Solidarity through Celebration: The third World Women's Alliance and international Women's Day

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SOLIDARITY THROUGH CELEBRATION: THE THIRD WORLD WOMEN'S ALLIANCE AND INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

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Introduction

As the Sixties came to an end, revolution was in the air. The United States military suffered heavy losses against North Vietnamese guerrillas, the Cuban Revolution had established a socialist country in America's own hemisphere, and African colonies were rising up against their colonial rulers. Young leftists of color in the United States, influenced by the long struggle for civil rights and the anti-war movements of the 1950s and 1960s, turned to the struggle which seemed to be engulfing the planet. Influenced by the writings of Chairman Mao and Franz Fanon, they began to view their struggle as racial minorities within the United States as part of a larger struggle, and themselves as colonized people living in the belly of an imperialist beast.

The Third World Left emerged in the final years of the decade as a network of anti-imperialist organizations, coalitions, and groups, who felt solidarity with the Third World liberation struggles and regarded them as sources of inspiration. These organizations were often militant and inspired by revolutionary nationalism and Marxist, Leninist, and/or Maoist thought. While most organizations had a mixed-gender membership, the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) stood out for being an exclusively women's organization. Formed in 1969, it grew out of a women's caucus in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and had Black, Puerto Rican, Chicana, Asian-American, and Native American members. Rejecting the women's liberation movement's singular attention on defeating patriarchy, Alliance members developed a Third World theory and praxis, dedicating themselves to destroying the "triple jeopardy" of capitalism, sexism and racism simultaneously. Women of color, they argued, were the most oppressed group and therefore an essential force in the revolution.

In 1971, the organization expanded form New York to the Bay Area. Although the two chapters shared a name and a philosophy, the differences in their membership base and the

geographical distance separated them since the beginning. In the process of defining the chapter's ideology, the Bay Area members identified their two primary objectives as "[involving] sisters in the anti-imperialist struggle through (…) work, criticism, and study", and "[promoting] Third World solidarity."[1] A key approach they adopted in pursuing their objectives was organizing annual International Women's Day celebrations. From 1974 to 1979, the celebrations brought together Third World, women's, and leftist organizations and included speeches, plays, music, discussions, and education. "More than any other activity", recalls former Alliance member Patricia Romney, "International Women's Day (…) epitomized the spirit of TWWA in the Bay Area."[2]

This thesis will analyze how the Bay Area TWWA chapter promoted Third World solidarity, with the International Women's Day celebrations as case studies. Though studying these grassroots organizing efforts, it seeks to shed light on how the U.S. Third World Left activists understood solidarity and their own role in the worldwide struggle. Furthermore, it aims to illuminate women's role in Third World solidarity and the broader movement. As a woman-led effort, International Women's Day highlights the specific concerns of women revolutionaries and shows how they put theory into practice. The thesis will argue that the Alliance fostered solidarity in three main ways: by involving women in the organizing process to develop their skills and to build community; by finding, creating, and celebrating the commonalities between them; and by breaking misconceptions through education and positive representations.

The analysis is principally based on primary sources from the digitized TWWA collections housed at Smith College. In recent years, extensive efforts have been made to

[1] "Handout, June 23, 1973," in Mobilizing Meetings, 1973-75, Third World Women's Alliance, Bay Area chapter records, Sophia Smith Collection, SSC-MS-00697, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, MA (hereinafter TWWA Bay Area Records).
[2] Patricia Romney, *We Were There: The Third World Women's Alliance and the Second Wave* (New York: Feminist Press, 2021), 176.

restore and collect documents, such as letters, speeches, financial records, meeting minutes, and leaflets, from former Alliance members. These archival sources provide valuable insights into the internal workings of the organization. Notably, there is a wealth of documents pertaining to the International Women's Day celebrations, including scripts for skits, posters, programs with artwork, and song lyrics. To supplement these sources, transcripts of interviews with former Alliance members have been consulted, as well as writings by them, most importantly the book *We Were There: The Third World Women's Alliance and the Second Wave* (2021) by Romney, which combines interviews and archival research with her personal narrative.

This study will contribute to the growing scholarship on the Third World left, so far theorized by scholars including Max Elbaum, Cynthia Young, and Laura Pulido. It will also provide a new point of view on the Third World Women's Alliance. Most existing scholarship focuses on the New York chapter and erroneously lumps it and the Bay Area chapter together as one organisation with a cohesive agenda and activities. Although attention will be paid on the roots of the Alliance until the point the chapters separated to show how they developed their Third World identity and ideology, the focus will be on the Bay Area, which has received very little attention. Furthermore, the TWWA has so far mainly been studied as a Black feminist or a Black Power organization, despite its diverse membership base.[3] This thesis will, instead, consider it as part of the wider Third World Left in the United States. While the Alliance members were inspired by Black Power, particularly the international, anti-imperialist strand of it, they never identified as a Black Power organization. They believed sexism and racism to be legacies of capitalism and imperialism, read Marxist and

[3] For the TWWA as a Black feminist organization, see Stephen Ward, Kimberley Springer, Ashley D. Farmer, Benita Roth, and Kristin Anderson-Bricker.

Maoist literature, and strove to unite all working people of color. Identifying as a Third World organization most accurately encompassed their goals.

