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HIST4435 US History 1945-73: From the Cold War to the Counterculture

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### **How did alternative newspapers respond to critique of male draft resisters and anti-war protesters' masculinity by the mainstream press during the Vietnam War?**

Ehrenreich asserts that draft resisters and antiwar protesters laid responsibility for the Vietnam War at the door of 'errant masculinity', and even abandoned masculinity as a yardstick altogether.<sup>1</sup> In fact, alternative newspapers, supporters of draft resistance, turn mainstream modes of critiquing conscientious objectors' (COs') masculinity back on the established press. Standing against the war is presented as archetypally masculine behavior: the 'cowards' are those who allow the war to continue despite majority public opposition to it.<sup>2</sup> By analyzing the specific arguments and language used to defend draft resistance, and the attitudes demonstrated towards women and domesticity, I will demonstrate that the underground press subscribed firmly to the masculine values promoted by the establishment. Theirs was at least a 'complicit masculinity', rather than 'subordinate'.<sup>3</sup>

Mainstream newspapers present draft resisters as immature, scheming and cowardly. As Ehrenreich points out, these accusations pose a challenge to the protesters' masculinity.<sup>4</sup> Avoiding direct action by refusing to fight a war and engaging in subterfuge to avoid declaring objection outright are passive behaviors, associated with femininity in Western philosophy. Interviews with those hiding out in Canada published in *The*

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1983), 106, 107.

<sup>2</sup> Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: the antiwar movement of the Vietnam era* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 73; James Bevel, 'A Movement to End Mass Murder', *The Resistance*, March 15-April 3, 1968, 11.

<sup>3</sup> Congdon, Brad, *Leading with the Chin: Writing American Masculinities in Esquire, 1960-1989* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, 11.

*Washington Post* portray the resisters as spineless, irresponsible trouble-makers. The title, 'Draft Dodgers Conduct Own Anti-US Underground War From Canadian Sanctuary', argues that their actions constitute underhand behavior. One subtitle calls them 'paranoia orientated', and a Canadian collaborator is quoted saying that he 'paint[s] the picture as black as [he] can' to resisters concerning what will happen if they return to the US, suggesting CO culture is based on deception and an immature propensity for melodrama. The resisters are 'tired' of explaining themselves to the press: Maffre comments that many promised 'to talk with The Washington Post, but [...] had second thoughts and stayed away'.<sup>5</sup> Considering their peers are fighting on the frontlines of a war, and that this interview does not put them at any risk of arrest, the COs seem no more than 'a passive breed doing nothing and going nowhere' with none of the sense of duty associated with a grown man.<sup>6</sup>

Resisters who do submit themselves to legal punishments are presented as manipulating the system to get the minimum sentence. J Harry Muir's 'guilty plea [...] com[es] as a surprise', and its mention just after the comment that 'he could have been given [...] five years at hard labor' implies his decision to plead guilty was taken merely to avoid this.<sup>7</sup> Draft resisters also have a predisposition to fraud: thirty-eight Washington men are reported to have 'faked deferments by using AF forms', and *The Atlanta Constitution* describes a 'draft-dodging traveler [who] winds up in [an] Egyptian jail', having 'stole[n], lied and bluffed his way around much of the world'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Maffre, 'Draft Dodgers Conduct Own Anti-US Underground War From Canadian Sanctuary', *The Washington Post*, January 22, 1967, E1.

<sup>6</sup> Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 11; Scott Young, 'Draft-dodgers: a passive breed doing nothing and going nowhere', *The Globe and Mail*, February 16, 1968, 7.

<sup>7</sup> 'Soldier Receives 2-Year Sentence for Anti-War Acts', *New York Times*, Feb 24, 1967, 2.

<sup>8</sup> '38 Nabbed in Biggest Draft Fraud', *The Washington Post*, March 31, 1966, A1; 'Draft Dodging Traveller winds up in Egyptian Jail', *The Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1970, 8C.

Some stories are more direct in their criticism of draft resisters' masculinity, openly poking fun at those who do not fit the macho ideal. An associated press story mocks former CO Jonathan Spicer, whose 'strongest swear word was, 'Golly'' and 'could not develop a tough exterior [...] until he went to work aiding the wounded at Khe Sanh'.<sup>9</sup> Spicer's deployment is a remedy to his conscientious objection and makes a man out of him, suggesting draft resisters are less than men. *The Sun* is even more straightforward: one story reports on a resister who fled to Canada in 'girl's clothing'. The claim that his 'shoulder-length hair' led to the suggestion in court that he might benefit from a psychiatric evaluation raises not only serious questions about the masculinity of the draft resisters, but the wider countercultural movement.<sup>10</sup>

