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## Women's Liberation and Sixties Armed Resistance

[Choonib Lee](#)

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### Women's Liberation and Sixties Armed Resistance

[Choonib Lee](#)

On 9 October 1969, about 50–70 women from the Weatherman gathered at Grant Park in Chicago to march toward the city's Armed Forces Induction Center.<sup>1</sup> The Weatherman was made up of extremists from the national New Left group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and was later referred to as the "Weather Underground." The Weatherwomen, including Bernardine Dohrn, Cathy Wilkerson, and Diana Oughton, had planned to shut down the draft board office as an antiwar demonstration.<sup>2</sup> They were wearing helmets, heavy gloves, and boots and were carrying Vietcong flags—a few women were even holding wooden sticks and pipes.<sup>3</sup> Facing hundreds of police, they could go no farther than half a block, and a dozen women were arrested. At the park, Dohrn distinguished the Weatherwomen's march from the actions of the feminists, saying, "We're not picketing in front of bra factories . . . This is not a self-indulgent bullshit women's movement."<sup>4</sup> Reminding the public of the anti-Miss America Pageant protestors in the previous year—called "bra burners" by the media—the Weatherwomen demanded women's strength and courage as revolutionaries, fighting for antiracism, anti-imperialism, and antisexism rather than for women's issues alone. This article focuses on those revolutionary women, especially Weatherwomen: what women's liberation **[End Page 25]** meant for them and how they practiced their women's movement throughout their armed struggles.

Radical women had worked together for antiracism and antiwar efforts during the 1960s, and together they experienced indisputable sexism within male-controlled movements. However, militant women, like Weatherwomen and Black Panther women, kept their

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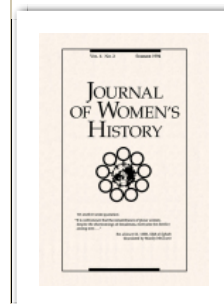
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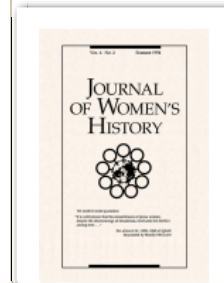
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and male-identified.<sup>6</sup> For the feminists, their women's liberation movement was a different style of activism: distinctly for women—particularly American women—and purposefully pacifistic, as sociologist Gilda Zwerman observed.<sup>7</sup> The participation of women in armed and clandestine groups, like the Black Panther Party (BPP), its extremist faction the Black Liberation Army, and most notoriously the Weatherman, raised serious questions about what women's liberation meant, dividing feminists over "the question of arms and violence."<sup>8</sup>

Reflecting the contemporary conflicts of the sixties, historical literature has marginalized women involved in armed resistance, particularly Weatherwomen, in spite of significant numbers of feminists who were also involved in violent activism, like feminist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Susan Saxe.<sup>9</sup> The accounts of women's armed resistance in women's history has tended to be buried within the more pervasively positive, peaceful, and mainstream antipatriarchal feminist movements.<sup>10</sup> I believe that the same tendency has been reinforced in prominent second-wave feminist narratives, which labeled all women as nonviolent pacifists, or at least peace promoters.<sup>11</sup> The relationship between women and violence is normally categorized as victimization through the narrative of violence *against* women, as outlined by Susan Brownmiller.<sup>12</sup> Feminist sociologist Becky Thompson calls this mainstream women's history "hegemonic feminism," which consequently omits militant women of color and antiracist white women like Black Panthers and Weatherwomen.<sup>13</sup> Hegemonic feminism largely focuses on sexism and patriarchy as the fundamental oppressions for universal women, disregarding class, race, and sexuality in its analyses. In these hegemonic narratives of second-wave **[End Page 26]** feminism, feminist perspectives on women in militant groups are exclusively limited to the relationship between women and men. Radical feminists, especially Robin Morgan, criticized revolutionary women, particularly Weatherwomen, for being masculine and male-identified, or submissive to men.<sup>14</sup> These views of women as powerless victims of male sexism and heterosexual exploitation made revolutionary women invisible in feminist history and diminished the significance of the roles of female members within militant groups and sixties radicalism.

Recent histories have given slightly more attention to women's armed resistance in the sixties, albeit without conducting extensive inquiries into those women's thoughts or including sufficient feminist perspectives.<sup>15</sup> Based primarily on new sources—personal interviews and...



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## Women's Liberation and Sixties Armed Resistance

On 9 October 1969, about 50–70 women from the Weatherman gathered at Grant Park in Chicago to march toward the city's Armed Forces Induction Center.<sup>1</sup> The Weatherman was made up of extremists from the national New Left group, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and was later referred to as the "Weather Underground." The Weatherwomen, including Bernadine Dohm, Cathy Wilkerson, and Diana Oughton, had planned to shut down the draft board office as an antiwar demonstration.<sup>2</sup> They were wearing helmets, heavy gloves, and boots and were carrying Vietcong flags—a few women were even holding wooden sticks and pipes.<sup>3</sup> Facing hundreds of police, they could go no farther than half a block, and a dozen women were arrested. At the park, Dohm distinguished the Weatherwomen's march from the actions of the feminists, saying, "We're not picketing in front of bra factories . . . This is not a self-indulgent bullshit women's movement."<sup>4</sup> Reminding the public of the anti-Miss America Pageant protestors in the previous year—called "bra burners" by the media—the Weatherwomen demanded women's strength and courage as revolutionaries, fighting for antiracism, anti-imperialism, and antisexism rather than for women's issues alone. This article focuses on those revolutionary women, especially Weatherwomen: what women's liberation

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