This study is divided into three chapters. Chapter 1 will provide an overview on the scholarship on the Third World Left, including women on the Third World Left and the Third World Women's Alliance. It will argue that while Third World ideology within U.S. revolutionary nationalist groups, such as the Black Panthers, has received scholarly consideration, more attention should be paid on multiracial coalitions and activism that was not limited to specific racial/ethnic communities. Furthermore, it will argue that although some studies exist about women on the Third World Left, the TWWA has not been accurately represented in scholarship, since it has primarily been studied as a Black feminist organization.

The second chapter will chart the development of feminist thought on the U.S. political left during the 1960s and 1970s, the period traditionally known as the second wave of feminism. It will argue that feminist consciousness developed at different times for white and women of color. For women of color, the development of a Third World identity and theory was essential in allowing them to consider women's issues within the movement, and as a result many Black and other women of color organizations were Third World oriented. It will also trace the formation of the Third World Women's Alliance chapters in New York and the Bay Area and argue that the Alliance should be considered a Third World Left organization due to its diverse members base and its primary focus on anti-imperialism.

The third chapter will examine the International Women's Day celebrations as a case study. It will provide an in-depth analysis of the various activities the Alliance organized and their role in fostering Third World solidarity both domestically and internationally. It will shed light on the Alliance's innovative approaches as well as their shortcomings, revealing instances where important factors were overlooked or ignored in their pursuit of unity. It will

show how, through community-building, celebrating commonalities across cultural lines, and education, the Alliance brought to bring about transformative change in their communities and around the world.

It must be noted that there are limitations to the study. While a substantial number of sources are available online, some have not been digitized and are only available at Smith College, inaccessible due to limited time and resources. When studying the International Women's Day celebrations, the lack of external viewpoints and outside sources posed a constraint. Besides some newspaper clippings, all sources provide the perspective of leading Alliance members. There is almost no photographic material available. Furthermore, this study does not attempt to provide a full picture of the TWWA. A more comprehensive understanding of the organization would require exploring its other coalition efforts, for example its work in the field of women's health.

This study is not about the developing world or decolonizing struggles, but the concept of "Third World" and the related political ideology adopted by U.S. activists of color. The TWWA defined "Third World" as the colonized or formerly colonized countries that have been exploited by first world powers, as well as individuals with ancestors from Asia, Africa, and Latin America living in internal colonies within the U.S. Internal colonies, as defined by Third World leftists, were isolated and concentrated urban communities that experienced systemic oppression akin to that suffered by colonies in the traditional Third World and could only achieve liberation through revolution.[4] As a political ideology of the time, "Third World" was shorthand for a multipronged political focus, a "way of signaling an intersectional focus on empire, race, class, and often gender that did not reduce their political struggle to any single issue."[5] Linda Burnham, former member of the Bay Area chapter,

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[4] Ramon A. Gutierrez, "Internal Colonialism: An American Theory of Race," *Du Bois Review* 1, no. 2 (2004): 282.
[5] Cynthia Ann Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 14.

further notes that “Third World” was used in the same way as “people of color” is used today.[6]

A study of the Third World Women’s Alliance’s International Women's Day celebrations offers an intriguing perspective on 1970s activism, particularly on the contributions of women of color, which are often overlooked in accounts of the era. Contrary to past assumptions, the participation of Black and other women of color in radical movements was not only influential but also groundbreaking in nature. By examining the Alliance within the broader framework of the Third World Left, this study attempts to shed light on the unique position of a group that applied a feminist perspective into the wider context of civil rights, Black Power, and Marxist/Leninist organizing, and emphasizing a class-conscious, anti-racist approach to feminism. Through an exploration of this multifaceted and at times contradictory group, this thesis aims to illuminate their ambitious vision for radical change and their pioneering insights into the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class, which continue to resonate today.

[6] See Linda Burnham, interviewed by Loretta J. Ross, March 18, 2005, transcript. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 22.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

When historian Donna Murch sat down to watch *Forrest Gump*, she was horrified. A scene portrayed members of the Black Panther Party, a Black Power organization active during the late 1960s, aggressively hurling insults at the white characters. Such portrayals in popular culture have created an image of the Panthers as destructive and one-dimensional, and yet this image, Murch argues, is "exactly the opposite of what made the Panthers so powerful". In truth, the members were inspired by Marxism and they believed in class struggle. Far from the anti-white militants of the big screen, the real Panthers advocated for cross-racial, anti-imperialist coalition politics. In fact, it was their cross-racial, revolutionary organizing which made them such a target for law enforcement, Murch concludes. She was so appalled by *Forrest Gump* that she had to walk out of the theatre.[7]

Older studies of the !960s tend to similarly dismiss activism after 1968 as one-dimensionally chaotic and destructive.[8] The focus of scholarship has been either on the white, young, anti-war Left – which has falsely painted the entire Left as white[9] – or on the civil rights and Black Power movements, which, as Cynthia Young has argued, has overly emphasized race while downplaying the influence of class and gender in the movement.[10] As a result, radical organizations with a membership of mainly people of color that opposed capitalism and/or imperialism have not received enough attention. However, recent scholarship has reconsidered the period, and a new concept has emerged: the Third World Left. Due to its disputed definition and its small size, this network of organizations that

[7] "The Real Black Panthers," NPR Thoroughline, Podcast audio, February 2, 2023. https://www.npr.org/2023/01/31/1152784993/the-real-black-panthers-2021.
[8] For example, Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1987).
[9] Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 2.
[10] Young, *Soul Power,* 6.

linked the struggles of people of color in American cities to the worldwide decolonization movement remains an under-studied part of late 1960s and 1970s activism.

