections, Wisconsin State Historical Society Archives, Madison, Wisconsin, hereafter, JLP, folder 7. Three activists, including Loesch, were arrested and convicted on charges of depredation of government property. Loesch is pronounced ‘lesh, like “flesh.”

<sup>2</sup> Other Catholic anti-abortion organizations formed during this period include Catholics United for Life, Feminists for Life, Pro-Life Action Network, Pro-Life Nonviolent Action Project, and the Seamless Garment Network.

Catholic women who gravitated toward grassroots anti-abortion activism in the 1970s pose a curious problem for historians of grassroots movements in the United States. These activists are difficult to categorize. Many opposed nuclear proliferation and the Vietnam War and supported the civil rights and labor movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Many called themselves feminists. They often worked outside the parameters of formal political and legal frameworks. Instead, they engaged the public on city sidewalks, at clinic entryways, and in women's living rooms. Their organizations were small and poorly funded compared to larger, single-issue groups. However, during the 1970s and 1980s, progressive grassroots Catholics emerged as one of the fiercest coalitions against abortion rights for women and adopted protest strategies that would later become part of the repertoire of much larger national organizations.

Juli Loesch's experience as a grassroots anti-abortion activist captures the rise and fall of Catholic women's influence in the pro-life movement. During the course of her career, she had to reconcile her support for socially progressive causes with her work in the anti-abortion movement. Worried that activists from the anti-Vietnam War and anti-nuclear proliferation movements would be reluctant to protest against abortion, Loesch set out to divest the anti-abortion movement of its un-hip, politically conservative, and anti-feminist reputation. She adopted rhetorical strategies and tactics to suit the changing tides of public opinion, popular press, and the anti-abortion movement as a whole. For a time, Loesch was an instrumental voice in an intellectually vibrant, dynamic grassroots movement that fused her belief in social justice with her vision of feminism.

Her experiences with progressive social justice movements during the 1960s and 1970s influenced the way Juli Loesch would later think about abortion.<sup>3</sup> After graduating

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<sup>3</sup> While American women have a long tradition of involvement in social movements, working-class Catholic women were relatively absent from late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century- activist movements, particularly the suffrage and corresponding anti-suffrage movements. James J. Kenneally speculates that the conservatism of Catholic education and the relative poverty of



from high school in Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1969, Loesch enrolled in summer school at Antioch College, a private liberal arts university in Yellow Springs, Ohio, famed for organizing civil rights and anti-Vietnam War protests in the 1960s. But she was disappointed at the lack of political activism she found at Antioch College. She determined that campus protests did little to combat the social injustices that permeated American culture. “I had heard that Antioch was a hotbed of radicalism and anti-war activism and that’s what I wanted to do. . . . It turned out not to be,” she explained, “Everybody was basically smoking dope and getting laid . . . I mean I wanted to do serious things, I wanted to be involved in non-violent revolution.”<sup>4</sup> After three months, Loesch traded in the rolling hills of southwestern Ohio for the grape fields of California, hoping to put her ideological support for human rights into action.

Loesch spent the next five years learning the strategies of nonviolent activism with César Chávez. She was a fixture in the Chavez family, and even served as a bridesmaid in one daughter’s wedding. From 1969 to 1972, she worked as a boycott organizer for the National Farm Workers Union in Delano, California, and volunteered with the Farmworkers Boycott Committee in Detroit.<sup>5</sup> In 1972, she returned to her hometown,

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American Catholics prevented working-class Catholic women from having the resources to participate in national activist campaigns. James J. Kenneally, “Eve, Mary, and the Historians: American Catholicism and Women,” in *Women in American Religion*, ed. Janet Wilson James, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982), 191-206. Catholic women were not completely absent from debates about suffrage or the ERA in the early twentieth century, however. The National Council of Catholic Women testified against the ERA in the 1920s, arguing that it “seriously menaced the unity of the home and family life.” Qtd. in Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), 141.

<sup>4</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, interview by Karen Lamoree, transcript, October 19, 1994, 4, 19, JLP, folder 2. In 1993, Antioch College adopted a comprehensive sexual offense policy that required students to obtain verbal consent before proceeding to new levels of intimacy. The policy, which was praised by advocates for victims of sexual assault, was lampooned by late-night talk show hosts and parodied on *Saturday Night Live*. “‘Ask First’ at Antioch,” *The New York Times*, October 11, 1993, A16.

<sup>5</sup> Wiley interview, 5. At age thirty-four, Juli Loesch boasted, “I have worked as a frozen hamburger patty packer, a plastic injection molder, a labor organizer, a women’s shelter staffer, and a writer, speaker, agitator, and activist.” Juli Loesch, “Personal Letter of Purpose,” 1985, JLP, folder 1. For a lively analysis of the adaptability of religion in American political, social, and spiritual life

Erie, Pennsylvania, where she co-founded the city's Pax (Peace) Center, a feminist Benedictine community inspired by the Catholic Worker model. Members engaged a variety of social justice issues, including anti-poverty, peace, anti-nuclear weapons, and workers' rights campaigns. Pax Center members subscribed to the seamless garment philosophy, which held that life should be protected from conception to death. Pax Christi is an international Catholic peace organization formed after World War II as a vehicle to oppose war, and later, war and abortion. The phrase "seamless garment" appears in John 19:23, "When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom."<sup>6</sup> Loesch was a member of the American Abolitionist League during the 1970s; in 1978, she was arrested for trespassing at the Women's Health Services in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, with eight other members of the group.<sup>7</sup>

In 1979, Juli Loesch and a handful of friends founded Prolifers for Survival (PS) in the wake of the partial meltdown of a nuclear reactor at Three Mile Island, located near Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Environmentalists and peace activists were quick to respond to the nuclear disaster, which occurred at the height of the nation's energy crisis and at a moment when U.S. foreign relations were still mired in Cold War tensions.<sup>8</sup> PS members did not have to work hard to justify their opposition to nuclear technology in the

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in the twentieth century, see Paul S. Boyer, "The Chameleon with Nine Lives: American Religion in the Twentieth Century," in *Perspectives on Modern America: Making Sense of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Harvard Sitkoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Wiley, interview, 2. See James R. Kelly, "Finding Renewal: Why the Pro-Life Movement Should Return to Its Roots," *America* 200 no. 5 (February 16, 2009), 10. *The Holy Bible: New International Edition* (Biblica, 2011), available on-line: <http://niv.scripturetext.com/john/19.htm>

<sup>7</sup> "Hour by Hour Chronology of a Protest," *National Right to Life News* (NRLN), January 1979, 16.

<sup>8</sup> Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 128-130.

progressive Catholic circles they inhabited. Loesch was aware that many would find the group's dual mission strange. She believed that the process of educating people about the relationship between nuclear weapons and abortion was an effective way of transforming Americans' attitudes about both issues.

Loesch believed that the proliferation of nuclear weapons and legal abortion were signs of the devaluation of human life in American culture. After distributing 6,000 leaflets at anti-nuclear technology demonstrations throughout summer of 1979, fourteen activists from the anti-nuclear proliferation movement agreed to help Loesch and several friends organize the fledgling anti-abortion and anti-nuclear weapons group. PS chapters were soon established in eight states; in August, Loesch sent the organization's first newsletter to 200 members.<sup>9</sup> In less than four years, the group would have 2,500 members in twenty chapters located in the United States, West Germany, and Australia.<sup>10</sup>

### The Tactics of Progressive Anti-Abortion Activists

While their well-funded professional counterparts worked day and night to overturn *Roe*, grassroots activists focused their attention to educational "consciousness raising" meetings, sidewalk counseling in front of clinics, large protests, tax evasion and pregnancy crisis centers.<sup>11</sup> These strategies, which required face-to-face encounters with women and personal risk of prosecution, provided balance to the movement as a whole. While pro-life bureaucrats, attorneys and politicians worked to change policy, grassroots activists became the face of the movement for ordinary Americans.

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<sup>9</sup> "Prolifers for Survival Chapter Handbook," ca. 1979, 3, JLP, Folder 7. Other PS co-founders include Mary Meehan, Leszek Syski and Liz Moore.

<sup>10</sup> Lisa Engelhardt, "Juli Loesch: 'War is Abortion and Abortion is War,'" October 1983, JLP, folder 1.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Merton, *Enemies of Choice: The Right-To-Life Movement & Its Threat to Abortion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), 8.

During PS's formative years, members engaged in theatrical, symbolic demonstrations that attracted the attention of curious passersby and the press. Members used these spectacles to teach the public about the group's dual mission to protest against nuclear proliferation and abortion. An organization handbook advises, "You've got to understand what the TV news, the radio, and newspapers are all about. They're about entertainment." Although opponents of nuclear arms and abortion were at a disadvantage because, "nukes and abortions are not funny or appealing topics," PS leaders hoped that members could overcome such obstacles.<sup>12</sup>

Creative tactics for agitating against nuclear arms and abortion may have attracted media coverage, but the complexity of the group's mission was difficult to communicate in sound-bites. Loesch struggled to convince people outside of her tight-knit band of progressive Catholic activists that the anti-abortion and the anti-nuclear weapons movement had much in common. Within the first year of its existence, PS leaders changed the mission and tactics of the organization in order to court new members. They narrowed the mission of the group, so that members focused almost exclusively on abortion activism. And instead of drawing upon a committed group of activists to participate in acts of civil disobedience, PS leaders persuaded abortion opponents that anyone, shy or outspoken, those prepared to devote hours a week and those who could spare only minutes, could join the effort to curb abortion.

Juli Loesch devised dozens of tasks—ranging from clerical to confrontational—in the quest to recruit members. She created an elaborate volunteer checklist that enabled women with diverse skill sets to identify tasks they might feel comfortable performing. PS members could volunteer to place phone calls, sponsor garage sale fundraisers, provide legal advice, or simply run errands.<sup>13</sup> Loesch advised local chapters to educate the public, participate in

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<sup>12</sup> "Chapter Handbook," 7.

<sup>13</sup> Juli Loesch, "Prolifers for Survival: Volunteer Form" undated, JLP, folder 7.

clinic demonstrations, assist pregnant women, and court media attention to the anti-abortion movement. After watching graphic films and conversing about their disapproval of abortion, PS leaders encouraged women who attended the “educational” meetings to complete the volunteer checklist.

American Catholics were engaged in lively debates about how to think about abortion when Loesch founded PS. In 1983, Cardinal Bernardin of Chicago introduced the term “consistent life ethic” in an effort to unite people who advocated on behalf of a variety of moral issues.<sup>14</sup> In order to maintain ethical consistency, he maintained, one must protect and defend all forms of life, from conception to death. The moral appeal to defend life consistently had a strategic purpose. It would not only be inconsistent, but also self-defeating to protest against nuclear arms, the death penalty, or euthanasia without opposing abortion, too.<sup>15</sup>

Progressive Catholics, including PS members, argued that their belief in a “consistent life ethic” helped them to get right what most in the anti-abortion movement were getting wrong.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the 1980s, abortion opponents were criticized for defending fetal rights while opposing federal programs that supported families and

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<sup>14</sup> Nat Hentoff, “How Can the Left Be Against Life?” *The Village Voice* 16 July 1985, 18. Bernardin had previously become a cause célèbre among anti-abortion intellectuals when, in 1983, he delivered a lecture titled “A Consistent Ethic of Life: An American Catholic Dialogue,” at Fordham University. See Kelley, “Finding Renewal,” 11. In a 1989 study of 400 people in Muncie, Indiana, sociologists found that most respondents who identified as “pro-life” were not ideologically committed to a belief in the “consistent life ethic.” However, of those who correlated their opposition to abortion with a belief in the “consistent life ethic,” a majority was Catholic. Joseph B. Tamney, Stephen D. Johnson and Ronald Burton, “The Abortion Controversy: Conflicting Beliefs and Values in American Society,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 31 (March 1992): 44.

<sup>15</sup> Archbishop John Roach of St. Paul, Minnesota, explained, “Selective reverence for human life is a kind of contradiction in terms, not only as a matter of logic, but also as a matter of existential reality.” qtd. in Hentoff.

<sup>16</sup> Progressive Catholics used the terms “consistent life ethic” and “seamless garment philosophy” interchangeably.

children and promoting the expansion of the military.<sup>17</sup> Socially progressive anti-abortion activists argued that their concern for the well-being of humans before and after birth gave them the humanity and logical consistency that their conservative colleagues lacked.

Conservative Catholics balked at Bernardin's proposal to consider abortion as one part of a larger strategy to promote and nurture life. Archbishop John O'Connor of New York said, "if the unborn in a mother's womb is unsafe it becomes ludicrous for the bishops to address the threat of nuclear war."<sup>18</sup> Myrna Shaneyfelt, a conservative Catholic pro-life activist in Oregon, believed that Bernardin's call for Catholics to engage a variety of social issues was distracting. She reflected, "[We needed to] keep the focus on babies."<sup>19</sup> Opposition to the seamless garment philosophy and the consistent life ethic revealed deeper tensions about Vatican II within the Catholic Church. Shaneyfelt, who referred to the Second Vatican Council as a "cataclysmic event in the Church" and "a takeover by the leftists, who imparted theology in social justice," understood abortion to be an absolute evil. In PS, Loesch offered nuanced explanations for thinking about the fight against abortion as a fight on behalf of the interests of women.

### Pro-Life Feminism

Many progressive Catholic anti-abortion activists considered themselves to be feminists. Anti-abortion feminists believed that men and women were fundamentally different, and that in order for women to attain social and economic equality, they needed to be protected from exploitation. Loesch argued that the sexual revolution promoted sexual permissiveness, which threatened the innocence of romantic relationships and

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<sup>17</sup> Linda Gordon, "Is Abortion the Issue?," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1986, 37.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Margaret Ross Sammon, "The Politics of the U.S. Catholic Bishops: The Centrality of Abortion," in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith & Power*, ed. Kristen E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Myrna Shaneyfelt, telephone, December 3, 2010.

damaged women psychologically.<sup>20</sup> She described friends who were “casualties” of “fly-by-night” relationships and “were barely able to cope” with the regret they felt after having procured abortions “on a whim.”<sup>21</sup> Abortion, she maintained, was a tool that prevented men from marrying women and establishing families. For pro-life feminists, legal abortion represented the abandonment of legal and social protections for women and the availability of the procedure left women vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Loesch characterized abortion as a gateway to objectification: “abortion becomes part of the female-body-as-recreational-object syndrome. The idea is that a man can use a woman, vacuum her out, and she’s ready to be used again. It’s like she’s a rent-a-car or something. This obviously plays into a very alienated kind of male use of women.”<sup>22</sup>

Unlike most activists in the professional anti-abortion movement, who were generally opposed to feminism, PS and Feminists for Life members supported the Equal

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<sup>20</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, “The Tale of a Feminist ‘Freak:’ Solidarity and Sexual Shalom,” *New Oxford Review* May 1990, 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* Nineteenth century members of the woman’s movement also offered socialist critiques of industrial capitalism. The resources of the communitarian socialist tradition helped to make the gender politics of labor and the household issues of public concern and examination. Cott 17. John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 64. The term “feminist” was not used widely until the 1910s. See Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 13. Loesch was conscious of her invocation of 19<sup>th</sup> century womanist rhetoric. See *Pro-Life Feminism*, ed. Gail Grenier Sweet (Toronto: Life Cycle Books, 1985). Loesch’s chapters, titled “Pro-Life, Pro E.R.A.,” “Abortion and the Left,” “Nukes Abort Everybody,” and “Our Bodies, Their Lives,” are included in this collection, which also contains chapters by Kathleen M. Glover, “Pro-Life Feminism: A Historical Perspective,” which explicitly connects 20<sup>th</sup> century pro-life feminism with so-called “first-wave” feminists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Notably, the only male contributor to the essay collection was Ken Kesey, author of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (1963), who wrote “The ‘Unwanted’ Child.”

<sup>22</sup> “Portrait of a Prolife Pro: Salt Interviews Juli Loesch,” *Salt* October 1984, 8. JLP, folder 1.

Rights Amendment.<sup>23</sup> In 1979, Loesch criticized pro-choice ERA supporters for including abortion rights in their calls for political, legal, and economic equality. She maintained that the basic premise of the ERA campaign, which was that women deserved legal equality “as a matter of justice,” could have attracted a wide base of supporters, including members of most religious denominations.<sup>24</sup> However, she contended, linking abortion rights to the ERA paralyzed the initiative. “Abortion is such a liability as an issue that it should have been rejected as a priority by the women’s movement on pragmatic political grounds alone,” she explained. The political blunder of linking abortion to the ERA was emblematic of the larger problem of identifying abortion rights as a feminist issue. Pro-choice logic, she contended, was anti-feminist. “Collective responsibility is eroded by abortion,” Loesch maintained, because society can tell a woman with an unwanted pregnancy, “Lady, we feel no particular responsibility for your little problem because there is nothing to feel responsible for; so just terminate your little problem and everyone will breathe easier.” By focusing on abortion rights, politicians, attorneys, and activists were ignoring the economic and political circumstances that made pregnancy burdensome for poor women, Loesch contended. The president of Feminists for Life, Pam Cira, explained,

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<sup>23</sup> “ERA-Abortion Link Now Indisputable,” *NRLN* March 22, 1983, 1 and 8. Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life, the NRLC affiliate founded by Marjory Mecklenburg and her husband, opposed the initiative to pass a state ERA in that state. Douglas Johnson, “Pennsylvania Ruling Increases Awareness of ERA/Abortion Link,” *NRLN* April 5, 1984, 1. In 1984, the NRLC Board of Directors adopted a resolution opposed to the passage of the ERA unless it was amended to stipulate that it would not expand abortion rights. Douglas Johnson, “Why Is NRLC a ‘Single-Issue’ Organization?” *NRLN* June 1, 1984, 6.

<sup>24</sup> Juli Loesch, “Feminists for Life Author Says No Abortion Link,” *NRLN* January 1979, 9. Mainstream activists in the movement were generally critical of the ERA. Thomas J. Marzen, “ERA Decision Hurts Cause of HLA,” *NRLN* January 25, 1982, 1.



“The basic tenant of feminism is the equality and dignity of each individual.”<sup>25</sup> She continued, “If a woman’s value is intrinsic and not to be based on her ‘wantedness’ by someone else, then the life of an unborn child has intrinsic worth and should not depend on wantedness by another.” Extending legal rights to fetuses, according to this rationale, was similar to the fight for gender equality that feminists had been waging for centuries.

Women who supported most of the aims of second-wave feminism but opposed abortion did not have an ideological home in mainstream feminist or anti-abortion organizations in the 1970s. NRLC member Theresa Ross rejected the notion that opposition to abortion might be compatible with contemporary feminism. In response to Loesch’s assertion that “the feminist movement and the pro-life movement must eventually dock together,” in order to remain relevant, Ross countered, “That can never be! We are the true feminists, feminine, loving, caring, women.” She contended that women in the anti-abortion movement had ceded the word “feminist” to pro-choice feminists, “(we prefer to call them feminoids) [who] will never change their position on abortion or their endorsement of the Equal Rights Amendment.” As for pro-life feminists, Ross warned, “those who delude themselves into believing there can ever be a meeting of minds have an endless wait.”<sup>26</sup> Ross characterized Loesch as a divisive fool, “When will our dedicated

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<sup>25</sup> Pam Cira qt. in “Feminism and the Pro-life Movement,” *NRLN* July 21, 1980, 10. It is useful to compare the invocation of 19<sup>th</sup> century feminism by late-20<sup>th</sup> century activists to works on invented traditions. Eric Hobsbawm explains, “It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the ‘invention of tradition’ so interesting for historians of the past two centuries.” *Invention of Tradition*. ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 2. While women’s participation in progressive activism (ex. child labor, anti-lynching, desegregation) has received the lion’s share of scholarly attention to women’s activism in the post-suffrage era, historians have studied how conservative women used the language of citizenship as articulated by the suffrage movement to advance conservative, often nativist causes. See Kathleen M. Blee, “Women in the 1920s Ku Klux Klan Movement,” in *Feminist Studies* 17 (Spring 1991): 57-77 and Lisa McGirr, “Piety and Property: Conservatism and Right-Wing Movements in the Twentieth Century,” in *Perspectives on Modern America: Making Sense of the Twentieth Century*. ed. Harvard Kitkoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 33-53.

<sup>26</sup> Theresa L. Ross, “ERA Connection,” letter to the editor, *NRLN* March 1979, 14.

Right to Lifers stop quibbling over terminology and recognize the enemy for what it is?" PS members, however, were not ready to concede that American feminism was intractably bound to support for abortion rights.

Women in progressive pro-life groups believed that the status of women could be improved by strengthening social and economic protections for pregnant women and mothers. Feminists for Life member Paulette Joyer used the language of rights to explain her ideological orientation. She explained, "The pro-life tenet is that each and every human being, pre-born or born, deserves the opportunity to develop into the best she or he is capable of; that each individual be respected, however minimal or great their development may be." She argued that feminism supported the very same tenets: "That each and every human being, woman or man, deserves the opportunity to develop into the best she or he is capable of; that each individual be respected, however minimal or great their development may be."<sup>27</sup> The relationship between fetal rights and the welfare of mothers resonated with the social justice rhetoric of the 1960s and 1970s. Juli Loesch explained, "The solidarity of woman and embryonic child...made sense in terms of everything else I believed in: the discipline of nonviolent conflict resolution, the insights of ecology ("everything is connected"), and women's health and wholeness advocacy." PS, she maintained, provided a forum for women to promote and protect human rights. "I felt as if I had become a "prolifer" not despite, but because of my commitment to values on the progressive side of the political/social spectrum. I had become, in plain words, consistent."<sup>28</sup>

In many respects, the work of progressive grassroots activists complemented the work performed by the Catholic Church. Priests used their moral authority to decry abortion as murder from the pulpit and church newsletters reminded parishioners that

<sup>27</sup> Paulette Joyer, "Pro-Life and Feminism: No Opposition," in *Pro-Life Feminism*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, "The Tale of a Feminist 'Freak,'" 11.

abortion was a sin punishable by excommunication. Although progressive Catholics often worked in tandem with the Catholic Church, PS was committed to preserving its nondenominational status. A Church endorsement certainly would have eased PS's constant financial quandary. However, independence enabled PS members to pursue non-religious goals and appeal to non-Catholics. The range of tactics used by members of PS reflects the dynamism of the anti-abortion movement during the early 1980s. PS members felt just as comfortable redefining the parameters of abortion protest as they did challenging the philosophical and political boundaries that separated pro-choice and anti-abortion progressives.

PS members took great care to describe the organization as a nonpartisan alternative to the professional anti-abortion movement. Partisanship posed two problems for PS: first, it conflicted with the laissez-faire tone leaders sought to cultivate. Secondly, neither the Republican nor the Democratic Parties supported all of PS's positions, which included opposition to the expansion of the military and support for robust welfare programs for women with children.<sup>29</sup> When she founded the organization, Loesch "... was a feminist with a skeptical view of 'sexual and reproductive rights,' a left-liberal who sided—on one subject, at least—with Jesse Helms. I had become, in plain words, a freak."<sup>30</sup> She understood that her support for reducing the military and preventing abortion would not find a comfortable home in the Republican or Democratic Parties. She also did not want to alienate potential allies. Loesch emphasized PS's diverse composition when she

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<sup>29</sup> Other progressive anti-abortion groups included Seamless Garment, Catholics United for Life, and the Pro-Life Nonviolent Action Project. See Richard Lowry Hughes, "Tangled Up in the Sixties: Progressive Activism and the Anti-Abortion Movement" (Ph.D. diss., Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, "Tales of a Feminist 'Freak'" 11.

wrote or spoke about the group, explaining, “We literally could be in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for left-right wingspan. We range from Marxist to Moral Majority.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Qtd. in Lisa Engelhardt, “Juli Loesch: ‘War is Abortion and Abortion is War,’” no journal title, (October 1983), *JLP*, folder 1. See also Juli Loesch, “Prolife and Nonviolent,” *NRLN* January 11, 1982, 5 and 12.



Figure 3.1 Illustration of PS membership, ca. 1980. Loesch fashioned Prolifers for Survival as a politically diverse group, united by opposition to abortion, nuclear weapons and nuclear technology. "Prolifers for Survival Chapter Handbook," ca. 1980, JLP, folder 7. (Courtesy Wisconsin Historical Society).

Many activists were puzzled by Juli Loesch's refusal to endorse political candidates, to comment on pending legislation, or to support legal efforts to overturn *Roe*. When she was profiled in a Christian magazine in 1984, Loesch was asked why her group remained nonpartisan at a time when most large anti-abortion organizations came to see participation in partisan politics as an effective means for reducing abortion rates. Loesch criticized her colleagues for their shortsightedness, arguing that partisanship was divisive in the long-term. "If people look at the issues from a strong political standpoint in the sense of power, in the sense of elections, [and] numbers of votes in the House of Representatives, and they think more in terms of the next election rather than the next generation," she explained, "then they're inevitably going to see each other as being irreconcilable rivals because they're backing two different candidates."<sup>32</sup> Progressive anti-abortion activists wanted to preserve ideological ground to allow for nuanced ways of thinking about life and to leave open avenues for compromise. By refraining from partisan politics and engaging social justice issues broadly, PS members framed alternative means for thinking about abortion.

Instead of challenging *Roe*, Loesch urged abortion opponents to transform the way Americans thought about the procedure. "My own view is that abortion will be illegal again," she said. "I think it is inevitable. Either we will make it illegal or this society will collapse, and its successor will make it illegal . . . I think the real power is in making abortion and a nuclear holocaust not merely illegal but unthinkable."<sup>33</sup> Women must cease to want the procedure in order for a legal prohibition to have a meaningful effect, she maintained. Instead of writing to legislators or bending politicians' ears in the corridors of state capitols, progressive Catholic women took their message to the streets and living rooms of ordinary Americans in ordinary towns.

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<sup>32</sup> "Portrait of a Pro-life Pro," 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

### Tensions within the Left

Abortion was a divisive issue in progressive circles well before the formation of PS. In 1972, one year before *Roe v. Wade*, Juli Loesch attended a hearing sponsored by the Pennsylvania Status of Women Committee in Pittsburgh. Pro-life Catholic women stood outside the meeting and held roses to protest the group's support for liberalizing the state's abortion law. Characterizing herself as curious and open-minded, Loesch recounted, "So I went over to the [Catholic protestors] to talk to them and then the left wing women all started buzz, buzz, buzzing about, 'What's she doing over there?' 'She's not supposed to sit on that side, she's supposed to sit on this side.'"<sup>34</sup> Unlike pro-choice feminists, whom she described as "punk" and "braless," the Catholic anti-abortion protestors were kind and open-minded. "To my amazement," she recalled, "they listened to me without interruption and then presented . . . pictures of friendly fetuses, you know, healthy, lively, pink, lovely . . . It was very much like the films I used to show against the war in Viet Nam."<sup>35</sup> She hoped to persuade potential converts that the labels used to chide moral conservatives, particularly those of "intolerant," and "ignorant," should be applied to pro-choice, not anti-abortion protestors.

Catholic women who sought to keep one foot planted in labor and anti-nuclear issues as they stepped into anti-abortion activism were keenly aware that they were testing the limits of support among their colleagues in movements for social justice. In 1979, Juli Loesch and Mary Meehan marched down Pennsylvania Avenue, in Washington D.C., tracing the route Meehan and other protestors used when they protested against the

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<sup>34</sup> Loesch Wiley interview, 30-31.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 31. Women who opposed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in the 1920s used a similar tactic. Nancy F. Cott describes the divergent views of womanhood between ERA opponents and supporters: "Opponents of the ERA who resented finding themselves opposed to something called equal rights maligned the National Women's Party as 'pernicious' and described its members as women who 'discarded all ethics and fair play,' an 'insane crowd' who espoused 'a kind of hysterical feminism with a slogan for a program.'" Cott, 137.

Vietnam War. Only a handful of people—mostly Catholic women—joined them. They were disappointed that significant numbers of socially progressive activists refused to join them. “How can so many liberal politicians be against war, against capital punishment and for abortion? How can they be concerned about poverty and . . . child abuse . . . yet accept what someone called the ‘ultimate child abuse’ of abortion?” Loesch asked.<sup>36</sup>

While PS was eager to ally with other human rights activist organizations, the feeling was not mutual. In March 1980, PS tried to affiliate with Mobilization for Survival, a coalition of peace, labor, social justice, and nuclear disarmament activists. Members of Mobilization for Survival denied the request. Loesch felt slighted, explaining, “various Left groups outdid each other in rejecting PS’s offer of affiliation and support.”<sup>37</sup> PS’s application for membership prompted Mobilization for Survival members to pass a resolution affirming the coalition’s support for abortion rights one year later. In 1980, members of the National War Resisters League, anticipating that pro-life peace activists would call for the organization to adopt a pro-life plank, also affirmed a woman’s right to abortion.<sup>38</sup>

The growth of pro-life feminist organizations disconcerted many feminists. On July 16, 1985, the New York City weekly, *The Village Voice*, published a special issue devoted to the American abortion debate. Feminist columnist Ellen Willis wrote an article titled, “Putting Women Back into the Abortion Debate,” in which she considered how progressive Catholics were changing the way Americans, both pro-choice and anti-abortion, thought about the procedure. She described socially progressive anti-abortion activists as “. . . a small, seemingly eccentric minority in both the ‘progressive’ and antiabortion camps.”

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<sup>36</sup> Mary Meehan, “Antiwar, Pro-Life: The March Goes On,” *The Washington Post* February 8, 1979, A25.

<sup>37</sup> “Chapter Handbook,” 3.

<sup>38</sup> The resolution to support a woman’s right to abortion passed 20-3. David McReynolds, Letter to the Editor, *The Village Voice* August 20, 1985, 8.



Willis posited, “[They have] played a critical role in the movement: by arguing that opposition to abortion can be separated from the right’s antifeminist program, [they have] given antiabortion sentiment legitimacy in left-symp [sic] and (putatively) profeminist circles.”<sup>39</sup> She noted how the rhetoric of the abortion debate had shifted away from a consideration of personal autonomy and freedom to the premise that women needed protection from having to make a lamentable moral decision.

Ellen Willis believed anti-abortion activists who called themselves feminists were hypocrites and singled out Juli Loesch, Mary Meehan, and other prominent pro-life feminists by name for appropriating feminist rhetoric for anti-feminist purposes. “[‘Pro-life’ feminists] blame the prevalence of abortion on oppressive conditions—economic injustice, lack of child care and other social supports for mothers, the devaluation of childrearing, men’s exploitative sexual behavior and refusal to take equal responsibility for children.”<sup>40</sup> According to Willis, this was precisely how pro-life feminists diverged from the principles of feminism. By depicting women with unwanted pregnancies as victims of male exploitation, pro-life feminists denied “ordinary human miscalculation, technological failure, or the vagaries of passion . . .” She decried the incongruity of pro-life feminist logic: while unwanted pregnancies are nearly always the result of coercive or exploitative encounters, motherhood is valued as a universally positive experience. For Willis, pro-life feminists were responsible for a stunning development in the abortion debate. Not only was support for women’s sexual pleasure being replaced by the rhetoric of idyllic

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<sup>39</sup> Ellen Willis, “Putting Women Back into the Abortion Debate,” *The Village Voice* July 16, 1985, 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

motherhood, but also it was being done so by women who claimed to be feminists. “The seamless garment is full of holes,” she concluded.<sup>41</sup>

Loesch fired back, charging that pro-choice feminists failed to acknowledge that abortion rights jeopardize women’s economic and emotional security. Legal abortion, she maintained, left women vulnerable to exploitation and ultimately prevented many from achieving economic equality. Two months after the article about pro-life feminism ran in *The Village Voice*, Willis printed Loesch’s response in her column. “[Am I predicting] that the men are going to take off, and not only that, but feel justified about it?” Loesch asked. “Hell, no . . . I’m reporting it. I do women’s shelter work. I see it all the time.”<sup>42</sup> Prior to *Roe*, she explained, social pressures shamed men to support the children they fathered. Because abortion made motherhood optional, men did not feel the same obligation to support the byproduct of an “optional” pregnancy.

Willis charged that Loesch misunderstood what conditions were like for women prior to *Roe*. “Loesch can romanticize the past because she never had to live through it as a sexually active adult—she was 21 when *Roe v. Wade* came down . . . I grew up in the days of forced marriages, illegal abortions, virginity fetishism, [and] sexual guilt . . .” Willis noted that American men abandoned women they had impregnated when abortion was illegal. She explained, “I have no quarrel with Loesch’s anger at male irresponsibility, just at her lack of historical and political perspective.”<sup>43</sup> For Willis, Loesch’s brand of feminism

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 24. During this period, scholars were also beginning to argue that attacks on abortion rights are part of a larger ideological struggle over the meaning of the family, motherhood and sexuality, in particular, young women’s sexuality. Two fine examples of this scholarship are Rosalind Polack Petchesky, *Abortion and Woman’s Choice: The State, Sexuality and Reproductive Freedom* (London: Verso, 1985), and Linda Gordon, *Woman’s Body, Woman’s Right* (New York: Grossman, 1977).

<sup>42</sup> Qtd. in Ellen Willis, “Looking for Mr. Good Dad” *The Village Voice* September 3, 1985, 24. A copy of the original letter is available in the JLP, Ellen Willis to Juli Loesch, July 24, 1985.

<sup>43</sup> Willis, “Looking for Mr. Good Dad,” 25.

smacked of naïveté and an archaic, if sentimental, understanding of men's perceived responsibility to women and children.

Juli Loesch was simultaneously angered and invigorated by her appearances in the pages of *The Village Voice*. While Ellen Willis took progressive anti-abortion activists to task for her perceived misuse of feminist principles, fellow *Voice* columnist Nat Hentoff wrote a spirited defense of seamless garment adherents.<sup>44</sup> With a circulation of 150,000, in a well-educated, left-leaning market, Feminists for Life, Prolifers for Survival, and Sojourners came to the attention of the very people they hoped to recruit.<sup>45</sup> Loesch later invoked Willis's critique to cultivate a sense of urgency amongst her activist peers. According to Loesch, Willis's misrepresentation of the group's philosophy demonstrated just how important PS's educational mission was.

In the aftermath of *The Village Voice* exposure, Loesch wrote to a dozen socially progressive anti-abortion activists. Referring to her target as "Wicked Witch Willis," Loesch outlined Willis's shortcomings. Not only had Willis conceded that the left was divided over the issue of abortion, but her defense of abortion rights was born out of selfishness: "the main reason to keep abortion legal is because it's necessary if we're going to live sexually self-serving ('autonomous') lives."<sup>46</sup> In one letter, she characterized Willis as a "proabort feminist who was whining and bitching because of lefties...who are abandoning the pro-choice camp."<sup>47</sup> She interpreted Willis's critique as evidence that her small faction of the

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<sup>44</sup> Nat Hentoff, "How Can the Left Be Against Life," *The Village Voice* July 16, 1985, 16 and 20.

<sup>45</sup> *International Directory of Company Histories: Encyclopedia of Company Histories*, (The Gale Group, Inc.) available on-line: <http://www.answers.com/library/Encyclopedia%20of%20Company%20Histories>.

<sup>46</sup> Juli Loesch to Richard Cowden-Guido, July 21, 1985, JLP, folder 3.

<sup>47</sup> Juli Loesch to Joel Stevens, August 1985, 5, JLP, folder 4.

anti-abortion movement was rattling pro-choice progressives: “Ellen Willis gives me hope that maybe, finally, my work IS working!”<sup>48</sup>

### Turning-point for Progressive Anti-abortion Activists

The anti-abortion movement hit its stride in the 1980s. As thousands of evangelical Christians flooded into the movement, abortion, a topic politicians had recoiled from just a decade earlier, had become a celebrated wedge issue. Throngs of evangelicals, convinced a revolution was at hand, joined Catholic women who had been praying in front of abortion clinics for a decade. The new, dynamic organizations made older, Catholic-dominated groups look stodgy by comparison.

Juli Loesch saw a bit of herself in the new cohort of young evangelical activists. Similar to PS members, activists in the emerging evangelical groups took their message to the streets. Instead of working behind closed doors to secure votes for anti-abortion legislation, members of grassroots evangelical groups engaged in direct action protests, confronting Americans in public spaces. However, unlike PS, whose membership never exceeded 3,000, new evangelical groups attracted tens of thousands of new activists to protest against abortion. The success of these new organizations, combined with the financial straits and stagnant membership of PS, caused Loesch to disband the organization she founded. After eight years of existing on a shoestring budget, first as director of PS from 1979 until 1983, then as a contributing editor to a Catholic magazine, Loesch decided to jump ship.<sup>49</sup> In the winter of 1987, Juli Loesch, five coordinators and one

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<sup>48</sup> Juli Loesch to Dave Mall, July 25, 1985, JLP, folder 3.

<sup>49</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, “Autobiographical Outline” no date, JLP, folder 1.

director co-wrote a letter to the membership stating that the organization would officially disband on May 1, 1987.<sup>50</sup>

PS leaders explained that the evangelical grassroots movement had eclipsed the organization's role in the movement. Two coordinators had informed the board of directors that they intended to leave their posts. She explained, "[This] forced us to look squarely at some realities of passing the organization on to a new staff. It also set in motion an evaluation of our history and goals."<sup>51</sup> One of PS's founding principles was to "promote dialogue on the consistent ethic of respect for life."<sup>52</sup> Support for the consistent life ethic took root among progressive Christians and adherents of the seamless garment philosophy caught the attention of major news outlets. She noted, "These groups have adopted the peace/prolife message to such an extent that it is no longer our idea alone. What was once...ignored is now an idea discussed in the pages of *The Village Voice*, *The Washington Post*, and even *The New York Times*."<sup>53</sup> At the group's final meeting, in March 1987, members announced the formation of the Seamless Garment Network, which would serve as an umbrella for dozens of grassroots groups who framed their opposition to abortion within the seamless garment philosophy or consistent life ethic.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Juli Loesch to PS Membership, 1, 16 February 1987, JLP, folder 7. In 1984, Jean Doyle, the President of the NRLC noted the changes underway in the composition of the anti-abortion movement: "I see a phenomenal growth in the movement due in part to the huge influx of members from the evangelical/fundamental communities. They have added a new dimension in many ways.... I see a preponderance of fresh young faces in the audience, a witness to the fact that a new generation of right to life champions is emerging." Jean Doyle, "From the President's Desk: RTL: Flowing with New Energy," *NRLN* April 5, 1984, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Loesch to PS Membership, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> By 2003, over 120 member organizations were affiliated with the Seamless Garment Network. These groups included Pax Christi, Evangelicals for Social Action, Buddhis Vihara Society, and Sojourners. See Kelly, "Finding Renewal," 14.