Comparison of these publications to the alternative press demonstrates that underground newspapers used the same language and arguments made against draft resistance to argue that the establishment and their supporters were the ones betraying traditional masculinity by supporting the war. *Berkeley Barb* writer Ady contends it is the government who are 'coward[ly]' in their secrecy over Vietnam and their use of 'informers' in dealing with college students.<sup>11</sup> In *The Resistance*, Bevel presents those who 'g[e]t scared [...] and ha[ve] to go get an army' and 'good white folks' who oppose the war but do not act on their feelings as the 'cowards'.<sup>12</sup> Non-violence is a harder 'fight' than warfare, and the true mark of manhood: he tells the reader 'when I became a man, I didn't need a gun'.<sup>13</sup> Rather than rejecting conventional definitions of masculinity, or masculinity altogether,

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<sup>9</sup> 'War-Hater, Badly Hurt, Now Hero', *The Austin Statesman*, March 11, 1968, 6.

<sup>10</sup> 'Jail Term Given to Draft Dodger', *The Sun*, August 19, 1967, B6.

<sup>11</sup> D. Howard Ady, 'Secret USAF mission to the Himalayas', *Berkeley Barb*, July 28, 1967, 2; 'FBI Agents Visit Campus', *Los Angeles Underground*, 1967, 2; Harvey Stone, 'Southern Hospitality: Austin', *The Rag*, February 26, 1968, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Bevel, 'A Movement', 11, 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

writers and editors for the alternative press laid claim to the same values the establishment espoused in their defense of COs.

Indeed, the alternative newspapers go so far as to depict the antiwar protests as a form of warfare. The protestors are participants in soldierly action, rather than simply victims of government militarism. *The Resistance* estimates the numbers of 'men' who will turn out to protest in Chicago by city, as if describing army units.<sup>14</sup> A cartoon later in the paper shows a soldier being awarded a medal 'for manning a recruiting station on campus', suggesting antiwar activists were as much a military force to be reckoned with as any army.<sup>15</sup> The draft resisters were as engaged in the manly business of war as those who had gone to Vietnam, and were therefore no less masculine than they were. Again, this demonstrates that the alternative press advocated the same standards of masculinity as the establishment, rather than producing any radical new philosophy of manly behavior.

Those involved in the alternative press tended to comprise the more conservative element of the antiwar movement, and therefore held less radical views concerning masculinity. Ehrenreich's argument fails because she assumes that all the subgroups of the counterculture operated under the same principles as the hippies. As Rossinow points out, the student-led New Left, which represented a significant proportion of alternative press leadership, was much more conventional in its values than the hippies, whose culture it adopted primarily for political purposes.<sup>16</sup> Stories in the alternative press reveal a cautious attitude towards drug use, evident in a *Los Angeles Underground* article on their capacity to 'blow' the 'mind', and render one's 'capacity to function in this society just about nil'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 'National Survey', *The Resistance*, March 15-April 3, 1968, 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> 'It's for manning a recruiting station on campus,' Cartoon, *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Rossinow, 'The Revolution', 100, 106.

<sup>17</sup> 'Drug Devastation', *Los Angeles Underground*, 1967, 5.

DeBenedetti describes how reports on the trial and execution of Nazi paramilitary leader Adolf Eichmann reinforced on the American public the importance of actively opposing wrongdoing.<sup>18</sup> This led to a resurgence of the value of civic responsibility amongst New Left students, despite its association with the oppressive and ‘still [...] McCarthy period’: the Port Huron Statement’s primary complaint was that ‘almost no students value activity as citizens’.<sup>19</sup> Mettler demonstrates that encouraging participation in local communities and wider American society was key to 1950s governmental philosophy, illustrated by policies like the GI Bill and the ‘mental hygiene’ videos.<sup>20</sup> Despite their objection to the political system of the establishment, the alternative press continued to advocate for its core values.

The commitment of the alternative press to a relatively conservative conception of gender roles is evident in their treatment of women, whose marginalization within the New Left is well-documented. Todd Gitlin admits that the SDS was obsessively focused on ‘homoerotic male bonding’ in a way that meant it became ‘male-run’.<sup>21</sup> In his chapter, Rossinow includes a photograph of a woman washing a man’s feet at a University of Texas ‘Gentle Thursday’ event: close reading of underground newspapers suggests this was a fair representation of the dynamic between the sexes within the countercultural movement.<sup>22</sup> *Rolling Stone* is orientated towards a male readership, vastly over-representing male stars amongst the musicians they hold up as role models. The other thing ‘Richard Goldstein, Jim Morrison, Paul Williams, Robert Crumb, Ed Sanders, Michael Lynch, James Kennen and Richard Meltzer have in common’ besides ‘The New Paperback Magazine’ is the fact that

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<sup>18</sup> DeBenedetti and Chatfield, *An American Ordeal*, 72.

<sup>19</sup> Students for a Democratic Society, ‘The Port Huron Statement,’ (New York: Students for a Democratic Society, 1964 [1962]), 2.