The first part of this chapter aims to provide an overview of the existing scholarship on the Third World Left, starting with a review of the growing body of literature that explicitly engages with the concept of a "Third World Left." Additionally, it will explore how the fields of Black Power, Chicano, and Asian American studies have contributed to our understanding of how the nationalist movements in the U.S. developed a sense of Third World identification that allowed them to forge connections across borders. It argues that pioneering scholars have shown the diversity of activism beyond the year 1968 and have begun to uncover the variety of ways activists united around a Third World identity. However, it also contends that more studies are needed about multiracial organizations and coalitions that operated outside, or across, specific racial/ethnic movements.

The second part of the chapter will focus on women, first highlighting recent research on the contributions of women in the Third World Left, and then discussing the Third World Women's Alliance, one of the most prominent examples of such organizing. It argues that despite the growing scholarship on the Third World Left and women in the movement, the TWWA has so far not been considered as a Third World Left organization. Instead, the majority of writings designate the TWWA as a Black women's organization, an example of a growing Black feminist consciousness within the Black Power movement. This is primarily due to scholars' focus on the New York chapter, with the Bay Area chapter being largely overlooked.

The Third World Left

Scholars who study the U.S. Third World Left share a common goal of providing a more nuanced view of the 1960s and 70s. They argue that studying the radical movements beyond

1968 show that the era gave birth to ideas and organizations that had the power to challenge American society. In addition, they emphasize the importance of coalition-building efforts across ethnic lines and national borders and investigate how – and why – the US Third World Left strove to bridge the geographical and cultural distances between themselves and the Third World.

Activist and historian Max Elbaum was among the first to foreground the Third World Left in his research. The turbulent events of 1968, Third World Liberation movements, and the growing influence of Maoist and Marxist thought, he argues, gave a new generation of American revolutionaries a "framework for taking the most radical themes articulated by Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and transforming them into a comprehensive revolutionary ideology".[11] Elbaum provides an extensive overview of organizations, such as the Black Panther Party, the Brown Berets, and the Young Lords, that were formed around a focus on race and class and the intersections of the two, and shows how they recruited members among the working class and communities of color. Despite the promise of political change, he argues, the movement failed to adapt to challenges including the rise of the Right, the increasingly noticeable flaws of China and the USSR, and the strength of US capitalism.[12] Elbaum's in-depth study marks the beginning of Third World Left scholarship, but it focuses heavily on political ideology, instead of considering cultural aspect to the activism.

Historian Cynthia Young focuses on culture and to how cultural works enhanced the politics of the Third World Left. In *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and Making of a U.S. Third World Left* she argues that activists could better imagine their community and its connections to the Third World through cultural production, and that these "cultural, material, and ideological links" challenged "U.S. economic, racial, and cultural arrangements."[13] For

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[11] Max Elbaum, "What Legacy from the Radical Internationalism of 1968?" *Radical History Review* 82 (2002): 41
[12] Ibid., 53.
[13] Young, *Soul Power*, 3.

example, she discusses how the activist documentary film group Newsreel produced an anti-imperialist critique through aesthetic experimentation in their films. Transnational cultural networks are at the center of Young's work. She points to a "time-space compression" that enabled the spread of Third World ideas – including radical literature – as one of the main requirements for the Third World Left to emerge.[14] At the same time, she also highlights the dangers of drawing parallels between people of color in the US and people in the Third World, since it could erase the differences between Third World peoples and nations and fail to acknowledge the privileges of groups living in a First World country.[15]

Why did activists join Third World Left organizations and what were the main challenges in building coalitions across racial/ethnic lines? Geographer Laura Pulido asks these questions in *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*. In a detailed account of the rise and politization of the Third World Left, Pulido compares three Los Angeles based groups, the Black Panther Party, the Chicano organization El Centro de Accion Social y Autonomo, and the Japanese-American group East Wind, to understand how they analyzed class, race, and gender. She shows that although the organizations developed along racial lines, they identified a shared struggle which enabled them to build alliances. However, Pulido also demonstrates the challenges of coalition building: the groups were affected by distinct experiences of racism, unique histories, cultures, and economic opportunities.[16] She argues that having to balance the organizations' commitments to their own racial/ethnic communities with solidarity with other oppressed groups could cause tension and confusion.[17]

Historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu's *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era*, provides a valuable perspective on Sixties radicalism

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[14] Ibid., 9.
[15] Ibid., 14.
[16] Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 4.
[17] Ibid., 153.

and internationalism, although it does not explicitly focus on the Third World Left. Wu's work explores the journeys of American activists of diverse political backgrounds, including members of the Black Panther Party and women's liberation activists, to Asia. Through their journeys, she argues, they created a "global public sphere" where they critiqued of U.S. imperialism and its role in the Vietnam War.[18] The connections to the Third World, she shows, were not only ideological or cultural exchanges, but also included traveling and meeting with Third World activists in person, often feeling empowered by their experiences and fostering strong, personal connections with the people they met. Wu argues the Americans were guided by the ideology of "radical orientalism"– idealization of the socialist, revolutionary East.[19]