PS's success at framing abortion as a social justice imperative rather than a partisan or strictly Catholic issue was hugely influential for the anti-abortion movement as a whole. However, the group's ability to enlarge the way activists thought about abortion was also part of its undoing. By the mid-1980s, changes in the political landscape forced members of PS to consider whether their small grassroots organization was prepared to adapt to the quickly changing movement. Several organizations, most of them larger and better funded than PS, had adopted PS's support for a consistent life ethic. Loesch wrote, "In many cases, they are much better equipped—because of longevity, membership, financial resources, etc.—to carry out the task of promoting a truly prolife agenda."<sup>55</sup> She continued, "In a sense we have done our job. We've accomplished our purpose of making the peace/prolife dialogue heard and acted on."<sup>56</sup>

The philosophical influence of PS did not translate to financial prosperity or popularity. In the years preceding its dissolution, PS had become dependent on foundation grants rather than donations or membership dues. The group's leaders explained, "At present levels, our income can cover one salary of \$200/month (no health insurance or benefits), a small office and minimal supplies, and publication of *PS* five times a year—again at bare-bones levels."<sup>57</sup> The strength of PS—its educational mission, which helped to persuade thousands of activists to adopt a consistent life ethic—did not translate to financial solvency. "Often when we are asked to speak it is by groups as poor as we are. When we travel for speaking tours it is at the expense of [our] newspaper budget. From the very beginning, PS has not been able to do both effectively."

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<sup>55</sup> Loesch to PS Membership, 1. These groups included U.S. Catholic Bishops, Evangelicals for Social Action, Right to Life of Southern California, Sojourners, JustLife Political Action Committee, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Mennonite Central Committee of the U.S.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

The board of directors encouraged members to join anti-abortion organizations that supported the consistent life ethic: “We know many of you will be saddened by this news. Some of you may feel abandoned.” Hoping to inspire its base to continue to protest against abortion, they continued, “And yet, we want to encourage you to reach out once more. Join one of the organizations that is beginning to see the connections . . . Support and be active in it. If we stretch, the organization we choose will have to stretch to fit us in. And others like us, too. That is, after all, the original spirit of P.S.”<sup>58</sup> They concluded by asking members to donate money to the organization to help retire a \$2,000 debt to the printers.

### We Will Stand Up

Once Prolifers for Survival disbanded, Juli Loesch began organizing an ambitious nationwide anti-abortion protest campaign, We Will Stand Up, which coincided with Pope John Paul II’s visit to the United States in the fall of 1987. “We Will Stand Up” was a reference to a 1979 speech by Pope John Paul II, in which he declared, “When the sacredness of life before birth is attacked, we will stand up and proclaim that no one ever has the authority to destroy unborn life.”<sup>59</sup> The goal of the campaign, described by some as the first nationwide mobilization of grassroots pro-life activists, was to close abortion clinics in each city the pope visited as he traveled across the United States.<sup>60</sup> Loesch, assisted by a small band of Catholic activists, sought to organize demonstrations in Detroit;

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>59</sup> Maurice Miller, “Pro-lifers to Picket for Pope,” *The Miami News* February 17, 1987, JLP, folder 8. Mary Meehan, “Clinics Targeted for Shutdown during Papal Visit,” *National Catholic Register* March 22, 1978, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>60</sup> Don Threshman, “Forty-nine Abortuaries Closed Nationwide during Pope’s Visit,” *The Texas Rescuer* November 1987, 1, JLP, folder 8.

Miami; Columbia, South Carolina; Phoenix; San Antonio; Monterey, California; Los Angeles; and San Francisco.<sup>61</sup>

In her role as project organizer, Loesch met with law enforcement officials, media outlets, anti-abortion activists, and abortion clinic directors in the seven cities targeted by the campaign.<sup>62</sup> She financed most of these trips herself.<sup>63</sup> By May 1987, thirty anti-abortion groups had volunteered to participate in the campaign.<sup>64</sup> We Will Stand Up organizers encouraged activists to participate in demonstrations across the regions in which they lived. “We’re not expecting anybody to follow the Pope across the whole country, taking part in action after action,” explained one organizer. “Instead, we have the country divided into regions, and activists in each region have their own city that they’re responsible for. For instance, the activists here in Georgia will be going to Columbia, South Carolina.”<sup>65</sup>

Loesch hoped activists would “literally occupy the sidewalk and street space,” pray and sing, and refrain from “free-lance vocalizing.”<sup>66</sup> When asked whether project

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<sup>61</sup> Miller, “Pro-lifers to Picket for Pope.”

<sup>62</sup> See Juli Loesch, “Papal Pro-life Pilgrimage” 1987, JLP, folder 10. This is the journal Loesch wrote while she traveled the nation organizing the We Will Stand Up campaign. See also Juli Loesch to Commissioner Hart, undated, JLP, folder 11.

<sup>63</sup> Pam Smith, “‘We Will Stand Up’: Pro-lifers Vow to Close Abortion Clinics Along Papal Route,” *The North Carolina Catholic* August 9, 1987, JLP, folder 8. See also Juli Loesch to Dan Grimm, October 22, 1987, JLP, folder 9. Loesch sent Grimm a check for \$100 to cover expenses related to protests in Florida. She explained, “You know all these things are hand-to-mouth, and I have no other income.” In a letter to former PS members, Loesch asked for money to help finance her work for We Will Stand Up, “If each of you could pledge me . . . \$25 . . . I’ll have enough money to live.” Juli Loesch to Former PS Members, undated, JLP, folder 11.

<sup>64</sup> William Bole, “Right-to-life Advocates Seek to Stop Abortions during Papal Visit,” *Religious News Service* May 12, 1987, 2, and Larry Witham, “Abortion-Free Day is Goal for Pope’s Visit,” *The Washington Times* July 10, 1987, no page, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>65</sup> Cathy Hoffner, qtd. in Joseph Scheidler, “During the Papal Visit,” *The Wanderer* June 11, 1987, JLP, folder 8 and Larry Witham, “Abortion-free Day is Goal for Pope’s Visit,” *The Washington Times*, July 10, 1987.

<sup>66</sup> Maurice Miller, “Pro-lifers to Picket for Pope,” *The Miami News* February 17, 1987, JLP, folder 8.



organizers feared being criticized as carpetbaggers as they descended upon city after city, she replied, “Well, we’re a civil rights movement. Naturally, we’re outside agitators.”<sup>67</sup> She hoped that non-Catholics would participate in the campaign, particularly in the South, where she counted on evangelical Christians to provide support. Loesch found an ally in Claire Hartford of the Omaha Christian Action Council. Hartford explained why she and fellow evangelicals planned to participate in the campaign, “The Pope is an international pro-life leader who has earned the respect of many Evangelical pro-life leaders for his unequivocal stand against abortion.” The campaign was “an excellent opportunity for all Christians to rally together and stop the killing.”<sup>68</sup>

But Catholic leaders in the United States were not receptive to Loesch’s campaign.<sup>69</sup> The stalwartly pro-life National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Catholic diocese of Miami refused to endorse or participate in the campaign. A Miami diocese spokesperson explained, “We’re concentrating on the papal visit and that’s it.”<sup>70</sup> Father Daniel Kubala, the director of the Respect Life Apostolate of the Archdiocese of Miami explained that the local clergy were “committed more to education” than the protest tactics endorsed by We Will Stand Up organizers. “We’re committed to helping the girls and letting our voice be known but that [demonstrations] is not part of our apostle.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Qtd. in Mary Meehan, “Clinics Targeted for Shutdown during Papal Visit,” *National Catholic Register* March 22, 1978, JLP, folder 8

<sup>68</sup> Qtd. in Joseph Scheidler, “During the Papal Visit,” *The Wanderer* June 11, 1987, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>69</sup> A notable exception was Fr. Sherrill Smith, who advised Catholics in San Antonio, Texas, to participate in the We Will Stand Up Campaign. According to Smith, “Catholic silence about abortion is unpardonable. The Pope said something about standing up and sounding off.” Sherrill Smith to Priests, August 26, 1987, JLP, folder 9.

<sup>70</sup> Qtd. in William Bole, “Right-to-life Advocates Seek to Stop Abortions during Papal Visit,” *Religious News Service* May 12, 1987, 2, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>71</sup> Qtd. in Ana Rodriguez-Soto, “Group: Halt Abortions While Pope Visits,” *The Voice* (Miami) July 10, 1987, JLP, folder 8.

Father Joseph Battaglia of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles took great care to distance the church from the campaign. “The Catholic church encourages the dissemination of information so their rights can be made known to them,” he explained. “The church does not encourage interfering with anybody’s rights.”<sup>72</sup> Large anti-abortion groups also opposed the campaign. The NRLC opposed the planned demonstration. In Florida, the state Right to Life chapter refused Loesch’s invitation to join the campaign.<sup>73</sup>

Pro-choice Catholics denounced the We Will Stand Up campaign. Across the United States, many priests, nuns, and congregants supported abortion rights for American women. The largest Catholic pro-choice group, Catholics for a Free Choice, was formed in 1973.<sup>74</sup> This group commissioned reports on the history of Church policy regarding abortion, wrote position papers that contended legal abortion was compatible with Church doctrine, and sponsored public dialogues between supporters and opponents of legal rights.<sup>75</sup> Frances Kissling, a member of Catholics for a Free Choice, stated, “If you need an abortion, you shouldn’t have to wait just because the pope is here. Besides, many of the women going to abortion clinics aren’t Catholics and couldn’t care less if the pope is

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<sup>72</sup> Qtd. in Susan Pack, “Abortion Clinics Vow to Stay Open during Papal Visit,” *Long Beach Press-Telegram* August 27, 1987, B5, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>73</sup> Witham, “Abortion-free Day is Goal for Pope’s Visit,” and Joan Andrews to Juli Loesch, September 2, 1987, JLP, folder 9.

<sup>74</sup> See Mary C. Seegers, “The Loyal Opposition: Catholics for a Free Choice,” in *The Catholic Church and the Politics of Abortion*, 169-184. Seegers cites a 1988 study by the Alan Guttmacher Institute (AGI), which revealed that while Catholics constituted 22-23% of the population of the United States, they had 30% of the abortions. “Moreover, according to a 1987 AGI survey of 9,480 women who had abortions, Catholics have 30 percent more abortions than Protestants and Jews (among those who reported a religious affiliation),” 169. Eleanor Smeal, the President of the National Organization for Women from 1977-1982 and 1985-1987, and Senators Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Patrick Leahy, and Edward Kennedy identified as Catholics and supporters of abortion rights. Mary Meehan, “Catholic Liberals & Abortion,” *Commonweal*, November 20, 1981, 650.

<sup>75</sup> Listen to an interview with Frances Kissling, a former president of Catholics for a Free Choice, “Listening Beyond Life and Choice,” *On Being* (National Public Radio, January 20, 2011), <http://being.publicradio.org/programs/2011/listening-beyond/>.

there.”<sup>76</sup> Kissling asked campaign organizers to consider how such campaigns “have a real potential to incite less rational people to violence.”<sup>77</sup> Catholics for a Free Choice organized counter-protests along the pope’s route to “inform the Pope of the divergence of opinion among his constituency.”<sup>78</sup>

We Will Stand Up organizers provoked clinic administrators well in advance of the pope’s visit. Loesch’s close friend, John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe, the founder of the Pro-life Nonviolent Action Project, wrote to ninety clinic administrators in the nine cities the pope intended to visit and explained the purported intent of the mass rallies planned to occur in front of clinics. “We would like to make it possible for you to go hear [the pope].” He continued, “We hope you will take the opportunity to think seriously about changing your line of work so you can concentrate on curing and caring instead of killing.”<sup>79</sup> A Florida clinic administrator explained her reaction to a letter sent by We Will Stand Up organizers: “I just think that it was cloaked in a particularly moralistic leaning and that the choice of words was leading—portraying coalition organizers as generous, gentle, loving people.”<sup>80</sup> After receiving the campaign’s letter of intent, Lynne Renihan, the director of the Delta Women’s Clinic in New Orleans wrote to the *National Catholic Register* to voice her dismay, “I’m not going to let them intimidate me. I’m going to stay open.”<sup>81</sup> Renihan noted that she was Catholic and planned to see the pope when he visited the city.

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<sup>76</sup> Qtd. in William Bole, “Right-to-life Advocates Seek to Stop Abortions during Papal Visit,” *Religious News Service* May 12, 1987, 2, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Frances Kissling to Tim Wilkinson, undated, JLP, folder 11.

<sup>79</sup> John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe to Clinics, 1987, JLP, folder 9.

<sup>80</sup> Qtd. in Maurice Miller, “Pro-lifers to Picket for Pope,” *The Miami News* February 17, 1987, JLP, folder 8. The administrator asked her name to be withheld from the article.

<sup>81</sup> Qtd. in Mary Meehan, “Clinics Targeted for Shutdown during Papal Visit,” *National Catholic Register* March 22, 1978, JLP, folder 8

Clinic administrators and feminist activists criticized campaign organizers for using the rhetoric of peace and justice to describe the planned demonstrations. In Los Angeles, Eyde Berg, the director of the Feminist Women's Health Center in Los Angeles explained, "We are taking this threat very seriously and see it as a deliberate attempt on the part of some rabid anti-abortionists to potentially use the pope's visit as a rationale for yet another wave of illegal, violent activity against women and abortion clinics."<sup>82</sup> Carol Downer of the Federation of Feminist Women's Health Centers argued, "If the pope is truly in favor of peace, then he will begin by addressing his own followers to stop this absolutely fanatical, hysterical attack."<sup>83</sup> Patricia Ireland, serving as treasurer of the National Organization for Women in 1987, called the planned campaign, "further illegal activity designed to make a woman's constitutional rights of choice unavailable," she contended, "If we were to surround a place of worship, can you imagine what the reaction would be?"

Loesch conceded that the goal of the project was to deny women access to abortion facilities, "Hopefully, we'll be able to block all access to the clinics from public roadways...."<sup>84</sup> She justified the tactics of the campaign by posing a question, "Our position is that the abortion clinics can give it a rest for one day. Do they have to do it every day?"<sup>85</sup> She rejected the suggestion that anti-abortion activists would court violence: "I don't know of any pro-life groups that would want violence to occur on that occasion. It would only work to the advantage of the abortionists."<sup>86</sup> Loesch assured the public that anti-abortion activists would receive nonviolence training prior to the September event.

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<sup>82</sup> Qtd. in Susan Pack, "Abortion Clinics Vow to Stay Open during Papal Visit," *Long Beach Press-Telegram* August 27, 1987, B1, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> Miller, "Pro-lifers to Picket for Pope."

<sup>85</sup> Qtd. in William Bole, "Right-to-life Advocates Seek to Stop Abortions during Papal Visit," *Religious News Service* May 12, 1987, 2, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>86</sup> Miller, "Pro-lifers to Picket for Pope."

According to Loesch, “We will not shout. We will not use bullhorns or voice amplification. We will not chant. Our discipline is either to maintain silence or to sing.”<sup>87</sup> Activists would be instructed to kneel and pray on sidewalks in front of clinics, with the goal of blocking access to the buildings. If provoked, however, demonstrators would respond. “[I]f they choose to stomp on us, we will visibly portray what they do to an unborn child,” she explained.

In the weeks leading up to the pope’s visit, activists who planned to participate in the We Will Stand Up campaign intensified their rhetoric. Marya Krestyn, a campaign organizer in Los Angeles warned, “If the truce fails and somebody decides to kill a child during the pope’s visit, we will assemble as many generous people as possible to kneel in front of the abortion mills, praying for peace in the family.”<sup>88</sup> Activists affiliated with the campaign staged a forty-minute demonstration in Los Angeles the week before the pope’s visit. Twenty-eight children pretended to lie dead on a sidewalk in front of an abortion clinic while their mothers drew chalk outlines of their bodies to dramatize their fight against abortion.

Most clinic administrators prepared for the campaign by hiring additional security. Edye Berg of the Wilshire District’s Feminist Women’s Health Center in Los Angeles explained, “We intend to continue to provide these much needed abortion services to women.”<sup>89</sup> Los Angeles area feminists planned to participate in a joint counter-demonstration in front of City Hall with activists for gay and lesbian rights for the papal visit.<sup>90</sup> Women for Change in the Catholic Church, a group comprised mostly of pro-

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<sup>87</sup> Rodriguez-Soto, “Group: Halt Abortions While Pope Visits.”

<sup>88</sup> Qtd. in Brian Lewis, “Anti-Abortionists Urge ‘Cease-fire,’” *News-Press* (Santa Barbara, California) September 11, 1987, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>89</sup> Ira Rifkin, “Clinics to Boost Security: Feminists Fear Anti-abortion Clash,” *Daily News* (Los Angeles) August 27, 1987, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

choice feminists, planned to hold a candlelight vigil near a Los Angeles Church to protest against “the voicelessness and invisibility” of Catholic women in the church.<sup>91</sup>

In Miami, clinic administrators elected to close all of the city’s clinics for the pope’s two-day visit to the city.<sup>92</sup> In lieu of staging unnecessary clinic demonstrations, protestors planned to unfurl a forty-foot banner near the airport so the pope would see their support for his anti-abortion message. Activists failed to raise the banner in time for the pope to see it.<sup>93</sup>

In most cities along the pope’s route, We Will Stand Up activists failed to prevent women from entering reproductive health clinics. In Columbia, South Carolina, two-dozen activists demonstrated outside a Planned Parenthood during the pope’s visit. Six demonstrators, two women and four men, were arrested and charged with loitering.<sup>94</sup> “We are providing our services on our usual schedule,” explained the executive director of Planned Parenthood of South Carolina. “We are not making changes because they have threatened us. Abortion is a very private and individual choice.”<sup>95</sup> In San Francisco, clinics

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<sup>91</sup> Maura Dolan, “Protest Groups to Let Pope Know How They Feel,” *Los Angeles Times* August 27, 1987, A3. See also Jane Estes, “Protests to Greet Pope Along Tour,” *Star News* (Pasadena, California) September 10, 1987, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>92</sup> Lewis, “Anti-Abortionists Urge ‘Cease-fire,” and Luis Feldstein Soto and Rodrigo Lazo, “Promised Protests Fall Flat Amid Festivities,” *The Miami Herald* September 11, 1987, 6P, JLP, folder 8. See also Juli Loesch and John Cavanaugh O’Keefe to Ralph Columbro, September 1, 1987, JLP, folder 11.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* Several protest groups, including AIDS activists, were disappointed by the low turn out for planned demonstrations. The largest demonstration by any group in Miami was an assembly of nine rabbis who called for better dialogue between Catholics and Jews.

<sup>94</sup> John Batteiger, “Protesters Arrested at Clinic,” *The Columbia Record* September 11, 1987, 1A, and “Two Dozen Protest at Abortion Clinic,” *State* (Columbia, South Carolina) September 12, 1987, JLP, folder 8. Siblings Lucy O’Keefe, 29, of Chapel Hill, North Carolina and John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe, 37, of Gaithersburg, Maryland, Bill Cotter, 36 of Boston, Vince Fitzpatrick, 34, of Washington, D.C., Joan MacGuire, 40, of Virginia Beach, Virginia, and Harry Hand, 30, of Gaithersburg, Maryland were arrested.

<sup>95</sup> Nancy Raley, qtd. in John Batteiger, “Protesters Arrested at Clinic,” *The Columbia Record* September 11, 1987, 1, JLP, folder 8.

operated as usual during the pope's visit to the city.<sup>96</sup> In Los Angeles, thirty-five anti-abortion protestors failed to block the entrances at any of the city's sixty-seven abortion clinics.<sup>97</sup>

By the middle of the pope's ten-day tour of the United States, participants in the We Will Stand Up campaign were eager to claim any victory they could. Twenty activists claimed to have closed a Glendale, Arizona, clinic during their two-hour demonstration, where protestors prayed and sang songs. Protest organizer Geri Urrutia explained, "Obviously yeah [this is a success]. By this time now, people are usually streaming in. There's nobody in the waiting room. That's highly unusual."<sup>98</sup> A clinic spokesperson disputed the organizer's claim, explaining, "There's nothing really to say. No, they didn't [have an effect on business]. We just had pregnancy testing today [as scheduled]."

The most aggressive protests of the campaign occurred in Detroit, where one hundred activists picketed in front of the Summit Medical Center, resulting in the arrest of nineteen.<sup>99</sup> According to a pro-choice escort, two women who tried to enter Summit faced hostile shouts from protestors, including, "Do you know what you are doing? Do you know you're pulling the head off this baby?"<sup>100</sup> Anti-abortion protestors carried signs that read, "Former Fetus" and "Abortion: Hitler Lives On."<sup>101</sup> Rudy Stefanick, a thirty-year-old man from Battle Creek, Michigan, walked around the clinic with a jar containing what he

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<sup>96</sup> "Pro-lifers Hail Partial 'Abortion Cease-Fire' during Pope's Tour," *National Catholic Reporter* October 2, 1987, 3, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>97</sup> Judy Pasternak, "Variety of Protest Fare Is Dished Out for Pope," *Los Angeles Times* September 16, 1987, B7.

<sup>98</sup> Qtd. in Lewis, "Anti-abortionists Claim Brief Victory."

<sup>99</sup> Joel Thurtell, "Police Arrest Twenty During Protest at West Side Family Planning Clinic," *Detroit Free Press* September 20, 1987, A11.

<sup>100</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.*

<sup>101</sup> Mary Meehan, "'We Will Stand Up' Takes Detroit Action," *National Catholic Register* October 4, 1987, pg. 8, JLP, folder 8.

claimed to be a ten week-old aborted fetus, shouting, “Are you proud of this?”<sup>102</sup> Fifteen men and a couple of women, led by Monica Migliorino, blocked the front door of the clinic. A scuffle erupted between clinic escorts and anti-abortion protestors, resulting in the arrest of one escort. A Catholic newspaper described the racial composition of the two protest blocks: whereas pro-choice activists were racially diverse, “the proliferers were overwhelmingly white.”<sup>103</sup> The We Will Stand Up Campaign failed to deter twenty women from having abortions at the Summit Medical Center in Detroit on September 20, 1987. Clinic administrators had warned patients about the planned protests, and all elected to keep their appointments. She pointed out that the clinic provided many services in addition to abortions, including pre-natal referrals, VD screening, breast and cervical cancer detection, and general health care for women.<sup>104</sup>

Although the We Will Stand Up campaign failed to attract a notable number of protestors, and managed to close clinics in only one city, Pope John Paul II assured the activists that their work was part of a larger, divine mission. He reserved his harshest critique of the United States’ abortion laws for the final speech of his tour. In Detroit, the pope said, “Every human person, no matter how vulnerable or helpless, no matter how young or how old, no matter how healthy, handicapped or sick, not matter how useful or productive for society, is a being of inestimable worth created in the image and likeness of God.” He continued, “This is the dignity of America, the reason she exists...yes, the ultimate test of her greatness: to respect every human person, especially the weakest and most defenseless ones, those as yet unborn.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Thurtell “Police Arrest Twenty,” A11.

<sup>103</sup> Mary Meehan, “We Will Stand Up.”

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> “Stern Words On Abortion by the Pope,” *The New York Times* September 20, 1987, A31. Joseph Sheidler issued a statement to the Pro-Life Action League explaining that he interpreted the pope’s speech as an endorsement of the We Will Stand Up campaign. Threshman, “Forty-nine Abortuaries Closed,” 9.



We Will Stand Up organizers touted the campaign as a major victory for the anti-abortion movement. Pro-life newspapers claimed—incorrectly—that the campaign forced forty-nine abortion clinics to close during the pope’s visit. Conservative Catholic Joseph Scheidler, the founder of the Pro-Life Action League said, “We estimate that several hundred babies have been saved over the nation because of this campaign, and everyone who participated in it...should be proud of their accomplishment.”<sup>106</sup> The California Activist Network released a special report claiming that the campaign was responsible for closing clinics in seven of the nine cities the pope visited.<sup>107</sup>

Privately, We Will Stand Up organizers admitted that the campaign was not an overwhelming success. In an internal memo, Juli Loesch lamented that organizers failed to attract a broad base of support from diverse populations. She identified “weaknesses,” which included a lack of African American participants, a lack of Spanish-speaking activists, a lack of local activists in each city, and a lack of nonviolence training for activists.<sup>108</sup>

Anti-abortion activists who felt energized by the We Will Stand Up campaign were eager to replicate the traveling protest model they believed worked so well during the pope’s visit to the United States. In 1988, Randall Terry organized Operation Rescue, whose base of evangelical members traversed the United States, protesting in front of abortion clinics in each city it visited.<sup>109</sup> Impressed by Loesch’s work for the We Will Stand Up campaign, Randall offered her a job as communications director for Operation Rescue (OR). For Loesch, joining OR meant that she would have to work alongside

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<sup>106</sup> Threshman, “Forty-nine Abortuaries Closed.”

<sup>107</sup> “Special Report” California Activist Network, undated, 1, JLP, folder 11.

<sup>108</sup> “What Did We Learn?” undated, JLP, folder 11.

<sup>109</sup> “Pro-life Activists Protect Unborn Children during Pope’s Visit” *Pro-Life Action News* November 1987, no page, JLP, folder 8.

evangelical Christians who made no promise to uphold the social justice or the feminist values she held. However, it also meant that she could play an instrumental role in expanding the grassroots anti-abortion movement to an energized, dynamic group of young activists.

### Operation Rescue

In 1988, Juli Loesch joined Operation Rescue. The decision was not without risk—as a progressive Catholic partnering with conservative evangelical Christians, she hoped she could leverage her decade of experience into a position of leadership. She had reason to believe that OR might help her realize her dream of transforming Americans’ opinions about abortion. In November 1987, an anti-abortion journalist captured the excitement many felt toward the new group: “Have you heard about OPERATION RESCUE? Many pro-life leaders believe it will be the most critical event of recent times in the battle against abortion. The importance and uniqueness of this event cannot be overstated.”<sup>110</sup> Loesch was impressed with OR leaders’ ability to attract thousands of seasoned and first-time activists to well-disciplined sit-ins at clinics across the United States. Moreover, she believed that the organizational model of OR harkened back to the civil rights model. “Like the Southern Christian Leadership Conference 25 years before, [OR] recruited pastors to provide the local leadership and made churches basic organizing bases.” Indeed, some observed that OR was to the staid NRLC what SNCC had been to the NAACP during the 1960s—a feistier, younger, more aggressive organization for translating belief into action.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> “Operation Rescue Philly Field Training,” *Pro-Life Action News* November 1987, 1, JLP, folder 8.

<sup>111</sup> Garry Wills, “Evangel of Abortion,” *New York Review of Books* vol. 36, no. 10 (1989): 21.

Loesch believed that OR had the potential to enact the social change she had been struggling for her entire adult life to achieve. OR relied on the logistical structure provided by evangelical Christian churches, but was not tied to any single denomination. Loesch explained, “Churches also provide built-in logistic support: they’ve got telephones, typewriters, and sanctuaries which can be used for rallies.” Perhaps most importantly, “they’ve got a built-in recruiting base which is often highly responsive—especially in the case of small, close-knit congregations which show strong personal loyalty for their pastors.”<sup>112</sup> For Loesch, evangelical Christianity had a natural appeal: she saw it as a local, pastor-driven (rather than Vatican-driven) style of worship where someone with good ideas and good work ethic might find a welcoming community.

OR infused the anti-abortion movement with young, politically conservative evangelical Christian activists.<sup>113</sup> Loesch explained, “the same elements which contributed to the rapid growth of the rescue movement inevitably also caused some conflicts.” Older activists, many with two decades of experience, sometimes resented taking orders from new activists. Some progressive Catholics worried about the conservative worldview of evangelical Christian activists, who, until the late 1960s, had been hostile toward Catholicism.<sup>114</sup> Loesch believed that the mingling of Catholics and Protestants might revitalize the movement: “In many cases, these interpersonal differences have resulted in

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<sup>112</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, “Pro-Life: Rescue Movement in Transition,” *PAX Christi USA* Summer 1989, 12 JLP, folder 13. See also Bill J. Leonard, “Independent Baptists: From Sectarian Minority to ‘Moral Majority,’” *Church History* 56, no. 4 (December 1987): 506.

<sup>113</sup> Most participants were in their thirties and divided their time between counseling, shelter work, and activism. Juli Loesch, “Operation Rescue,” 17.

<sup>114</sup> Anti-Catholicism became a feature of American evangelical Christianity in the early 1850s; this sentiment peaked in 1928, when Al Smith, a Catholic, ran for U.S. President as the Democratic nominee. See George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 61 and 89.

new relationships and creative cooperation. (Speaking of which: I met my Tennessee Baptist husband through OR!)”<sup>115</sup>

Initially, Juli Loesch supported the aggressive character of OR-sponsored demonstrations. “O.R. had a serious commitment to nonviolence: participants sign a pledge to refrain from engaging in verbal exchanges with abortion bound women, clinic staffers, hecklers, or police,” she observed. “OR people don’t carry picket signs . . . They are instructed not to shout or chant; the rules call for singing, praying, or maintaining a dignified silence.” OR’s brand of protest was never particularly peaceful, however. OR members deployed a variety of tactics, including physically blocking clinic entrances, harassing individual women as they entered clinics, and staging large demonstrations to frighten or embarrass women away from clinics. Loesch rationalized the dissonance between OR’s purported peacefulness with the reality of OR-sponsored demonstrations, explaining: “judging from the number of apparent ‘turn arounds’ at the sites, and the increase in numbers of women seeking help at pregnancy aid centers, OR leaders are reasonably sure that 400-500 pregnant women and their children were indeed ‘rescued’ in 1988 because of OR efforts.”<sup>116</sup>

Evangelical Christians infused the anti-abortion movement with a dynamism Catholics were never able to cultivate. Loesch described a plain church she sometimes attended while working for Operation Rescue. It contained used furniture and pews from older churches. She recalled a church service attended by fewer than a dozen people. “We sat, scattered in this drab sanctuary, and somebody began a hymn....These white people can sing! And another hymn, ardently—everybody’s eyes were closed, with only me paging through the hymnal like a heathen trying to find the words. And then to my delight,

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<sup>115</sup> Loesch Wiley, “Pro-Life: Rescue Movement in Transition,” 12.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

glossolalic singing: voices rising freeform, syllables tumbling.”<sup>117</sup> While the Catholic Church offered Loesch a place to form theological arguments against abortion, evangelical Christianity struck a spiritual chord that transcended the cerebral.

Loesch was also attracted to the sense of urgency conveyed by anti-abortion leaders in the evangelical wing of the movement. Randall Terry explained why anti-abortion activists needed to engage in more aggressive campaigns if they wanted to stop the practice of abortion in the United States. He said, “We’ve lost the abortion war. In the past eight years—during the administration of Ronald Reagan, the most prolife president we’ll have for the rest of this century—another 15 million American babies were killed.” He did not believe that American politicians had the political will to change laws related to abortion, “Even the best politicians, if they had to rate their priorities from one to ten, would put abortion somewhere between eleven and infinity.”<sup>118</sup> OR leaders convinced prominent Catholic bishops to denounce abortion in front of throngs of abortion activists—something small, Catholic grassroots groups had not been able to achieve.

In 1988, OR hosted its first mass rally at the Times Square Church, which was packed with evangelical Christians and Catholics. After Randall Terry delivered an electrifying speech warning that America must abolish abortion or God would abolish America, Austin Vaughan, the Auxiliary Bishop of New York approached the podium. Over the course of his lecture, the white-haired former president of the Catholic Theological Society of America “explained that it took some inner struggle to associate himself with an arrest-risk action, because he comes from a family of priests and police, congenial law-abiders.” His frustration with New York politicians, who were unwilling to broach the topic of abortion in their primary campaigns, caused him to seek alternative means for protesting against abortion. Vaughn’s trajectory in the anti-abortion movement—

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Randall Terry, qtd. in Loesch, “Operation Rescue”<sup>18</sup>.

from Catholic consciousness-raising groups to evangelical direct action mass protests—resonated with Loesch. She explained, “So while [Vaughn] wishes there were a more peaceful way—or a less controversial way—to force an uncaring community to confront abortion, Operation Rescue is, to him, ‘the only show in town.’” Vaughn concluded his lecture by telling the crowd that he had recently received a ring from a fellow bishop, who had received the ring from Pope Paul V. According to Loesch, “The ring, which symbolizes his vocation, has the images of three men on it who were arrested—indeed, executed—by the reigning government. They are St. Paul, St. Peter, and Jesus Christ.”<sup>119</sup>

The crowd ignited in cheer after Vaughn’s lecture. Juli Loesch recalled, “I’ve never seen anything like it in a church—with standing-on-the-seats, stomping, peeling acclamation, the Born-again cheering, ‘Halleluiah!’ and the Catholics shouting, ‘Bless you, Bishop! God love you Bishop!’”<sup>120</sup> An organization composed primarily of evangelical Christians provided a forum where a Catholic bishop could captivate a crowd of anti-abortion activists. “I thought: there are Catholics who have been thirsting for years to hear a bishop get up and say what this quiet white-haired man just said,” Loesch explained. “An infusion of warm feeling shot through us, a Pentecost of gratitude.” Later that day, Bishop Vaughn, two monsignors, twelve Catholic priests, eleven evangelical pastors, four nuns, two rabbis, and one Eastern Orthodox priest were among 503 anti-abortion activists arrested during a protest organized by Operation Rescue.<sup>121</sup>

The rigorous character of OR inspired and sustained Juli Loesch. She was impressed when Randall Terry spoke critically about the mainstream anti-abortion movement. He maintained that education campaigns, sidewalk counseling, and lobbying were failing to curb abortion rates in the United States. Terry called for “conflict,

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<sup>119</sup> Loesch, “Operation Rescue,” 22

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

controversy, and a sense of intolerable urgency; the kind of intense street drama which fired all the great movements—antislavery, women’s suffrage, civil rights, and the rest—which have shaped America’s destiny.”<sup>122</sup> OR was a larger, more radical organization than PS, and one that Loesch believed would jumpstart a social justice movement akin to those she cherished, namely the civil rights movement.

Loesch expressed some concern about Randall Terry’s limited support for religions other than his own. She explained, “What Terry wants to orchestrate is an uprising—a peaceful but massive upheaval—of faithful, righteous people, to say ‘No More Dead Babys.’” Terry’s vision of a “massive upheaval,” however, included only certain religious denominations. “Evangelicals? Yes. Catholics? Well, the ‘born-again’ Catholics.’ Jews? That’s a little harder. Like everybody, Randy communicates best with people very much like himself: white, male conservative, Spirit-filled Christians.”<sup>123</sup> Loesch counseled observers against judging Terry, explaining that men like him are “a very fine tribe, actually: ardent, servant-hearted guys who love Jesus. They tend to sound like Jimmy Swaggart, but they don’t live like him.”<sup>124</sup> However, Loesch understood that the white, evangelical Christian, male leadership of OR posed a serious media relations problem. “The problem is, the media has most of the country convinced that they are Swaggart clones, every one of them,” she lamented. “I could imagine them going to Manhattan and coming off like Gentile Nerds from the Planet Midwest.”

Loesch encouraged OR leaders to cultivate a more diverse leadership base in order to remain vibrant and avoid criticism. She explained, “I made some suggestions for what

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<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* During the mid-1980s, Jimmy Swaggart had the highest-rated televised ministry program in the U.S. His program, *A Study in the World*, aired in 190 markets nationwide. Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart, *American Heroes in a Media Age* (New York: Hampton Press, 1994), 241.

amounts to Affirmative Action recruitment of Blacks, Jews, and women to the left of Beverly LaHaye, preferably in visible speaking roles.” Loesch described Randall Terry’s reaction to her suggestions: “Terry accepted some of these ideas, rejected others, and then asked if I’d go to Manhattan in the role of Communications Coordinator, contacting the media.” Loesch reflected on his decision to offer her the job, “Why would he trust a new volunteer like me—not exactly Red Emma, but certainly a Papist Pink—in such a position? Maybe because he does not want the movement to be broader than its initial natural constituency. And—mostly—because this is war: he’ll go with any volunteers he can get.”<sup>125</sup>

Unsatisfied with OR’s failure to reach out to religiously, racially, and ethnically diverse populations, Loesch set off on her own to recruit new members. She befriended Mike Bobrow, whom she described as “an amiable Jewish friend from the Bronx in a pulled-over-the-ears wool hat who can scan a list of New York editors and tell me who’s a sweetheart and who’s a schmuck.”<sup>126</sup> Bobrow helped Loesch to get press releases to Jewish newspapers and get an audience with rabbis. She also trumpeted the participation of anti-abortion feminists at OR events whenever she had the chance. Loesch explained how Adele Nathanson, who at the time was married to famed-anti-abortion physician Bernard Nathanson, admonished a crowd of pro-choice counter-demonstrators at an OR event. “Adele Nathanson, Lord love her, addressed the counter-demonstrators with hot blasts of prolife feminism,” Loesch recalled. “‘I will not,’ she said, ‘wade through the blood of violated women and murdered children to gain my liberation!’”<sup>127</sup>

Loesch interjected the rhetoric of social justice when opportunities presented themselves. At an OR march, she persuaded fellow activists to sing, “We shall overcome/Moms and kids together/Doctors will not kill /Children all will live/We will

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<sup>125</sup> Loesch, “Operation Rescue,” 22.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 19

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.



live in peace/We shall overcome . . . ” and later, “All we are saying/Is give life a chance.”<sup>128</sup> Loesch argued that social justice messages “always elicit the sympathy of the cops, many of whom are Black. And besides, it bugs the brains of the Lefties over on the proabortion side, and under the circumstances, I consider bugging Lefties’ brains a Spiritual Work of Mercy.” She believed Catholic women would be touched to see a mass of evangelicals singing social justice-themed songs. “In some ways, we are doing it to affirm, sharpen and channel the holy anger of these Mass-goers—many of them older women—who have endured the obscene jibes of homosexual demonstrators week after week.”