<sup>20</sup> Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The GI Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>21</sup> Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 108, 375.

<sup>22</sup> Rossinow, ‘The Revolution’, 114.

they are all men.<sup>23</sup> The only woman mentioned in the whole 14<sup>th</sup> June 1969 issue is Irish civil rights leader Bernadette Devlin, who is objectified her albeit ironic description as ‘fiercely beautiful’.<sup>24</sup> An article on legislature against art that ‘simulate[s] [sexual] feeling’ encourages its readers to pursue real-life sexual satisfaction instead with the words ‘get on with it, brothers’, establishing men as leaders both of the counterculture’s sexual revolution, and in the heterosexual bedroom. Even in the more radical *Haight-Ashbury Tribune*, the role of women within the antiwar movement is characterized by Joan Baez as primarily one of service through ‘say[ing] yes to the young men who say no to the draft’.<sup>25</sup> The attitude the alternative press took towards gender roles, despite their pretensions concerning their support for sexual liberation, shows that their conceptions of masculinity and femininity were far from a radical deviation from those of the previous decade, or the rest of society.

The conventionality of the antiwar movement’s conception of gender roles is also evident in their fetishization of racial minorities. *Rolling Stone* promotes the hero-worship of musicians who play the new fusion between black and white music, rock and roll, to the point of running a competition for lookalikes of the Grateful Dead’s Ron ‘Pigpen’ McKernan.<sup>26</sup> Echols argues that this adoration of the ‘cool’ rock musician, a version of the ‘cool cat’, was due to seeing the black men who played a key role in creating the musical genre as free from the ball and chain of domesticity, and the associated attachment to women and femininity, in a way that was ultimately racist.<sup>27</sup> As Congdon shows, James Baldwin made exactly the same argument in *Esquire* magazine in 1968 about self-declared

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<sup>23</sup> ‘What do Richard Goldstein, Jim Morrison, Paul Williams, Robert Crumb, Ed Sanders, Michael Lynch, James Kennen and Richard Meltzer have in common?’, *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1969, 25.

<sup>24</sup> *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1969, 38.

<sup>25</sup> Joan Baez, ‘Draft-Age? Listen’, *Haight-Ashbury Tribune*, October, 1967, 15.

<sup>26</sup> *Rolling Stone*, June 14, 1969, 7.

<sup>27</sup> Alice Echols, ‘We Gotta Get out of This Place’: Notes Toward a ReMapping of the Sixties,’ *Socialist Review* 22, no.2 (April 1992): 17.

radical Norman Mailer's 1957 article, 'The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster', which argues that hipsters' (fans of jazz music) lifestyles are inspired by the 'art of the primitive' exemplified in the behavior of black Americans, particularly their supposed promiscuity.<sup>28</sup> The fact that critiquing an article from the 1950s was still considered important and relevant in the 1960s suggests that very little had changed in terms of understandings of black people, or attitudes towards women and femininity, amongst alternative thinkers even late in the succeeding decade. The featuring of Baldwin and Mailer in the popular magazine *Esquire* also suggests that there was little difference in fact behind the New Left's and the establishment's definition of masculinity: it was merely that *Esquire* aimed to convince their fashion-conscious readership that non-conformity to domesticated masculinity was determined by what you read rather than public action, in order to keep social change at a controlled pace.<sup>29</sup> All that the New Left behind the alternative press advocated was that these values be carried through to their conclusion in public as well as in private, and as soon as possible.

Alternative newspapers responded to criticism of draft resisters' and antiwar protestors' masculinity turning the arguments and language of the establishment directly back on them. Their portrayal of the government and those who did not act directly to oppose the war as cowards, and their use of militaristic language to describe the actions of the war protesters suggests that they wanted their masculinity to be measured by the same yardstick applied to the young men heading off to fight in Vietnam. Their conservative attitude towards gender roles with respect to women, reflected not only in their interactions with the opposite sex within their texts, but also indirectly in their idealization

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<sup>28</sup> Congdon, *Leading with the Chin*, 36, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Congdon, *Leading with the Chin*, 36.

of black men (or at least the characteristics they projected onto them), suggests that the antiwar protesters of the New Left and the pro-war conservatives who clashed so violently were not so far removed from one another in terms of values. They both believed that direct action in the face of injustice and for the sake of freedom, and dedication to one's duty to society were the greatest traits an American male could possess: the justification for escalation in Vietnam in the first place was defense of its people from totalitarian rule. This shines a light on the similarities between the political right and left in a way that could be applied to heal divisions in today's world. As Bernstein put it in his analysis of the House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, both the Republican government and the Hollywood screenwriters were 'trying[...] to be good liberals': more often than not, right and left simply have different means of reaching the same ends.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *Trumbo*, directed by Peter Askin (2007; New York: Magnolia, 2008), DVD.



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