As these scholars have shown, the Third World Left was a complex network of organizations and activists, formed in the gaps between more prominent movements – and inspired by them. However, they have presented differing views on what the most important influences were. Young underlines the influence of the Old Left, the Communist party and New Deal-era unions in international, leftist organizing.[20] For Elbaum, the Civil Rights movement laid the groundwork for the Third World Left by combatting McCarthyism and repression of political protest, and successfully fighting legal discrimination, which exposed the ways racism manifested itself beyond the legal sphere.[21] Pulido emphasizes the way Black Power rewrote the rules of Black struggle, substituting nonviolence and calls for integration for racial pride, nationalism, and self-defense. Most importantly, Black Power activists inspired and radicalized other racial/ethnic groups, which was a crucial step for the Third World Left to emerge. Through rejecting the power and global reach of white

[18] Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 4.
[19] Ibid., 5.
[20] Young, *Soul Power*, 3.
[21] Elbaum, "What Legacy", 39.

supremacy—thus reframing the struggle as a worldwide one—Black Power activists enabled more people to develop an international consciousness.[22]

Regardless of where its main source of influence is located, the Third World Left collaborated and intersected with Black Power and other revolutionary and cultural nationalist movements. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the scholarship done about the Third World Left it is necessary to look beyond studies of a coherent "Third World Left" to studies on specific ethnic groups and nationalist movements. While this literature review cannot cover all relevant scholarship, the following section will highlight recent scholarship on the Third World Left in Black, Chicano, and Asian-American nationalist movements.

The Third World Left and the Black Power, Chicano, and Asian American movements

Recent scholarship underscores how Third World solidarity was a fundamental aspect of the Black Power movement.[23] Correspondingly, scholars challenge the stereotype of Black Power as violent and backwards, and as the destructive counterpart of the Civil Rights Movement. The more nuanced view has also emphasized the international dimensions of Black Power.[24] From its inception, historian Peniel E. Joseph argues, the movement was influenced by Pan-Africanism, which considered the African continent as the homeland of Black Americans. With the decolonisation movements, Africa became an inspiration for a new generation. The African Liberation Support Committee, Joseph argues, was the most powerful display of

[22] Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 93.
[23] Peniel E. Joseph. "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *The Journal of American History*, 96.3 (Dec. 2009).
[24] Peniel E. Joseph, "Introduction," in Peniel E. Joseph ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4.

Black Power's internationalism, organizing the first African Liberation Day celebration in 1972 and providing financial support to former Portuguese colonies in Southern Africa.[25]

Among all the Black Power and Third World Left organizations, the Black Panther Party (BPP) has received the most scholarly attention. The group was founded in the Bay Area but later grew to be nationally and internationally known. Despite not explicitly defining itself as Marxist and lacking a comprehensive revolutionary ideology, it drew inspiration from a long history of black internationalism and anticolonial thought.[26] The internal colony theory was central to the BPP's ideology and police brutality in communities of color influenced their emphasis on community service and armed self-defense. Recent studies have shed light on the internationalism of the BPP. For example, Sean L. Malloy's *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism During the Cold War* argues that the BPP saw their struggle for self-determination as part of the worldwide socialist revolution. Their strategy "mixed street theater, radical pedagogy, and community organizing" Malloy writes, "while building a foundation for a revolution that would link black Americans with their brothers and sisters in the Third World."[27]

The focus on the interconnectedness of class and race facilitated the Black Panther Party's alliances with other Third World oriented organizations. Most importantly, the BPP's revolutionary nationalism spoke to other ethnic minorities in the U.S. who were beginning to see their situation in the same terms. Historian Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar argues that the BPP was the main influence for a score of revolutionary nationalist organizations in the late 1960s, who adapted Black Power ideas to fit their own contexts.[28] The Mexican-American Brown

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[25] Ibid., 15.
[26] Robin D.G. Kelley and Betsy Esch, "Black like Mao: Red China and Black Revolution" in Fred Ho and Bill V. Mullen, eds. *Afro Asia: Revolutionary Political and Cultural Connections Between African Americans and Asian Americans* (Duke University Press, 2008), 125-126.
[27] Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017), 6.
[28] Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, "Rainbow Radicalism: The Rise of the Radical Ethnic Nationalism," in Peniel Joseph ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights-Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 193-194.

Berets, the Puerto Rican Young Lords, the Red Guard, the Asian American Political Alliance, and their contemporaries mobilized to fight discrimination in education, healthcare, housing, and for political representation. Often, they modeled their appearance, programming, and rhetoric on the BPP, forming alliances with the BPP and each other. All were influenced by Marxist thought to some extent, identified with the Third World, and saw themselves as colonized people inside the US.[29]

These radical groups, however, were not the only manifestation of the Third World Left in Chicano and Asian American movements. In *Raza si! Guerra no! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era*, historian Lorena Oropeza argues that the Vietnam War played a galvanizing role in the wider Chicano movement. The draft and government spending on foreign wars fueled discontent among Chicanos, people of Mexican descend who were born in the U.S., leading to a shift in loyalty. Many began to challenge the tradition of Mexican-American military service as a means towards equal citizenship, viewing the US government as the enemy and themselves as a colonized "brown" race. They saw themselves engaged in the same struggle as the Vietnamese. Many Mexican Americans joined groups such as the Third World Liberation Front in California universities.[30] Similarly, historian Daryl Maeda's work *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* highlights how Asian-American activists drew inspiration from the Black Power, anti-imperialism, and anti-war movements, and how the movements influenced the formation of a multiethnic Asian American racial identity. Maeda argues that interracial and transnational solidarity was central to Asian American activism, including the critique the two "Chains of Babylon",