While Loesch had a meaningful effect on OR, it is also clear that Loesch herself was influenced by socially conservative evangelical Christians. During her tenure with OR, she began to assert that the pro-choice movement was composed largely of gays and lesbians. She described a pro-choice demonstration that occurred on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan in response to an anti-abortion vigil. According to Loesch, “the homosexuals and abortion rightsers [gathered] to shout their contempt for us” outside the church doors. After a Litany service later in the day, “a number of us came out and tarried on the steps of the Cathedral to face the howling homosexuals.” She explained, “the homo-Spart-abortion alliance surged down Fifth Avenue a thousand strong.”<sup>129</sup> Loesch considered herself to be more supportive of gays and lesbians than many of her colleagues. She recalled an instance when she found a red carnation in a public trash basket. She retrieved the carnation and read the attached tag, “God is love and we are called to love one another. Please remember us in your prayers [name] who died of AIDS related complications.” Loesch explained that she placed the carnation in a buttonhole of her coat and said a prayer for the man named on the tag. Later, “two ladies on the bus noticed the flower: they whispered briefly, but all I

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 20

caught was ‘the fags.’” Loesch thought to herself, “That’s all right. One thing faggots and fetus-lovers have in common: we stand in need of prayer.”<sup>130</sup>

Although Loesch embraced or tolerated most of the ideological underpinnings of OR, she was never able to reconcile the marginalization of women in the upper echelons of the organization. According to Loesch, the prevalence of local evangelical pastors as leaders in OR “had the indirect effect of sidelining female leadership.”<sup>131</sup> Evangelical pro-life organizations were highly disciplined and hierarchical, with male pastors at the helm. Women organized and participated in significant numbers in mass demonstrations, but men dominated all of the paid leadership posts. During Operation Rescue’s “Siege on Atlanta” during the 1988 National Democratic Convention, 40.7% of the total number of OR members arrested were women.<sup>132</sup> Women were arrested at comparable rates in other demonstrations across the U.S. In February 1989, women accounted for nearly 42% of the nearly one hundred protestors arrested at the Women’s Suburban Clinic in Houston.<sup>133</sup> Two months later, women comprised seven of eleven anti-abortion protestors arrested at a clinic in Milwaukee.<sup>134</sup> By 1991, women accounted for 38% of the total members of the

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>131</sup> Loesch Wiley, “Pro-Life: Rescue Movement in Transition,” 12.

<sup>132</sup> Seven hundred fifty-one OR members were arrested during the Convention; the records of fourteen activists were redacted. Of the remaining 737 records, 300 (40.7%) were women and 437 (59.3%) were men. Twelve (1.6%) were black, including six men and six women. The only racial categories recorded were “white” and “black.” “Bureau of Corrections: Operation Rescue Arrests, July 19, 1988-August 27, 1988,” Susan Hill Papers (hereafter SHP), accession 2, box 13 (Department of Special Collections, Duke University, Durham, N. Carolina).

<sup>133</sup> Ninety-four anti-abortion activists were arrested. One person’s record was redacted because he or she was a minor. Of the remaining 93 records, 39 (41.9%) were women, 54 (58.1%) were men. “Protestors Arrested at Women’s Suburban Clinic, February 8, 1989” SHP, accession 2, box 17.

<sup>134</sup> “Listing of Issued Non-Traffic Citations: Abortion Protestors, 4-15-1989” City of Milwaukee Municipal Court. SHP, accession 2, box 15. Several months later, sixty activists (out of a total of 200 anti-abortion protestors) were arrested at Milwaukee-area clinics; the protests were organized by Operation Rescue. Most were arrested for blocking the entrance to the clinic and neighboring businesses. Tim Cuprisin and Anne Bothwell, “Abortion Sides Take to Streets” *The Milwaukee Journal* July 8, 1989, A1.

Lambs of Christ arrested for illegal protest activities in nine cities across the United States.<sup>135</sup> Despite women's numeric significance in the rank-and-file confrontational wing of the anti-abortion movement, men dominated the leadership.

The masculine face of OR troubled Loesch. At the conclusion of a weeklong protest in May 1988, OR leaders held a press conference outside the Glad Tiding Tabernacle in New York. She recalled how the stage full of men contrasted with the audience, mostly full of the press corps, two-thirds of whom were women. Loesch noted, "the 'Men Talk: Women Listen' impression was not lost" on the journalists.<sup>136</sup> Amy Goodwin of WBAI asked, "How come there's only men up there?" Randall Terry replied, "We just come out of a clergy luncheon, and that's for men, for obvious reasons." Goodwin followed up, "You didn't have any women at your strategy session?" Terry responded, "Well, not this time. No." Loesch observed the reaction of the press corps: "Standing with the media people, I could see the eyes rolling."

Sensing that he had fumbled, Randall Terry tried to salvage what was to have been the grand finale of the protest campaign. He leaned into the microphone and tried to redirect the charge of sexism to the media, "We had a great spokeswoman yesterday, Adele Nathanson, and not one of you quoted her. Why the media blackout on a prominent woman who's against abortion?" Someone from the press corps asked, "Who's she? What's she done?" Terry responded, "She's the wife of..." Loesch described the reaction of the press corps, "Audible groans ('Wife of Gimme a break.')"<sup>137</sup> "In the end," she recalled, "I

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<sup>135</sup> Of the 176 members of the Lambs of Christ arrested during the early 1990s, 67 were women, 109 were men. "Lambs" May 3, 1991. SHP, accession 2, box 16. These figures do not include the hundreds of arrests that occurred in 1991 in Fargo, North Dakota.

<sup>136</sup> Loesch, "Operation Rescue," 24-25.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* On the tensions between progressive and conservative Catholic women, see Frances B. O'Connor and Becky S. Drury, *The Female Face in Patriarchy: Oppression as Culture* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 1999), 31-39.

saw close up, the way Randy was quite deliberately subordinating women within the movement.<sup>138</sup>”

The evangelical grassroots anti-abortion movement, with its emphasis on local action and independence from ecclesiastical authorities, proved to be inhospitable to women who sought leadership positions. The strict patriarchal structure of evangelical Christian churches, where women were subservient to their pastors and their husbands, proved to be stifling. In 1988, progressive Catholic women started to withdraw from OR. Women who left the organization believed that leaders spent so much time describing women who seek abortions as victims that the labor, ideas, and skills of women activists were hardly noticed. Loesch believed that the movement would benefit from spokeswomen such as Kathy Kelley, who had an abortion in 1979 and later counseled women against having abortions. Kelley insisted, “Women must move past being victims of abortion, and go on to become veterans—like Vietnam Veterans Against the War—who can reach out to others on the basis of painful experience.” Women’s experiences gave them a perspective on the fight against abortion that men did, and could not have. She explained, women can say, “I’ve been there; I know the defiance, the denial, the emptiness, and the grief; and I’m here to give other women the life-saving chance I wish I’d had ten years ago.”<sup>139</sup>

Some of the women who left OR formed organizations that were conscious of women’s unique perspective on pregnancy and motherhood. Kathy Kelly organized Rachel’s Rescues, events that were led by women who had abortions but regretted them. In California, Teresa Harbo organized a sit-in to close a San Francisco abortion clinic the day before Mother’s Day in 1989. Harbo explained, “We asked our men and children supporters to stay back at a nearby church and pray for us as we did the rescue.” The

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<sup>138</sup> Qtd. in Jim Risen and Judy Lundstrom Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 296.

<sup>139</sup> Loesch Wiley, “Pro-Life: Rescue Movement in Transition,” 12.

registered nurse and mother of five stated, “An abortion-bound woman will often feel instant resentment against a man who tries to *intervene*...but we do know, and I think we can establish a level of trust that can make the difference between life and death.”<sup>140</sup>

When Loesch left OR in 1988, she ceased being a full-time participant in the grassroots anti-abortion movement. She met her husband, Donald, Wiley, a Baptist, through their work in OR; they married in 1988. After she had her first of two children, Loesch began writing for Catholic magazines, resuming the intellectual work she had started with Prolifers for Survival. She contemplated how American women could be better served by a different conception of feminism than that provided by second-wave feminists. She believed that women’s unique contribution to parenting was not valued by social policy or popular culture, and that this lack of support for mothers was detrimental to American society. She explained, “No sitter, no day-care program, no early-childhood-development expert can give our little son what I, his mother, can give: optimal nourishment, intimate observation, and consistent, round-the-clock, loving discipline.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> Juli Loesch Wiley, “Babies Need Their Mothers at Home,” *U.S. Catholic* August 1990, 14-15, JLP, folder 13. Loesch cited the work of Dr. Burton White, who conducted research on the emotional development of children at Harvard and Dr. Anna Freud’s analysis of babies who were placed in nurseries while their mothers worked in England during the early twentieth century.




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Figure 3.2 Photograph of Juli Loesch Wiley, ca. 2009. Used by permission of Juli Loesch Wiley.

Women could be good mothers and have successful careers, Loesch contended, if they dropped out of the paid workforce when their children were born and returned once their children entered elementary school. She pointed to Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, who had an extremely successful career after having scaled back her law practice to raise her young children. Loesch explained, "Women can have it all—but not at the same time. As we roll into the twenty-first century, millions of women will learn the wisdom of sequencing—organizing their lives so they can move in and out of the paid-labor market and enjoy being full-time mothers in the years when such mothering is irreplaceable."<sup>142</sup> Loesch advised mothers who stayed at home to raise children to earn money and stay intellectually vibrant by working for wages within the home. "The traditional women's home industries—child care, music instruction, needlework...are still excellent choices."<sup>143</sup> She believed that new technologies were making it even more

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<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

possible for women to work out of the home. “The linkup of telephone and computer technology provides even more extensive possibilities for home employment.” Although she continued to write about gender politics, she no longer worked as a leader in the grassroots anti-abortion movement.

The women who gathered at the Pentagon on a winter’s day in 1980 influenced the way later grassroots activists agitated against abortion. While groups such as OR later adopted the tactics devised by socially progressive Catholic women, Catholic women were not beneficiaries of the rise of the evangelical wing of the anti-abortion movement. Once it became clear that evangelical leaders of the grassroots anti-abortion movement had little interest in promoting issues of life writ large, and even less interest in promoting women internally, progressive Catholics retreated from large, grassroots groups. They organized their own women-only anti-abortion groups and wrote columns for Catholic magazines, continuing to make connections between issues of social justice, feminism, and abortion. In the process, many of their provocative arguments about life, abortion, and feminism became noticeably absent from the American abortion debate.

## CHAPTER FOUR

“SAINT JOAN:” THE RESCUE MOVEMENT AND THE  
MARTYRDOM OF JOAN ANDREWS BELL

Joan has always acted in gray areas between non-violence and violence—hanging on, destroying weapons, refusing to cooperate. At every step, it has been easy to misunderstand her. On the face of it, actions such as hers could be motivated by love, or by anger.

—Joseph Sheidler, 1989<sup>1</sup>

In 1988, prominent evangelical ministers Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and James Dobson looked into television cameras and told their congregations about the plight of Joan Andrews.<sup>2</sup> The devout Catholic was serving a five-year sentence at the Broward Correctional Institution in Florida for invading an abortion clinic, destroying medical equipment, and resisting arrest. That these evangelical Protestant leaders took up Joan Andrews’s cause, and embraced her—Catholic identity and all—marked a larger transformation in U.S. religious history.

During the 1980s, conservative Catholics and evangelical Christians joined forces in the grassroots anti-abortion movement. These religious groups had historically-rooted tensions about the meaning of scripture in general and the process of salvation in particular. In the post-World War II period, however, religious differences mattered less to Americans, who were more apt to intermarry, relocate, and study in a secular university

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Scheidler, Foreword to Joan Andrews and John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe, *I Will Never Forget You: The Rescue Movement in the Life of Joan Andrews* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), 10.

<sup>2</sup> In the 1980s, evangelical Christians typically distinguished themselves from liberal Christians by having a literal interpretation of the Bible, admitting to having had a “born-again” conversion experience, participating in efforts to convert others to Christianity, and holding conservative views on social issues. Sociologist Robert Wuthnow discusses the findings from a June 1984 Gallup Organization survey of self-identified evangelical and liberal Christians in his book, *The Struggle for America’s Soul: Evangelicals, Liberals, and Secularism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 23.



than previous generations.<sup>3</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, the ecumenical movement took root among Americans who remained tied to religious belief, but were increasingly interested in issues of social justice. Members of various denominations came together in ecumenical coalitions to put faith into action—supporting and opposing a range of issues, including civil rights, war, and the Equal Rights Amendment.<sup>4</sup> Liberal Catholics, mainline Protestants, and Jews were the most visible religiously identified political activists until the mid-1970s. Evangelical Protestants were slower to mobilize and articulate their moral values in political—and public—terms. By the 1980s, the anti-abortion movement began to resonate with evangelical Christians, who, just a few decades earlier, might have found it strange to join a movement widely regarded as Catholic. Believers of diverse stripes united around a conservative strain of religion that emphasized apocalyptic visions of God’s wrath against a country’s dissent into sinfulness.<sup>5</sup> Joan Andrews, sometimes referred to as the “rescue heroine” of the anti-abortion movement, was key to the expansion of pro-life activism beyond the Catholic Church.<sup>6</sup>

A conservative Catholic from the small farming town of Lewisburg, Tennessee, Andrews was horrified by what she perceived to be the moral unraveling in the face of the

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 15 and 32-33. In order to understand the significance of religious difference to Americans’ conceptions of religious identity prior to World War II, see Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday-Anchor, 1955). Religious discrimination does continue, however. Journalist Michelle Goldberg points out that many evangelical universities continue to prohibit Jews and Catholics from joining the faculty and that officials from Bob Jones University were still referring to Catholicism as a “cult” as recently as 2000. Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007): 70.

<sup>4</sup> According to Wuthnow, “. . . one estimate suggests that by the mid 1980s, more than 800 religious special purpose groups had been organized as national nonprofit organizations—with more than half of these organizations coming into existence since the early 1960s . . .” Wuthnow 53.

<sup>5</sup> For a useful analysis of the apocalyptic themes in anti-abortion literature from the 1960s through the 1990s, see Carol Mason, *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002): 99-129.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Kaplan, “America’s Last Prophetic Witness: The Literature of the Rescue Movement,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* vol. 5 no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 60-61.

sexual permissiveness that accompanied the sexual revolution of the 1960s. For her, faith need not be encumbered by complex religious doctrines or nuanced philosophical debates: humans were duty-bound to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, and to fight against sin, knowing they had the full support of God. Her actions occasionally put her at odds with members of the clergy and progressive Catholic university students, who criticized her use of aggressive, illegal tactics.<sup>7</sup> Andrews did not hesitate to condemn Catholics—male and female, rank-and-file, and members of the Church hierarchy—if they did not share her beliefs about abortion, activism, or faith.

Andrews developed a strong attachment to Catholicism during her childhood, when her religious identity set her apart from her peers, who she would later recall were primarily Protestant and hostile toward Catholics.<sup>8</sup> Joan's father received a J.D. at Vanderbilt University, but chose to raise cattle and teach. Her mother transplanted to the South from an Irish Catholic neighborhood in Detroit, worked as a nurse.<sup>9</sup> She was a towering presence in her children's lives. Joan Andrews recalled her parents fighting over the Vietnam War, with her mother using arguments made by Catholic social justice advocates to challenge her father's support for President Johnson's policies.<sup>10</sup> Andrews, who had "little civil rights involvement," was deeply interested in the human rights dimensions of the Vietnam War when she was a high school student in Nashville,

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>8</sup> Joan Andrews to Peter Lennox, February 13, 1987, in *You Reject Them, You Reject Me: The Prison Letters of Joan Andrews*, ed. Richard Cowden-Guido (Manassas, Virginia: Trinity Communications, 1988): 31. ". . . [T]he kids . . . believed [Catholics] to be liars, cheaters, and, to put it in general terms, just no good."

<sup>9</sup> Charlotte Hays, "The Pro-Life Movement's Ultimate Activist," *The Washington Times* April 5, 1989, E2.

<sup>10</sup> Andrews did not specify which Catholic activists sustained her mother's opposition to the war. In the 1970s and 1980s, many Catholic anti-abortion activists, including Juli Loesch and Mary Meehan, worked with brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan, who were known nationally for their anti-war, anti-nuclear technology, and labor activism. Social Action Vertical File, box 6, folder Daniel Berrigan, Wisconsin Historical Society Archives (Madison, Wisc.)

Tennessee, in the mid-1960s.<sup>11</sup> “When we started to send more than just arms—started to send troops—that changed the argument,” she recalled.<sup>12</sup> Andrews was impressed with monks who set themselves on fire to protest the war in Southeast Asia. Self-sacrifice would become a hallmark of Joan’s activism two decades later.

During her only semester of study at St. Louis University (SLU) in the spring of 1966, Andrews joined the campus anti-war group, and participated in debates, fasts, and prayer vigils.<sup>13</sup> However, she recoiled at her colleagues’ use of anger-filled rhetoric. “Even though I treated my dad badly when I was angry,” she explained, “I would never call him names, never showed him disrespect on that level.”<sup>14</sup> Twenty years after her semester at SLU, she recalled that did not identify with the “Jane Fondas” of the anti-war movement, whom she thought were “blind to what the other side was doing.” Within months, she quit the SLU anti-war group, just as one of her brothers was drafted to fight in the war, which left her “emotionally distraught.”<sup>15</sup> Although Andrews was no longer tied to the anti-war movement, she continued to believe the war was immoral and unjust.

At SLU, Andrews registered for courses that enabled her to study the Holocaust, an event that had intrigued her since adolescence. Joan’s mother recalled her daughter’s childhood fascination with Adolph Hitler. “She . . . read everything she could on Hitler, appalled by his plan for systematic annihilation of the Jewish race.”<sup>16</sup> In term papers, Andrews turned her attention to Christians who helped save Jews during the Nazi period.

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<sup>11</sup> Joan Andrews to Richard Cowden-Guido, November 4, 1987 in *You Reject Them, You Reject Me: The Prison Letters of Joan Andrews*, 33.

<sup>12</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> Andrews to Cowden-Guido, 33-34.

<sup>14</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> Andrews to Cowden-Guido, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Andrews to unnamed recipient. January 1988, in *You Reject Them*, 29.

She was disgusted by the complacency of millions of Europeans during the genocide, asking, “How could the people not rise up in defense of the Jews? How could the people not rise up?”<sup>17</sup>

In 1966, Andrews left St. Louis at the end of the spring term and returned to her parents’ farm in Tennessee, where she trained thoroughbred horses for the next seven years. She later said of this period, “I spent most of my time writing stories, some children’s stories, but primarily stories regarding morality.”<sup>18</sup> She hoped she would find a devout Catholic man and “raise a huge family of barefoot kids (hopefully on a farm).” However, this did not happen. “I contentedly stayed at home and expected God to send the right man to me,” she explained.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Andrews to Cowden-Guido, 34.




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Figure 4.1 Joan Andrews in her mid-30s, ca. 1984. She lost her right eye to cancer in 1980. (Courtesy of Pro-life Action League)

Andrews abandoned her quiet, reflective lifestyle when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in 1973. Many Catholics understood *Roe v. Wade* in the context of twentieth-century warfare: for them, the state-sanctioned assaults on civilians abroad had grown into a domestic assault on babies. “In 1973, when *Roe vs. Wade* was decided, I was shocked,” explained Andrews, who was twenty-five years old when the decision was announced. “I felt that we had returned to the world of Nazi Germany. I had always figured that we lived in a civilized world, but now that had changed.”<sup>19</sup> However, unlike many progressive Catholic women, Andrews shared a belief common among conservative evangelical Protestants: that the United States was founded as a Christian nation and that it was losing its way in the modern era. “That such brutality and slaughter could happen in

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<sup>19</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 27.

a country that had been Christian, that we called Christian, was shocking,” she remarked.<sup>20</sup>

The analogy between legal abortion and Nazi Germany was a useful rhetorical strategy for anti-abortion activists. First, it enabled them to frame their work as a noble battle against evil, and perhaps even more importantly, as an alternative to passivity. How, they asked, could ordinary citizens remain silent in the face of state-sanctioned murder? “I kept looking for the public outcry, but there was no outcry,” Andrews recalled. “At Mass, the priests were not proclaiming that there was mass murder of children going on in this country . . . I expected to see action. But I did not see anybody organizing anything.” The Holocaust analogy also permitted anti-abortion activists to criticize the entire apparatus that allowed abortion to continue, including abortion providers, clinic staff, police officers who arrested protesters, judges, lawyers, and prison guards. “There is a mass holocaust going on,” explained Andrews, “and it is not isolated to the one arena of the abortion mill where the killing actually takes place. That is just the apex of it.”<sup>21</sup> By insinuating that dozens of categories of professionals were complicit in the murder of babies, rescuers were able to justify their disruptive and hostile tactics as part of a larger battle to dismantle a corrupt system.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 27 and 50.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 196. Anti-abortion protestors routinely shouted Holocaust analogies at women who entered women’s health clinics. See Senate Statement of [name withheld] to the Senate Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, March 6, 1985, 2, box 21, folder NAF 1985 (1), Takey Crist Papers, Department of Special Collections, Duke University (Durham, N. Carolina).

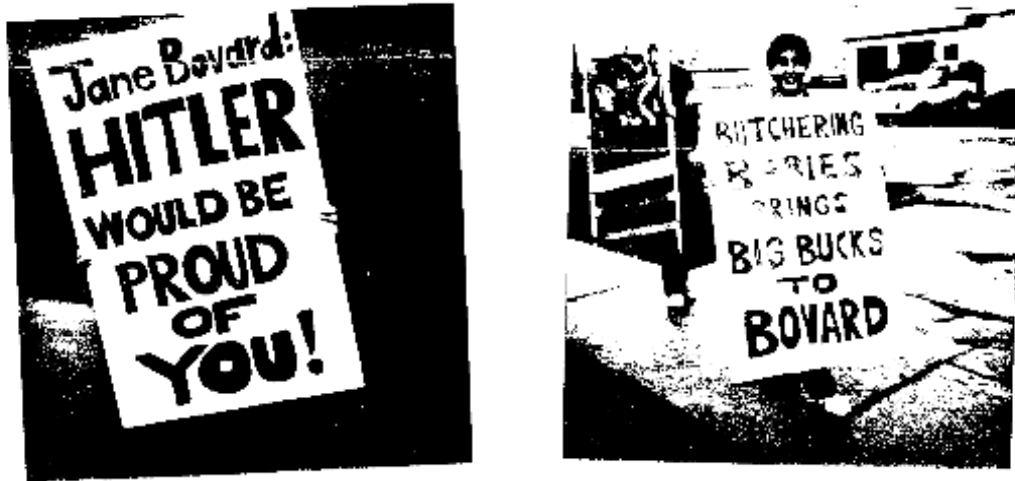


Figure 4.2 Anti-abortion protestors, 1984. Protestors targeted Fargo [N. Dakota] Women's Health Clinic administrator Jane Bovard at the clinic and in her neighborhood. "Abortion Clinic Director's Home Picketed," *The Forum*, June 3, 1984, D7, SHP, box 5, folder 3. Used by permission of *The Forum*.

Parish priests were generally slow to respond to the National Council of Bishops' condemnation of abortion. Some had helped women to secure safe abortions when the procedure was illegal.<sup>22</sup> Others, inspired by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, preferred to focus on the pressing human rights issues of the day, notably migrant labor organizing campaigns.<sup>23</sup> The Archbishop of St. Louis, John May, was a sharp critic of

<sup>22</sup> Protestant clergy and Jewish rabbis maintained the largest, most visible abortion referral programs. Edward B. Fiske, "Clergymen Offer Abortion Advice: Twenty-one Ministers and Rabbis Form New Group—Will Propose Alternatives," *New York Times* May 22, 1967, 1 and 36. The spokesperson for the Clergymen's Consultation Service in New York, Rev. Howard R. Moody, explained, "If legal therapeutic abortion is not possible, but an abortion is indicated, we will try to get the woman the best possible medical advice to take care of her problem pregnancy."

<sup>23</sup> Andrews noted that during the 1970s, some of the most out-spoken critics of anti-abortion protest tactics were faculty at the Jesuit St. Louis University. Andrews *I Will Never Forget You* 44.

grassroots anti-abortion activists who used illegal methods to disrupt clinic operations. He told pro-life police officers that their duty to enforce the law should supersede their personal beliefs about abortion.<sup>24</sup> Andrews, frustrated with the Catholic Church's passive response to *Roe*, took matters into her own hands.

Shortly after *Roe* was decided, the self-described "coward" traveled to Chicago to "smash the abortion weapons." She chose the city because it was within driving distance of her parents' Tennessee home, but still far enough away to keep her name out of local newspapers if she were charged with a crime, thus sparing her parents embarrassment. Her first attempt to destroy clinic equipment was a complete failure. When she arrived at a Chicago bus terminal, Andrews found a Yellow Pages book and began scouring the pages to find the address of an abortion clinic. A police officer mistook her for a prostitute and arrested the would-be vandal. When she was released from a police substation without having been charged, Andrews returned to her parents' farm.<sup>25</sup>

Upon her return to Tennessee, Joan reached out to anti-abortion activists in Nashville to help with statewide grassroots organizing efforts. She joined Respect Life, a Catholic pro-life group in the Nashville area, and Tennessee Volunteers for Life, a local Right to Life chapter. She recalled that most of the first anti-abortion activists in Tennessee were Catholics who operated informally outside of churches and with little-to-no support from the clergy.<sup>26</sup> Many of these activists struggled to persuade priests to permit the distribution of pro-life literature in their churches. During the mid-1970s, Joan and her

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<sup>24</sup>In 1986, the bishop of Pensacola, Florida, Keith Symons, and Thomas Horkan, an official with the Florida Catholic Conference, would also condemn the actions of rescuers, whom they believed were an anathema to peaceful protest. *Ibid.*, 49 and 184.

<sup>25</sup> James Risen and Judy L. Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998): 191.

<sup>26</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 28.



sister, Susan, lobbied successfully on behalf of three pro-life bills in the Tennessee General Assembly. However, Joan derived the most satisfaction from her work outside the formal political process. Between 1975 and 1978, this consisted of distributing literature and picketing hospitals and clinics that provided abortions.

In 1978, Joan left her parents' Tennessee farmstead and moved with her sister to Delaware. They distributed posters that promised to assist women with unplanned pregnancies. Two women responded to their advertisement, one, a pregnant woman with several children and the other, a woman with no children who wanted to flee an abusive relationship. The women and children lived with the Andrews sisters until they found housing. Next, the Andrews sisters moved to St. Louis, which was quickly becoming a center for grassroots anti-abortion activism.

### The Reluctant Leader: Joan Andrews and the Rescue

#### Movement

By 1977, grassroots activists in a handful of cities with significant Catholic populations, including St. Louis, Kansas City, New Orleans, and Gaithersburg, Maryland, started to engage more frequently in a form of activism they termed "rescues."<sup>27</sup> The definition of a rescue is malleable, and can consist of blocking the entrance to a clinic, invading a clinic, or preventing a clinic from operating normally (for example, by calling in

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<sup>27</sup> The first rescue is believed to have occurred in 1975, when a handful of men and women arranged to trespass at a Rockville, Maryland, clinic. Six women were arrested for blocking the entrance and later sentenced to six months of unsupervised probation. This particular tactic is referred to as a 'sit-in.' Cynthia Gorney, *Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998): 248. See also "Logistical Plan for August 2, 1975" JCOP, box 6, folder 3. For state-by-state comparisons of religious affiliations, see The Association of Religion Data Archives, "Catholic States (1980)," [http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList\\_60.asp](http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList_60.asp) (accessed March 7, 2010) and The City of New York City Graduate Center "American Religious Identity Survey," [http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research\\_briefs/aris/key\\_findings.htm](http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/key_findings.htm) (accessed March 7, 2010). In her analysis of Operation Rescue members' tactics, Peggy Phelan discovered that membership in the organization "can mean anything from participating in a single rescue to traveling throughout the country and performing rescues constantly." Peggy Phelan, "White Men and Pregnancy: Discovering the Body to be Rescued," in *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*, ed. Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan (University of Michigan Press, 1993), 384.

a bomb threat). Rescuers' primary goal is to prevent abortion procedures, thereby 'rescuing' the fetus. Rescuer Monica Migliorino Miller defined rescues as a form of activism distinct from protest. "A protest is a verbal and much needed public denunciation of an evil," she explained. "A rescue is the giving over, not only of one's voice, but of one's body so that another human body, that of a fetal child, can be protected."<sup>28</sup>

The first rescues were covert, chaotic operations, organized by grassroots activists who met secretly to develop missions for the 'cell.'<sup>29</sup> Religious belief inspired, sustained, and justified these operations. Jeffrey Kaplan, a scholar of religion, explains: "Rescue is a small but deeply held form of religious commitment which is enacted on the public stage."<sup>30</sup> Monica Migliorino Millier explained, "Most often, it is [an act of] charity rooted in Christian religious conviction."<sup>31</sup> The initial organizers of militaristic-sounding "rescue operations" identified as Catholics, but had loose ties to the Church. Migliorino Miller explained that it was pragmatic to keep rescue operations small, "We could not close an abortion center with twenty people forming a human chain, but we could close one with two cars, locks, chains, and two men."<sup>32</sup> In addition to Migliorino Miller, Juli Loesch, John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe, Harry Hand, John Samuel Lee, and members of the Dominican lay group, Catholics United for Life, organized most of the rescues between 1975 and 1988. The tactics of the small, regional Catholic grassroots rescue movement would later be adopted by large, nationwide Protestant anti-abortion organizations, including

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<sup>28</sup> Monica Migliorino, "Abortion Battles Ahead," *Crisis*, September 1989, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Andrews to Cowden-Guido, 35.

<sup>30</sup> Kaplan also notes that "rescuers form a definite sub-culture in that they appear to share common interests, beliefs, language and, by virtue of their practice of periodically converging on target cities, luminal experiences marked by shared feelings of danger, privation, and sacrifice." Kaplan, "Literature of America's Rescue Movement," 70-71.

<sup>31</sup> Migliorino, "Abortion Battles Ahead," 17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

Operation Rescue and the Pro-Life Action Network (PLAN). Members of Operation Rescue, taking a cue from the grassroots extremist anti-abortion activists of the late 1970s, changed their names, addresses, and telephone numbers frequently to avoid surveillance. PLAN leaders preferred to have women serve as spokespeople. According to a PLAN manual for local groups, “[The spokeswomen] should not be wearing...any religious symbols!”<sup>33</sup>

A typical rescue consisted of activists entering one-by-one into an abortion clinic and hiding in washrooms until all members of the group were inside the building. “Then they would sneak around,” explained Andrews, “until they ended up inside the abortuary—in the killing room or the waiting room—and then block doors.”<sup>34</sup> Once the doors were barricaded, the activists would swarm the building, encouraging women in the waiting room to leave the building, screaming at clinic staff to stop ‘killing’ babies, and destroying medical equipment.<sup>35</sup> Most activists tried to resist arrest. Police occasionally had to use wheel chairs to remove activists who refused to stand.<sup>36</sup>

According to Joan Andrews, rescuers in Delaware, Maryland, and Missouri were “mainly middle-aged, married people with young kids,” while in Philadelphia, “they ran the gamut.”<sup>37</sup> Rescues attracted as few as one person and as many as 2,000. However, a revolving core group of about twenty people participated in most of the rescues that

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<sup>33</sup> Judy Lundstrom Thomas and Jim Cross, “Operation Rescue: Now You See Them . . .,” *Grand Forks Herald* January 5, 1992, C1 in SHP, accession 1, box 6, folder 1992-1993, and “Guide to Formation of a Direct Action Group,” Pro-Life Action Network, ca. late 1980s, JCOP, box 6, folder 7.

<sup>34</sup> Joan Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 43.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 44-46.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 152.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 115.

occurred in the United States during the 1980s.<sup>38</sup> Picketers and sidewalk counselors frequently accompanied rescuers, which contributed to the chaos around clinics. These activists did not consider themselves to be ‘rescuers’ because they did not violate trespass laws. Rank-and-file rescuers were primarily Catholic, but beginning in 1980, an increasing number of Protestants began to join the rescue movement. Many of the new activists were inspired by Dr. C. Everett Koop and Francis Schaeffer’s 1979 film *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, and by the founder of the Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell, who promised to register four million conservative Christian voters for the 1980 presidential election to support Ronald Reagan.<sup>39</sup> Andrews explained, “The feeling of solidarity [shared among rescuers] is perhaps similar to what soldiers feel.”<sup>40</sup>

In 1979, Andrews moved from Delaware to St. Louis, where pro-lifers were raiding area clinics at least once a week. Between 1977 and 1979, anti-abortion activists organized regular clinic invasions throughout the city. Andrews explained that as direct action protest picked up, the nuts-and-bolts of grassroots organizing suffered; activists had little time to hold meetings, raise money, and expand the educational mission of the movement.<sup>41</sup> Instead, rescuers had more immediate concerns: Should they resist arrest? Should they refuse bond? How would the necessity defense resonate with the community? The excitement of confronting abortion providers directly and the possibility of preventing abortion immediately overrode activists’ interest in the comparatively dull work of tending to organizational responsibilities.

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<sup>38</sup> For Migliorino’s description of the history of Citizens for Life, see *Ibid.* 123-130. The organization released approximately ten mailers per year.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Baird-Windle and Eleanor J. Bader *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 61.

<sup>40</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 219.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 36-54.

This was a heady time for grassroots activists. Emboldened by confronting abortion providers and women wishing to receive abortions, rescuers began to announce clinic invasions to the media days before they occurred. Andrews, who had decided that she'd "rather eat spinach all day" than participate in another meeting, was thrilled that more people were participating in direct actions.<sup>42</sup> In March 1980, two weeks after participating in a rescue in St. Louis, Joan felt she had found a community of friends who shared her commitment to making the world a more moral and just place. "You wouldn't believe the fun we have. Mike is always arguing philosophy with Jane, who is working on her doctorate in philosophy. Poor Mike, it seems we always gang up on him . . . he sees shades of distinction in arguments when none in substance exist . . ."<sup>43</sup>

The rescue movement provided an alternative to the more formal, professional wing of the movement, represented by the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC). While the two wings shared an ideological opposition to abortion, the divergent tactics used by participants in the two groups would create lasting fissures in the movement. Andrews articulated this growing divide: "It is one thing to argue about when life begins . . . It is another thing to stand at a door and see women approach, knowing that if they go in, there will be a dead baby there in an hour or so." She continued, "The cold reality is very different from the late-night argument."<sup>44</sup> Like Juli Loesch, she was skeptical of the legal and legislative work of the mainstream movement, believing that if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, the practice of abortion would simply move underground just as it had been for most of the twentieth century. The only way to end abortion, she maintained, was to participate in a guerilla war against those who would kill.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 40.

<sup>43</sup> Joan Andrews to John Andrews, March 22, 1980, in *You Reject Them*, 39-40.

<sup>44</sup> Joan Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 53.

<sup>45</sup> Joan Andrews to Bernard and Adelle Nathanson, July 3, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 166.

Grassroots anti-abortion activists had mixed feelings about mainstream anti-abortion organizations, which held contradictory positions about rescues. Annual NRLC meetings served as meeting grounds for activists of all stripes. However, the leadership of the NRLC did not publicly support activists who used illegal tactics. Andrews sometimes lent her support to the NRLC and sometimes criticized its conservative approach to ending abortion. She understood why the NRLC adopted a cautious, policy-driven approach to ending abortion: “these groups are large and ‘safe,’ many join them who would never join us.”<sup>46</sup> The movement against abortion was best served, she maintained, when activists emphasized the shared goal of ending abortion rather than engaging in internal squabbles about the effectiveness of particular tactics. Rescuers agreed that if the two branches of the movement could mute their philosophical and tactical differences and present a united front, it would become an attractive vehicle for activists with varying degrees of comfort and interest in ending abortion.

NRLC leaders feared that rescues might imperil the legitimacy of the movement. In 1986, NRLC convention organizers fretted that rescuers would drive away the presidential candidates who’d agreed to attend. “If any pretext is given for leading the public to believe that this associates [the politicians] with unruly or even violent groups,” the organizers warned, “it will damage our future chances of getting public officials to identify themselves with the pro-life cause.”<sup>47</sup> The NRLC further distanced itself from the rescue movement by articulating its own philosophical position of using “nonviolent [sic] solutions for the sometimes difficult problems faced by pregnant women.” The NRLC found “verbal harassment or abuse and physical intimidation toward persons or property ... foreign to

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<sup>46</sup> Joan Andrews to Jeff Frye, June 13, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 163.

<sup>47</sup> NRLC memorandum to Conference Attendees, September 5, 1985, 1, JCOP, box 2, folder 5.

our purpose.”<sup>48</sup> The organization soon prohibited paid employees from participating in rescue work and cut appropriations to groups that sponsored sit-ins.<sup>49</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, grassroots protestors weaved in and out of legal, illegal, confrontational, and conciliatory forms of activism. After having participated in rescue operations for several years, many of Joan Andrews’s friends had grown weary and began to seek other ways to protest against abortion. Some heeded the advice of Archbishop May, who commanded activists to stop invading clinics and souring Americans’ opinion of the movement. The St. Louis group’s inability to attract new members seemed to confirm the archbishop’s warning. Some activists had simply grown weary of the confrontational nature of rescues.<sup>50</sup> Others suspected that judges were going to start issuing lengthy prison sentences and hefty fines; by 1980, judges had enjoined pro-life activists from entering nearly every clinic in the St. Louis area. Meanwhile, the establishment of pregnant women’s crisis centers had gained traction within the movement. One of Andrews’s colleagues, Samuel Lee, believed that the future of the anti-abortion movement lay in the establishment of affordable housing centers for pregnant women and children. Lee explained, “No one will kill a baby out of desperation because they don’t have a place to stay! We don’t have to do rescues!”<sup>51</sup>

Joan Andrews was infuriated by her friends who retreated from the rescue movement. “It was mind boggling to me,” she explained. “Of course, we have to provide support for pregnant women, but that is not the heart of the issue. People kill babies for lots of reasons. Very few do so because they don’t have a place to stay, very, very few.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Debra Braun to National Right to Life Committee, April 28, 1986 and Mary Meehan, “Pro-life Groups Divided on Sit-Ins,” *Register*, May 11, 1986, no page, JCOP, box 2, folder 5.

<sup>50</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 64.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

She believed that it was illogical for activists to turn away from rescues in order to focus on less confrontational forms of protest; after all, most people were radicalized because they perceived that educational and legislative efforts were too slow and ineffectual.

Andrews's commitment to the rescue movement would only grow. Between 1980 and 1985, she was arrested approximately 120 times for trespass, disorderly conduct, and destruction of property in six states, with nearly half of the arrests occurring near St. Louis. She spent an average of six hours in jail on each charge.<sup>53</sup> Prosecutors declined to pursue charges against Andrews approximately ninety percent of the time. On the dozen or so occasions when Andrews was brought before a judge, she received sentences ranging from four days to nearly one year. During her fifteen days in a Baltimore prison, Andrews escaped an attempted sexual assault, suffered from an outbreak of crabs that had infested the women's section, and led prayer vigils.<sup>54</sup> Between 1980 and 1985, Andrews spent over three years in jails throughout the east coast and Midwest, including a year-and-a-half stint in Gumbo prison in St. Louis.<sup>55</sup> Joan's haphazard experiences with the justice system were typical of most rescuers', due in part to the federal government's refusal to categorize the behavior of rescuers as a form of domestic terrorism.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> "Presentence Report" Office of the Court of Common Pleas Criminal Division, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, prepared for Hon. Raymond A. Novak, December 24, 1985, in Andrews, *You Reject Them*, 70.

<sup>54</sup> Andrews, *You Reject Them*, 80-83.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 78-79 and Elizabeth Andrews [Joan's mother] to unnamed recipient, 30.

<sup>56</sup> David J. Garrow, *Liberty & Sexuality: The Right to Privacy and the Making of Roe v. Wade* (New York: Macmillan, 1994), 651. Nanette Falkenberg, the executive director of the National Abortion Rights League, was critical of the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms' finding that there wasn't enough evidence to link the violence to anti-abortion organizations. "It starts with picketing, then paint in the waiting room, then the locks are jammed," she contended. James Barron, "Abortion Issue Takes a Violent Turn," *New York Times* November 24, 1984, E2. Jack Killorin, a spokesperson for the ATF defended the Reagan Administration's decision to investigate individuals rather than organizations, "If there were a national conspiracy we'd say there is one. If we needed help, we'd say, hey, we need help." Leslie Maitland Werner, "U.S. Asserts Bombings Aren't Work of Single Group," *New York Times* January 3, 1985, A17.



The first rescuers, almost all of whom were white, suffered few legal consequences for their illegal activities.<sup>57</sup> Until 1983, a handful of Missouri judges accepted proliferers' use of the 'necessity defense,' a legal strategy used in the 1960s by civil rights activists who violated segregation laws by staging sit-down demonstrations in public spaces reserved for whites.<sup>58</sup> According to Andrews, "In our legal tradition, common law follows common sense, and it is just common sense that you can trespass, or even break and enter, to save a life."<sup>59</sup> Joan Andrews believed that sympathetic police officers aided anti-abortion protestors. She contended that they paid for pro-life banners to be flown across the St. Louis sky during major rescue operations, organized fundraisers for prolife legal defense funds, and "could not identify people properly" in court.<sup>60</sup>

As the rescue movement dwindled in size during the first half of the 1980s, the zeal of the remaining committed activists intensified.<sup>61</sup> Joan Andrews and an ad-hoc band of approximately twenty colleagues spent their days in a cycle that consisted of invading clinics, posting bond, violating the terms of bond by returning to clinics, and serving prison sentences, which ranged from days to years.<sup>62</sup> According to Andrews, "The rescue,

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<sup>57</sup> This is particularly noteworthy given that incarceration rates soared during the mid-1970s and 1980s. The most significant predictor of whether someone would be sentenced to prison was if the defendant was black. Kevin B. Smith, "The Politics of Punishment: Evaluating Political Explanations of Incarceration Rates," *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 66, no. 3 (August 2004): 934. For an assessment of how race, class, and the aggressive prosecution of drug-related offenses fueled the prison boom of the 1980s and 1990s, see Becky Pettit and Bruce Western, "Mass Imprisonment and the Life Course: Race and Class Inequality in U.S. Incarceration," *American Sociological Review*, vol. 69, no. 2 (April 2004): 151-169.

<sup>58</sup> A handful of judges in Virginia and Missouri had accepted anti-abortion activists' use of the necessity defense. In Missouri, this came to an end with *City of St. Louis v. Klockner*, when a federal court judge ruled that the anti-abortion activists could not classify illegal protest activity as 'necessary.' 637 S.W. 2d 174 (Mo. App. 1982).

<sup>59</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 51.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 38 and 49.

<sup>61</sup> Kaplan, "America's Last Prophetic Witness," 61.

<sup>62</sup> Susan Hill, the executive director of the Women's Health Organizations, which operated clinics throughout the United States, explained that it is nearly impossible to determine

the trial, and jail are all parts of a single whole.”<sup>63</sup> She compared rescuers’ suffering to pregnant women and to the crucifixion of Jesus. Rescuers had to show allegiance with pregnant women who walked away from abortion clinics. If they were asking pregnant women to suffer through several more months of physical, financial, and emotional hardship in order to deliver a baby, rescuers should be prepared to sacrifice their own money and freedom. “Some women think pregnancy is like jail,” she explained. “Their decision to act in love and to give birth to a child carries a high price . . . Why should we surprised or resentful if the same thing happens to us?”<sup>64</sup> Andrews compared the rescue cycle—which consisted of protest, arrest, and sentencing—to the activism of Jesus. “Sometimes I think that the Lord saw his decision to give himself to his disciples, his trial and death and his time in the tomb as three parts of one event.” Jesus’s service to the apostles and his compassion for tax collectors and prostitutes were similar to rescuers’ service to babies and compassion for pregnant women, according to Andrews. While Jesus paid for his activism with his life, anti-abortion activists sacrificed their freedom.<sup>65</sup> By conceptualizing herself as a holy figure in the modern world, the earthly, secular

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precisely how many activists engaged in violent protest tactics. “My problem is that there are so many unsolved crimes that I can’t know how many people attacked those clinics and where they are. So it could be one person doing a hundred butyric acid attacks on a clinic, it could be a hundred people doing it.” Deposition of Susan Hill for *National Organization for Women v. Joseph Scheidler et al.* Case No. 86C78888, January 29, 1997, 2051, Susan Hill Papers, (hereafter SHP), accession 2, box 1, Duke University Department of Special Collections (Durham, N. Carolina). Between 1977 and 1988, eighteen geographical clusters accounted for 41% of the arsons, bombings, and bombings of abortion clinics in the United States. Fifteen individuals or groups (totaling 33 persons) perpetrated 42 cases of arsons, bombings, and firebombings (38% of the total). David A. Grimes, Jacqueline D. Forrest, et al. “An Epidemic of Anti-Abortion Violence in the United States,” *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 165(5): 1265.

<sup>63</sup> She also referred to herself as a “professional protestor.” Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 177 and 220.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 177.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 177-178. When rescuers’ cases were brought before Jewish judges, Andrews said she would “breathe a sigh of relief,” because they would consider the merits of the charges and were unencumbered by a self-imposed pressure to separate their religious beliefs from their responsibility to uphold secular law, 174-175.

punishments of fines and prison sentences reinforced Andrews's belief that she was engaged in a noble, transcendental project.

While Andrews praised police officers whom she perceived helped anti-abortion activists to avoid prosecution, she condemned the police officers who did not demonstrate solidarity with trespassers. Police, frustrated by arresting the same few activists week after week, began to roughhouse pro-lifers, according to Andrews. She accused police officers of failing to record pro-lifers' accusations of police brutality. Allegations of police brutality against women rescuers angered the grassroots prolife community, which didn't like "to see women getting beaten up."<sup>66</sup>

The rescue movement exacerbated the growing divide between Catholics who performed their secular professional responsibilities separately from their personal faith and those Catholics who believed that religious conviction should guide personal and professional decisions. Andrews lamented that Catholic judges often presided over the hearings of anti-abortion activists. "It is hard to understand the extent of Catholic involvement in abortion," she explained. "But when we go into court and get a Catholic judge, usually we expect the worst." She believed that Catholic judges were concerned about appearing unbiased, and would "probably lean over backward to prove that [their] legal decisions are not influenced by [their] 'sectarian beliefs.'" She had deciphered that one of her judges was "a fallen-away Catholic," one was "a devout Catholic," another had attended "Martin Luther King's old seminary," and that one of her friends had been tried before an "ex-priest." The sentences, she maintained, were a form of religious persecution.

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<sup>66</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 114. See also, "Sadism, Strappado and Savagery: West Hartford Police Brutally Attack Peaceful Pro-Lifers," press release by Laura Winterroth of Bi-State Operation Rescue Network, June 19, 1989, and Michael T. Grumbine to John Finn, September 29, 1989, in John Cavanaugh-O'Keefe Papers, hereafter JCOP, box 2, folder 6, Wisconsin State Historical Society (Madison, Wisc.)

If she complied with injunctions, she maintained she would “compromise my principles as a Catholic. We won’t, so we are being persecuted for our religious beliefs.”<sup>67</sup>

In 1984, Joan Andrews returned to Delaware to teach activists in the Northeast some of the skills she’d honed in the Midwest. When she wasn’t moving in and out of the Delaware justice system for vandalizing abortion clinics, Andrews conducted workshops to instruct activists how to destroy medical equipment (her signature tactic), how to impede the arrest process, and how to navigate the legal system if they were charged with trespassing.<sup>68</sup> Joseph Scheidler, the “father of the pro-life movement,” and a close friend of Andrews’s, helped to coordinate some of the educational initiatives.<sup>69</sup> Scheidler, a former Benedictine monk, had met personally with President Ronald Reagan in 1980, giving him a certain cachet within the anti-abortion movement. Joan Andrews’s ties to Scheidler indicate how the grassroots movement’s overarching goal of ending abortion united political partisans, conservative clergy, and social progressives.

In May 1984, Andrews was one of three hundred people who pledged to participate in the first sit-in organized by John Cavanaugh-O’Keefe’s Pro-Life Non-Violent Action Project at a new clinic in Gaithersburg, Maryland. Fewer than half of the people who pledged to picket showed up for the event and much to Andrew’s dismay, she was the only

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<sup>67</sup> Pete Sheehan, “Abortion Controversy Continues in Pittsburgh,” *Our Sunday Visitor* January 19, 1986, 4, JCOP, box 3, folder 9.

<sup>68</sup> Memorandum, “Hillcrest Clinics,” 9-10. The Delaware Women’s Health Organization was the site of numerous large anti-abortion campaigns, including Project Jericho in 1986, modeled after a tactic outlined in Joseph Scheidler’s manual for anti-abortion activists, *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*. Activists hoped to make Delaware an “abortion-free” state by closing its only abortion clinic. See also “Complaint” *National Organization for Women et al. v. Scheidler et al.* Civil Action No. 86-263, June 9, 1986, 8, Takey Crist Papers, box 18, Joseph Scheidler lawsuits. Complaint, *National Organization for Women et al. v. Scheidler et al.*, 7. Scheidler shepherded the movement to bridge conservative Catholics with evangelical Christians in the fight against abortion. See also Kaplan, “America’s Last Prophetic Witness,” 66-67.

<sup>69</sup> Scheidler was infamous for yelling at women who entered abortion clinics through a bullhorn. Garry Wills, “Evangel of Abortion,” *New York Review of Books*, June 15, 1989, 19.

protestor arrested.<sup>70</sup> Despite her frustration with Cavanaugh-O'Keefe's poor planning, Andrews stuck with his fledgling group and persuaded local Right to Life Committee members to defy the NRLC's strict prohibition of direct action and join the rescue movement. Within a year, she persuaded fourteen activists join her for a clinic invasion in Pittsburgh, where she was arrested with twelve of the participants, including the young Juli Loesch.<sup>71</sup>

Andrews served as a mother figure for many grassroots activists. Juli Loesch recalled how frightened she had been when she was arrested for the first time in Pittsburgh. When she was placed in a prison cell, she was overcome with terror. "My heart pounded. I broke out in sweat," she recalled. "I had the insane desire—and if you've never experienced a phobia, you won't know what to make of this—to tear off my clothes and batter myself against the bars."<sup>72</sup> A prison guard, eager to calm the agitated prisoner, moved Loesch to Andrews's cell. Loesch was embarrassed by the panic attack, particularly because her outburst occurred in front of seasoned prolife activists. Andrews, age 37, calmed Loesch, age 34, by offering her a portion of her lunch and assuring Loesch that one day she would have the psychological strength to endure incarceration. A few hours later, Loesch was released on bond.

In June 1985, Andrews returned to Delaware, unlawfully entered the Delaware Women's Health Organization, where she and twenty other rescuers contaminated and destroyed surgical equipment. It took the Wilmington police officers nearly five hours to clear the clinic. Activists had chained themselves to medical instruments.<sup>73</sup> Andrews was

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<sup>70</sup> James Risen and Judy L. Thomas *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 89. While in prison after the Maryland protest, Andrews became engaged to New York pro-life activist Tom Herlihy. They did not marry.

<sup>71</sup> Sheehan, "Abortion Controversy Continues," 4.

<sup>72</sup> "Reflections by Juli Loesch: December 1987" for *You Reject Them* 80-81.

<sup>73</sup> Baird-Windle and Bader, *Targets of Hatred*, 95.

convicted of criminal trespass and conspiracy in the Municipal Court for the City of Wilmington.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps because her arrests occurred in multiple cities in multiple states, Andrews did not receive a prison sentence. Instead, she was ordered to pay court costs and to stay away from the clinic for two years. She soon left Delaware to join her sister in St. Louis. Within a month after her return, Andrews was arrested, along with sixty-one other activists at a St. Louis area clinic.<sup>75</sup>

### Martyrdom in Pensacola

Between 1979 and 1986, Joan Andrews was a pivotal figure in the rescue movement because of her willingness to move from city to city and share new strategies for disrupting abortion clinics with activists in each locale. Most Americans, however, were unfamiliar with rescue operations, which occurred routinely in only about a half a dozen U.S. cities. This would begin to change in the mid-1980s, when the small grassroots movement expanded to include thousands of energized evangelical Protestants. Once again, Joan Andrews was crucial to the development of the rescue movement, bridging the seasoned cadre of Catholics with new coalitions of Protestant anti-abortion activists.

In January 1986, Andrews met with Earl Appleby, an aide to Senator Jesse Helms, in Washington, D.C. Appleby had close ties to members in the rescue community, including Joseph Scheidler. He also contributed to Defenders of Defenders of Life, an organization that raised money for the families of incarcerated anti-abortion activists, including bombers, and in the 1990s, murderers.<sup>76</sup> Appleby asked Andrews to assist John

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<sup>74</sup> Complaint *National Organization for Women et al. v. Scheidler et al.*, 9.

<sup>75</sup> “1985 Chronological History of Sit-Ins, Local,” 1, TCP, box 18, Joseph Scheidler background folder. Thirty-one of the activists were men, thirty were women. Forty-three were Missouri residents.

<sup>76</sup> Note that “Defenders of Defenders of Life” is not a misspelling. Defenders of Defenders of Life members support the families (defenders of activists) of pro-life activists (defenders of “babies”) who commit crimes to stop abortion.

Burt, a born-again Christian and Army of God member, in his effort to stage a rescue operation in Pensacola, Florida. Andrews agreed to teach Burt's band of evangelicals how to disrupt clinic operations.

The rise of the rescue movement was part of a larger growth of extremism in the anti-abortion movement. Between 1977 and 1988, anti-abortion activists were responsible for at least 110 building attacks; this number peaked in 1984, when twenty-nine clinics sustained damage, typically by arson or bombing.<sup>77</sup> Most prominent pro-life figures sought to distance themselves from activists who committed crimes. Rescuers defended these activists. Joseph Scheidler, the president of the Pro-Life Action League, and author of *Closed: 99 Ways to Close an Abortion Clinic*, told a Congressional subcommittee that he understood why some activists were driven to destroy clinics. "The moral outrage at the waste of human life . . . prompts this response." Some anti-abortion leaders denounced the destruction of abortion facilities, but Scheidler "refused to condemn it because we refuse to cast the abortionists in the role of victim when they are, in fact, victimizers."<sup>78</sup>

Pensacola had been the site of grassroots anti-abortion extremism well before Andrews's arrival. On Christmas Day, 1984, two men, both twenty-one years old, detonated pipe bombs at three area abortion clinics. Kaye Wiggins, the fiancée of one of the bombers, described the blasts "as a gift to Jesus on his birthday."<sup>79</sup> Wiggins and the

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<sup>77</sup> These numbers are considered to be conservative. Some clinics stopped reporting attacks to the ATF after it became clear the Reagan administration was not going to intervene to protect clinics. David A. Grimes et al., "An Epidemic of Antiabortion Violence in the United States," *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* 165, no. 5 (November 1991): 1263-1268. This included thirty bombings between May 29, 1982 and January 1, 1985, in California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Texas, Virginia and Washington. David C. Nice, "Abortion Clinic Bombings as Political Violence," *American Journal of Political Science* 32, no. 1 (February 1988): 178.

<sup>78</sup> U.S. Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on the Judiciary, *Abortion Clinic Violence—Oversight Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, 99<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., March 6 and 12, 1985, 52-53*. See Joseph M. Scheidler, *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, Rev. Ed. (Tan Books and Publishers, 1993).

<sup>79</sup> Mary Voboril, "Bombings Were 'Gift to Jesus' Woman Says," (Jacksonville, NC) *Daily News*, January 4, 1985, 9A. President Reagan and Rev. Jerry Falwell, leader of the Moral Majority, denounced the Pensacola bombings nine days after they occurred. See also Sam Howe Verhovek,

other bomber's wife, Kathren Simmons, both eighteen years old, were charged with conspiracy and aiding and abetting. Wiggins purchased the gunpowder that the two men stuffed into their homemade bombs. She later explained that she thought her fiancé was going to use the powder to make a gift for his friend, a hunter. She claimed that once she learned of the intent to bomb clinics, she tried to dissuade her fiancé from carrying out his violent plan. "I believe God had a job for Matt and Jimmy, but I don't believe it was blowing up clinics." The two bombers and their partners were members of First Assembly of God, a Pentecostal church in Pensacola. Their minister condemned the bombings, stating, "I do not believe God tells people to do these kinds of things. As Christians, we have no right to take the law into our own hands."<sup>80</sup>

Investigators found a cache of t-shirts labeled "Protector of the Code" in one of the men's homes. While some believed the t-shirts suggested that the couples were involved in an underground anti-abortion group, the couples' attorney insisted that they simply reflected the men's commitment to helping others. The attorney explained that Protector of the Code "relates to an idea between the two boys having to do with chivalry. It meant they would be chivalrous and do good deeds, help out people when the opportunity presents itself."<sup>81</sup> Whether the t-shirts signaled the couples' participation in a renegade anti-abortion organization or simply indicated of their personal beliefs, they suggested that the perpetrators subscribed to a militaristic view of Christianity. John Burt, Andrews's contact in Pensacola, said of the bombings, "When the history of this period is written, it

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"Pensacola's Decade of Violence: Escalating Battle Over Abortion," *The New York Times*, August 6, 1994, 1A.

<sup>80</sup> Lindall Ballenger, qtd. in Voboril, "Bombings Were 'Gift,'" 9A.

<sup>81</sup> Paul Shimket, qtd. in Voboril, "Bombings Were 'Gift,'" 9A.



won't be the pickets or the letter-writers who will be the heroes. It's going to be the bombers.”<sup>82</sup>

John Burt, a former Klansman, drug addict, and alcoholic, had become a born-again Christian while serving a prison sentence for grand larceny sometime in the early 1980s.<sup>83</sup> Upon his release from prison, Burt founded Our Father's House, a home for wayward girls, and served as a minister for a loosely organized band of evangelicals in the Pensacola area.<sup>84</sup> He was well known among abortion providers in the city, having organized dozens of protests in front of clinics, with some demonstrations attracting as many as 2,000 picketers.<sup>85</sup> Burt longed to enlarge Florida protest, to not merely voice discontent with abortion, but also to cause the level of disruption instigated by rescuers in other U.S. cities. Law enforcement officials in Pensacola, still reeling from the 1984 clinic bombings, would have little patience for the aggressive tactics of rescuers.

In March 1986, Joan Andrews, along with five activists, including John Burt, invaded the Ladies Center clinic in Pensacola, Florida, ransacked a medical room, and destroyed medical supplies. As the rescuers charged into the building, they pushed two clinic employees to the ground, causing one employee to suffer permanent neck, shoulder, and ear damage.<sup>86</sup> Andrews was charged with third-degree burglary, malicious mischief,

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<sup>82</sup> Jon Nordheimer, “Bombing Case Offers a Stark Look at Abortion Conflict,” *New York Times* January 18, 1985, A12.

<sup>83</sup> “I was a very bigoted young man,” said Burt. “I was convinced that integration was a Communist conspiracy to take over the U.S.A.” Jon Nordheimer, “Bombing Case Offers a Stark Look at Abortion Conflicts,” *New York Times* January 18, 1985, A12.

<sup>84</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 195. Burt would become a major figure in the grassroots anti-abortion movement in Pensacola. He mentored Michael Griffin, who, in 1993, shot and killed Dr. David Gunn.

<sup>85</sup> Patricia Baird-Windle and Eleanor J. Bader, *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 91.

<sup>86</sup> “Six Arrested at Abortion Clinic,” *New York Times* March 27, 1986, A18.

resisting arrest, and assault.<sup>87</sup> Less than a month later, Andrews, who had been released on bond from the Escambia County Jail in Pensacola, was arrested along with one hundred other protestors when they tried to close a clinic in St. Louis County, Missouri. She was later extradited to Florida, where she was convicted of trespass and violating multiple injunctions. In July 1986, Judge William Anderson found Andrews, age 38, guilty of third degree burglary and two misdemeanor charges. Andrews had to be carried out of the courtroom, continuing her “noncooperation policy” by going limp.<sup>88</sup> Two months later, Anderson sentenced Andrews to serve five years in prison. This was the first time Andrews was convicted of a crime more serious than trespassing. Her imprisonment would elevate her status within the movement and inspire thousands of evangelicals, while her refusal to cooperate with authorities would serve as a model for future militant prolife activists.

Andrews’s lengthy sentence sent shockwaves through the pro-life community. She said later, “It took a while for proliferators to figure out that a five-year sentence really meant a five-year sentence.”<sup>89</sup> After she refused to comply with prison policies at the Broward Correctional Institution in Pensacola, Joan Andrews received “gain-time,” which meant that she was denied the opportunity for early release for demonstrating good behavior. Each refusal to comply with a prison policy cost Andrews sixty days of early release time.<sup>90</sup> In less than one year in prison, Andrews was disciplined thirteen times, resulting in 410 days of “gain time.”<sup>91</sup> Had she complied with prison policies, Andrews would have been

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<sup>87</sup> Richard Cowden Guido, “Introduction” *You Reject Them, You Reject Me: The Prison Letters of Joan Andrews* (Manassas, Virginia: Trinity Communications, 1988): 16.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17. Andrews was born March 7, 1948. Andrews had learned about the noncooperation tactic during her time in Pennsylvania, when she worked alongside activists familiar with Quaker peace protest tactics. Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 203.

<sup>89</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 204.

<sup>90</sup> Joan Andrews to Miriam McCue, September 19, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 180.

<sup>91</sup> Ray E. Howard, Director, Clemency Administration for the Florida Parole and Probation Commission, to Miriam McCue, November 9, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 187.

eligible for a work-release program after serving eighteen months, and would have been released on probation after two-and-a-half years.<sup>92</sup> Her primary method of protesting prison policies was to pretend to be a fetus during interactions with prison officials. She refused to speak, stand, or comply with orders to move.<sup>93</sup>

Once prison officials designated her as non-cooperative, Andrews not only lengthened her stay in prison, but also lost the basic privileges afforded most prisoners. She was housed in the disciplinary confinement wing of the Broward Correctional Institution, where her attorney was the only person outside of prison permitted to visit her. She could not use the telephone. Prison officials often denied her requests for paper, which prevented her from corresponding with friends and family.<sup>94</sup> The lone window in her cell was painted white and she was only permitted to leave for occasional exercise breaks.

The mainstream anti-abortion movement, including the NRLC and most Catholic clergy, did not offer Andrews support during her imprisonment. Bishops in Delaware and Florida, two states where Andrews had violated trespassing and vandalism laws multiple times, supported her conviction and sentence.<sup>95</sup> Instead, Andrews found support in the conservative wing of the Catholic Church, which was forging alliances with evangelical Protestants. Fr. James Lisante, the coordinator for Respect Life, a New York-based anti-abortion advocacy group, endorsed the evangelical Operation Rescue and voiced his

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<sup>92</sup> Gene Cryer, editor, and Kingley Guy, editorial page editor, *News/Sun Sentinel* (Fort Lauderdale, Florida), November 29, 1986, in *You Reject Them*, 112.

<sup>93</sup> See Joan Andrews, "Reflection on Non-Cooperation Upon Entering Broward Correctional" November 1986, in *You Reject Them*, 104-109 and Robert W. MacMaster, Information Services Director for the Florida Department of Corrections, Untitled Report, May 15, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 159-160.

<sup>94</sup> Joan Andrews to Father Paul Quay, January 5, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 130.

<sup>95</sup> Untitled report in *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), November 27, 1986, in *You Reject Them*, 112 and Joan Andrews to Jeff Frye, June 13, 1987 in *You Reject Them*, 163.

support for Andrews. Two years later, Catholics United for Faith bestowed the Catholic Woman of the Year Award upon her. Fr. Lisante accepted on her behalf, as she was still serving her sentence in Florida.<sup>96</sup>

Evangelical ministers were eager to capitalize on the plight of Joan Andrews, as her lengthy prison sentence struck a chord with Protestants, who were just beginning to enter the anti-abortion movement in significant numbers. Although Andrews was rarely mentioned in national coverage of the movement, she became a cause célèbre in the evangelical media. A young Randall Terry, who would later lead Operation Rescue, organized “Free Joan Andrews” protests outside the Pensacola prison that housed her. At the conclusion of Operation Rescue’s “Siege of Atlanta” protest at the 1988 Democratic National Convention, about 300 anti-abortion demonstrators marched on the Florida Capitol seeking a clemency hearing for Andrews; 133 were arrested.<sup>97</sup> Marlin Maddox, a Protestant evangelical who hosted a nationwide radio program, spoke frequently in support of Joan Andrews. Pat Robertson, D. James Kennedy, and James Dobson voiced their support for Andrews on their television and radio programs.<sup>98</sup> Her prominence in evangelical media outlets also encouraged the perception among evangelicals that the national media was not interested in or hostile to the anti-abortion movement. This helped to strengthen social conservatives’ perception that evangelical programs, including the *700 Club* and the *Coral Ridge Hour*, revealed the dirty underbelly of secularism.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> T.H., Memorandum to Rescue Activists, December 8, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 193. Bishop Austin Vaughn, an auxiliary from the Archdiocese of New York, also supported Andrews publicly.

<sup>97</sup> Andrews, *I Will Never Forget You*, 205-207. “69 More Opponents of Abortion Jailed in Atlanta Protests,” *New York Times* August 7, 1988, 20.

<sup>98</sup> James Risen and Judy L. Thomas *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 186.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.



Figure 4.3 Andrew Scholberg speaks before a Free Joan Andrews rally, ca. 1988. Scholberg was a fundraiser for Joseph Scheidler's Pro-life Action League and co-founded Operation Rescue with Randall Terry. (Courtesy Pro-life Action League)

Andrews's popularity among evangelical Christians helped the rescue movement, which had previously been the province of Catholics, to acquire a new base of support. After prominent evangelical televangelists began to profile Andrews's imprisonment, evangelical Christians mobilized to support the orthodox Catholic, whom many believed was a nun. At least 30,000 supporters, mostly evangelicals, wrote letters of support to Andrews. Approximately 15,000 people sent letters to Florida Governor Bob Martinez, asking him to release Joan Andrews.<sup>100</sup> Andrews would receive more popular support

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 188.

from evangelical Christians, who were careful to note her Catholic identity (“Saint Joan”), than she ever did from Roman Catholics.

The way in which the news of Joan Andrews’s imprisonment was communicated to evangelical Christians and was used to strengthen their resolve to fight against abortion reveals crucial differences between Catholic and evangelical Protestant anti-abortion activism. Catholic bishops and priests who opposed abortion were more likely to encourage parishioners to contribute financially to mainstream educational and lobbying groups, including the NRLC, or to participate in organized prayer vigils and marches near abortion clinics. Catholics who wanted to adopt more aggressive tactics worked outside the province of the Church. Many evangelical Christian churches were not bound to a formal denomination, which enabled hundreds of pastors and congregants to chart their own courses. Evangelicals simply had to find churches that nurtured the type of activism they wished to use—rather than operating outside of churches, they looked within for leadership, money, and participants. When anti-abortion activism became the province of evangelical churches, opportunities for women to shape the anti-abortion agenda diminished. As Joan Andrews fasted and prayed in her Florida prison cell, the young evangelical minister Randall Terry solidified his position as a leader of the rescue movement. The new face of the movement would be eager to draw upon the strategies and traditions developed by Andrews and Loesch, but reluctant to welcome them as leaders.

### Gender and the Rescue Movement

Andrews was sensitive to the gendered dynamics of anti-abortion rescues. “If you think of the rescues as an exercise in power,” she reflected, “then maybe it is not good if the rescues are done by a lot of men.” If the public perceived that the rescue movement consisted primarily of men intent on denying women from exercising control over their bodies, she maintained, they would never take the rescue movement seriously. But if male rescuers could demonstrate that they took “responsibility for babies and [were] taking risks

to protect babies,” she suspected the movement might gain traction.<sup>101</sup> By risking their own freedom to protest against abortion, Andrews believed that male rescuers might demonstrate solidarity with women who make physical and financial sacrifices to continue with pregnancies.

Indeed, the gender composition of the movement would become a liability for rescuers over the course of the decade. A combination of factors caused women to become less visible in the rescue movement. First, when evangelical Protestants entered the rescue movement in significant numbers in the 1980s, they formed national organizations, including Operation Rescue (OR), which was led by Randall Terry and The Lambs of Christ, led by Norman Weslin. As Juli Loesch’s experiences with OR demonstrate, the male clergy who led national rescue groups enforced a patriarchal structure that did not permit women to have formal roles in the upper echelons of the organization. Secondly, the rise of pregnancy hotlines and crisis pregnancy centers provided activists with opportunities to work with pregnant women directly. As judges became more inclined to levy stiff financial penalties and prison sentences on anti-abortion activists who violated injunctions, non-confrontational forms of activism became an increasingly attractive alternative to rescues.<sup>102</sup>

The financial and emotional burden of the rescue cycle took a toll on marriages. The marriage of Bryan and Ellen Brown, rising stars in Operation Rescue in the late 1980s, collapsed, in part, due to their rescue work. “My wife was a leader,” explained Bryan. “And essentially from the pressures, she had a nervous breakdown and left me.” Brown

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<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 194.

<sup>102</sup> See Cate McKenna “Success Through Perseverance,” *All About Issues* (publication of the American Life League) circa 1991, in SHP, accession 1, box 6, folder 1992-1993. McKenna explains, “Picketing, letter writing, counseling and the myriad of other...activities can be difficult to sustain.”

continued to participate in the rescue movement after his marriage dissolved, and cited Ellen's departure as evidence that women were not as capable as men of being successful rescuers. "What happened to Ellen is a lesson that there are pressures on this battlefield that a woman is just not necessarily set up to be able to completely handle and take." The loss of women reinforced the patriarchal, militaristic nature of the rescue movement by enabling men to portray women as too weak and fragile to participate in the taxing, risky work of rescue operations. Bryan Brown did not mince words, "We are patriarchal. We believe that men are supposed to lead and that a man's greatest role in our society is to protect a woman."<sup>103</sup>

As an unemployed, single woman without children, Joan Andrews had the freedom to move from city to city and in and out of jail. This flexibility enabled Andrews, a woman who did not want to be a leader of the movement, to educate and inspire activists in Missouri, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and Florida. Regional leaders, including Joseph Scheidler in Chicago, John Ryan in St. Louis, and Michael McMonagle in Philadelphia, relied upon Andrews to teach rescuers innovative methods for disrupting abortion services. She taught activists how to glue locks most effectively and how to procure noxious liquids so they could be released in heating and cooling units.

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<sup>103</sup> Bryan Brown, qtd. in Lundstrom Thomas and Cross, "Operation Rescue" *Grand Forks Herald*, C5. In her study of anti-abortion literature, Carol Mason notes: "pro-life ideology habitually and consistently defines its hero as male, straight, Christian, and white. If this is not an intention of pro-life writers, surely it is an effect of their writing, of narrating abortion as apocalypse." Carol Mason, *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 190.





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Figure 4.4 Joan Andrews in her early 40s, early 1990s. (Courtesy Pro-life Action League)



Figure 4.5 Ann and Joseph Scheidler at the Pro-Life Action Network headquarters in Chicago, Illinois, March 3, 2010. Note that Joseph is wearing his signature black leather coat and black hat. Photograph by Karissa Haugeberg. Used with permission of Ann and Joseph Scheidler.

The intense, unabashed religiosity of rescuers stood in stark contrast to the mainstream movement, which sought to appeal to a broad base of religious and nonreligious supporters during the 1980s and 1990s. For Joan Andrews, Catholicism's emphasis on Christian works fueled her desire to block clinic entrances and dismantle clinic machinery.<sup>104</sup> Frustrated by the lack of support she received from her local clergy, Andrews and fellow disgruntled Catholics charted their own course, unencumbered by Church policies and bureaucracy. Andrews's supporters likened her to other famous Catholic women, including Joan of Arc and Mother Theresa. During the late 1980s, an unsigned memo circulated among Catholic rescuers regarding Andrews's work, "[I am] overwhelmed . . . that the woman . . . has been given to us at all. It is so Catholic (with all due admiration to Evangelicals and everyone else.) It is like the difference between all the marvelous social programs and Mother Teresa going out to rescue her first dying man in the streets of Calcutta."<sup>105</sup>

The gendered dimensions of religious faith proved to be a crucial determinant for women's place in the rescue movement. Catholics and Protestants who gravitated toward the aggressive grassroots wing of the movement shared the beliefs that the United States had fallen into a state of immorality and that Christians had a moral duty to intervene and save babies.<sup>106</sup> Ideological differences in beliefs about salvation and the necessity of good works, which had been a source of tension between Catholics and Protestants for centuries, were not important for most rescuers.

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<sup>104</sup> Joan Andrews to Jeff Frye, February 18, 1987, in *You Reject Them*, 142.

<sup>105</sup> Unsigned Memo to Joe Wall, circa late 1980s, in *You Reject Them*, 146.

<sup>106</sup> See Rhys H. Williams and Jeffrey Blackburn's sensitive analysis of the similarities and differences in ideological belief between leaders and rank-and-file members of Operation Rescue, "Many Are Called but Few Obey: Ideological Commitment and Activism in Operation Rescue," in *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*. ed. Christian Smith, 167-185. They found that pro-lifers' emphasis on morals, rather than scripture, enabled evangelical Christians to work alongside Catholics. Rhys and Blackburn note, "Separating theology, in which differences are often many, from morality, where issues such as abortion and homosexuality can produce consensus, allows the coalition-building necessary for social-movement action." 178.

The campaign to free Joan Andrews exacted a heavy toll on the Florida state government. Andrews's imprisonment was particularly thorny for Republican Governor Martinez, who wanted to appease social conservatives and maintain his reputation as a law-and-order politician. In 1988, Martinez granted Andrews clemency, knowing that she would be extradited to Pennsylvania to face multiple trespass charges. After a few days in a Pittsburgh prison, a judge released Andrews on probation and ordered her to stay away from a local abortion clinic where she had protested earlier in the decade. Shortly after she was released, Andrews returned to the Pittsburgh clinic. She was convicted for trespassing and her sentencing hearing was scheduled for April 1990.<sup>107</sup>

In between her conviction and sentencing in Pennsylvania, Andrews traveled to Vermont, where she was arrested along with ninety-five other demonstrators in front of two Burlington abortion clinics. The activists refused to give their names, identifying themselves as "Baby Jane Doe" and "Baby John Doe." They were held for eleven weeks for failing to identify themselves. Judge Matthew Katz of District Court found the demonstrators guilty of unlawful trespass and sentenced them to the time they had already served. Andrews, age 41, was released from a Vermont jail in May 1990, one month after she was supposed to have appeared in a Pittsburgh court for sentencing.<sup>108</sup> Andrews was a fugitive for the next eight years. She set her sights on Europe, where she was arrested along with twenty-five other anti-abortion activists outside a clinic in Manchester, England. She was assigned to a sympathetic judge, who dismissed the charges against her.<sup>109</sup>

Meanwhile, during the heyday of evangelical Protestant anti-abortion protest in the 1990s, legions of rescuers adopted the tactics Joan Andrews and her band of Catholic activists had been using for years. For example, Operation Rescue and Lambs of Christ

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<sup>107</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 213.

<sup>108</sup> "95 Abortion Protestors Are Freed," *New York Times* May 10, 1990, A21.

<sup>109</sup> Scheidler, Foreword to *I Will Never Forget You*, 7-8.

protestors went limp and refused to identify themselves when they were arrested in front of clinics in Kansas and North Dakota in the early 1990s.<sup>110</sup>

In 1998, Joan Andrews was captured in Bayonne, New Jersey, and transferred to Pittsburgh to face the same judge who had presided over her case eight years earlier. Judge Raymond Novak sentenced Andrews, age forty-nine, to serve three-to twenty-three months in prison with an additional three years of probation.<sup>111</sup> Women's Health Service director Mary Ellen Tunney attended the sentencing hearing, and recalled Andrews's dramatic reaction to the sentence, "When he announced her sentence, Andrews Bell fell to the ground with her arms extended like Jesus Christ on the cross." However, law enforcement officials were prepared to resist her antics. Tunney observed, "It was interesting because the sheriff's deputies wouldn't let her do it. They folded her up really fast. She stayed in Allegheny County Jail for two months and then agreed to accept probation."<sup>112</sup>

While she never regained the national prominence she had in the late 1980s, Joan Andrews continued to participate in educational and activist missions within the prolife movement. The rescue movement Joan Andrews knew before she entered the Broward Correctional Facility in 1985 had changed considerably by the end of the decade. The close-knit community of devout Catholics had been subsumed by a mass evangelical Protestant movement. By the end of the 1980s, 600-800 people, primarily evangelical Christians, participated in rescues in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, alone.<sup>113</sup> Its new leaders, most notably the charismatic Randall Terry, had little interest in including the women who had helped organize the grassroots anti-abortion movement, including Andrews and Juli

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<sup>110</sup> Jon G. Lindgren and H. Elaine Lindgren, "Social Change Within the "Establishment": A City's Response to National Anti-abortion Protesters," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 31, no. 4 (December 1, 1995): 479.

<sup>111</sup> "Pro-Life Activist Ordered to Jail," *Christianity Today* March 2, 1998, 75.

<sup>112</sup> Baird-Windle and Bader, *Targets of Hatred*, 297.

<sup>113</sup> Deposition of Susan Hill 2052.

Loesch. Terry told friends that Joan Andrews made him uncomfortable.<sup>114</sup> She continued to make occasional appearances at prolife conferences. Andrews was the featured speaker at the 1997 Pro-Life Action Network Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which was attended by Monica Migliorino Miller, Joseph Scheidler, and Rev. Matt Trehwella, a leader in the militia movement who mentored Shelley Shannon.<sup>115</sup> However, she never commanded the prominence she once had in the movement. Instead, she established roots in New York, where she married and had children.

Women's participation in the rescue movement challenges us to consider the ways in which women not only advocated, but committed acts of malice. "All of us who were into rescues, we have a criminal mind," explained Doris Grady, a rescuer who helped James Kopp, a rescuer who fatally shot Dr. Bernard Slepian on October 23, 1998, when he lived as a fugitive. Rescuers, she explained, had to adopt the instincts of a criminal, "How can I get into this building without being detected? How can I get past the guard?"<sup>116</sup> Christians could, in good conscience, adopt this mentality because "it was for peaceful, nonviolent purposes." The refusal to acknowledge how unchecked aggression nurtured violent tactics enabled women to justify their presence in the rescue movement.