[29] Ibid., 226-227.
[30] Lorena Oropeza, *Raza si! Guerra no! Chicano Protest and Patriotism during the Viet Nam War Era* (Berkeley, University of California Press. 2005), 95.

racism and imperialism, through various cultural productions, and through protest of the Vietnam War.[31]

College campuses often served as battlegrounds for Third World leftist activists. A notable event that has garnered some attention is the 1968 San Francisco State College Third World Liberation Front strike. This historic alliance brought together Black, Asian American, Latino, and American Indian students who collectively went on strike for weeks to demand, successfully, the establishment of the first School of Ethnic Studies in the U.S. Karen Umemoto describes the strike as a "microcosm" of the broader struggles in the United States for self-determination, including demands for more accessible and relevant education for minority communities.[32] Similarly, in *Chains of Babylon*, Maeda highlights the role of S. I. Hayakawa, the president of San Francisco State College, who advocated of the "model minority thesis" that promoted assimilation and downplayed the realities and effects of racism in Asian-American students' lives.[33] The fact that students rebelled against Hayakawa's assimilationist stance underscores the significance of interracial (Third World) solidarity among the strikers.

This section has shown that the scholarship on the Third World Left is shedding new light to the existence of multiracial organizations and coalitions in a time that has traditionally seen characterized as a time of division and identity politics. These activists saw themselves as part of a larger struggle, recognizing their shared Third World identity within the context of the imperialist United States. They found common ground and solidarity with one another, inspired by socialist revolutions and decolonization movements in the Third World. Scholars have explored how these ideas were manifested in nationalist movements,

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[31] Daryl J. Maeda, *Chains of Babylon: The Rise of Asian America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 9.
[32] Karen Umemoto, "On Strike! San Francisco State College Strike, 1968-1969: The Role of Asian American Students," in Min Chou and Anthony Christian Ocampo, ed. *Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 25.
[33] Maeda, *Chains of Babylon*, 41.

arts and culture, and universities. However, more studies are needed about organizations and coalitions that operated outside of specific racial/ethnic movements.

Women on the Third World Left

Writing in the early 1980s, author and theorist bell hooks claimed Black women were by and large "silent" during the second wave. "It was the silence of the oppressed – that profound silence engendered by resignation," she wrote. "Contemporary black women could not join together to fight for women's rights because we did not see 'womanhood' as an important aspect of our identity."[34] This view of Black and other women of color as absent in the wave of feminist activism of the 1960s and 1970 has been proven false by a number of scholars. This section will highlight the studies done on women on the Third World Left and how the Third World identity influenced feminist theorizing. However, it will also highlight a gap in scholarship. Despite its diversity and clear anti-imperialist and socialist focus, the Third World Women's Alliance has not been considered a Third World Left organization. Instead, it has been studied as an example of Black feminist organizing.

Theorists of the wave analogy of feminism have designated the 1960s and 1970s as the primary period of the second wave. This perspective sees the first wave as having ended with women achieving the right to vote, and the second wave expanding to include reproductive rights, domestic violence, and workplace equality, among others. However, this view centers the experiences of white, middle-class women.[35] Becky Thompson argues that the wave analogy is outdated and insufficient to understand the diversity of feminist thought. According to Thompson, women of color were indeed interested in and dedicated to

[34] bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1981), 1-2.
[35] Becky Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism: Recasting the Chronology of Second Wave Feminism," in Nancy E. Hewitt, ed. *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press. 2010), 40-1.

advancing women's rights. They formed their own groups, both within civil rights and revolutionary nationalist organizations, and autonomously outside of them.[36] In *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave*, Benita Roth argues that white, Black, and Latina feminisms developed at the same time but separately due to the different issues faced by the different racial/ethnic groups. The racism within the women liberation movement and the sexism within the Black Power movement pushed women of color to develop their own feminist theories and praxis, which centered the intersections of race and gender and their impact on their lives.[37]

While studies focused on women in specific racial/ethnic groups are valuable, they also overlook a "third point of emergence" for feminist consciousness: the influence of the Third World.[38] In *Chicana Power: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement*, Maylei Blackwell argues that while women of color feminisms did develop in response to sexism and racism, a "gendered solidarity born out of U.S. third world liberation struggles" has been overshadowed.[39] Third World feminists expanded the critique of race and gender to include imperialism and capitalism, and moved beyond political rights to economic and cultural rights. They sought transnational solidarity and formed multicultural coalitions with a focus on both Third World and women's liberation.

Women were active in Third World Left organizations, but the movement was also a "site of gender struggle", Pulido argues.[40] Similar to the New Left, Civil Rights, and Black Power movements, women in the Third World Left had to fight against being sidelined and marginalized, even sexualized by the male activists. Within the organizations Pulido studied,

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[36] Ibid., 40-1.
[37] Benita Roth. *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
[38] Maylei Blackwell, *Chicana Power: Contested Histories of Feminism in the Chicano Movement* (Tucson: University of Texas Press, 2016), 23.
[39] Ibid., 23.
[40] Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 181.

women nevertheless fought to advance their rights to develop as political leaders.[41] She mentions two Third World Left organizations, the Young Lords and I Wor Kuen, who explicitly addressed gender equality in their platforms.[42] However, she does not mention the Third World Women's Alliance or other women's groups on the Third World Left.