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<sup>114</sup> Susan Brindle [Joan Andrews's sister] interview with Risen and Thomas in *Wrath of Angels*, 213.

<sup>115</sup> "Attend the 1997 P.L.A.N. Conference" flyer. SHP, accession 2, box 15. Trehwella, a former Detroit gang member, became a fundamentalist Christian, and in 1990, founded Missionaries to the Pre-Born. He was contemptuous of the National Right to Life Committee and supported armed resistance and Christian militias. Baird-Windle and Bader, *Targets of Hatred*, 8.

<sup>116</sup> David Samuels, "Wanted: The Making of a Fugitive," *New York Times Sunday Magazine* March 21, 1999, 48.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“IT WAS THE MOST HOLY, RIGHTEOUS THING I’VE EVER  
DONE”: THE RISE OF LETHAL VIOLENCE IN THE ANTI-  
ABORTION MOVEMENT

On the afternoon of August 17, 1993, Rachele “Shelley” Shannon approached a handful of pro-life activists who picketed each day at Dr. George Tiller’s abortion clinic in Wichita, Kansas. Introducing herself as “Ann from Sacramento,” Shannon helped to distribute pamphlets to passersby and shouted at patients who left the clinic.<sup>1</sup> Around 7:00 p.m., Shannon spotted Dr. Tiller in his S.U.V. “He slowed at the end of the driveway and was sitting erect, looking straight ahead, like he was trying to ignore me,” she recalled.<sup>2</sup> Shannon reached into her purse. This caught the attention of Dr. Tiller. He assumed that she was going to hand him a brochure, just as hundreds of pro-life activists did each year. Exhausted and probably irritated, Tiller decided to “flip the bird” at the woman walking toward him. Shannon, who had hoped to hit Tiller’s heart, instead shot five bullets from her .25-caliber handgun into his raised arms.

Journalists and scholars have struggled to understand the relationship between violent extremists and the social movements with which they identify. When, in the 1970s, anti-abortion extremists—male and female—began to commit arson and detonate bombs at clinics across the U.S., the myth that violence was the pursuit of male renegades who operated alone took root. Scholars who studied the movement and federal law enforcement officers who profiled extremists sustained this belief. Between 1977 and 1993, the federal government refused to investigate whether the 31 burglaries, 543 reported cases of vandalism, 113 arsons, 28 bombings, 188 reports of stalking, 88 incidents of assault and

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<sup>1</sup> Regular protestors included a nun, a retired fighter pilot, a band manager, members of the clergy, and homemakers. John McCormick, “Rising Tide of Zealotry,” *Newsweek*, August 31, 1993, 59; Spencer Heinz, “Praying With Fire: The Genesis of Shelley Shannon,” *The Oregonian* (Portland) November 14, 1993, A1.

<sup>2</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire,” A1.

battery, 166 death threats, and two kidnappings against abortion clinics or abortion staff that occurred during this period were the work of an organized group.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, FBI director William H. Webster told reporters in 1984 that the federal government did not classify anti-abortion violence as terrorism because the crimes were not committed by a “definable group or activity.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the task of prosecuting individual activists fell to individual prosecutors across the country.

In 1993, Dr. David Gunn was the first abortion provider to die at the hands of an anti-abortion extremist. Michael Griffin shot Gunn outside a Pensacola, Florida, clinic. The popular press turned to sociologist Dallas Blanchard, one of a handful of scholars who studied violence in the anti-abortion movement, to explain why a pro-life activist would kill.<sup>5</sup> Blanchard, who taught in Pensacola, Florida—the city where Gunn was killed—identified the paths that led some activists to become violent.<sup>6</sup> Activists who were likely to

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<sup>3</sup> *NAF Violence and Disruption Statistics, 1977-2007* (National Abortion Federation, March 2007), [http://www.prochoice.org/pubs\\_research/publications/downloads/about\\_abortion/violence\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.prochoice.org/pubs_research/publications/downloads/about_abortion/violence_statistics.pdf). and Jon Nordheimer, “Bombing Case Offers a Stark Look at Abortion Conflicts,” *The New York Times*, January 18, 1985, A12.

<sup>4</sup> “Terrorist Bombings Decline, Abortion Attacks Excluded,” *The Washington Times* December 5, 1984, A4. See also Patricia Donovan, “The Holy War,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (January 1985): 5-9. Indeed, the federal government did not begin to use its anti-terrorist resources to investigate anti-abortion activists until after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. By this time, pro-life militants were sending anthrax through the U.S. postal service to abortion clinics. Nonetheless, the FBI was slow to investigate anthrax-laced letters sent to abortion clinics in comparison to their investigation of anthrax-laced letters sent to U.S. Congressional offices and television studios. Carol Mason, “Who's Afraid of Virginia Dare - Confronting Anti-Abortion Terrorism after 9/11,” *University of Pennsylvania Journal of Constitutional Law* 6 (2003): 796-797 and 805-807.

<sup>5</sup> In the early 2000s, anthropologists and sociologists began to study violence in the anti-abortion movement. See Carol Mason, *Killing for Life: The Apocalyptic Narrative of Pro-Life Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2002); Carol J. C Maxwell, *Pro-Life Activists in America: Meaning, Motivation, and Direct Action* (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> For examples of journalists who relied on Blanchard’s expertise on the anti-abortion movement, see Joe Nicholson and Corky Siesmaszko “Inside Minds of Clinic Gunners” *New York Daily News* January 2, 1995; Carey Goldberg, “How Political Theater Lost Its Audience,” *The New York Times* September 21, 1997, WK6; and Christina Nifong, “Bomb Signals New Strategy,” *Christian Science Monitor* 90, no. 46 (February 2, 1998): 3.



turn to violence, he noted, “have been males, under 35 years of age, and rigid fundamentalists of Catholic, Protestant, or Mormon persuasion.”<sup>7</sup> Some, he explained, were long-time protestors who had grown frustrated by the movement’s failure to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in the courts. Others sought celebrity or martyrdom. He continued, “They tend to be authoritarian personalities, people who believe children should be seen and not heard, that women should stay in the home.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Dallas A. Blanchard, *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest*. (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994), 58. See also Dallas A. Blanchard and Terry J. Prewitt, *Religious Violence and Abortion: The Gideon Project* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Merle Hoffman, “Praise the Lord,” ca. 1994 p. 6 in Merle Hoffman Papers, Box P5, Merle Hoffman Papers (Duke University Special Collections, Durham, N. Carolina).

<sup>8</sup> Nicholson and Siemaszko “Inside Minds” np. By the late 1990s, law enforcement officials, journalists, and scholars began to characterize violent anti-abortion activists with precision: they are usually men, and they usually act alone, as so-called “lone wolves.” In his 1999 profile of James Charles Kopp, David Samuels described how Kopp conformed to the pattern of a gunman’s personality. “Most likely male, he was patient, organized, intelligent, and experienced in moving in and out of locations far from his home.” One of the most infamous so-called “lone wolves” of the twentieth century was Timothy McVeigh, who bombed the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995 out of revenge for FBI actions at Ruby Ridge and Waco. David Samuels, “The Making of a Fugitive,” *The New York Times Magazine*, March 21, 1999, 78. Sociologist Stuart A. Wright studied the bombing extensively and interviewed McVeigh in prison before he was executed. Wright demonstrates how McVeigh was supported by a network of militias across the United States in *Patriots, Politics, and the Oklahoma City Bombing* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 139-193. Other “lone wolves” include anti-abortion extremist Eric Rudolph; the Unabomber, Theodore Kaczynski; and James Von Brunn, a white supremacist who murdered a security guard at the Holocaust Museum in 2009. Amanda Robb is critical of journalists who describe violent anti-abortion activists as “lone wolves” because so many have admitted to coordinating attacks with other Army of God members, noting that “wolves run in packs.” Amanda Robb, “Not a Lone Wolf,” *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 2010, 26-31. On the ideology of violent anti-abortion activists, see Mason, *Killing for Life*; Sandi DuBowski, “Storming Wombs and Waco: How the Anti-Abortion and Militia Movements Converge,” *Front Lines Research* 2, no. 2 (October 1996): 1-10; Laura Flanders, “Far-Right Militias and Anti-Abortion Violence,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 7, no. 3 (1995): 383-386; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Rory McVeigh and David Sikkink, “God, Politics, and Protest: Religious Beliefs and the Legitimation of Contentious Tactics,” *Social Forces* 79, no. 4 (June 2001): 1425-1458; Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (Harper Perennial, 2004); Rhys H. Williams and Jeffrey Blackburn, “Many Are Called but Few Obey: Ideological Commitment and Activism in Operation Rescue,” in *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social-Movement Activism*, ed. Christian Smith (New York: Routledge, 1996); Maxwell, *Pro-Life Activists in America*.

Blanchard contended that different factors motivated men and women to join the anti-abortion movement. Pro-life men felt threatened by the choices legal abortion offered to women. Pro-life women worried that legal abortion would leave them vulnerable to exploitation by men, who could demand they have abortions. Blanchard explained that women who opposed abortion “believe men should be held responsible for their sexuality.” He elaborated, “[Women in the anti-abortion movement] believe ‘If you knock me up, you’re going to have to support this child.’” Blanchard’s careful study of the rise of violence in the anti-abortion movement has enabled scholars to distinguish mainstream from violent activism among men. However, the particular roles women played in making the movement violent remains less well understood.<sup>9</sup> By turning our attention to women in the extremist wing of the anti-abortion movement, we are asked to confront our assumptions about the type of people who commit violence and the degree to which they were embedded in a national social movement that conspired to end abortion through extralegal means.

### Rachelle “Shelley” Shannon

Born Rachelle Pauli in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, in 1956, Shelley Shannon had a troubled, nomadic childhood. She would later say, “My parents were high school dropouts who married young. I was their first surviving child. I’m glad abortion wasn’t legal then, or my mom would have been under a lot of pressure to abort me, probably.”<sup>10</sup> The Pauli

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Stephen E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Modern Worldwide Extremists and Extremist Groups* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2004) Atkins does not include a single entry on women extremists in the anti-abortion movement. In her study of network television media coverage of the abortion protests of the early 1990s, sociologist Ginna Husting speculates that journalists were eager to feature polarizing figures (in this case, pro-choice women and anti-abortion men) because it was a simple way of appearing balanced. According to Husting, the abortion debate “became a ‘safe’ war where journalists could recover their lost objectivity; the balance so obviously missing in Gulf war coverage became a dominant trope of the coverage of the war on abortion.” “When a War Is Not a War,” 166-168. She observes that stories about the abortion debate that included footage of women receiving abortions almost always featured white women patients and male physicians.

<sup>10</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire,” A1.

family moved every two years, as Shelley's father found temporary construction work across the upper Midwest and northwestern U.S. Periodically, the Pauli children lived with their grandparents on a farm in Indiana, and later, in Florida. By the time she was twelve-years-old, Pauli had attended thirteen schools.<sup>11</sup> As an adult, Shelley said that the frequent upheavals she experienced during her childhood taught her to be adaptable and resourceful—skills that proved useful when she became a traveling anti-abortion activist.<sup>12</sup>

When Shelley was twelve, her parents divorced, and she became estranged from her father.<sup>13</sup> The seven Pauli children settled in Chelan, Washington, with their mother, Vernis, who wanted to be closer to her relatives. Vernis entered a series of volatile marriages. During her marriage to James Grady Vaught, a grocery store owner, police responded to frequent complaints of domestic violence. In 1972, during Shelli Pauli's sophomore year of high school, Vaught, age thirty-five, was murdered by a gunshot wound to the chest. No one was charged in connection with the crime, but those close to Shelley believe her mother committed it.<sup>14</sup>

At Chelan High, Shelley Pauli was regarded as an enthusiastic artist who also excelled at math. A classmate, Susan Winship, remembered her friend as fun-loving and outgoing. Pauli and her friends enjoyed bowling, dancing, and dating.<sup>15</sup> During her junior

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Bray and Jayne Bray, *Tiller's Unheeded Warning: The Shelley Shannon Story*, January 2009, 4, <http://scottroeder.org/warning.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire," A1.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; Myrna Shaneyfelt, interview by Karissa Haugeberg, telephone, December 3, 2010. In his study of violent anti-abortion activists, professor of religious studies, psychoanalyst, and Methodist minister Matthias Beier has found that many "either had contentious relationships with or absence of their fathers, or felt deprived of becoming fathers due to an abortion." Paul Hill's father was frequently away from the home because of his job as an airline pilot. Paul de Parrie, a member of the Army of God, explains that he became a Christian fundamentalist shortly after his father was shot and killed. Neal Horsley's father died when Neal's mother was pregnant. Beier, "On the Psychology of Violent Christian Fundamentalism: Fighting to Matter Ultimately," *The Psychoanalytic Review* 93, no. 2 (April 2006): 307.

<sup>15</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire."

year of high school, Shelley Pauli attended a bowling tournament, where she met a married man whom she dated briefly. She became pregnant. Thirty years later, Shelley claimed that the man who impregnated her asked her to drink turpentine to prompt an abortion, but that she had refused and decided that she would raise the child alone.<sup>16</sup> “Abortion had just been turned loose on America by the Supreme Court,” Shannon recalled, “but it wasn’t too widespread and not really accepted by most decent people.” She noted that she was an atheist at this time, and that “I wouldn’t kill my baby.”<sup>17</sup>

Shelley Pauli’s friends contended that she became withdrawn when she learned she was pregnant. “I know the baby was something very important to her, very special to her,” recounted Winship. “I think it gave her a sense that this was something that no one could ever take away.” During her pregnancy, Pauli withdrew from school and completed coursework at home. She returned to school after she gave birth to her daughter, Angela. Motherhood transformed Shelley Pauli. “The Shelley I knew was outgoing and bubbly and always willing to be where the action was,” Winship remembered. “And all of a sudden, she’s into a shell.”<sup>18</sup>

After graduating from high school in May 1974, Shelley Pauli packed her infant daughter into a car and planned to move to Bellingham, Washington. En route, Pauli met David Shannon at a camping ground. In December, Shelley Pauli and David Shannon were married at a United Methodist Church. Shannon gave birth to her second child, a son, a few months later. David Shannon joined the U.S. Marines, and between 1975 and 1979, the young family lived on military bases in North Carolina and California. While living in North Carolina, Shelley read a Gideon Bible and began to refer to herself as a

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<sup>16</sup> Bray and Bray, *Tiller’s Unheeded Warning*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Shelley Shannon, qtd. in *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Qtd. in Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

“born-again” Christian.<sup>19</sup> She was also moved by a sermon she heard during a visit to Kokomo, Indiana, where the Shannon family attended a Nazarene church service with David’s grandparents. After David’s release from the military, the Shannon family moved to Yreka, California for one year. David worked for the U.S. Forest Service. Shelley worked briefly at the Siskiyou County Juvenile Hall and Probation Department. She resigned and began offering daycare services so that she could care for her young children at home.<sup>20</sup>

In 1980, the Shannon family moved to Klamath Falls, Oregon, so that David Shannon could attend the Oregon Institute of Technology to study computer systems engineering. Shelley homeschooled her children briefly, but had to return to the paid workforce when David’s G.I. Bill benefits expired.<sup>21</sup> During the next several years, Shannon held a variety of part-time jobs. She worked as a janitor, a hotel desk clerk, a church secretary, and a day care employee. Shannon was also a member of a women’s bible study group at a Wesleyan church. In 1987, she was asked to lead a group discussion about abortion, which prompted her to begin researching the topic.<sup>22</sup>

The Shannon family moved west, to Grants Pass, Oregon, in 1988, when David Shannon found employment as an electronics technician. Shelley divided her time between homeschooling her children, cooking, and volunteering at the nursery operated by the Church of the Nazarene. Like many evangelical Christians of the period, Shannon was not rooted to any particular church, but instead attended services at a few churches that

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<sup>19</sup> Jim Risen and Judy Lundstrom Thomas, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 350.

<sup>20</sup> Bray and Bray, *Tiller’s Unheeded Warning*, 7.

<sup>21</sup> On the history of homeschooling in the U.S., and the popularity of homeschooling among conservative evangelical Christians in the 1980s, see Milton Gaither, *Homeschool: An American History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 107-115.

<sup>22</sup> Bray and Bray, *Tiller’s Unheeded Warning*, 8.

were loosely affiliated rather than mainline denominations.<sup>23</sup> Pastor James Beals of the Church of the Nazarene described Shannon as a quiet, regular presence at church services. He recalled, “She’d come in and slip in one of the . . . back pews and just kind of sit there and bow her head, you know. And just keep to herself.”<sup>24</sup> Fellow parishioners had similar recollections of Shannon. “She wasn’t a person that opened up,” said Warren Worden. “She never got that close to anybody.”<sup>25</sup> Shannon would soon find personal fulfillment and a sense of community in the extremist wing of the anti-abortion movement.

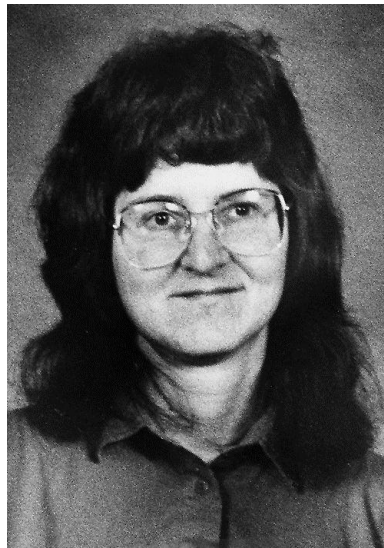


Figure 5.1 Shelley Shannon, late 1980s. (Courtesy *The Daily Courier* (Grants Pass, Oregon))

<sup>23</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview. On the worship practices of evangelical Christians in the twentieth century, see George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 82.

<sup>24</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire,” A1.

<sup>25</sup> Dirk Johnson, “Abortions, Bibles and Bullets, and the Making of a Militant,” *The New York Times*, August 28, 1993, A8.

### The Transformation of Shelley Shannon

Influential local activists and the conservative character of central Oregon shaped Shelley Shannon's formative experiences in the anti-abortion movement. Activists had been active in the region for nearly twenty years. In the late 1960s, Grants Pass resident Myrna Shaneyfelt had grown frustrated by local priests' refusal to speak out against Oregon's recently liberalized abortion law. She reached out to a small band of activists who were speaking out against the movement to legalize abortion in individual states across the U.S. Two founders of the National Right to Life Committee, Dr. Jack and Barbara Willke, were impressed with Shaneyfelt's efforts. The Willkes traveled to Oregon to help Shaneyfelt organize the state's first Right to Life chapter in 1970. She served as president of the Josephine County Right to Life for the next several decades. Shaneyfelt and her husband owned a small moving and storage business, and later, managed a motor home lot; this type of work afforded the couple the flexibility to organize activists in the region, and later, to attend clinic protests.<sup>26</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s, Shaneyfelt recruited Catholic men and women to join her group (with "no help from the priests"), and struggled to make inroads with non-Catholics. Protestant clergy, she explained, were generally reluctant to let Shaneyfelt, a conservative Catholic, speak to their congregations.<sup>27</sup> Shaneyfelt's recruits engaged in peaceful, small-scale clinic protests and distributed brochures with the hope of educating people about the practice of abortion. Myrna Shaneyfelt explained, "The majority of rescuers were women. We could raise the sons and go to events more readily than men. Women could [more easily] take time off work."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Myrna Shaneyfelt to Karissa Haugeberg, E-mail correspondence, December 8, 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

This began to change in the mid-1980s, when a new generation of leaders who promised to confront abortion providers directly resonated with evangelical Protestants. Most of the people who joined the anti-abortion movement in the 1980s had never felt energized by the lobbying and educational efforts of the mainstream movement. Leaders of these new groups adopted the strategies that Catholic women, including Joan Andrews and Juli Loesch Wiley, had been using for nearly a decade to protest abortion. “We were laughing about how beautiful it was that God brought us together,” Shaneyfelt reflected on the capacity of Operation Rescue to bridge pro-life Catholics and Protestants.<sup>29</sup>

Shaneyfelt brought the strategies of the nascent confrontational wing of the movement to Oregon. Since 1984, conservative Catholic Joseph Scheidler’s Pro-Life Action Network had sponsored “Action for Life” conferences that included educational seminars and opportunities to participate in clinic demonstrations. At the second annual conference, Scheidler proclaimed 1985 to be the “year of pain and fear.” Attendees wore firecrackers as lapel pins and the conference marquee said, “Have a Blast.”<sup>30</sup> In 1986, Shaneyfelt attended the third Action for Life Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, where she was arrested with Joan Andrews for trespassing at a clinic.<sup>31</sup> The confrontational arm of the grassroots anti-abortion movement flourished in the Grants Pass area, which, by the late 1980s, had become known regionally as a hub for pro-life organizing.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Victoria L. Johnson, “The Strategic Determinants of a Countermovement: The Emergence and Impact of Operation Rescue Blockades,” in *Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties*, ed. Jo Freeman and Victoria L. Johnson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 245; Frederick Clarkson, “Anti-Abortion Violence: Two Decades of Arson, Bombs, and Murder,” *Southern Poverty Law Center Intelligence Report*, Summer 1998, <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/1998/summer/anti-abortion-violence?page=0,1>.

<sup>31</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview.

<sup>32</sup> The local Grants Pass newspaper referred to the town as a “hotbed” of pro-life activism. See Foster Church, “Anti-Abortion Activists Take Long, Hard Look at Violence,” *The Oregonian* (Portland, August 27, 1993). During the 1980s and 1990s, three religious extremists from the sparsely populated area killed or attempted to kill people. Edith Decker, “Religious Extremism in



Shortly after moving to Grants Pass in 1988, Shelley Shannon received a newsletter from Melody Green's Last Day Ministries, a fundamentalist Christian group based in Texas that was affiliated with Operation Rescue.<sup>33</sup> One article included frames from Dr. Bernard Nathanson's film, *Silent Scream*, which purported to show an abortion in progress.<sup>34</sup> Shannon was so moved by the story that she contacted her local Right to Life chapter and with her daughter, Angela, attended the next meeting of the Josephine County Right to Life, where they watched an Operation Rescue recruiting video that also purported to depict an abortion. The film concluded with a plea to viewers to participate in clinic 'rescues.' The Shannons claimed that the experience of watching a fetus being destroyed transformed them from casual opponents of abortion to activists. "I had just turned fourteen. We kind of never thought about the issue," Angela recalled. "But then we watched this video, and we saw an abortion performed. We both were thinking, 'this is something you can't ignore.'"<sup>35</sup> After the screening, Shelley and Angela volunteered to participate in a clinic blockade in Portland, Oregon.<sup>36</sup> At the time, Shannon worked for wages intermittently, which gave her the flexibility to devote herself of rescue work.

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County Has Resulted in Violence, Murder," *The Daily Courier* (Grants Pass, Oregon) April 1, 2010, D5.

<sup>33</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 350.

<sup>34</sup> Photographs purporting to show dismembered fetuses and videotapes purporting to show abortions have long been used as recruiting tools by the anti-abortion movement. Shannon saw the most widely distributed film, *Silent Scream*, which has been discredited by every major professional medical organization. Dr. Bernard Nathanson, *Silent Scream [VHS]* (American Portrait Films, 1984). See Rosalind Pollack Petchesky, "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1987): 263-292; Carol A. Stabile, "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1992): 178-205.

<sup>35</sup> Qtd. in Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest In Shooting Baffles Suspects' Family, Friends," *The Wichita Eagle*, September 5, 1993, A1.

<sup>36</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 350. It was common for adult members of grassroots anti-abortion groups to bring children to rescues. See Joe Maxwell et al., "Holy Week Rescues Show Movement Still Active," *Christianity Today* 35, no. 5 (April 29, 1991): 48.

When Shannon became an anti-abortion activist in 1988, the movement was divided into two camps: those who had gained a foothold within legal and political circles and those who vowed to fight abortion by extralegal means. Members of the largest mainstream anti-abortion organization, the National Right to Life Committee, engaged in legal, non-violent tactics, including lobbying, get-out-the vote efforts, and consciousness-raising campaigns. A smaller, more aggressive contingent of activists formed grassroots organizations. These activists blocked clinic entrances with cars, filed frivolous lawsuits against abortion providers, and disrupted clinic operations with mass rallies. The confrontational wing of the anti-abortion movement grew during the mid-1980s, in part, due to activists' frustration with the Reagan Administration, which they believed had done little to change abortion policy. In 1983, Reagan was unable to persuade the Democratically-controlled Senate to pass a constitutional amendment that would have allowed states and the federal government to prohibit abortion.<sup>37</sup> In *City of Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health*, the U.S. Supreme Court had struck down a state law that required women to wait twenty-four hours after receiving counseling to obtain an abortion.<sup>38</sup> In short, many anti-abortion activists were frustrated that the election of the first openly pro-life president had not ended legal abortion in the United States.

Of the hundreds of organized grassroots anti-abortion groups active in the U.S. during the 1980s, the best known was Operation Rescue. Led by the charismatic Randall Terry, Operation Rescue was prominent between 1988 and 1992. Leaders of Operation Rescue collaborated with smaller grassroots groups, including Joseph Scheidler's Pro-Life Action Network and Norman Weslin's Lambs of Christ, to stage confrontational, mass

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<sup>37</sup> S.J. Res. 3. The Human Life Amendment, which would have codified that life begins at conception into the US Constitution, appeared to be permanently stalled.

<sup>38</sup> During the pre-abortion counseling sessions, Ohio law required abortion providers to tell women "the unborn child is a human life from the moment of conception." 103 S. Ct. 2481 (1983). Nearly ten years later, this ruling was overturned in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

demonstrations at abortion clinics across the U.S. More than 60,000 people were arrested at Operation Rescue-sponsored demonstrations, making the pro-life movement the largest civil disobedience movement since the anti-war and civil rights campaigns of the 1960s.<sup>39</sup> Operation Rescue succeeded where previous groups had failed by attracting both conservative Catholics and evangelical Protestants with its simple message that abortion should be stopped expediently and directly.<sup>40</sup> The recruitment of new members hinged on the enthusiasm and charisma of thousands of (mostly male) preachers, who influenced the theological and political agendas of their congregations. Unlike priests in the Catholic Church or ministers in mainline Protestant denominations, preachers in evangelical Protestant churches lacked a hierarchical structure that might rein in radical impulses. Buttressed by a growing homeschool movement, Christian bookstores and publishing houses, Bible camps, and talk radio, evangelical Protestant preachers steered thousands of

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<sup>39</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 220.

<sup>40</sup> Catholic, Protestant and Jewish clergy were featured guests at the inaugural Operation Rescue rally, held in 1988 in New York City. Juli Loesch, "Operation Rescue," *Fidelity*, July/August 1988, 18-24. However, Operation Rescue failed to attract non-Christian and non-whites in significant numbers. A handful of non-Christians did participate in other grassroots groups. For example, Ann Saltenberger, who identified as Jewish, led the Gloucester County, New Jersey, chapter of Right to Life and worked at a Birthright center in the 1970s, compared legal abortion to the genocide. Effie Alley Quay, "Ann Saltenberger Speaks from Two Experiences: Mother and Jewish," *National Right to Life News (NRLN)* January 1979, 17. Saltenberger wrote "Every Woman's Right to Know the Dangers of Legal Abortion," a pamphlet that described the physical and emotional risks of the procedure; as of January 1979, it had undergone nine printings and two editions. See also Ann Saltenberger, *Holocaust: How Could It Have Happened*, copyright Ann Saltenberger, 1978, Department of Special Collections, Duke University (Durham, N. Carolina), Takey Crist Papers, (hereafter TCP), box 18, anti-abortion publicity folder. A tract titled "The New Holocaust," which described the "terrifying parallels between the genocide of the Nazi holocaust and the infanticide of the present holocaust" was distributed to local Right to Life chapters, including the Jacksonville, North Carolina Right to Life. It was originally published in the *Catholic Standard and Times*, the official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in April 1979, TCP, Box 5. Members of the Jewish Issues Committee, an anti-abortion group based in Solana Beach, California, issued a statement that explained why abortion conflicted with Jewish values. According to members, "Respect for life has always been a hallmark of authentic Jewish thought throughout the ages. It is against Jewish teachings to take a life for any reason less than life itself." This group opposed abortion except when the mother's life was jeopardized by continuing with the pregnancy. Members lobbied against federal and state funding for abortion services. "Jewish View," *NRLN*, July 1979, 5.

new activists into the grassroots anti-abortion movement. Direct action pro-life activists “counseled” women not to have abortions and picketed and blockaded clinics.<sup>41</sup>

Rescue movement leaders were white, male, and (usually self-designated) members of the clergy. Randall Terry and Norman Weslin were ultra-conservative Catholics. They had some clerical training and led non-affiliated congregations that resembled evangelical Protestant churches. By the 1980s, Joseph Scheidler, a former Benedictine monk, devoted his attention to recruiting conservative Catholics to engage in direct action pro-life campaigns with his group, the Pro-Life Action Network, and on behalf of Operation Rescue. Terry, Weslin, and Scheidler purported to be engaging in a nonviolent direct action campaign to stop abortion, but incited violence when the cameras of mainstream press were not rolling. For example, before mass demonstrations, Operation Rescue organizers asked participants to sign pledge cards promising that they would not engage in violence.<sup>42</sup> However, the public pledge of nonviolence contradicted the message rescue leaders communicated routinely in newsletters, books, and films. Terry, Scheidler, and Weslin endorsed the use of intimidating tactics in their books, pamphlets, and speeches to pro-life audiences.<sup>43</sup> In Scheidler’s primer for direct action activists, *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, he advised readers to “get to know [an] abortionist’s family, his church affiliation, his memberships in professional organizations and clubs, and other facts about his lifestyle.”<sup>44</sup> While this type of advice was not explicitly violent, it did provide direction to

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<sup>41</sup> Marvine Howe, “Thousands of Groups Press Movement Against Abortion,” *The New York Times*, June 14, 1992, 46.

<sup>42</sup> Mark Allan Steiner, *The Rhetoric of Operation Rescue: Projecting the Christian Pro-Life Message* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006), 8.

<sup>43</sup> Sociologist Victoria Johnson observed, “not only did Operation Rescue spokespeople claim they were participating in classic nonviolence, the media parroted their claims.” Johnson, “The Strategic Determinants of Countermovement,” 248.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph M. Scheidler, *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*, Rev. Ed. (Tan Books and Publishers, 1993), 166.

activists who wished to stalk and threaten providers and their families. Indeed, during this period, grassroots extremists deployed increasingly menacing tactics. Some began stalking providers and their families, comparing providers to Nazis in the press, and circulating 'most wanted' posters across the U.S. In 1988, Molly Yard, the president of the National Organization for Women noted the Reagan Administration's hypocritical approach to addressing terrorism. "President Reagan has refused to allow Yasser Arafat into this country, calling him a terrorist." She continued, "But he ignores the terrorists already operating in this country, the anti-abortion extremists operating through a pattern of violence, threats, and intimidation to close family planning facilities and clinics which offer abortion."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "NOW Demands Federal Prosecution of Anti-Abortion Extremists," News Release (New York, NY: National Organization for Women, November 28, 1988), 1, unprocessed SHP. See also Margalit Fox, "Molly Yard, Advocate for Liberal Causes, Dies at 93," *The New York Times*, September 22, 2005, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/22/national/22yard.html>.

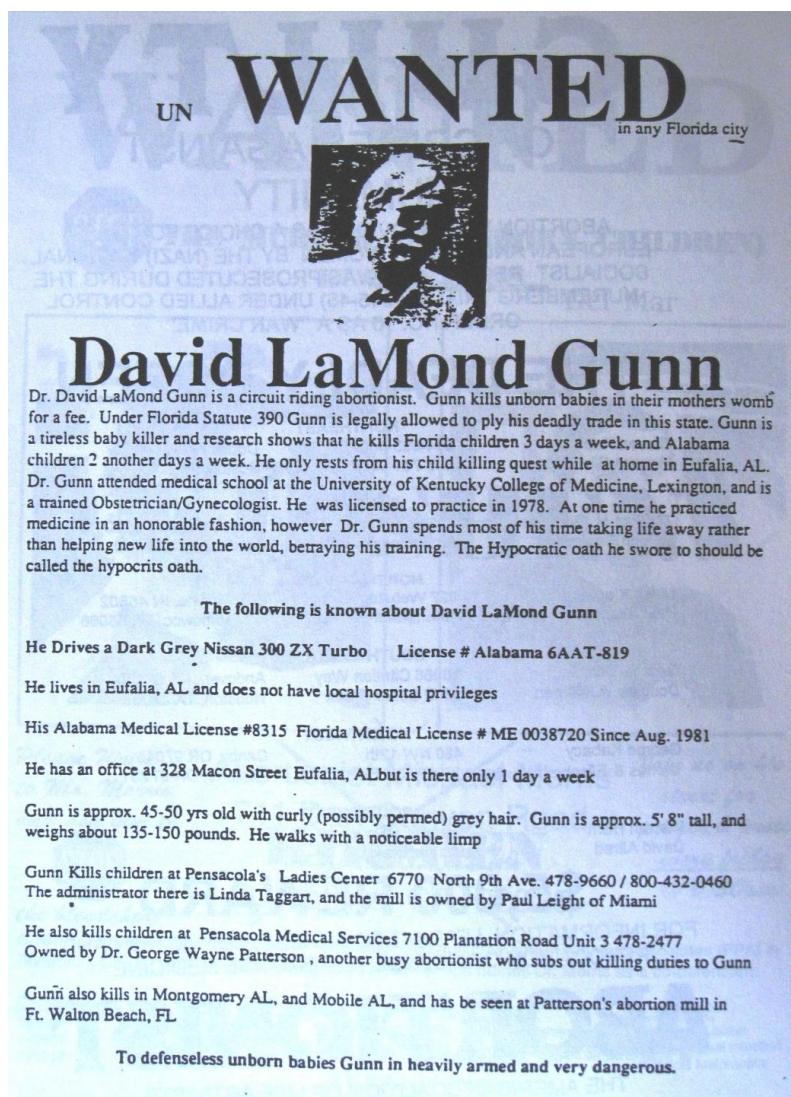


Figure 5.2 Flyer, “(Un)Wanted: David Gunn,” late 1980s. Anti-abortion activists circulated wanted posters featuring abortion providers and clinic staff in residential neighborhoods across the U.S. In 1993, anti-abortion activist Michael Griffin killed Dr. Gunn at a Pensacola, Florida abortion clinic. Unprocessed addition to the Susan Hill Papers, Duke University Special Collections (Durham, N. Carolina), [hereafter unprocessed SHP].

Shelley Shannon immersed herself in the most taxing, confrontational, and thrilling forms of activism. In 1988, along with several other members of the Josephine County Right to Life, Shannon participated in the infamous “Siege of Atlanta,” a mass demonstration organized by Operation Rescue. The Siege, which was planned to last the duration of the four-day Democratic National Convention, instead lasted over five months. Protestors overwhelmed the city. Over 1,300 anti-abortion activists, including Shelley Shannon, were arrested over the course of the event. The influx of anti-abortion activists from across the nation into Atlanta proved crucial to the organization and development of the extremist wing of the movement. Those who had previously felt isolated for advocating radical tactics in their local communities found others who shared their support for violence.<sup>46</sup>

In prison and on picket lines outside of Atlanta-area abortion clinics, Shannon bonded with activists who would soon comprise the violent fringe of the movement. One year after the Siege, half a dozen activists who had been found guilty of violating the city’s trespass laws multiple times during the protest, returned to Atlanta for sentencing. After refusing the judge’s offer to perform community service in their hometowns, Shelley Shannon, Regina Dinwidde, Michael and Jayne Bray, Norman Weslin, and James Kopp, were sentenced to serve two weeks in jail.<sup>47</sup> Officials housed pro-lifers in a separate wing of Atlanta’s Key Road Detention Facility, away from the general population. In jail, these

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<sup>46</sup> Evangelical ministers on Christian broadcasting television and radio programs encouraged viewers and listeners to travel to Atlanta to participate in the Siege; activists from across the nation pooled resources, often from within their evangelical churches, and traveled to Atlanta on buses. Faye D. Ginsburg, “Rescuing the Nation: Operation Rescue and the Rise of Anti-Abortion Militance,” in *Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, ed. Rickie Solinger (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 231-232.

<sup>47</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire,” A1; Patricia Baird-Windle and Eleanor J. Bader, *Targets of Hatred: Anti-Abortion Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave for St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 112-113. Shannon would later provide researchers with documents that describe the early organizing efforts of Norman Weslin’s Lambs of Christ. See Jeffrey Kaplan, “America’s Last Prophetic Witness: The Literature of the Rescue Movement,” *Terrorism and Political Violence* 5, no. 3 (Autumn 1993): 74.

activists began to write *The Army of God Manual*, a blueprint for using violent tactics to disrupt abortion. A passage from the manual warned, “We the remnant of God-fearing men and women of the United States of Amerika, do officially declare war on the entire child killing industry. . . . Our Most Dread Sovereign Lord God requires that whosoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed.”<sup>48</sup>

The jailed activists resurrected the name “Army of God” from an earlier wave of anti-abortion activism. AOG had emerged in 1982, when clinic arsonists Don Benny Anderson, Matthew Moore, and Wayne Moore firebombed Dr. Hector Zevallos’s Edwardsville, Illinois, abortion clinic. The trio kidnapped Zevallos and his wife and held them for eight days. They told the FBI they were members of the AOG, which advocated the use of violence against abortion providers.

In 1984, AOG members unleashed a series of coordinated attacks on abortion providers and supporters of legal abortion. A purported AOG member sent Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun, who wrote for the majority in *Roe v. Wade*, an anonymous death threat.<sup>49</sup> An AOG insignia was left at one of twenty-five clinics bombed or set on fire that year; AOG member Rev. Michael Bray was found guilty of planning or committing at least seven of those attacks. Between 1982 and 2009, people who claimed to be members of the Army of God (AOG) took credit for dozens of clinic arsons, death

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<sup>48</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 351.

<sup>49</sup> In February 1985, one year after he received the AOG threat, Blackmun received an anonymous letter from Buffalo, New York, which read, “Sir, I do not like the way you are doing your job. One day I am going to see you and shoot your brains out. I am going to shoot you dead and I will be coming to your funeral.” That night, someone fired a shot from a 9-mm handgun into Blackmun’s apartment in Arlington, Virginia. The bullet left a baseball-size hole in the Blackmun’s living room chair. The FBI concluded that the shooting was unintentional and that the shot had been fired from across the Potomac River and veered coincidentally into the Blackmun’s home. *Ibid.*, 34.



threats, and assassinations. Since its inception, all of the acknowledged or suspected members of this underground, leaderless, cell-structured group have been white.<sup>50</sup>

The AOG guide that emerged from the Atlanta detention facility in 1988 provided straightforward advice to activists who wished to perpetrate violence. Described as a resource “for those who have come to understand that the battle against abortion is a battle . . . against the devil and all of the evil he can muster,” the manual provided detailed instructions for building ammonium nitrate bombs and plastic explosives. Shannon and her comrades encouraged pro-lifers to exact physical pain and suffering on abortion providers “by removing their hands, or at least their thumbs below the second digit.”<sup>51</sup>

When she returned home to Grants Pass, Shannon became engaged in the gritty work of keeping the fledgling radical wing organized, motivated, and active. She struck up correspondence with other activists and began contributing to pro-life publications that advocated the use of violent tactics.<sup>52</sup> Shannon’s friends observed that she took deep satisfaction in the bonds she formed with activists across the U.S.<sup>53</sup> She soon began participating in month-long protests across the United States, many of which were organized by Advocates for Life, a 4,000-member grassroots group based in Portland, Oregon, that advocated violence against clinics and abortion providers. The group’s official

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<sup>50</sup> On the AOG, see Katie Monagle, “How We Got Here,” *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 7, no. 3 (1995): 379. Jennifer Gonnerman, “The Terrorist Campaign against Abortion,” *The Village Voice* 43, no. 45 (November 10, 1998): 36-57; and Justin C. Altum, “Anti-Abortion Extremism: The Army of God,” *Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research at the College of Charleston* 2 (2003): 1-12.

<sup>51</sup> Qtd. in Clarkson, “Anti-Abortion Violence: Two Decades of Arson, Bombs, and Murder.” Select chapters from *The Army of God Manual* are available on-line: <http://www.armyofgod.com/AOGhistory.html> [accessed October 18, 2010].

<sup>52</sup> For example, Shelley Shannon wrote a short article for the January 1993 issue of *Life Advocate* magazine, published by AOG member Paul deParrie. *Life Advocate* was the periodical for the violent wing of the anti-abortion movement. Johnson, “Abortions, Bibles and Bullets, and the Making of a Militant,” A8. Shannon also subscribed to Michael and Jayne Bray’s newsletter, *Capital Area News*, and David Leach’s *Prayer and Action Weekly News*.

<sup>53</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

magazine was published by Paul deParrie, who signed an AOG petition that declared the murders of Dr. Gunn and his escort, John Britton to be acts of “justifiable homicide.”<sup>54</sup>

The members of the Shannon household were divided in their support of anti-abortion activism. As a homeschooled student, Angela Shannon could accompany her mother to clinic protests throughout the region. The men in the Shannon household had little interest in the movement. David, who actually supported legal abortion, complained that her activism exacted a heavy price on the family’s finances, stating that it had “cost me some serious money.”<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, he tolerated his wife’s decision to become a devout activist. “These trips are her affairs,” he said. “I am not involved in the pro-life movement.” Shelley Shannon’s son was relieved when his mother left town to protest—sometimes for three months at a time—as it provided him an opportunity to engage with books and ideas not discussed in the Shannon household. “When she was gone,” he recalled, “I would go to the library and read about what really happened.”<sup>56</sup>

#### Paths to Lethal Violence in the Anti-Abortion Movement

When anti-abortion violence swept the nation during the 1980s, the federal government refused to intervene. This left local authorities responsible for prosecuting individual crimes. Activists found guilty of breaking laws during mass demonstrations were subject to wildly variable penalties. Their fate depended upon the willingness of local authorities to arrest, indict, and sentence activists, and also upon the laws in the communities where they protested. Most were charged with violating local trespassing laws. By the late-1980s, Shelley Shannon and other traveling activists—estimated to be between

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<sup>54</sup> “Anti-Abortion Extremists: The Army of God and Justifiable Homicide,” *National Abortion Federation*, ca 2007, [http://www.prochoice.org/about\\_abortion/violence/army\\_god.html](http://www.prochoice.org/about_abortion/violence/army_god.html).

<sup>55</sup> Johnson, “Abortions, Bibles and Bullets, and the Making of a Militant,” A8.

<sup>56</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 350; Ginny Graybiel, “Fan Letters Link Clinic Shootings,” *The Seattle Times*, August 22, 1993, A9.

one dozen and two hundred at any given time—rarely served more than a few days in jail for their crimes and routinely left town before they faced more serious charges.<sup>57</sup> Between 1988 and 1993, Shelley Shannon was arrested nearly fifty times and charged with a crime thirty-five times, usually for trespassing. She was usually found guilty of violating trespass laws, and was sentenced to perform community service or serve up to thirty days in jail and pay fines ranging from \$50 to \$100.<sup>58</sup>

The haphazard prosecution of traveling prolife activists began to change in 1990, when courts began to impose larger financial penalties and stiffer prison sentences. In response to the well-publicized mass blockades that besieged communities in the late 1980s, some states, including California, Georgia, Florida, Washington, Pennsylvania, and New York, issued injunctions that restricted anti-abortion activists' ability to interfere with clinic operations.<sup>59</sup> The state injunctions clarified the precise laws that local law enforcement officers needed to apply, gave local prosecutors tools to connect minor legal infractions to a larger conspiracy designed to restrict women's access to legal abortion, and enabled judges to issue stiff financial penalties and prison sentences.

Defiant activists, including Shelley Shannon, routinely violated the new wave of state injunctions, and in the process, bankrupted Operation Rescue. In 1990, Randall

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<sup>57</sup> John Balzar, "Suspect a Determined Abortion Foe, Friends Say," *The Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1993, C1.

<sup>58</sup> Anne Bower, "Soldier in the Army of God," *Albion Monitor* February 18, 1996, 2 SHP 2008/09 Accession, Box 6 and Bray and Bray, *Tiller's Unheeded Warning*, 11. Shannon completed community service in Portland and Seattle. She was jailed in Atlanta; Portland; Redding, California; and Fargo, North Dakota. In 1991, she was charged with trespassing in San Francisco, but skipped the sentencing hearing; Shannon will face trial for failing to attend the hearing when she is released from prison in 2018.

<sup>59</sup> For example, a Florida injunction prohibited protestors from entering a thirty-six foot 'bubble' in front of the state's abortion clinics. The Supreme Court found unconstitutional a Florida injunction that barred protestors from coming within three-hundred feet of an abortion clinic, but upheld the constitutionality of thirty-six foot bubbles. *Madsen v. Women's Health Center, Inc.* 512 U.S. 753 (1994).

Terry dissolved the nearly bankrupt organization, which had come to symbolize the aggressive, vitriolic nature of the abortion debate for many Americans. Whereas during its peak, in 1988 and 1989, Operation Rescue-sponsored demonstrations attracted tens of thousands of activists to single events, by 1990, only 1,363 people were arrested at thirty-four blockades—Operation Rescue and non-Operation Rescue sponsored—during the entire year.<sup>60</sup>

Pro-life activists who continued to violate state and federal laws became embedded in an underground subculture that was mostly leaderless and whose members were highly mobile. Radical activists took pride in the financial and personal sacrifices they made to remain committed to the movement. Shannon was prepared to travel at a moment's notice, and usually traveled with jeans and a t-shirt she wore, packing only a toothbrush. According to Judy Hager, "[Shelley Shannon] never wore a lot of makeup or fussed around with her hair. It was like she was a pilgrim. She didn't have an interest in clothes or personal things. Like Joan of Arc. She went into battle and didn't look behind her."<sup>61</sup> Hager described how rescuers had to pinch pennies. "I have...stayed in Times Square [New York] hotels for \$12 a night. We took our sleeping bags and stayed ten days. I pretended that I was camping out and the people were wildlife."<sup>62</sup> Occasionally, Shelley Shannon ran out of money on rescue trips and could not afford to buy food. She would tell fellow rescuers that she was fasting. "She was always on a shoestring budget," explained Hager. To support their travels, activists organized fundraising dinners and relied on donations from

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<sup>60</sup> *Violence and Disruption Statistics, 1977-2009* (National Abortion Federation, 2009), [http://www.prochoice.org/about\\_abortion/violence/violence\\_statistics.html](http://www.prochoice.org/about_abortion/violence/violence_statistics.html). and Johnson, "The Strategic Determinants of Countermovement," 248. During its heyday, OR also attracted hundreds of thousands of dollars. In 1989, OR reported to the IRS an income of \$300,000, primarily through direct mail solicitation.

<sup>61</sup> Judy Hager, qtd. in Lundstrom Thomas, "Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting," A1.

<sup>62</sup> Church, "Anti-Abortion Activists Take Long, Hard Look at Violence," D1.

friends and family and took part-time, minimum wage jobs.<sup>63</sup> Their time away from regular jobs and the routines of daily life probably exacerbated activists' detachment from society.

In 1993, the Clinton Administration ended decades of federal indifference to anti-abortion violence. In response to the murder of Dr. Gunn, the Administration added its support to a lawsuit initially filed in 1986 by the National Organization for Women (NOW) against Joseph Scheidler and members of his organization, the Pro-Life Action Network. After a spate of clinic bombings and an escalation of death threats against clinic staff, NOW alleged that members of PLAN had violated Sherman-Clayton anti-trust laws. In 1989, the suit achieved class action status when NOW asked the court to apply the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, commonly known as RICO, against Operation Rescue and approximately one hundred activists. (Congress had passed RICO in 1970 to prosecute organized crime syndicates.) NOW argued that mass anti-abortion demonstrations interfered with the daily operations of abortion clinics much like organized crime threatened the normal operations of small businesses.

From 1989 until 1991, appellate courts upheld RICO convictions against anti-abortion organizations and prominent leaders in the rescue movement. Rescuers, who were accustomed to receiving nominal prison sentences and fines, were subject to significantly harsher financial penalties and lengthy prison terms when they were convicted of violating federal RICO statutes. In *NOW v. Scheidler*, clinic supporters contended that the harassment tactics used by Operation Rescue and Pro-Life Action Network members amounted to extortion, and that these groups had become racketeering enterprises, conspiring to eliminate women's access to abortion. Leaders of anti-abortion organizations

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<sup>63</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview.

could be named as co-conspirators even if they did not attend rallies where demonstrators violated injunctions.<sup>64</sup>

By 1992, the specter of costly RICO prosecutions and the proliferation of state injunctions that restricted protest activities deterred even the most stalwart social conservatives, including the Rev. Jerry Falwell, from associating with extremist anti-abortion organizations. Most Operation Rescue members realigned themselves with more moderate groups or stopped agitating against abortion altogether. However, several thousand committed activists, still bitter with the federal government for its crackdown on the rescue movement, soldiered on in covert, militia-style bands across the United States. Among this new breed of foot soldier was Shelley Shannon.

The militia-style grassroots anti-abortion movement in southwest Oregon drew on activists' feelings of outrage, persecution, and powerlessness. The government's support of NOW's case against Operation Rescue fueled Shannon's anger. When a local reporter asked Shannon to comment on the case, she replied, "If you see somebody killing another person and you step between them, you can expect to get hurt." She warned, "getting hurt isn't going to stop us."<sup>65</sup>

#### A Christian Defense of Violence

Shelley Shannon's understanding of Christianity sustained her beliefs about the types of tactics she could use to fight abortion. It was her religious awakening that transformed her into an anti-abortion activist. "I [always knew] that abortion is wrong, but

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<sup>64</sup> In 1991, a trial judge rejected the application of RICO against anti-abortion groups because they appeared to be motivated by religious belief rather than economic gain; this finding was upheld by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals. See *National Organization for Women, Inc. v. Scheidler*, 968 F.2d 612 (7th Cir. 1992) and *National Organization for Women, Inc. v. Scheidler*, 510 U.S. 249 (1994). The case was brought before the U.S. Supreme Court three times between 1993 and 2006, with the Court finally finding in Scheidler's favor. See Linda Greenhouse, "Court Weighs Abortion Protest Curbs," *The New York Times*, December 9, 1993, A18. and Greenhouse, "Abortion Opponents Win Dispute." *The New York Times*, March 1, 2006, A14.

<sup>65</sup> "Anti-Abortion Suspect 'Always Been Peaceful'," *The Seattle Times*, August 21, 1993.

until I became a Christian, I didn't really care what other people were doing to their own kids," she said. "As a Christian, I can't turn my back on the ones who need our help the most: little babies who are being cruelly murdered." Transposing various passages from the Bible, Shannon continued, "If you want to love your neighbor as yourself, do what you would want someone to do if you were the one they were going to kill."<sup>66</sup> Women who engaged in confrontational forms of protest activity received support from women who provided vigorous theological and ideological defenses for pro-lifers' use of violent tactics and male and female colleagues who had committed violent crimes.

Shannon was not atypical of anti-abortion activists in her area during the late 1980s. Judy Hager, a Portland homemaker, was arrested over forty times, sometimes with Shelley Shannon, usually for obstructing the entryways of abortion clinics. Her transition from conventional to radical forms of protest transformed her sense of Christian womanhood. Instead of obeying authority outright, she became more inclined to test policies that she found to be unfair or immoral. "I went to Sunday school all my life," Hager explained. "I was always very good and wanted to please authorities." The rescue movement, however, changed Hager's belief about following the rules. Prior to joining the movement, she recalled, "I didn't want to get into trouble. It was one of the hallmarks of my life until I got started rescuing."<sup>67</sup> For some women, the anti-abortion movement provided the context to exert authority and question rules—actions that fundamentalist Christian women were discouraged from doing in their own homes and churches.

Unlike activists in the conventional anti-abortion movement, radicals in the grassroots wing were not entrenched in legislative or legal circles. In fact, grassroots extremists were highly critical of the values that made legislative and legal change possible, including patience, moderation, and a willingness to compromise. These activists turned

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<sup>66</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire," A1.

<sup>67</sup> Church, "Anti-Abortion Activists Take Long, Hard Look at Violence," D1.

away from political and legal strategies and instead focused almost exclusively on religious arguments to end abortion. Pro-life women who defended the use of violence invoked scripture and appeals to maternal moral authority.

Many women looked to the Bible for stories of revenge. Stephanie Hunley, who described herself as a full-time homemaker and a “home school mom,” became active in the movement in 1989. Women who justified anti-abortion violence maintained that God called upon men and women to engage in violent, sometimes gruesome acts as a part of a larger holy plan. Writing for *Life Advocate*, Hunley described Biblical depictions of heroes who were honored for their violence.<sup>68</sup> In the fifth chapter of Judges, Jael permitted Sisera, the commander of the Canaanite army, to seek refuge in her tent following his defeat by Israeli army. She provided Sisera a good meal, offered him a comfortable bed, and promised to guard him while he slept. When he drifted off, Jael drove a stake through his head, killing him. According to Hunley, “Through this ‘blessed’ woman, Israel rested for forty years.”<sup>69</sup> Women activists cited other characters in the Old Testament, including David, who killed Goliath by embedding a rock into his forehead then decapitating him, and Joshua and Caleb, who were commanded by God to slaughter men, women, children, and animals in Jericho.

Women highlighted their roles as mothers and wives when they expressed their support for violent tactics. Donna Bray exemplified many evangelical Christian women who became grassroots activists in the 1980s. She worked at a pregnancy crisis center operated by her brother-in-law, Michael Bray, a convicted fire bomber and AOG member. By the mid-1980s, Donna Bray routinely distributed anti-abortion literature in front of

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<sup>68</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire,” A1.

<sup>69</sup> Stephanie Hunley, “Violent Acts Committed by Godly People,” *Life Advocate* December 1994, 9.



clinics in Maryland.<sup>70</sup> She was one of the first people to come to the defense of her long-time friend, Michael Griffin, after he shot and killed Dr. Gunn. Bray collected signatures for a petition that declared support for people who used force to defend the lives of “unborn children.” She also founded Defenders of the Defenders of Life, a grassroots group that provides financial assistance to the families of anti-abortion activists sentenced to prison for their crimes.<sup>71</sup> In 1994, the thirty-three year-old mother of five reflected on her activism to date, “I was more than an activist; I was a wife and a mother.”<sup>72</sup> She may have been “more than an activist,” but Bray’s status in the movement gave her the platform to exalt publicly her roles as a wife, mother, and Christian.<sup>73</sup> It was easy for her to defend anti-abortion activists who murdered physicians: “Defending Michael Griffin’s action came naturally to me. Babies were not murdered on the day David Gunn was shot and a serial killer would never kill again.” Whether they harkened to Biblical examples of violence, the sanctity of motherly love, or simple moral outrage, women in the anti-abortion movement made violence central to a movement predicated on saving life.

By linking themselves to religious (and often Catholic) icons who transcended their gendered identities, women were able to participate and thrive in the extremist, patriarchal

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<sup>70</sup>Robert O’Harrow, Jr. “Anti-abortion Activists Divided Over Ethics on Clinic Shootings,” *Washington Post* January 6, 1995, p. D1.

<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.* Sociologist Dallas A. Blanchard points out that Defenders of Defenders of Life did little more than issue press releases articulating the group’s support for extremist violence. *The Anti-Abortion Movement and the Rise of the Religious Right: From Polite to Fiery Protest* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994): 38. However, this group did connect militant anti-abortion activists to important political figures, including Senator Jesse Helms. Earl Applby, an aide to Sen. Helms, was a member of Defenders of Defenders of Life. Applby met with prominent activists, including Joan Andrews, in Helms’s Washington, D.C. office. After Curtis Beseda was convicted of bombing clinics in the Pacific Northwest, Applby said, “I certainly could not judge Mr. Beseda for acting in the defense of innocent human life.” Qtd. in Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 194.

<sup>72</sup> Donna Bray, “A Bitter Mercy,” *Life Advocate* December 1994, 42. For additional biographical information on Donna Bray, see Risen and Thomas *Wrath of Angels*, 65.

<sup>73</sup> Defenders of violence, of course, are not necessarily perpetrators of violence. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 10th ed. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 190.

wing of the grassroots anti-abortion movement. Women who supported anti-abortion violence tapped into a history of women's activism that was rooted in Biblical tradition and maternalism.<sup>74</sup> They believed that legal abortion was a threat to traditional gender roles in general and motherhood in particular.<sup>75</sup> Women who wanted to use violent tactics, however, did not articulate these concerns. Instead, these women emphasized the moral imperative of Christians to fight against injustice and evil. They justified their actions by claiming that they were acting on behalf of a righteous, transcendent, and immutable truth: abortion was fundamentally evil and the battle to stop it was fundamentally good. Women who wanted to take up arms were hamstrung by the traditional gender roles espoused by the patriarchal evangelical wing of the anti-abortion movement. Shelley Shannon generally avoided attributing her work to her status as a woman and instead portrayed herself as a neutral, holy "chosen one," just as Joan Andrews had done throughout the 1970s and 1980s, when was arrested for invading abortion clinics. The importance of Shannon's activism transcended her earthly womanly roles. "I love my daughter dearly and my husband, but God is my life," she reflected.<sup>76</sup>

In her manifesto, "Join the Army," Shannon described the spiritual awakening that had drawn her to the fringes of the anti-abortion movement. Her acceptance of violent

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<sup>74</sup> Reflecting on the attempted assassination of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, Paul Krugman observed, "It's important to be clear here about the nature of our sickness. It's not a general lack of 'civility,' the favorite term of pundits who want to wish away fundamental policy disagreements. Politeness may be a virtue, but there's a big difference between bad manners and calls, explicit or implicit, for violence; insults aren't the same as incitement." "Climate of Hate," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2011, A21. After Scott Roeder killed Dr. George Tiller, Paul Krugman criticized the anti-abortion movement for failing to root out members who advocated violence. Paul Krugman, "The Big Hate," *The New York Times*, June 12, 2009, A27.

<sup>75</sup> Women who defended the use of violence tapped into an intellectual history of pro-life women's activism explored by Kristen Luker in the 1980s. She found that "Women who oppose abortion and seek to make it officially unavailable are declaring, both practically and symbolically, that women's reproductive roles should be given social primacy." *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 200.

<sup>76</sup> Denny Walsh, "Abortion Foe Says Daughter Innocent: Imprisoned Activist Threat Made By Me," *The Sacramento Bee*, June 12, 1996, B1.

tactics, she contended, had more to do with God's demands on her than her own beliefs about the use of violence to stop abortion. "The biggest hurdle was being willing to even consider that God could indeed require this work of anyone. Christians don't do that kind of thing, do they? but prayer and God cleared that up. Then I realized that I needed to stop the killing, too."<sup>77</sup> Unlike many women in the extremist wing of the movement who supported but did not commit acts of violence, Shannon did not articulate her role in the movement in terms of her identity as a woman or a mother. Instead, she understood herself to be divinely ordained to inflict terror on abortion providers. Perhaps by identifying herself as "chosen" to commit violence, Shannon shielded herself from being criticized for transgressing gender roles when she became a soldier in the hyper-masculine, violent wing of the movement.

"It Is Going to Get A Whole Lot Worse": The Escalation of  
Violence in the Anti-Abortion Movement

During the early 1990s, Shannon's tactics changed from disruptive to violent. In March 1992, Shannon received a warning from convicted arsonist Marjorie Reed, who predicted, "It is going to get a whole lot worse. Blood will be shed, not just the babies' blood either."<sup>78</sup> One month later, on April 11, 1992, Shannon set fire to the Catalina Medical Center in Ashland, Oregon.<sup>79</sup> When the blaze was reported on television, and perhaps hoping to evade suspicion, she called Myrna Shaneyfelt and announced, "I can't believe it. They just burned down the clinic in Ashland!"<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, Shannon wrote a

<sup>77</sup> Shelley Shannon, *Join the Army*, ca 1992, 1, unprocessed SHP.

<sup>78</sup> Marjorie Reed to Shelley Shannon, March 1992, in Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 351.

<sup>79</sup> Bryan Denson, "Slain Abortion Provider Shot by Oregon Woman in 1993," *The Oregonian* (Portland) June 1, 2009, A1. The Ashland clinic fire caused \$379,000 in damages.

<sup>80</sup> Shaneyfelt interview.

detailed description of the firebombing in her computer diary, including the two failed attempts that preceded the successful ignition. “Praised God all the way home. It was a very powerful religious experience,” she concluded.<sup>81</sup>

Shannon’s violence was supported and encouraged by fellow anti-abortion extremists. In July, she received another note from Marjorie Reed. “So you are going on a mission,” she wrote. “I know how you feel when engaging in a life-saving mission, the awe and excitement and some fear and apprehension all at the same time. God Bless. I just pray that there are a lot more.”<sup>82</sup> One activist, who used the code name “A.C.,” sent Shannon maps and directions, and another colleague, “W.P.” offered to provide her with an alibi if she were questioned by the police. John Bell later admitted to a grand jury that he was “W.P.”<sup>83</sup>

On August 1, 1992, Shannon set fire to the Lovejoy Surgicenter in Portland, where she had engaged in her first protest against abortion four years earlier. She was disappointed because the fire failed to spread, and caused only twenty-five dollars in damages. She wrote her friend, AOG member Michael Bray, “Why no results?” He replied, “Thanks for the good news! Don’t be discouraged. ‘Little strokes fell mighty oaks,’ said Ben Franklin.”<sup>84</sup>

For six weeks during August and September, David Shannon worked on assignment in California, leaving Shelley with the family’s car. Marjorie Reed commented on the opportunities David’s departure provided. “I would give my right arm to be in that situation—a car, time, money, ideas,” wrote the imprisoned activist. “What an opportunity.

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<sup>81</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 352.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

Get certain of us together with the above. What wonders could happen!!”<sup>85</sup> That month, Shannon confided in her diary, “This morning in bed it seemed God asked, ‘Is there any doubt?’” She concluded, “No, Lord. Please help me do it right.”<sup>86</sup> A few weeks later, she noted, “I love my kids. David too (the poor guy—having a wife like me!) I’m sad about going. Will I get to come back this time? I love you, Jesus.”<sup>87</sup> On August 17, Shannon drove to Redding, California, where John and Elaine Bell gave her maps, gas, and jugs. On August 18, Shannon used homemade napalm to firebomb the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Sacramento, California. Afterward, she drove to Reno, Nevada, where she tried, unsuccessfully, to firebomb the West End Women’s Health Group. She returned to the Bells’ home in Redding to rest before returning home to Grants Pass.<sup>88</sup>

In mid-September, Shannon resumed her crime spree. She firebombed clinics, injected butyric acid (a foul-smelling chemical) into the walls of clinics in Oregon, Nevada, and California.<sup>89</sup> On November 28, 1992, Shannon’s seven-and-a-half month attack on U.S. abortion clinics came to a fiery conclusion, when she caused \$175,000 worth of damage to the Pregnancy Consultation Center in Sacramento, California. A firefighter sustained minor injuries.<sup>90</sup> Shannon had adopted the mentality of a soldier willing to risk

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>89</sup> On September 16, Shannon firebombed the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Eugene, Oregon. Later that day, she drove Reno. She entered the West End Women’s Health Group and pretended to be a patient. She walked to the restroom, where she used a horse syringe to inject butyric acid, a foul-smelling chemical, into the walls, causing \$500 in damage. This tactic, which is featured in *The Army of God Manual*, had the intended effect: the noxious fumes spread throughout the clinic, rendering it uninhabitable for several days while it was fumigated. The next day, September 17, Shannon injected butyric acid into the walls of the Feminist Women’s Health Center in Chico, California, causing \$20,000 in damages. *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> Bower, “Soldier in the Army of God” 5 and Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 354.

her freedom to advance her pro-life mission. She observed, “Glorious, glorious trip. Didn’t even care if I made it back [after the Sacramento arson], or care so much about getting caught or killed, just wanted to close the place good,” she recalled. “It was supposed to be a birthday present to Jesus...but I found it was He who gave me a gift.”<sup>91</sup>

After the Sacramento arson, Shannon retreated to her Oregon home to plot her next move. By this time, the rhetoric and tactics used by the right-wing fringe of the anti-abortion movement had reached a fevered pitch. In 1993, clinics across the U.S. reported a 100-percent increase in hate mail and harassing phone calls from the previous year. Bomb threats against clinics nearly doubled. Death threats against abortion providers increased by nearly tenfold.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Shelley Shannon “christadvent 2” [personal computer file], qtd. in Bower “Soldier in the Army of God,” 5.

<sup>92</sup> Monagle, “How We Got Here,” 380-381.



Angela Shannon because she misspelled “Milwaukee” on the death threat just as she had misspelled the word in previous correspondence intercepted by law enforcement. She was sentenced to serve four years in prison for interfering with the operation of a Milwaukee clinic and using the mail to threaten a person.<sup>93</sup>

Anti-abortion extremists’ repertoire of violent tactics soon included murder. On March 10, 1993, Michael Griffin shot and killed Dr. David Gunn as he entered the Pensacola Medical Services Clinic.<sup>94</sup> Five months later, the Rev. David Trosch, a Roman Catholic priest in Magnolia Springs, Alabama, tried unsuccessfully to buy space in a local newspaper to post a letter declaring the murder of abortion providers to be “justifiable homicide.” He later said, “If one-hundred doctors need to die to save over one million babies a year, I see it as a fair trade.”<sup>95</sup> AOG supporter Andrew Burnett, the founder of *Life Advocate Magazine*, and Shannon’s longtime friend, declared that “defense of the unborn even lethal may be justifiable and consistent with our nation’s Christian heritage

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<sup>93</sup> Shelley Shannon tried, unsuccessfully, to protect her daughter by claiming she herself wrote the letter and asked her daughter to send it. U.S. 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, *USA v. Shannon*, no. 97-10057. <http://laws.findlaw.com/9th/9710057.html> [accessed May 31, 2009]. Angela Shannon’s death threat altered the lives of the Woodward family. Dr. Woodward began wearing a bulletproof vest; he hired security to escort him to and from work; Dr. and Mrs. Woodward altered their driving routes; and the Woodwards no longer felt comfortable letting their son ride the public school bus. See also Bower “Soldiers in the Army of God” 10, “Suspect in Doctor’s Shooting Praised Killing,” *The New York Times* August 22, 1993, A30, and Denny Walsh, “Abortion Foe’s Daughter Gets Prison: Threatened Life of Milwaukee Doctor,” *The Sacramento Bee*, January 10, 1997, B1.

<sup>94</sup> Shortly before he murdered Dr. Gunn, Michael Griffin had joined the anti-abortion group Advocates for Life Ministries, led by the former Ku Klux Klan member turned born-again Christian, John Burt. Several clinics in Pensacola, Florida, reported an uptake of bombings and bomb threats in the months preceding the murder. Merle Hoffman, “Praise the Lord and Kill the Doctor” ca. 1995, 1, Department of Special Collections, Duke University (Durham, N.Carolina), Merle Hoffman Papers (hereafter MHP), box P5.

<sup>95</sup> Jeff Mapes and Bill Graves, “Some Activists Call Attack Justified,” *The Oregonian* (Portland) August 21, 1993, A1. Trosch was later censured by his bishop for advocating violence against abortion providers. McCormick, “Rising Tide of Zealotry,” 59.



and laws.”<sup>96</sup> Paul Hill circulated a petition entitled “Justifiable Homicide Declaration” so that extremists could declare their support for Michael Griffin. Thirty-two people, including Shelley Shannon, three priests, and three ministers signed the document.<sup>97</sup>

During her sojourn in Grants Pass, Shannon reached out to the most isolated, extremist members of the anti-abortion movement. Her husband’s indifference to her activism contrasted sharply with the attention she received from men in the grassroots movement. Shannon began to correspond with the co-creator of the Army of God, Don Benny Anderson and Curt Baseda, who were still serving a prison sentence for arson and kidnapping convictions.<sup>98</sup> “GREAT mail!” she wrote in her diary, “Cards from Curt [Baseda], Don B. Anderson. . . . Don asked for my phone # to call!! Wow!”<sup>99</sup> The jailed activists encouraged Shannon to join their quest to destroy abortion facilities.<sup>100</sup> Then she reached out to John Brockhoeft, who was serving a seven-year sentence for firebombing a Planned Parenthood clinic in Cincinnati in 1985 and attempting to burn another in Pensacola, Florida.<sup>101</sup> Between 1992 and 1993, she sent him over 350 letters of support.

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<sup>96</sup> Qtd. in Judy Lundstrom Thomas, “Tiller Shooting Divides Religious Activities,” *The Wichita Eagle*, September 11, 1993, A8. Shannon had participated in rescues that Burnett organized in Portland, Oregon, in the early 1990s. John W. Kennedy, “Pro-Life Movement Struggles for Viability,” *Christianity Today* 37, no. 13 (November 8, 1993): 42.

<sup>97</sup> Eric Schaff, “Redefining Violence Against Women: The Campaign of Violence and the Delay of RU486,” *Temple Political & Civil Rights Law Review* 8 (1999 1998): 318.

<sup>98</sup> Lundstrom Thomas, “Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting,” A1.

<sup>99</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 351.

<sup>100</sup> Law enforcement officers seized letters and postcards Shannon received from fellow extremists when they searched the Shannon family’s property after the Tiller shooting. This correspondence is sealed by the FBI due to ongoing investigations. Journalists James Risen and Judy L. Thomas were granted special permission to review some of this correspondence, which they describe in their book, *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 351. In her correspondence with journalists from prison, Shannon made reference to correspondence that the FBI could not find; presumably, many of these letters were destroyed when Angela Shannon set fire to her mother’s materials. Heinz, “Praying With Fire,” A1.

<sup>101</sup> “Anti-Abortion Suspect ‘Always Been Peaceful,’” A1; “Suspect Briefly Edited Pro-Life Publication,” *Tulsa World*, August 21, 1993, A2.

In January 1993, John Brockhoeft entrusted Shannon with the editing and mailing of his newsletter, *The Brockhoeft Report*. He had two hundred subscribers.<sup>102</sup> The report claimed “It is a well-known fact that some people who...knowingly worship Satan take jobs in abortion chambers.”<sup>103</sup> In July, Shannon visited Brockhoeft at his minimum-security prison in Summit, Kentucky. When her two-day visit concluded, Shannon left the prison in tears. From Kentucky, she drove to Chillicothe, Ohio, to visit Ray Streicher, who was serving time for clinic vandalism and burglary.<sup>104</sup> Brockhoeft later described Shannon as his closest friend, and remarked that she was “very shy, perhaps the most compassionate person that I’ve ever met, [and] angelic.”<sup>105</sup>

Michael Griffin, who was awaiting trial for the murder of Dr. Gunn, became the next object of Shannon’s fascination. She believed that he was a holy warrior and was not receiving the support from the anti-abortion community he deserved. In one of the twenty-five letters she wrote to Griffin between March and August 1993, Shannon called him a “brave soldier” and “the greatest hero of our time.”<sup>106</sup> In her diary, she reflected, “I’m not convinced that God didn’t require it of Michael to do this.”<sup>107</sup>

Shelley Shannon’s sympathy for Michael Griffin was transformative: not only did she support and rationalize his behavior, but also she began to imagine herself as a person

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<sup>102</sup> Baird-Windle *Targets of Hatred* 204-205. After he was released from prison, Brockhoeft married Joanne Phimester. They named their first-born daughter Rachelle Shannon Brockhoeft and their first-born son Paul Hill. Bray and Bray, *Tiller’s Unheeded Warning*, 26.

<sup>103</sup> Qtd. in *Ibid.* 204.

<sup>104</sup> “Anti-Abortion Suspect ‘Always Been Peaceful.’”; Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 355.

<sup>105</sup> Qtd. in Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

<sup>106</sup> Graybiel, “Fan Letters Link Clinic Shootings,” A9.

<sup>107</sup> Griffin called Shannon once and wrote her at least one letter during this period. In one of her letters to him, Shannon reported she had burned one of his letters. She promised “not to give the slightest clue to anyone if I ever have any contact from you.” Graybiel, “Fan Letters Link Clinic Shootings.”

capable of killing an abortion provider. “It was not murder. It was more like anti-murder,” she wrote Griffin. “I believe in you and what you did, and really want to help if possible. I wish I could trade places with you.”<sup>108</sup> Shannon confided to Myrna Shaneyfelt, “He’s my hero,” and sent \$160 to a fund established to defray Griffin’s legal expenses. “I’m praying God will push more of us ‘off the deep end,’” she concluded, “please help me do it right.”<sup>109</sup> As she became closer to Griffin, Shannon began waking up each morning at four o’clock to pray.

We still do not know how much David Shannon knew about Shelley Shannon’s plans to kill Dr. Tiller. He claimed that he did not know that checks bearing his signature had been sent to Michael Griffin’s defense fund. “I just sign the checks,” he explained.<sup>110</sup> He also claimed to be completely unaware that Shannon had visited Griffin in prison in early August 1993. However, he did acknowledge that she had changed over the course of their marriage, “She’s a lot more conservative person than when I married her. We’ve both evolved over the years, and we don’t resemble the people that we were. But that’s a perfectly normal evolution of personalities.”<sup>111</sup> Perhaps by feigning ignorance, David Shannon shielded himself from being implicated in Shannon’s plot to destroy clinics and maim abortion providers.

Although her family claimed not to notice, it is clear that Shannon prepared for battle during the summer of 1993. She purchased a .32-caliber semiautomatic pistol and began target practice in the family’s back yard. Shannon also became friendly with local militiamen and white supremacists. Howard Romano, an anti-abortion activist with ties to

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<sup>108</sup> “Suspect in Doctor’s Shooting Praised Killing,” *The New York Times* August 22, 1993, A30.

<sup>109</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview., and Shelley Shannon, “Christ Advent” [personal computer file], unprocessed SHP.

<sup>110</sup> Graybiel, “Fan Letters Link Clinic Shootings.”

<sup>111</sup> Qtd. in Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

Oregon's militia movement, accompanied Shannon to a local firing range.<sup>112</sup> Shannon asked Myrna Shaneyfelt to attend a pro-life meeting with a fringe group near Grants Pass. Shaneyfelt left the meeting when she became suspicious that the group was affiliated with the Aryan Nation, whose members opposed abortion because they feared that legal abortion would result in the birth of fewer babies to white women.<sup>113</sup> Shaneyfelt did not know that Shelley Shannon was in the final stages of her plan to kill an abortion provider.

### The First Attempt to Kill Dr. George Tiller

That Shannon set her sights on Dr. George Tiller was not surprising. As one of a handful of physicians in the United States who performed second- and third trimester, so-called "late-term" abortions, he had long been a target of the pro-life movement. Tiller had not planned to become an abortion provider. In 1970, his parents, sister, and brother-in-law were killed in a plane crash near Yellowstone National Park. Tiller, who was working as a Navy flight surgeon at the time of the tragedy, returned home to Wichita. George and his wife, Jeanne, adopted the infant son of his deceased sister, and George considered opening a dermatology practice in the town of 300,000 residents, where Boeing was the largest employer.<sup>114</sup> In the process of closing his father's family practice, George Tiller discovered that since the 1940s, significant numbers of women had turned to the prominent physician for illegal abortions.<sup>115</sup> Soon, women started to call George Tiller, hoping that he would

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<sup>112</sup> Romano, a member of Advocates for Life, served more than a year in prison after refusing to pay federal income taxes; he was fined over \$500,000 for blocking abortion clinic entrances during the 1990s. Sandi DuBowski, "Storming Wombs and Waco: How the Anti-Abortion and Militia Movements Converge," *Front Lines Research*, December 21, 1997, 2.

<sup>113</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview. Shaneyfelt also stated that the members supported "the guy in Ruby Ridge, Idaho," presumably Randy Weaver. According to Shaneyfelt, the fringe Aryan militia group left Oregon six months after Shelley Shannon shot Dr. Tiller. She thought they moved to Canada.

<sup>114</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire," A1.

<sup>115</sup> Michele Kort, "A Man Who Trusted Women," Ms. 19, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 34.

provide abortions, just as his father had done for generations of women in south central Kansas. Touched by the stories women told him, he became convinced that he had a duty to provide abortions. In 1973, Tiller resumed the work his father had performed illicitly for decades, just after the Supreme Court handed down *Roe v. Wade*.

George Tiller was a skilled physician and a shrewd businessman. Many physicians who provided abortions in the immediate post-*Roe* period did so discreetly and infrequently. Dr. Tiller provided abortions publicly and proudly. Women trusted him and referred their friends to his clinic. Many obstetricians and gynecologists in the region appreciated Tiller's practice. They could refer women to him yet not have to be associated with a procedure that was considered unseemly by many. Buttressed by a mushrooming referral pool and sustained by a willingness to undercut his competitors, Tiller operated one of the largest abortion clinics in the region by the late 1970s. He advertised his services, including the provision of second- and third-trimester abortions, nationally.