Third World Feminism, as theorized by writers such as Gloria Anzaldua and Audre Lorde, emerged in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Third World feminists saw themselves as a distinct community, separate from both men of color and white women, inhabitants of what Anzaldua named "a new mestiza."[43] Not only did they share a political sense of solidarity, but they also shared a consciousness, an ability that allowed them to recognize the hidden structures of power that perpetuated various forms of oppression in their lives. Anzaldua and Cherrie Morada's anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981) was a manifestation of Third World Feminism, a rallying cry for women of color in the US and in the Third World.[44] Chela Sandoval has further developed the concept of Third World Feminism as a "model for oppositional political activity and consciousness". In *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000) she argues that Third World Feminism allowed different ideologies to come together and work collaboratively while acknowledging their differences.[45] However, Sandoval argues, this unique theoretical structure "remained just outside the purview of the dominant feminist theory emerging in the 1970s, functioning within it – but only as the unimaginable."[46]

The 1971 Indochinese Women's Conference is an example of an event that brought together women from different racial and cultural backgrounds to foster peace and solidarity. Six Indochinese women traveled to Canada to meet with delegations of North American

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[41] Ibid., 214.
[42] Ibid., 185. On the Young Lords, see Johanna Fernández and Iris Morales.
[43] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Aunt Lute Books, 1987).
[44] Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds. *This Bridge Called My Back* (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 1981).
[45] Chela Sandoval. *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 42.
[46] Ibid., 41.

women, from both white and Third World organizations, to discuss US involvement in the Vietnam War. Such conferences, Wu argues in *Radicals on the Road*, were an attempt to build "global sisterhood", that "simultaneously critiqued and transcended racial and cultural divides", not only by Western women but by the Indochinese women as well.[47] Studying the IWC shows, however, how fractured the North American feminists were, divided into factions by race, sexuality, and political ideology.[48] In "La Raza en Canada": San Diego Chicana Activists, the Indochinese Women's Conference of 1971, and Third World Womanism," Dionne Espinoza shows that the conference brought up tensions within Third World women's groups as well – some felt uncomfortable identifying as "Third World" instead of as Chicana or Black. However, she argues, attending the conference and making personal connections with the Indochinese women had a significant impact on attendees, leading many to develop a Third World perspective even if they hadn't held one before.[49] The conference included a day dedicated to Third World women, during which the "Third World Statement of Solidarity" was written, naming US imperialism as the common enemy and emphasizing the solidarity between US Third World women and the Indochinese women.[50]

The Third World Women's Alliance was among the organizations invited to the conference, although their representative never made it there.[51] Despite Third World solidarity being of the utmost importance to the Alliance, however, the most significant studies on the group depict it as an example of Black feminist organizing in the second wave. The following section will discuss these studies and argue that while the TWWA is a

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[47] Wu, *Radicals on the Road,* 194.
[48] Ibid., 220.
[49] Dionne Espinoza, "La Raza en Canada": San Diego Chicana Activists, the Indochinese Women's Conference of 1971, and Third World Womanism," in Dionne Espinoza, Maria Eugenia Cotera, Maylei Blackwell, eds. *Chicana Movidas: New Narratives of Activism and Feminism in the Movement Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018), 266-7.
[50] Ibid., 270.
[51] Ibid., 269.

noteworthy example of the development of Black women's feminist consciousness, the definition does not accurately represent the organization as a whole.

In "'Triple Jeopardy': Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975" historian Kristin Anderson-Bricker traces the development of Black feminist consciousness within the SNCC. She argues that the 1968 shift in SNCC's focus from strict Black nationalism to a broader Third World perspective and a more comprehensive critique of American society created the necessary context for Black feminism to emerge.[52] The predecessor to the Third World Women's Alliance, the Black Women's Liberation Committee, criticized male chauvinism within the movement and advocated for women to hold higher positions within the organization. They believed women needed a space to discuss their issues in order to strengthen the movement, since without gender equality, Black liberation would not be fully realized.[53] After identifying imperialism and capitalism as the main enemies of Black women, Anderson-Bricker argues, the group changed its name to Third World Women's Alliance. In her discussion of the TWWA's work she writes solely about the New York chapter with a heavy focus on the newspaper, *Triple Jeopardy*, which, she claims "represented the organization's main effort to attain a socialist society."[54] Finally, she falsely claims the Alliance "disappeared shortly after the summer of 1975."[55]

Kimberley Springer and Benita Roth both reference the Alliance in their studies which strive to uncover Black feminist organizing during the second wave. Roth discusses the TWWA as an example of a Black feminist organization that developed alongside white and

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[52] Kristin Anderson-Bricker, "'Triple Jeopardy': Black Women and the Growth of Feminist Consciousness in SNCC, 1964-1975," in Kimberly Springer, ed. *Still Lifting, Still Climbing: African American Women's Contemporary Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 50.
[53] Ibid., 58.
[54] Ibid., 62.
[55] Ibid., 63.