So-called "late term" abortions are rare. In the U.S. in 2000, only .17-percent of all abortions were performed in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy; nearly ninety-percent of abortions occur within the first three weeks of gestation.<sup>116</sup> Most women who sought late-term abortions reported that they were not aware they were pregnant, that they could not afford the procedure, or that they lived in an area that lacked an abortion provider. Others experienced unexpected health complications or learned the fetus had severe abnormalities. According to Dr. Tiller, about twenty-four percent of the second- and third-trimester abortions he performed were due to chromosomal irregularities or severe heart, lung, or intestinal fetal abnormalities. "Most places in the United States say that even if you have this kind of a problem you may not have a termination of pregnancy," he

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<sup>116</sup> Lawrence B. Finer and Stanley K. Henshaw, "Abortion Incidence and Services in the United States in 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 35, no. 1 (February 2003): 13. More precisely, in 2000, thirty-one providers reported performing 2,200 dilation and extractions (D&Es), the type of abortion procedure used to extract fetuses during the second- and third-trimesters of pregnancy.

said. “What this says is that. . . women are not smart enough, they are not tough enough and they do not love enough to make these family decisions about their children and their families.”<sup>117</sup>

State laws that prohibited abortions after sixteen weeks and physicians’ lack of familiarity with the procedure made it difficult for women to obtain mid- and late-term abortions, particularly in rural states. In 1992, 84-percent of U.S. counties lacked a single abortion provider and thirty-percent of women of reproductive age lived in counties that lacked an abortion provider. The number of counties with an abortion provider actually decreased over time. In 1978, 714 U.S. counties had one or more abortion provider. By 1992, only 495 counties had one or more abortion provider—a thirty-one percent decline.<sup>118</sup> By the early 2000s, nearly half of women who sought second- and third-trimester abortions in the U.S. reported that it was difficult to find a provider willing or trained to perform the procedure.<sup>119</sup> Many of them turned to Dr. Tiller.<sup>120</sup>

Anti-abortion activists paid special attention to Tiller because he provided late-term abortions. As early as 1975, pro-lifers began to stage regular protests at his clinic. At least six hundred activists from around the nation pledged to protest at Tiller’s clinic each year. On a typical workday, five to ten anti-abortion protestors gathered to pray, chant, and distribute literature outside the building.<sup>121</sup> Pro-life groups organized a boycott of vendors

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<sup>117</sup> Kort, “A Man Who Trusted Women,” 25.

<sup>118</sup> Stanley K. Henshaw and Jennifer Van Vort, “Abortion Services in the United States, 1991 and 1992,” *Family Planning Perspectives* 26, no. 3 (May 1, 1994): 103.

<sup>119</sup> Melody Rose, *Safe, Legal, and Unavailable? Abortion Politics In the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2006), 40-41.

<sup>120</sup> The majority of Dr. Tiller’s patients traveled from out-of-state. Of the 4,800 abortions Tiller performed in 1998, 2,000 involved fetuses that could not have survived outside the womb. David Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2009, A15.

<sup>121</sup> Kort, “A Man Who Trusted Women.”

who did business with Tiller. “We had nobody in town that would deliver pizza,” recalled Linda Joslin, an employee of the clinic.<sup>122</sup> Anti-abortion groups identified vendors that continued to do business with Tiller on their web sites. In 1986, a pro-life activist bombed his clinic.

Anti-abortion groups, supported by Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline, organized petition drives that led to two grand jury investigations of Tiller. Prosecutors questioned whether Tiller complied with a Kansas state law that stipulated that second- and third-trimester abortions were permissible only if the fetus was no longer viable or if the mother would face “substantial and irreversible impairment of a major bodily function” by continuing with the pregnancy.<sup>123</sup> Tiller was acquitted both times.

Tiller received so many death threats that he eventually stopped recording them. Mark Gietzen, the chair of the Kansas Coalition for Life described the strategy of grassroots activists who targeted Tiller: “We wanted to get it to the point where it was no longer feasible to stay open.”<sup>124</sup> In the summer of 1991, over 2,000 members of Operation Rescue were arrested for blockading his clinic. Shelley Shannon participated in the mass protest, dubbed the Summer of Mercy, but was not arrested. The media attention that surrounded the mass protest made Operation Rescue and Dr. Tiller familiar names to many Americans.<sup>125</sup>

Tiller was defiant, but he was not reckless. He outfitted his clinic, Women’s Health Care Services, with high-tech security cameras, bulletproof glass, metal detectors, and

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<sup>122</sup> Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” A14.

<sup>123</sup> Joe Stumpe and Monica Davey, “Suspect Is Identified in Killing of Abortion Doctor,” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2009, U.S. edition, B2.

<sup>124</sup> Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” A14.

<sup>125</sup> Dirk Johnson, “An Abortionist Returns to Work After a Shooting,” *The New York Times*, August 21, 1993, A5. “Suspect in Doctor’s Shooting Praised Killing,” *The New York Times* August 22, 1993, p. A30. Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” A14. Lundstrom Thomas, “Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting,” A1.

floodlights. He wore a bulletproof vest, drove an armored S.U.V., and hired armored bodyguards. He was a savvy lobbyist. When he met with legislators, he showed pictures of severely deformed fetuses to demonstrate the heartbreak women who sought second- and third-trimester abortions faced. He was careful to hire employees who understood the intense pressures of working in an office that was considered to be a primary target of the anti-abortion movement. He distributed t-shirts that read “Team Tiller” and plaques that read “Freedom Fighters” to boost morale.<sup>126</sup>

Nationally, Tiller was known as an abortion doctor. Residents of Wichita, however, came to know him as a person who defied and adored the conventions of the Great Plains. A loyal Republican and card-carrying NRA member, Tiller was an enthusiastic supporter of his alma mater, the University of Kansas. He flew an American flag outside the clinic, perhaps to recognize his service in the Navy. He belonged to the city’s oldest country club. He spoke openly about his addictions to alcohol and painkillers after a 1984 arrest for driving under the influence. He volunteered with the program for impaired physicians sponsored by the Kansas Medical Society.

Tiller, who was active in his Lutheran church, framed his support of legal abortion in terms familiar to Christians by making reference to redemption, transformation, and forgiveness. “We have made higher education possible,” he said. “We have helped correct some of the results of rape and incest. We have helped battered women escape to a safer life. We have made recovery from chemical dependency possible.”<sup>127</sup> Providing abortion was central to Tiller’s identity as a Christian. He framed one of his favorite axioms—“The only requirement for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing”—and displayed it in the clinic. While it may seem odd that the nation’s best-known late-term abortion provider lived in one of the most politically and socially conservative states in the U.S., Tiller’s

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<sup>126</sup> Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” A1.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, A14.



disarming honesty, bravado, and curiosity made him—and by extension, his clinic—a part of the community.

Anti-abortion activists did not limit their harassment to Tiller, his clinic, and his staff. They stalked his family, the families of clinic employees, and patients, too. In 1977, pro-lifers distributed “most wanted” posters that offered \$5,000 for information leading to his arrest throughout Tiller’s neighborhood.<sup>128</sup> They followed one of his daughters to her high school volleyball games. And they distributed fliers that accused clinic employees of working for a “baby killer” to the neighbors of clinic staff.

Women who entered and exited Tiller’s clinic—for whatever purpose—were subjected to taunts, threats, and harassment. Pro-life activists formed gauntlets with posters of dismembered fetuses and signs that decried the sinful nature of abortion. They approached cars that entered the clinic parking lot, handing women baby blankets as they urged them to visit the pro-life pregnancy clinic located next door to Tiller’s clinic.<sup>129</sup> Protestors followed patients to their hotel rooms, where activists slipped pro-life pamphlets under the door. In the late 1990s, pro-life activists rented a hotel room that had a view of Tiller’s clinic. Activists used a high-power camera to take pictures of patients, and then posted the photographs on pro-life web sites after blurring the faces of women. Tiller responded to threats against his patients, his clinic, his staff, his family, and himself with

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* For more on the harassment of abortion providers’ families, see Eyal Press, *Absolute Convictions: My Father, a City, and the Conflict That Divided America* (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 2006); Susan Wicklund and Alan Kesselheim, *This Common Secret: My Journey as an Abortion Doctor* (Public Affairs, 2008).

<sup>129</sup> Pro-life groups commonly open pseudo-medical clinics near abortion clinics in the hope that women will mistake their clinics for abortion clinics. Pro-life clinic employees, often dressed in medical garments, provide pregnancy tests and ultra sounds. When pregnant women ask about abortion, employees urge women to continue with their pregnancies and consider adoption. See Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, *12th and Delaware*, DVD (Home Box Office and Loki Films, 2010).

defiant bravado. “If a stake has to be driven through the heart of the anti-abortion movement,” he said, “I want to have my hand on the hammer.”<sup>130</sup>

On August 16, 1993, Shannon, now 37 years old, boarded a Greyhound bus in Grants Pass for a two-and-a-half day trek to Oklahoma City. At 9 p.m. on August 18, she rented a car at the Will Rogers Airport in Oklahoma City and drove through the night to Wichita. Along the way, she stopped at a rest stop, where she wrote a letter to her daughter that read, “I’m not denying I shot Tiller. But I deny that it was wrong. It was the most holy, most righteous thing I’ve ever done. I have no regrets.”<sup>131</sup> The next morning, Shannon arrived at Tiller’s clinic, where she had made an appointment for an abortion. She hoped that she would spot Tiller as soon as she entered the clinic so that she could shoot him immediately.<sup>132</sup> When Shannon did not see her target upon entering the clinic, she fled.

Moments later, Shannon reappeared at the clinic and joined the anti-abortion protestors camped at the end of the clinic’s driveway.<sup>133</sup> Shannon was dressed in blue jeans and a t-shirt that said, “Women’s Peace Camp.” Terry Adelman, a regular protestor at Tiller’s clinic, recalled, “She just held onto this white purse, and I thought that was pretty peculiar. I wanted her to leave.”<sup>134</sup>

When Tiller exited the parking lot in his 1989 Chevy Suburban after a long day of work, his decision to “flip the bird” at Shannon likely saved his life. When Shannon pulled

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<sup>130</sup> Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” A14.

<sup>131</sup> Bray and Bray, *Tiller’s Unheeded Warning*, 1.

<sup>132</sup> Don Phillips, “Violence Hardly Ruffled Protest Ritual,” *The Washington Post*, August 22, 1993, p. A8.

<sup>133</sup> The activists were legally prohibited from crossing a gate that led to the clinic’s driveway Heinz, “Praying With Fire.” and Merle Hoffman, “Praise the Lord” 5. Two days after Tiller was shot, Dr. G. Wayne Patterson, the owner of six abortion clinics around Pensacola, Florida, including the one where Dr. Gunn was murdered, was killed in Mobile, Alabama. The police contended that he was murdered during a botched robbery attempt. Many pro-choice activists were skeptical of this theory because nothing—including his wallet—was stolen from him.

<sup>134</sup> Lundstrom Thomas, “Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting,” A1.

the trigger, she aimed for his heart. Instead, five bullets sprayed into Tiller's raised arms. His initial reaction was to follow his assailant, who ran away from the clinic, probably toward her rental car. He stopped his vehicle when he noticed Shannon reach into her pocket. A clinic nurse who witnessed the shooting noted the physical description and license plate number of Shannon's car. Tiller suffered some nerve damage in both hands, but returned to work the day after the shooting, eager to restore a sense of normalcy to the shaken clinic. "I'm a health-care provider," he explained, "We had patients to take care of."<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> "Suspect in Doctor's Shooting Praised Killing," *The New York Times* August 22, 1993, A30.



Figure 5.4 Dr. George Tiller receiving medical assistance after having been shot by Shelley Shannon on August 19, 1993. (Courtesy *The Wichita Eagle*/Kansas.com)

Shannon fled to Oklahoma City, ditching her gun along the way.<sup>136</sup> She was apprehended later that night when she returned the rental car.<sup>137</sup> Shortly after the arrest, she told the police, “If there ever was a justifiable homicide that would have been it.”<sup>138</sup> A search of her vehicle yielded a New Testament Bible, copies of *Life Advocate* magazine, anti-abortion pamphlets, and her 1993 diary.

Some speculated that other activists helped Shannon to carry out the attack on Tiller. Angela Shannon doubted that her mother could have driven from Oklahoma City to Wichita at night because of her limited vision. “She can see enough to drive in the daylight, but we would never let her drive at night. [Watching her drive was] like seeing a blind person on the road.”<sup>139</sup> Judy Hager said that she had never seen Shelley drive a car. “She’s always ridden here with other people, and she’d take the bus home sometimes. Her husband came and got her one time.” Myrna Shaneyfelt was also skeptical: “I can’t believe that she acted by herself.” She did not believe that Shannon was cunning enough to lie about her identity. “And when she used the name ‘Ann,’ that’s not like her,” she said. “She wouldn’t have thought of that on her own.”<sup>140</sup> The Wichita Police disagreed, however. In their investigation of the shooting, they found only one witness who vaguely recalled seeing Shannon with another woman in a white car, but dismissed the sighting when no one could corroborate it.

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<sup>136</sup> Judge Gregory Waller of District Court would cite Shannon for contempt of court when she refused to identify who helped her acquire the gun at her trial. The gun was never recovered. “Abortion Foe Who Shot a Doctor is Convicted of Attempted Murder,” *The New York Times* March 26, 1994, A7.

<sup>137</sup> “Abortion Foe Who Shot a Doctor,” *The New York Times*, A7.

<sup>138</sup> Risen and Thomas, *Wrath of Angels*, 356.

<sup>139</sup> Lundstrom Thomas, “Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting,” A1.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

The Shannon family continued to deny that they knew Shelley's plans. When he learned of the shooting, David Shannon admitted that he was angry with his wife initially, but soon "got over it." He said, "I support her, but there's a hell of a lot of questions unanswered."<sup>141</sup> He claimed that he had no idea where Shelley was or what she was planning in the days leading up to the shooting. "I didn't have the slightest idea. She travels a lot, about four to five times a year for these protests."<sup>142</sup> After the shooting, Shelley Shannon confided to a friend, "My husband didn't even know I had a gun."<sup>143</sup> FBI investigators concluded that David Shannon was oblivious to the criminal dimensions of his wife's activism.<sup>144</sup>

Angela Shannon, who had dropped her mother off at the Greyhound station in Grants Pass, believed her mother had been planning to conduct a 'rescue' at Tiller's clinic, similar to the types of protests she had conducted at dozens of clinics across the United States.<sup>145</sup> Angela claimed that she did not notice that her mother had been shooting a gun in the family's backyard all summer. "My mom can't shoot," Angela declared. "We used to tease her because she could never do it. Me and my dad and my brother, we're pretty okay with guns. But she could never shoot anything."<sup>146</sup> She questioned how her mother came into possession of a gun. "That is the weirdest thing because she didn't have enough money to get one. When she left...she had a charge card. She did not charge a gun, so how did she get one?" During the trial for the attempted murder of Dr. Tiller, Shelley Shannon

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Johnson, "An Abortionist Returns to Work After a Shooting."

<sup>143</sup> Lundstrom Thomas, "Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting."

<sup>144</sup> Peter Korn, *Lovejoy: A Year in the Life of an Abortion Clinic* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996), 99.

<sup>145</sup> Lundstrom Thomas, "Shelley Shannon: A Puzzle Arrest in Shooting."

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

admitted that several people, whom she refused to identify, helped her to acquire the gun.<sup>147</sup>

Shelley Shannon's father, Robert Dean Pauli, from whom she was estranged, speculated, "Someone has gotten a hold of [Shelley] and twisted her mind in some way, shape, or form. I blame these abortion activists for trying to infiltrate her into their organization to do what she's done, if she did it."<sup>148</sup> Shannon's mother, Vernis Saulsbury, was saddened to learn that her daughter had tried to murder Dr. Tiller. Saulsbury, who hadn't seen her daughter for five years, explained, "It's just a shock to all of us, you know?" She continued, "She was a beautiful student and a wonderful mother. She was just A-One. She sang in the choir and everything."<sup>149</sup>

Grants Pass-area anti-abortion activists claimed to be bewildered by Shannon's actions as well. Myrna Shaneyfelt said that her group had no idea how or why Shannon had taken up arms: "It's a mystery to all of us."<sup>150</sup> Shaneyfelt had protested alongside Shannon in Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Portland, and had been Shannon's confidante as she became entrenched in the militant wing of the movement. But had little insight to offer investigators who wanted to know why Shannon tried to kill Dr. Tiller. "She has always been very peaceful," she said. Nearly two decades after the crime, Shaneyfelt still expresses shock, "It was so upsetting to us because she hadn't said a word regarding violence. It was a terrible trauma."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> See *State v. Shannon* 905 P.2d 649 (Kan. 1995): 656.

<sup>148</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire," A1.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.* Shannon corresponded with her mother, and prior to the shooting, had begun sending fifty-five year-old Vernis Saulsbury twenty dollars each month.

<sup>150</sup> "Anti-Abortion Suspect 'Always Been Peaceful'."

<sup>151</sup> Shaneyfelt, interview.

In the days that followed the shooting, Shannon sent her daughter letters that detailed her pride and fragility. Shelley noted, "I hope [Tiller]'s not killing babies today. If he is, at least I tried." Recounting the day she shot Tiller, she wrote, "His coming after me with his vehicle, swerving all over, even after being shot (hopefully), reminds me of Sodom &/or Gamorrah(?) when the angels smote the perverts with blindness & still they kept coming after them."<sup>152</sup>

Five weeks after the shooting, the Oregon State Police and the FBI scoured the Shannon family property. Although the Clinton Administration appeared more willing to prosecute violent anti-abortion activists and defend abortion clinics than previous administrations, the Office of the Attorney General authorized only one federal agent to examine whether Shannon had ties to other crimes and groups that coordinated violent attacks nationally.<sup>153</sup> Before law enforcement arrived at the Shannon residence, Angela Shannon set fire to her mother's papers. Angela later claimed that she was simply venting her frustration and had not intended to destroy potential evidence.<sup>154</sup> Law enforcement turned their attention to the family's backyard, where they found buried copies of *The Army of God Manual*; several issues of *Life Advocate*, with one opened to a 1991 story about Dr. Tiller titled, "The Wichita Killer"; documents about explosives; correspondence from other anti-abortion activists; burned marijuana cigarettes; and Shelley's 1992 diary.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire," A1.

<sup>153</sup> Judy Lundstrom Thomas, "Shannon Diaries Under Study As Probe Broadens; Feds Seek Link to Other Clinic Violence," *The Wichita Eagle*, December 5, 1993, B1. For a searing review of the federal government's refusal to investigate the possibility that the anti-abortion violence was coordinated and national in scope by the 1980s, see Joni Scott, "From Hate Rhetoric to Hate Crime: A Link Acknowledged Too Late," *The Humanist*, February 1999, 8-14.

<sup>154</sup> Spencer Heinz, "Activist's Daughter Says She Burned Files," *The Oregonian* (Portland, December 16, 1993), A8.

<sup>155</sup> Heinz, "Praying With Fire."



Against the advice of her court-appointed attorney, E. Jay Greeno, Shannon granted interviews and wrote unsolicited letters to members of the press before her trial. One morning, Greeno was startled awake by his clock radio. He heard the voice of Shelley Shannon, who was being interviewed by a local reporter. “Yes, I shot George Tiller and I’m glad I did it,” Shannon declared. Greeno moaned, “I just rolled over and said ‘I do not want to go to work today.’”<sup>156</sup> In October 1993, Shannon told *The Wichita Eagle* that the FBI’s seizure of materials from her backyard would prove damning for herself and her fellow grassroots activists. “My diary might, um, send me a lot of places . . . either one prison or a bunch of jails,” she admitted.<sup>157</sup> She estimated that “four or five” other states might investigate Shannon’s connection to arson and vandalism at abortion clinics based upon information from her diaries. Next, she spoke with a reporter from the local Grants Pass newspaper. She was reluctant to discuss her life before she became, in her words, “a rescuer.” When asked about her childhood, she replied, “Just say I was born in Wisconsin and led a very average life. I had a great childhood, I can tell you that. I wasn’t abused at all.”<sup>158</sup> Later, a Grants Pass reporter received a handwritten letter from Shannon, who acknowledged that she was communicating against the advice of her attorney. “Tell your boss you don’t need to do a story about me,” she instructed. “All you need to do is show people the truth about abortion, and they should be able to tell that real people are really being murdered by real mass murderers.”<sup>159</sup>

Shelley Shannon expressed regret about the crime only once, and it was because she—a woman—had engaged in violence. “As far as guns and bombs and that kind of thing,

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<sup>156</sup> Denson, “Slain Abortion Provider Shot by Oregon Woman in 1993,” A1.

<sup>157</sup> Lundstrom Thomas, “Shannon Diaries Under Study.” Fifteen years after the trial for the attempted murder of Dr. Tiller, Greeno, continued to lament the difficulty of representing Shannon. Denson, “Slain Abortion Provider Shot by Oregon Woman in 1993,” A1.

<sup>158</sup> Qtd. in Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

I think women should just stay out of the way and let the men do that sort of thing.” She acknowledged, “I didn’t think that before. This is my recently developed viewpoint.”<sup>160</sup> She did not think the violent acts themselves were regrettable. This regret proved to be momentary.

Anti-abortion activism filled Shelley Shannon with a sense of purpose that was so profound that it was worth spending the rest of her life behind bars. “My life, beginning now, is about the opposite of what it was,” she explained. “At home, I did a lot of work that seemed pretty futile, didn’t bother much with things like my hair and myself, ate ‘high off the hog,’ did whatever I wanted to, and slept in a very comfortable bed where it was very dark and very quiet.” Prison life, in contrast, was grueling but rewarding. “Here there are always lights on, there’s lots of noise, and everything is different. I still have two of my favorite things. I can still run . . . and I get lots of great mail.” Fan mail was a source of particular pride for Shannon. “I’ve been overwhelmed by the amount of ‘love mail.’ I would never have expected so much support.”<sup>161</sup>

In the months preceding the state trial, Shannon entered into a plea agreement with the federal government. The government offered to recommend a reduced prison sentence if Shannon provided information about fellow anti-abortion extremists. FBI agents asked Shelley to describe the activities of the dozen purported AOG members who were believed to have been responsible for the surge of violence across the U.S. Some FBI agents balked at the government’s strategy. “We should investigate violations,” one agent told *The New York Times*. “We shouldn’t investigate groups.”<sup>162</sup> Shannon told the FBI agents that the *Army of God Manual*, which she helped to draft during the Siege of Atlanta,

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<sup>160</sup> Qtd. in “Anti-Abortionist Talks on Violence,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 3, 1993, A2.

<sup>161</sup> Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

<sup>162</sup> Annys Shin, “Feds Revisit Clinic Violence,” *Ms.* 9, no. 3 (May 1999): 30.

provided explicit directions for committing violence. Revised and updated copies of the manual circulated through an underground network of activists who used pseudonyms, including Mad Gluer, Pensacola Cop Hugger, Atomic Dog (now known to be James Kopp), and Shaggy West (discovered to be Shelley Shannon). She told the FBI that two people convinced her to shoot abortion providers and that she had been taught how to execute people “sniper style.”<sup>163</sup> Special agent Cheryl Glenn conducted interviews with Shannon on behalf of the federal government. She remarked that Shannon seemed to be “a shy and bored small-town homemaker with children soon to leave home, a woman ripe for a cause, for something to lend purpose to her life.”<sup>164</sup>

Shannon’s plea agreement fell apart after two polygraph examinations indicated she was not telling the truth when investigators asked her to identify the original author of the *Army of God Manual*. She plunged into a state of despair. Not only had she failed to benefit from divulging information to the FBI, but she also had potentially alienated herself from her base of supporters by snitching. She scrambled to salvage her reputation, and wrote a letter for the magazine popular among AOG supporters, *Prayer and Action Weekly News*, confessing that she had decoded for federal investigators much of the secret language of the underground grassroots anti-abortion movement. She hoped the public confession would be received with compassion, “I do want to do what I can as far as damage repair.”<sup>165</sup>

At her trial in the Sedgwick County District Court, Shannon explained, “I believe there are occasions when a person becomes so evil and perhaps to stop the crimes they’re causing or to stop them from murdering all kinds of other people, such as in the case of

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<sup>163</sup> Bower, “Soldier in the Army of God,” 9.

<sup>164</sup> Korn, *Lovejoy*, 99.

<sup>165</sup> Shannon to Friends, June 7, 1995, unprocessed SHP. According to Shannon, she told investigators the name of a “lady in Kansas” who sent her the *AOG Manual*. The deal fell apart when she would or could not identify the full name of an activist who used the pseudonym “Mad Gluer.” See “Shelley’s Warning: How the Feds Work” <http://armyofgod.com/ShelleyWarning.html> [accessed May 31, 2009].

Hitler...it may take something like their death to stop what they're doing.”<sup>166</sup> She admitted that if she had been released on bail, she would have attempted to bomb Tiller's clinic. She also admitted shooting Dr. Tiller, but denied that she intended to kill the person she referred to as a “late term abortionist.”<sup>167</sup> She testified, “Our government refuses to do its job and protect the lives of babies, so somebody has to.”<sup>168</sup> On March 25, 1994, a jury found Shannon guilty of attempted first-degree murder for the attack on Dr. Tiller and aggravated assault for pointing a gun at another clinic employee. At her sentencing hearing, Judge Gregory Waller was incredulous when Shannon refused to admit that she had committed a crime, “You didn't do wrong? You did do wrong.” Shannon replied, “They said that about Jesus.”<sup>169</sup> Shannon was sentenced to serve eleven years in prison for attempted first-degree murder and aggravated assault.

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<sup>166</sup> Qtd. in Baird-Windle, *Targets of Hatred*, 220.

<sup>167</sup> A description of the 1994 Sedgwick County District Court trial, including selections of Shannon's testimony, can be found in the Supreme Court of Kansas's decision regarding Shannon's appeal of the District Court case, *State v. Shannon* 905 P.2d 649 (Kan. 1995): 649-656.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 653.

<sup>169</sup> “11-Year Term” *The New York Times* A10.



Figure 5.5 Shelley Shannon glances at a spectator in a Wichita courtroom during the 1994 trial for the attempted murder of Dr. Tiller. (Courtesy *The Wichita Eagle*/Kansas.com)

The next year, Shannon pleaded guilty to ten felony charges, admitting that she had set fire to and released butyric acid at eight clinics in Oregon, California, and Nevada the year before she shot Dr. Tiller.<sup>170</sup> At her sentencing hearing, Shannon’s husband and teenage children asked Judge James Redden of Federal District Court in Portland, Oregon, to show mercy. Assistant U.S. Attorney Stephen Peifer countered, “The defendant has engaged in a long pattern of terrorist activity.” He concluded, “Her purpose is not to destroy property but to instill fear in people.” Redden sentenced Shannon to a twenty-year prison term, which was well above the sentencing guidelines, to be served consecutively

<sup>170</sup> “Court Upholds Shannon’s Twenty-Year Sentence for Abortion Clinic Attacks,” *The Wichita Eagle*, August 29, 1996, A11.

with her previous eleven-year sentence.<sup>171</sup> Judge Redden admonished Shannon, “Though I am loath to call anyone a terrorist, you are a terrorist.”<sup>172</sup> Shannon did not hesitate to compare herself to the most iconic Christian figures. When asked about how she felt about her lengthy prison sentences, she replied, “Most of the apostles were in jail. Most of the New Testament was written in jail.”<sup>173</sup>

### Responses to Shelley Shannon in the Anti-Abortion Movement

Her attempted murder of Dr. Tiller and her willingness to take credit—and punishment—for committing a string of arsons across the western United States made Shannon a folk hero in the extremist wing grassroots anti-abortion movement. Andrew Burnett, the director of Advocates for Life Ministries, declared, “I’m supportive of what she did. It was a courageous act.”<sup>174</sup> John Brockhoeft granted a rare interview with Shannon’s hometown newspaper. “I’m giving this interview only because Shelley Shannon is my best friend,” he said, “and because she’s a woman, and because cowardly pro-life men will be rushing forward to condemn her before there’s even a trial.”<sup>175</sup> The Rev. Paul Hill defended Shannon before he murdered Dr. John Britton and his volunteer escort, Col. James Barrett. Paul Hill also relished the media attention he received before and after he

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<sup>171</sup> “Shannon Found Guilty in Kansas,” *Christianity Today* April 25, 1994, 44 and “11-Year Term in Abortion Clinic Shooting,” *The New York Times* April 27, 1994, A10.

<sup>172</sup> “Woman Gets 20-Year Sentence in Attacks on Abortion Clinics,” *The New York Times* September 9, 1995, A7. Shannon continues to serve her sentence at the Federal Correctional Institution in Waseca, Minnesota, a low security facility that houses women inmates. Shannon is projected to be released on November 7, 2018. Federal Bureau of Prisons, “Inmate Locator” <http://www.bop.gov/iloc2/InmateFinderServlet> [accessed May 31, 2009].

<sup>173</sup> Walsh, “Abortion Foe Says Daughter Innocent,” B1.

<sup>174</sup> Johnson, “An Abortionist Returns to Work After a Shooting.”

<sup>175</sup> Qtd. in Heinz, “Praying With Fire.”

murdered Dr. Britton and his bodyguard, James Barrett. Like Shannon, Hill compared himself to famous religious figures, including Martin Luther.<sup>176</sup>

Judy Hager, the Portland homemaker who'd protested alongside Shelley Shannon in the years leading up to the shooting, understood Shannon to be a soldier in a battle against abortion. After the shooting, Hager reported, "I have a lot of mixed feelings. I feel like I can't condemn Shelley." She continued, "But sometimes I wonder if we are not in a war now and people don't realize we are in a war."<sup>177</sup> Cathy Ramey, Another member of the Portland-based Advocates for Life said, "From an eternal perspective, Shelley Shannon upheld an eternal truth." Dr. Tiller, she maintained, reaped what he had sown. "And if you shed the blood of an innocent person, you have jeopardized your own peace and security."<sup>178</sup>

In 1994, Rev. Michael Bray organized the first White Rose Banquet to honor activists who had committed violence against abortion providers.<sup>179</sup> The event became an annual rendezvous for the most violent anti-abortion activists in the United States. One attendee, Bob Lokey, referred to the banquet as "a gathering of the hardest core of the movement."<sup>180</sup> Included among the seventy attendees of the 1999 banquet, held in a

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<sup>176</sup> "Abortion Foe Who Shot a Doctor is Convicted" *The New York Times* A7 and Bower, "Soldier in the Army of God" 7 and Beier, "On the Psychology of Violent Christian Fundamentalism," 318.

<sup>177</sup> Church, "Anti-Abortion Activists Take Long, Hard Look at Violence," D1.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> A year earlier, Bray had commented on the Tiller shooting, noting "What might puzzle the observer is why Mrs. Shannon used such excessive restraint. Michael Bray *Capitol Area Christian News* September 1993, 2115. See also biographical profile "Michael Bray" ca. 1994, 2, SHP, original accession, Box 8. Bray served four years in prison for conspiring to bomb clinics along the east coast in the mid-1980s. He later wrote *A Time to Kill: A Study Concerning the Use of Force and Abortion* (Portland, Oregon: Advocates for Life Publications, 1994). Matt Trewhella, a former Detroit gang member-turned-anti-abortion-activist, organized similar fundraising campaigns for incarcerated activists, including Shelley Shannon, John Brockhoeft, and Michael Griffin. Baird-Windle, *Targets of Hatred*, 150.

<sup>180</sup> Bob Lokey in *Soldiers in the Army of God*. Orig. aired 2000, released to DVD 2006. Directed by Daphne Pinkerson and Marc Levin. New York: Home Box Office Home Video.

Holiday Inn in a Washington, D.C. suburb, were convicted fire bombers, a butyric acid attack proponent, and members of the clergy. Shelley Shannon, a featured honoree at each annual event, donated scarves and baby booties that she knitted in prison for the banquet's fundraiser auction. Proceeds from the auction and the sale of two-dollar bumper stickers that proclaimed, "EXECUTE Murders and Abortionists" were distributed among the families of incarcerated anti-abortion activists.<sup>181</sup> By honoring her along with other convicted activists, members of the extremist wing of the movement embraced Shannon on her own terms, as a mortal called upon by God to serve as a martyr. The choice to divide work between men as actors and women as supporters no longer mattered once God intervened.

The nation's largest anti-abortion organization said very little as violence raged in the radical wing of the movement. In part, the National Right to Life Committee had prevented itself from responding to violence in the movement: in 1980, the organization had adopted a policy not to report on direct action campaigns that engaged in violent activity in *The National Right to Life News*.<sup>182</sup> After each shooting, the NRLC released a perfunctory statement denouncing anti-abortion violence, but equated the horrific actions of activists to the practice of abortion. For example, after Shannon shot Dr. Tiller, the NRLC declared that it "strongly condemns both the shooting of Tiller" and "the violence of abortion."<sup>183</sup> NRLC leaders complained that they were victims of 'guilt by association' after an extremist perpetrated violence. The organization criticized the media for linking the violent behavior of a handful of activists to the entire anti-abortion movement. "Such a

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<sup>181</sup> Judy L. Thomas, "Buchanan Aide Visited Tribute to Doctor Killer," *Kansas City Star*, February 27, 1996, A1.

<sup>182</sup> Keith Cassidy, "The Right to Life Movement: Sources, Development, and Strategies," in *The Politics of Abortion and Birth Control in Historical Perspective*, ed. Donald T. Critchlow (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 150.

<sup>183</sup> "Some Groups Praise Doctor's Shooting," *The Salina Journal* (Salina, Kansas) August 21, 1993, A8.



suggestion is like blaming the civil rights movement—and those who courageously spoke in favor of the rights of African Americans for the riots or deaths that were a part of that era,” the press release read.<sup>184</sup>

The gruesome spike in violence was not addressed in *The National Right to Life News (NRLN)* until June 1993—three months after Michael Griffin killed Dr. Gunn. Only then did Wanda Franz use her presidential column to question the legitimacy of accusations that the movement was becoming alarmingly violent. Legitimate pro-lifers did not use violent tactics, she maintained. She suggested that reports of violence were a fiction created by “pro-abort media types.”<sup>185</sup> This “propaganda” she declared, led some within the movement to believe, incorrectly, that violence had seeped into the movement. She recounted a sermon delivered by her parish priest during the early 1990s. He implored members of the anti-abortion movement to root out those who engaged in or advocated violence. Franz confronted the priest and asked him to provide evidence that pro-lifers used violent tactics. She recalled, “He had none. He had simply parroted the ‘progressive’ pro-abortion media.”<sup>186</sup> Anti-abortion activists, she maintained, “are loving, they sacrifice, they work on behalf of those who can’t plead their case, [and] they fight abortion because [it] not only kills a defenseless child but also hurts women and families.”<sup>187</sup>

The first explicit condemnation of murder did not register in the *NRLN* until nearly two years after pro-life activists had begun killing physicians. In her January 1995 presidential column, Wanda Franz told the mainstream movement, “As pro-lifers, we totally reject the notion that people may kill other human beings in order to promote a

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<sup>184</sup> Johnson, “Abortions, Bibles and Bullets, and the Making of a Militant,” A8.

<sup>185</sup> Wanda Franz, “The Shameful Legacy” 3.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

cause.”<sup>188</sup> However, she stopped short of acknowledging that violence was a problem that needed to be confronted by the anti-abortion movement as a whole. Instead, she suggested that the violence committed by anti-abortion activists should be blamed on the fact that abortion was legal in the United States. According to Franz, the “violent act” of abortion was “committed 1.5 million times every year,” and this violence “helped foster a climate where the moral restraints on violent and impulsive action are becoming weaker and weaker.”<sup>189</sup> In subsequent articles, Franz blamed the liberal media for focusing on violent activists and ignoring the work of peaceful anti-abortion activists.<sup>190</sup>

The strongest condemnation of Shannon came from regional pro-life leaders. Lynda Harrington of the Oregon Right to Life, which claimed to have 140,000 members, explained, “We abhor violence. We encourage all pro-lifers to try to address the issue through legal and peaceful means.”<sup>191</sup> Gayle Atteberry, the vice president of Oregon Right to Life asserted, “There is no justification whatsoever in taking the law in your hands and participating in acts of violence.”<sup>192</sup> Bill Price, the president of Texans United for Life, warned that violence would undermine the objectives of the mainstream movement, “If the pro-life movement does not police itself [against violence], the government will.”<sup>193</sup> Price

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<sup>188</sup> Wanda Franz, “Violence is Not Pro-Life,” *National Right to Life News (NRLN)*, January 1995, 3. In the same issue, Dave Andrusko, *NRLN*’s news editor, condemned the slaying of clinic staff at two abortion clinics in Brookline, Massachusetts by the 22 year-old hairdresser, John Salvi. Andrusko was dismayed by anti-abortion activists who praised the murders, “Perhaps the only thing worse than the murders of two women were the comments of several people, calling themselves ‘pro-life,’ who defended Salvi’s despicable actions.” “Editor’s Note,” *NRLN*, January 1995, 2.

<sup>189</sup> Franz, “Violence is Not Pro-Life” 3. Professor Alan Goldstein, a professor of criminal justice at John Jay College, has noted that condemnations were often followed by rationalizations of violence. Joe Nicholson and Corky Siemaszko “Inside Minds of Clinic Gunners” *Daily News* January 2, 1995, MHP, Box CH22.

<sup>190</sup> Wanda Franz, “The Pro-Abortion Media Fog,” *NRLN*, July 22, 1996, 3.

<sup>191</sup> Mapes and Graves, “Some Activists Call Attack Justified.”

<sup>192</sup> Church, “Anti-Abortion Activists Take Long, Hard Look at Violence,” D1.

<sup>193</sup> Kennedy, “Pro-Life Movement Struggles for Viability,” 40.

articulated the dilemma the movement faced as it tried to appeal to diverse types of activists while maintaining legitimacy: “There is a place for Operation Rescue on the bus,” he said. “But if they are allowed behind the wheel, the movement will end up in a ditch.” Some members of the grassroots movement, to which Shannon had deep ties, tried to distance themselves from her. The Rev. Patrick Mahoney, a leader of Operation Rescue, insisted Shannon acted without support. “This woman is totally responsible for her actions,” he declared. “This woman acted as a lone ranger vigilante.”<sup>194</sup>

### Federal Responses to Anti-Abortion Violence

The proliferation of lethal violence during the early 1990s breathed life into long-stalled federal legislation intended to protect clinics and staff. The murder of Dr. Gunn prompted Congress to pass The Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act in 1993. One year later, President Clinton signed it into law. FACE made it a federal crime to erect barricades at clinics or to prevent clinics from operating normally. Susan Smith, the public policy director of the National Right to Life Committee, bristled at the pro-choice momentum that resulted from anti-abortion violence, positing that pro-choice legislators and lobbyists were “shamelessly exploiting” the murder of Gunn.<sup>195</sup>

President Clinton, the first president to be an unambivalent supporter of abortion rights, condemned abortion violence publicly and directed his cabinet to investigate and prosecute activists who interfered with the provision of abortion services. Attorney General Janet Reno took an unprecedented step when she authorized the FBI to investigate whether Shannon had assistance when she firebombed clinics across the western United States. She directed federal marshals to protect clinics in vulnerable, threat-prone areas

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<sup>194</sup> “Some Groups Praise Doctor's Shooting,” *The Salina Journal* (Kansas) August 21, 1993, 8.