Latina feminisms.[56] Like Anderson-Bricker, she explains the emergence of feminism and the eventual rupture of the Alliance from SNCC with the gender-based discrimination and chauvinism in the Black Power movement. Black feminists were, Roth argues, reacting to incidents such as the publication of the controversial Moynihan report of 1965, which led some Black nationalist men to call for a return to "natural" gender roles which would reduce Black women to a supportive role.[57] Roth relies almost exclusively on interviews with Frances Beal. The Bay Area chapter is mentioned only as continuing the TWWA's legacy after the New York chapter's demise.[58] In *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations,1968-1980,* Springer compares the TWWA to four other Black feminist groups, noting that TWWA was distinct for its anti-imperialism and inclusivity of all women of color as members. Importantly, she acknowledges the expansion of the TWWA to the West Coast, noting the role of the Venceremos Brigade in recruiting new members. Springer also mentions that while the East Coast chapter mainly had Black and Puerto Rican members, the Bay Area chapter included Asian American and Chicana women. She underscores the differences between chapters, arguing that the "activities of the two branches were consistent only in their adherence to the same ideological philosophy."[59]

In contrast to the perspectives of Anderson-Bricker, Springer, and Roth, Stephen Ward and Ashley D. Farmer argue that Black feminism was not antagonistic to Black Power ideas, but rather advanced the same agenda by using similar strategies. Ward argues that TWWA members were "simultaneously feminist activists and Black Power activists" who "built on and extended elements of Black Power politics."[60] Accepting members of other races and

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[56] Roth. *Separate Roads to Feminism,* 93.
[57] Ibid., 85-6.
[58] Ibid., 93.
[59] Kimberley Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations,1968-1980* (Duke University Press, 2005), 50.
[60] Stephen Ward, "The Third World Women's Alliance," in Peniel E. Joseph, ed. *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights – Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 120.

ethnicities and changing their name to Third World Women's Alliance was not "a reversal or abatement of their political identities as Black women activists",[61] but rather, the "'Third World' orientation remained grounded in, and responsive to, Black political struggles."[62] Ward also emphasizes the work of Beal and the *Triple Jeopardy*, but does not discuss the Bay Area Chapter. Similarly, Farmer argues the Alliance used the Third World perspective to "[redefine] black womanhood"[63] and to gain a more nuanced understanding of issues such as sterilization and birth control. They looked to Vietnamese women as proof that women could participate in the revolution as fighters instead of solely as mothers.[64] Farmer's account portrays the TWWA as consisting only of Black women, with the newspaper's writers and readership mainly being Black. However, she dedicates a paragraph to the Bay Area chapter, noting it would "become more diverse in membership and programming" than the New York chapter, and recognizes their contribution to International Women's Day celebrations.[65]

The studies discussed make two key mistakes. Firstly, they often ignore the fact the TWWA's member base was diverse since the beginning. The organization had members from various racial/ethnic backgrounds, and its focus was not solely on Black women. Secondly, these studies tend to only discuss the New York chapter and reduce the entire organization to the writings of its founder, Frances Beal. The Bay Area chapter is given minimal attention, and the differences between chapters are not adequately discussed. These two oversights are related. By focusing on the TWWA's roots in SNCC, the attention automatically falls on Black women. However, the Alliance should be studied as a multiracial, Third World Left organization, because eliminating capitalism and imperialism was its primary focus.

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[61] Ibid., 121.
[62] Ibid., 134.
[63] Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 159.
[64] Ibid., 184.
[65] Ibid., 173.

Furthermore, more attention should be paid to its later years and the Bay Area chapter to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Alliance's evolution and impact.

An example of such a study is social scientist Karen W. Tice's article "Contesting Bans and Borders: White Women and Women of Color Feminists on the Cuban Venceremos Brigades," where she argues that the Venceremos Brigade delegations to Cuba were important sites for women's solidarity with Third World revolution movements. The Brigade was a multiracial delegation of U.S. leftists who traveled to Cuba to support Cuban Revolution and to learn from the socialist country. While there, they engaged in various activities such as agricultural projects to contribute to the country's development. Traveling to Cuba had an impact on the political development and formation of many Third World Left organizations, including the TWWA. The journeys, Tice argues, became "blueprints for [the participants'] subsequent activism" and contributed to the creation of a "third world solidarity in the face of shared legacies of colonialism and imperialism in the global North and South."[66] She notes that the TWWA published articles on the VB, and that Frances Beal was one of the founders of Los Venceremitos, which organized children's camps in Cuba that included political education.[67] Tice's article is rare for its consideration of the TWWA as part of such a Third World coalition, and an example of the kind of scholarship that is needed to better understand the organization.