<sup>195</sup> Kim A. Lawton, “Florida Murder Brings New Challenges for Prolifers,” *Christianity Today* 37, no. 5 (April 26, 1993): 49.

after Paul Hill killed Dr. Britton and James Barrett in 1994. A number of states passed anti-stalking legislation to protect clinic staff. In 1994, Congress passed the Omnibus Crime Bill, which prohibited state motor vehicle agencies from releasing personally identifiable information to the public, and that year, in *Madsen v. Women's Health Services*, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld an injunction barring picketing within thirty-six feet of a Florida abortion clinic.<sup>196</sup>

The federal legislation that followed the spike in anti-abortion violence proved unsatisfactory to both supporters and opponents of legal abortion. Congress renewed the Hyde Amendment, which had prohibited federal funding for abortions since 1976, except in cases when abortion was necessary to save a woman's life. In 1993, Congress added another exemption, allowing federal funds to be used for abortion if a pregnancy was the result of rape. Because protections for clinics were not supplemented by means for ensuring that women could afford abortions, abortion provision became further isolated professionally and geographically.

The dynamic nature of anti-abortion activism enabled opponents of abortion rights to continue their work. By the early 1990s, the anti-abortion movement was comprised of three, interrelated types of activists: mainstream activists who used traditional means, including lobbying, educational efforts, and get-out-the-vote campaigns; activists who maintained some 4,000 pseudo-medical clinics and counseling hotlines (often called 'crisis pregnancy centers') throughout the United States and violent activists who were willing to commit arson, bombings, and murder.<sup>197</sup> The lines between peaceful protest and threatening behavior had blurred.

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<sup>196</sup> 512 U.S. 753 (1994) and Carole E. Joffe, *Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion Before and After "Roe v. Wade"* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 187-188.

<sup>197</sup> Kennedy, "Pro-Life Movement Struggles for Viability," 44.

After the murders of five abortion providers and clinic staff in 1993 and 1994, Dr. Barnett Slepian, an abortion provider in Buffalo, New York, explained to his community how his life was affected by anti-abortion activism:

The members of the local non-violent pro-life community may continue to picket my home wearing large “Slepian Kills Children” buttons, which they did on July 25. They may also display the six-foot banner . . . [in] my neighborhood. They can proudly display their “Abortion Kills Children” bumper stickers.... They may continue to scream that I am a murderer and a killer when I enter the clinics at which they “peacefully” exercise their First Amendment Right of freedom of speech. They may also do the same when...they see me during the routine of my day. This may be at a restaurant, at a mall, in a store or, as they have done recently, while I was watching my young children play.... They may do all of the above to me and other providers of this community. But please don’t feign surprise, dismay and certainly not innocence when a more volatile and less restrained member of the group decides to react to their inflammatory rhetoric by shooting an abortion provider. They all share the blame.<sup>198</sup>

Four years after warning his community about the dangers he feared, Dr. Slepian was gunned down in his home.

### Conclusion

By the close of the twentieth century, women had established themselves within each segment of the anti-abortion movement. They were casual supporters of the movement on the sidelines, tepid critics of violence, passionate defenders of violence, and participants in intimidating, coercive, and violent actions against abortion providers and women who sought to have abortions. Acknowledging the role of women in illegal, intimidating, and violent forms of activism challenges assumptions about religious women, evangelical Christian women in particular. Their behavior—as trespassers, stalkers, and (attempted) killers—was supported by the some of the most passionate believers in

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<sup>198</sup> Barnett A. Slepian, “Free to Speak, Pro-Lifers Still Bear Responsibility,” *Buffalo News*, August 13, 1994, sec. Editorial, A2. See also “Stalking Abortion Doctors Is a Mockery of Freedom,” *Buffalo News*, August 28, 1998, Editorial, A8.

fundamentalist Christianity. Turning our attention to women in the anti-abortion movement enables us to reconsider how 'lone' the activists who committed illegal, violent forms of protest activity really were.

Although it was men who were often the most vocal proponents of violent tactics in the anti-abortion movement, women in the mainstream and grassroots anti-abortion movement deflected responsibility for violence, publicly supported violence, and committed violent acts. One of the most remarkable features of anti-abortion activism during the 1990s is the relative ease with which women created an energized, organized, and lethal base of support in a patriarchal movement where women worked both as supporters and as participants alongside their male comrades. A study of women in the confrontational wing of the grassroots anti-abortion movement reveals that both men and women were entrenched in the most violent wing of the movement. Both men and women destroyed abortion clinics and both killed or attempted to kill abortion providers. These activists were embedded in communities that nurtured violence and supported activists and their families long after they were imprisoned for their crimes.

When President Clinton left office in January 2001, Attorney General Janet Reno had buttressed the FACE Act with a task force charged with protecting women's health clinics. Reno effectively reversed the FBI's position on anti-abortion violence. Instead of considering bombings, shootings, and death threats as isolated incidents committed by lone perpetrators, investigators were task to investigate "any connections that may exist between individuals engaged in criminal conduct."<sup>199</sup> President Clinton had allocated \$4.5 million from the Justice Department's budget to help increase security at the nation's most vulnerable clinics. The aggressive protective measures appeared to stem violence. When the FACE Act was authorized in 1994, half of all U.S. clinics reported experiencing

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<sup>199</sup> Shin, "Feds Revisit Clinic Violence," 30.

one or more incidents of violence. By 1999, less than one-quarter of U.S. clinics filed similar reports.<sup>200</sup>

The anti-abortion movement, however, continued to adapt to federal, state, and local attempts to curtail the targeted harassment of abortion providers, clinic staff, and patients into the twenty-first century. The murder of Dr. Slepian in 1998 demonstrated that anti-abortion activists would seek out abortion providers in their homes if they could not get near their clinics. Prolifers' ability to close in on Dr. George Tiller in the post-FACE Act era illustrates the resourcefulness of activists who were prepared to deploy a dizzying array of tactics to end abortion.

In 1997, the founder of Focus on the Family, James C. Dobson, declared George Tiller "the most infamous abortionist in the United States." The "Face the Truth" tour, organized by Monica Migliorino Miller and Joseph Scheidler, descended upon Tiller's clinic in 2001, replete with "Truth Truck" that displayed photographs of dismembered fetuses. And in 2002, Operation Rescue relocated to Wichita from California as part of its campaign to close Tiller's clinic.<sup>201</sup>

In 2004, Republican Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline resurrected his interest in Tiller when he subpoenaed Tiller's patient records to determine whether he had violated state law by failing to report abortions provided to victims of statutory rape or girls under age sixteen. The medical records included details of patients' sexual histories, their contraceptive practices, and their psychological profiles. After reviewing the charts, Kline filed thirty criminal charges against Tiller, but a state court judge dismissed every count.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Kort, "A Man Who Trusted Women," 35.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 36; Patricia Miller, "The Last Resort," *Ms.* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2005): 17. Indiana's attorney general, Steve Carter, issued a subpoena similar to Kline's. Carter subpoenaed the records of girls who received state-subsidized family-planning services. He claimed that he wanted to confirm that abortion providers were reporting cases involving minors who had been sexually abused.

In 2006, Kline's successor, Democrat Paul Morrison, picked up where Kline left off, and charged Tiller with nineteen misdemeanors, based on the findings from Kline's investigation. The state's case against Tiller dragged on for two years, ending when a jury found that Tiller was not guilty on all counts. According to Dr. Tiller's attorney, Dan Monnat, jurors asked the judge to deliver a private message to Tiller that expressed their gratitude to him for offering women a place to have safe abortions. Monnat recalled, "It was Kansas jurors, men and women, who were brave enough to deliver Kansas justice. Everything else was nonsense Kansas politics."<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Kort, "A Man Who Trusted Women," 36. See Thomas Frank, *What's the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).



## EPILOGUE

## THE LEGACY OF WOMEN IN THE ANTI-ABORTION MOVEMENT

Scott Roeder struck up a friendship with Shelley Shannon shortly after she began serving her thirty-year sentence and just as his personal life was unraveling.<sup>1</sup> A resident of Topeka, Kansas, Roeder was married with one son; the young family struggled to make ends meet. Roeder's stress was likely compounded by his occasional bouts of mental illness.<sup>2</sup> In 1992, Roeder watched for the first time Pat Robertson's *700 Club*. Shortly thereafter, he started referring to himself as a "born again" Christian and railing against taxes and abortion. He affiliated with Christian anti-government and anti-abortion groups, including the Freemen militia, Operation Rescue, and the Army of God. Roeder met Regina Dinwidde, an AOG member who had encouraged Shannon to destroy clinics. Dinwidde introduced Roeder to Shannon in 1993, as Shannon awaited trial for attempting to kill Dr. Tiller. For the next fourteen years, Shannon counseled, supported, and encouraged Roeder. Between 1993 and 2009, Roeder visited her in prison at least twenty-five times, exchanged dozens of letters, and communicated with her through Internet blog posts.

Shannon probably encouraged Roeder to continue in her footsteps. He subscribed to one of Shannon's favorite newsletters, *Prayer and Action News*, which continued to

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<sup>1</sup> Roeder sent Shannon at least twenty-five letters. Amanda Robb, "Not a Lone Wolf," *Ms. Magazine*, Spring 2010, 26-27. Shannon and her pen pal, Paul Hill, wrote to one another from their respective prisons. In their initial letters, they offered one another emotional support. However, their correspondence soon became conspiratorial, and the two developed their own code words for discussing strategies for inciting violence against clinics. Their working friendship ended on September 3, 2003, when Hill was executed by the State of Florida. Milan Korcok, "Physicians Targeted as Abortion Debate in U.S. Turns Violent," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* March 1, 1995, 727

<sup>2</sup> After he killed Dr. Tiller, Scott Roeder's brother, David, told the press, "We know Scott as a kind and loving son, brother, and father who suffered from mental illness at various times in his life." Joe Stumpe and Monica Davey, "Suspect Is Identified in Killing of Abortion Doctor," *The New York Times*, June 2, 2009, U.S. edition, A1.

advocate the murder of abortion providers well into the 2000s.<sup>3</sup> In April 1996, Shawnee County, Kansas, deputies pulled over Roeder for driving without a valid license plate. Roeder had affixed a plate popular among members of the Freemen militia, which reads: “Sovereign private property. Immunity declared by law. Noncommercial American.” A search of his vehicle revealed gunpowder, ammunition, and bomb-making materials. Roeder was sentenced to two years probation and was prohibited from associating with anti-government groups that advocated violence. He told his nine-year-old son that authorities mistakenly believed he had intended to bomb a federal building. Instead, he was planning to bomb an abortion clinic.<sup>4</sup>

Scott Roeder resumed his anti-abortion activism in 2002. He super-glued the locks at one Kansas City abortion clinic two times. The clinic’s manager reported the crimes to the FBI, noting that she had surveillance tapes that showed Roeder applying the glue. It is unclear whether the FBI investigated the reports. Later that year, he began stalking Dr. Tiller at his church.

In 2005, FOX News pundit Bill O’Reilly began condemning Tiller on his program, *The O’Reilly Factor*. Between 2005 and 2009, O’Reilly discussed Dr. Tiller twenty-nine times, commonly referring to him as “Tiller the baby killer” and “an operator of a death mill.”<sup>5</sup> O’Reilly once opened a show by stating, “In the state of Kansas, there is a doctor, George Tiller, who will execute babies for \$5,000 if the mother is depressed.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> After Scott Roeder murdered Dr. Tiller, Dave Leach, the editor of *Prayer and Action News* said, “To call this a crime is too simplistic. There is Christian scripture that would support this.” *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Robb, “Not a Lone Wolf,” 27-28.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Mackey, “Doctor Was Target of O’Reilly’s Rhetoric,” *The New York Times: The Lede*, June 1, 2009, <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/01/doctor-was-target-of-oreillys-rhetoric/?ref=us>; Paul Krugman, “The Big Hate,” *The New York Times*, June 12, 2009, A27.

<sup>6</sup> David Barstow, “An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death,” *The New York Times*, July 26, 2009, A15.

In 2007, anti-abortion activists began attending services at Tiller's church, Reformation Lutheran. The Tiller family had joined the church a few years earlier, after having been asked to leave their previous church because fellow congregants objected to his profession. At Reformation Lutheran, pro-lifers disrupted services from the pews and sent postcards that depicted dismembered fetuses to everyone listed in the church directory. Over time, anti-abortion activists became less interested in following Tiller to church—with the exception of Scott Roeder, who attended continued to attend services. Congregants took note of the quiet man. According to church member Keith Martin, Roeder "didn't seem in place," in part, because of his overwhelming body odor, which smelled like ammonia. Despite the regular presence of Roeder, Tiller felt that church was a place where he could relax. In 2009, he told a colleague "the church was the one place he felt safe."<sup>7</sup>

On Sunday, May 31, 2009, Dr. Tiller lingered in the foyer to his church with two ushers to distribute the bulletin to latecomers.<sup>8</sup> His wife, Jeanne, was in the sanctuary, seated with the choir. Tiller turned his attention to the doughnuts piled on a table, and admitted his fondness for sweets.<sup>9</sup> Congregants inside the sanctuary reported hearing a quiet pop—a sound that was out-of-place, but not alarming. An usher entered the sanctuary and told the congregation to stay seated. He escorted Jeanne Tiller to the foyer. Moments later, the congregation heard her scream. She had found her husband, age sixty-seven, dead from a single gunshot to the head.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Linda Joslin in *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Joe Stumpe and Monica Davey, "Abortion Doctor Shot to Death in Kansas Church," *The New York Times* May 31, 2009, A1.

<sup>9</sup> Monica Davey, "Man to Stand Trial for Murder in Shooting of an Abortion Provider," *The New York Times*, July 29, 2009, A9.

<sup>10</sup> Stumpe and Davey, "Suspect Is Identified in Killing of Abortion Doctor."

At the time of his death, Tiller was one of only three physicians still providing second- and third-term abortions. Not one politician of statewide or national significance attended Tiller's funeral, which drew 1,200 mourners.<sup>11</sup> Days after his death, the Tiller family, which included Jeanne, four children, and ten grandchildren, announced that that Women's Health Care Services would close. "We are proud of the service and courage shown by our husband and father and know that women's health care needs have been met because of his dedication and service," they said. "That is a legacy that will not die."<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after Roeder murdered Dr. Tiller, Shelley Shannon came to the defense of her friend. "Abortionists are killed because they are serial murderers of innocent children who must be stopped . . . May God bless Scott for his faithfulness and brave actions . . ."<sup>13</sup> At the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., Randall Terry told reporters that Tiller was a "mass murderer" and that "he reaped what he sowed."<sup>14</sup> An unrepentant Roeder warned, "I know there are many other similar events planned around the country as long as abortion remains legal."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Barstow, "An Abortion Battle, Fought to the Death," A15.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Roxana Hegeman, "Woman Who Shot Kansas Abortion Doctor Warns of Violence," *Charlotte Observer*, February 3, 2010, A1.

<sup>14</sup> Bryan Denson, "Same Abortion Doctor Shot By Oregon Woman," *The Oregonian*, June 2, 2009, A1.

<sup>15</sup> Hegeman, "Woman Who Shot Kansas Abortion Doctor Warns of Violence," A1.



Figure 6.1 Truth truck, 2009. Anti-abortion extremist Ronald Bruck circled Dr. Tiller's clinic in his "truth truck" two days before Scott Roeder killed Tiller. (Courtesy of Ron Moore)

Between 1978 and 2008, anti-abortion activists killed eight clinic personnel and attempted to kill another fifteen. They injured twenty-one providers, staff, police officers, and firefighters. They set fire to forty-one clinics. And they sent more than 385 death threats to clinic staff in the United States.<sup>16</sup> Dr. Tiller was the ninth person murdered by

<sup>16</sup> "NAF Violence and Disruption Statistics, 1977-2007," National Abortion Federation, March 2007, available on-line: [http://www.prochoice.org/pubs\\_research/publications/downloads/about\\_abortion/violence\\_stati](http://www.prochoice.org/pubs_research/publications/downloads/about_abortion/violence_stati)

an anti-abortion extremist. Two weeks before he was killed, a colleague asked, “Why are you still doing this, George? You certainly don’t need to. Why don’t you just retire, enjoy life?” Tiller replied, “I can’t, I can’t leave these women. There’s no one else for them.”<sup>17</sup>

Shelley Shannon is scheduled to be released from prison on November 7, 2018.<sup>18</sup>

### Assessing the Influence of the Anti-Abortion Movement on Abortion in the U.S. Today

The relative stability of Americans’ attitudes about abortion from 1972 to 2005 suggests that we cannot underestimate the influence of the anti-abortion movement to shape reproductive health policy and law. During this period, Americans’ support a woman’s right to abortion remained flat even as support for premarital sex and birth control increased. Political scientists Samuel J. Best and Benjamin Radcliff refer to Americans’ fixed opinion about abortion as “the abortion outlier” when compared to attitudes about other reproductive rights. They explain, “The fact that such support [for legal abortion] has remained stable is an important nonfinding. Apparently, there exist strong, pro-life period effects, which counteract secular demographic and cultural changes that would likely move public sentiment in the opposite direction.”<sup>19</sup>

When Kristin Luker studied women who opposed abortion in the 1980s, she speculated that homemakers who had not attended university were more likely than wage-earning, college-educated women to oppose legal abortion because policies that made

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stics.pdf [accessed October 6, 2010]. Joni Scott, “From Hate Rhetoric to Hate Crime: A Link Acknowledged Too Late,” *The Humanist*, February 1999, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Michele Kort, “A Man Who Trusted Women,” *Ms.* 19, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 38.

<sup>18</sup> Spencer Heinz, “Sentences Will Run Their Course,” *The Oregonian* (Portland) April 23, 2006, B2.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel J. Best and Benjamin Radcliff, eds., *Polling America: An Encyclopedia of Public Opinion* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2005), 4.

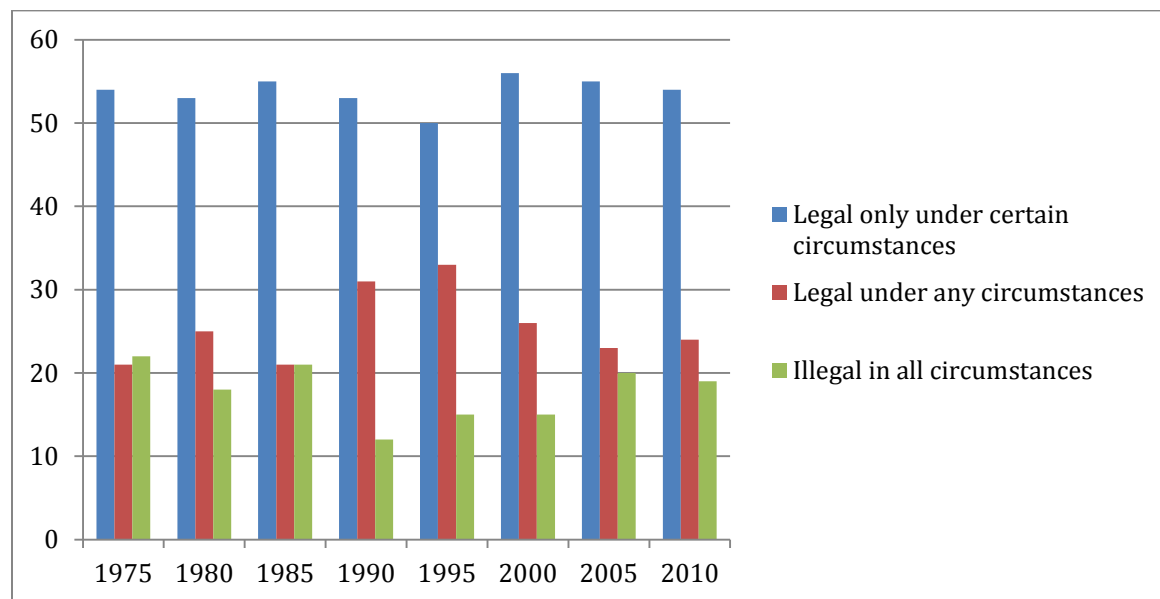
motherhood optional threatened their own worth and jeopardized an important financial and social safety net: marriages that came about and stayed together because of children.<sup>20</sup> While women with lower levels of education continue to oppose abortion rights more than women who have attended college, the pool of women who have never attended college has shrunk considerably since the 1980s.<sup>21</sup> We might expect that support for abortion rights would have increased as more women graduated from high school, attended post-secondary educational institutions, and received advanced degrees. Yet, as more women became employed outside the home and more women obtained university degrees, support for legal abortion has hardly budged [See Table 2].

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<sup>20</sup> Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 163. Between 1975 and 2009, educational achievement was consistently one of the strongest predictors of Americans' opinions about legal abortion. Lydia Saad, *Education Trumps Gender in Predicting Support for Abortion: College-Educated Adults-and Especially College-Educated Women-Most Supportive* (Gallup, Inc., April 28, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Best and Radcliff, *Polling America*, 5.

Table 2. Opinions about Legal Abortion, 1975-2010.



Responses to Gallup Poll question that asked respondents whether abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances, legal under any circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances. Source: "Abortion" Gallup Poll, no. 1576, ca. May 2010. Available on-line: <http://www.gallup.com>.



Even during the first-half of the 1990s, when anti-abortion violence peaked, Americans' attitudes about abortion remained stable [See Table 3].

Table 3. Opinions about Legal Abortion, 1990-1995.

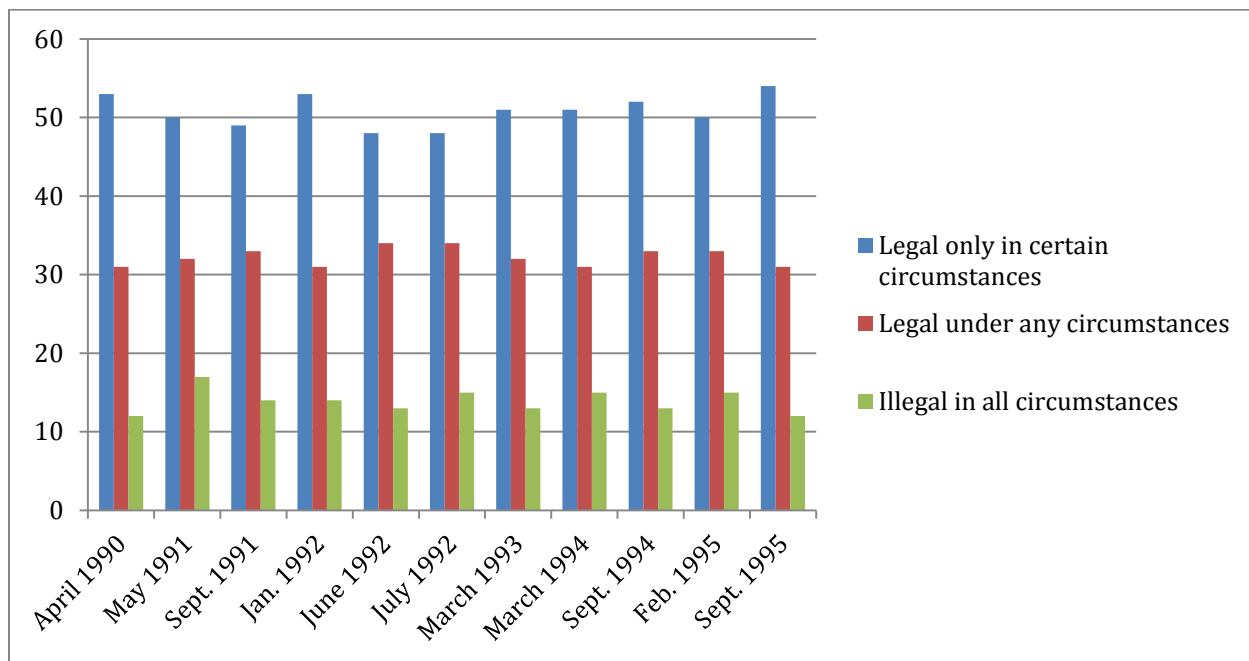
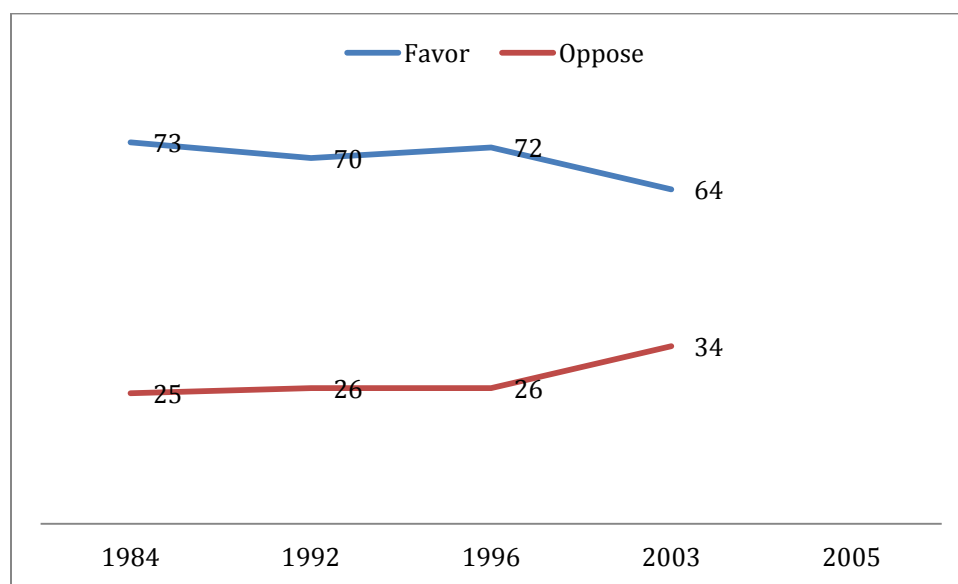


Table 3. Responses to Gallup Poll question that asked respondents whether abortion should be legal only under certain circumstances, legal under any circumstances, or illegal in all circumstances. Source: "Abortion" Gallup Poll, no. 1576, ca. May 2010. Available on-line: <http://www.gallup.com>.

However, Americans' opinions about *specific* abortion policies have changed over time. When respondents have been asked whether abortions should be banned in all circumstances except when necessary to save the life of the pregnant woman or whether

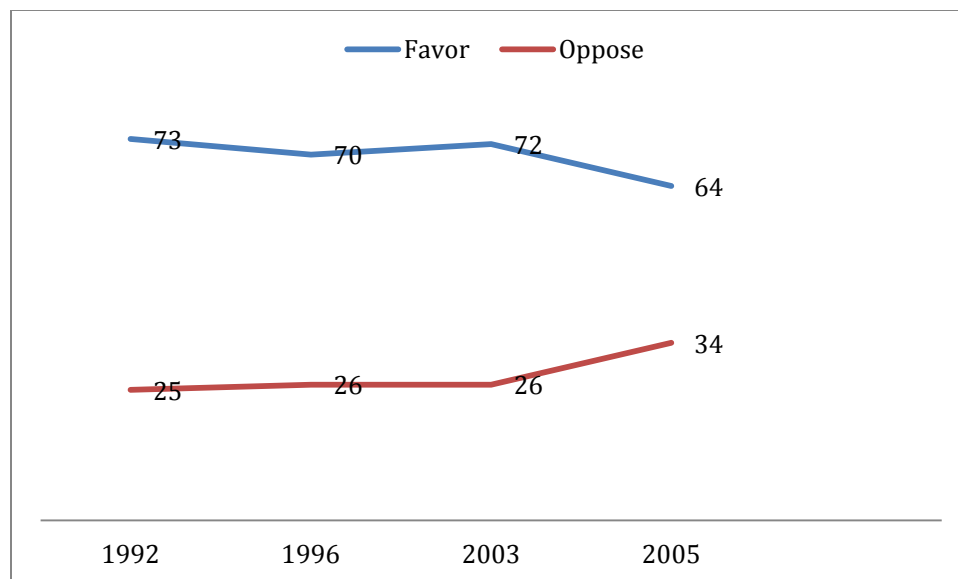
married women should be required to notify their husbands before having abortions, Americans have become more supportive of a pro-choice framework over time [See Tables 4 and 5].

Table 4. Constitutional Amendment to Ban Abortion, 1984-2003



Constitutional Amendment to Ban Abortion, 1984-2003. Responses to Gallup Poll question that asked whether respondents “favor or oppose a constitutional amendment to ban abortion in all circumstances, except when necessary to save the life of the mother.” Source: “Abortion,” Gallup Poll, ca. May 2010. Available on-line: <http://www.gallup.com>.

Table 5. Spousal Notification Requirement, 1992-2005.



Spousal Notification Requirement, 1992-2005. Responses to Gallup Poll question that asked whether respondents “favor or oppose a law requiring that the husband of a married woman be notified if she decides to have an abortion.” Source: “Abortion,” Gallup Poll, ca. May 2010.

To what degree have anti-abortion activists succeeded in their quest to eliminate abortion in the United States? The answer is complex. The abortion rate has steadily declined since its peak of 1.61 million in 1990. In 2000, the abortion ratio fell to the lowest level since the early 1970s.<sup>22</sup> Reproductive health researchers note that it is difficult to assess why this is the case. The economic prosperity of the 1990s enabled more women to afford contraception. More women use more effective forms of birth control in the

<sup>22</sup> Lawrence B. Finer and Stanley K. Henshaw, “Abortion Incidence and Services in the United States in 2000,” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* 35, no. 1 (February 2003): 6.

twenty-first century than ever before. The prevalence of sexual experience among teenagers declined by sixteen-percent between 1991 and 2001.<sup>23</sup> Women can now take “Plan B” or the morning-after pill, which prevents the union of sperm with eggs.<sup>24</sup> Despite the increased availability of options to prevent pregnancy, however, it has become more arduous for many U.S. women to obtain abortions since the 1980s.

A close examination of women who have unintended pregnancies reveals that a two-tiered system based upon class influences women’s reproductive choices. As affluent women’s access to birth control increased over the course of the late twentieth-century, they experienced fewer unintended pregnancies, and the abortion rate dropped. Poor women, who depended more heavily on federally subsidized forms of birth control, became more vulnerable to the whims of state and federal legislators during the late twentieth century. Between 1995 and 2001, state legislatures enacted over three hundred laws that restricted women’s access to abortion and other reproductive health services. Insurance companies were free to include medications for erectile dysfunction disorder while excluding birth control.<sup>25</sup> Reproductive services were considered to be commodities in the healthcare marketplace rather than pillars of women’s healthcare.<sup>26</sup> Women who lacked birth control, unsurprisingly, had more unintended pregnancies. Between 1995 and 2002,

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<sup>23</sup> Centers for Disease Control, “Trends in Sexual Risk Behaviors among High School Students—United States, 1991-2001,” *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 51, no. 38 (2002): 858.

<sup>24</sup> Melody Rose, *Safe, Legal, and Unavailable? Abortion Politics In the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Press, 2006), 30; Center for Drug Evaluation and Research, “Postmarket Drug Safety Information for Patients and Providers - FDA’s Decision Regarding Plan B: Questions and Answers,” WebContent, April 30, 2009, <http://www.fda.gov/drugs/drugsafety/postmarketdrugsafetyinformationforpatientsandproviders/ucm109795.htm>.

<sup>25</sup> Geraldine Sealey, “Erections Get Insurance; Why Not the Pill?,” *ABCNews.com*, June 19, 2002, <http://abcnews.go.com/US/story?id=91538>.

<sup>26</sup> Frances Kissling and Kate Michelman, “Long Roe to Hoe,” *Nation* 286, no. 4 (February 4, 2008): 7-8.

abortion demographics illustrate the divide between women who had access to affordable birth control and those who did not: during this seven year-period, the unintended pregnancy rate of poor women increased by 29%, while the unintended pregnancy rate of middle- and upper-class women fell by 20%.<sup>27</sup> In their attempt to purge the federal government from its unseemly ties to human reproduction, social conservatives actually increased the likelihood that poor women would have unintended pregnancies.

Women who wanted and could afford to have abortions had a harder time obtaining them in the first decade of the twenty-first century than they did in the 1970s. Between 1992 and 2000, the number of abortion providers in the U.S. declined by eleven percent. Rural states, including Georgia, Kansas, Kentucky, and Missouri lost more than fifty-percent of their providers during this period.<sup>28</sup> In 2009, eighty-seven percent of U.S. counties lacked a single abortion provider; one of every three women lived in a county without abortion services.<sup>29</sup>

No studies have confirmed a link between violence against abortion providers and clinics and the reduction in the number of clinics nationwide, but the decline in the number of abortion providers occurred against the backdrop of extreme violence. Between 1993 and 2010, eight abortion providers were killed, six at work, one at home, and one, Dr. George Tiller, at his church. Thousands of providers reported being terrorized and dozens of clinics have been vandalized and firebombed. In 2000, over half of all U.S. abortion providers reported that they had experienced some form of harassment from anti-

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<sup>27</sup> Jennifer J. Frost et al., "Estimating the Impact of Serving New Clients by Expanding Funding for Title X," *Occasional Report*, no. 33 (New York: Guttmacher Institute, November 2006), 7.

<sup>28</sup> Rose, *Safe, Legal, and Unavailable?*, 89.

<sup>29</sup> Tracy A. Weitz, "What Physicians Need to Know About the Legal Status of Abortion in the United States," *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology* 52, no. 2 (June 2009): 130.

abortion activists.<sup>30</sup> Concurrently, few medical education programs offered abortion training as part of the standard curriculum for students specializing in obstetrics or gynecology. Abortion provision, which has always lacked cachet within the medical profession, remained on the sidelines of American medical practices in the post-Roe period.<sup>31</sup> And the spike in violence—arson in particular—made it more expensive to operate abortion clinics. Because most U.S. clinics have been “stand-alone” operations, clinic owners have shouldered increased insurance, security, and legal expenses that accompanied the spike in violence.

Abortion opponents’ efforts to chip away at women’s right to legal abortion have been generally successful. Between 1973 and 1989, most challenges to women’s right to abortions during the first trimester of pregnancy were found unconstitutional. However, the standard for evaluating the constitutional merits of challenges to abortion rights began to change in 1989, with *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, when the Supreme Court allowed for greater state regulation and made it more possible to consider the legal rights of fetuses.<sup>32</sup> Three years later, states were given even greater power to restrict women’s right to abortion, so long as those restrictions did not place an “undue burden” on women, in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*.<sup>33</sup> The undue burden standard was so high, that parental notification requirements, waiting periods, and data reporting requirements were permissible, despite their potential to jeopardize women’s health or threaten their privacy.

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<sup>30</sup> Diane di Mauro and Carole Joffe, “The Religious Right and the Reshaping of Sexual Policy: An Examination of Reproductive Rights and Sexuality Education,” *Sexuality Research Social Policy* 4, no. 1 (March 2007): 73.

<sup>31</sup> See Carole E. Joffe, *Doctors of Conscience: The Struggle to Provide Abortion Before and After “Roe v. Wade”* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 47-48 and 94.

<sup>32</sup> *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services*, 492 U.S. 490 (1989).

<sup>33</sup> *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

Perhaps the most stunning legal victory for the anti-abortion movement occurred when the Supreme Court upheld the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 in *Gonzales v. Carhart* in 2007.<sup>34</sup> Writing for the majority, Justice Anthony Kennedy adopted a logic that long-circulated in anti-abortion circles: pregnant women need to be protected from themselves. Since the late 1970s, anti-abortion activists have claimed that abortion causes physical and emotional harm. They were successful lobbyists at the state level, convincing legislators that parents have a stake in their daughters' reproductive decisions. As of 2011, forty-four states required minors to notify or obtain the consent of their parents before obtaining abortions. The implicit message of state-level parental notification laws and with *Carhart* is that women and girls lack the ability to make serious, permanent decisions about their reproductive lives. When courts questioned women's ability to consider the implications of abortion, adult women were subjected to a scrutiny once reserved for girls.

For anti-abortion activists in the late-twentieth century U.S., morality politics intersected with the biological realities of pregnancy in a straightforward manner. The moment of conception, they maintained, marked the beginning of life: it would be immoral for stronger, more capable humans to interrupt an unfolding life. The arguments offered in the 1970s—by Marjory Mecklenburg, who suggested that women needed affordable birth control in order for demand for abortion to decrease, or by Juli Loesch, who proposed that the state needed to provide financial assistance to poor mothers in order for motherhood to be a realistic option for all women—had faded out of the movement. These nuanced positions, which accounted for the medical and legal vagaries of pregnancy, were not compatible with the political and religious worldview that broke the debate into two camps: killers and defenders. The mobilization of evangelical Christians

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<sup>34</sup> *Gonzales v. Carhart*, 127 U.S. 1610 (2007). See Reva B. Siegel, "Dignity and the Politics of Protection: Abortion Restrictions under Casey/Carhart," *Yale Law Journal* 117 (2008): 1694-1801.

into the anti-abortion movement changed the terms of the movement. In order to maintain positions of leadership within the movement, women who had been at the moderate to progressive end of the pro-life spectrum had to move to the right. To support abortion during the first trimester of pregnancy, or to make exceptions to complete bans on the procedure, would make their logic, that “all life is sacred,” vulnerable to attack.

Drawing upon earlier protest traditions, women who organized the first anti-abortion groups staged demonstrations that had both performative and political dimensions. Protests, which were first held at public sites, including the Pentagon, eventually moved to clinics, then finally to physicians’ neighborhoods. As the tactics became more aggressive, the divide between the professional and grassroots anti-abortion movement became more pronounced. Women nurtured and sustained both violent and non-violent tactics throughout the period. Religion does not cause anti-abortion extremism, of course, but it did provide language, symbols, and structure for thousands of men and women who believe that abortion is murder. Some anti-abortion activists achieved remarkable success in secular legal and legislative bodies, but most grassroots activists found solace in private, expressly religious—usually Christian—groups. The influence of women in these conservative, religious circles has been remarkable, if paradoxical.

Unlike other twentieth-century conservative political movements, including the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, the Nazi Party in Germany, and the Croix de Feu in France, the U.S. anti-abortion movement did not have a designated women’s section.<sup>35</sup> This is likely due to two factors. First, since its inception, women have constituted at least

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<sup>35</sup> See Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); and Caroline Campbell, “Women and Men in French Authoritarianism: Gender in the Croix de Feu and Parti Social Français, 1927-1947” (Ph.D. diss., Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 2009).



half of the contemporary movement. Second, most anti-abortion organizations were formed in the wake of second-wave feminism. Whether they acknowledge the influence of feminism or not, the structure of the movement generally reflected an egalitarian approach to organizing. Despite the close collaboration between men and women and women's ability to rise to positions of leadership, movement leaders—both male and female—drew upon traditional tropes about proper gender roles. The very women who left their families or delayed starting families in order to organize rallies, travel the nation on speaking tours, and take posts in presidential administrations spoke eloquently about the need to restore traditional gender roles and the social disruption caused by the progressive movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

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