The scholarship on the Third World Left has uncovered many multiracial groups, coalitions, and transnational solidarity projects in the years after 1968, arguing that it was not simply a time of infighting and division. However, the scholarship which focuses on the Third World Left as a distinct and significant group remains scarce. More studies have been done, instead,

[66] Karen W. Tice, "Contesting Bans and Borders: White Women and Women of Color Feminists on the Cuban Venceremos Brigades," *Feminist Formations* 33, no. 2 (2021): 140.
[67] Ibid., 143.

on Third World ideology within nationalist movements, particularly the Black Power movement. This focus runs the risk of misinterpreting groups that were, in fact, diverse and Third World oriented. This is the case with the Third World Women's Alliance, which has primarily been discussed as a Black feminist organization. The focus of studies has been on Frances Beal's theorizing about the "double jeopardy" of race and gender, and the beginnings of the New York chapter. However, after changing its name to the Third World Women's Alliance, the organization's focus was defined as including the critique of imperialism and capitalism as well as racism and sexism. For this reason, as Chapter 2 will argue, it should be studied as an anti-imperialist organization first and foremost; indeed, as its name suggest, a Third World Left organization.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

Witnessing the Women's Liberation Day Parade on August 26, 1970 would have made it difficult to deny that feminism was changing the social and political landscape of the United States. The day saw fifty thousand women march down Fifth Avenue, demanding full equality between the sexes. A range of organizations were present, from radical feminists to liberal groups, representing a range of political views. Among them marched the Black and Puerto Rican members of newly formed Third World Women's Alliance. They held a sign that read "Hands off Angela Davis," with their hand drawn logo next to the text: the female symbol surrounding a fist that clutches a rifle. Davis, who had been fired from a professorship at the University of California for being a member of the Communist Party, was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List for alleged kidnapping and murder. The Alliance considered her a victim of a political witch hunt. Not long after the march began, a (white) organizer approached the Alliance members and ordered them to take the sign down, since such a display had "nothing to do with women's liberation." The Alliance replied: "It has everything to do with the kind of liberation we're talking about."[68]

This chapter will trace the development of feminisms during the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. It will argue that, for leftist white women and women of color, feminist thought developed at different points in time and as a reaction to different concerns.[69] The white women's liberation movement emerged as a response to the increasingly masculinist, Black Power ideology of the civil rights movement and the misogyny in the New Left,

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[68] Frances Beal, interviewed by Loretta J. Ross, March 18, 2005, transcript. Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, MA, 46.

[69] "The second wave" is used here to describe the multiple and diverse strands of feminist though that emerged between the 1950s and the 1980s. The wave analogy has been criticized for centering white women's activism and majorly white feminist organizations while excluding other forms of activism, such as advocacy that preceded the first wave, and women's activism in the 19th century abolition movements. See Springer, *Living for the Revolution*, 8. "Feminist," as a term, has been similarly contested especially by activists of color. The TWWA often used "feminists" derisively to mean white feminists with no class/race-based concerns. It is used here to mean an advocate for women's rights and gender equality.

eventually separating and evolving independently into its own movement in the late 1960s.[70] In contrast, during this time Black and other women of color prioritized liberation struggles in their own communities, and the fight against racism overshadowed other issues. In 1968, Black Power activists, including women, expanded their focus from local communities of color to a worldwide struggle against imperialism, which prompted Black women to incorporate an analysis of sexism into their activism. However, most feminists of color never adopted a separatist stance, instead continuing to combat racism and imperialism alongside men.

Due to these developments, many women of color considered Third World solidarity and anti-colonialism central to their activism. The Third World Women's Alliance was a pioneering group which embodied Third World solidarity by accepting members form diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. Their approach was rooted in intersectional analysis, which included a focus on women's and worker's issues and drew inspiration from Marxist and Leninist principles. The Bay Area chapter separated from the original New York chapter in 1971, and though the chapters shared the same guiding principles, their distinct contexts and compositions caused them to develop differently. The Bay Area chapter placed an even greater emphasis on Third World unity, demonstrated in their coalition work and their annual International Women's Day celebrations.

This chapter will conclude that, though it was part of the broader surge of women of color feminism, the TWWA is most accurately characterized as a Third World Left organization. The women of the Alliance recognized that the oppressing forces of imperialism, sexism, and racism were all interconnected, and therefore the fight for women's liberation was inseparable from the fight for Black, Asian, Chicano, Native American

[70] It must be noted that this refers to the mainstream white women's liberation movement. There were always some white feminists who centered anti-racism in their work – often radical leftists, as shown by Thompson in "Multiracial Feminism."

liberation. Identifying imperialism as the fundamental issue and revolution as the solution. They emphasized solidarity with the working class, which eventually led to the group's transformation into the Alliance Against Women's Oppression in 1980, opening its doors to white members and changing its primary focus to workers' issues. This change coincided with the end of the second wave of feminism and the decline of the majority of Black feminist and Third World left groups in the U.S. However, the legacies of the TWWA and the AAWO have extended beyond what is considered the end of the second wave.

The Development of Feminisms – 1960-1980

The Civil Rights Movement created the foundations for the emergence of feminist organizing in the 1960s, for women of color as well as white women. In the movement's early stages, organizing efforts were based around Southern communities and churches, which allowed women to be active participants since the beginning. Although their role was not as visible as the men's, women played important roles behind the scenes, leveraging their knowledge and connections in the communities.[71] Their networks were essential in bridging new activists into the movement. Among the organizations that emerged during this period was the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), founded in 1960 to be a South-wide committee to bring together grassroots organizations and student groups, coordinating sit-ins and voter-registration drives. In its early years, between 1960 and 1964, it was ideologically open and multiracial, with a nonhierarchical, nonviolent approach. SNCC leadership did not exclude anyone based on their beliefs or background. While its primary focus revolved around fighting Jim Crow and advocating for civil rights legislation, the organization also maintained

[71] Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism,* 80-81.

an international orientation, protesting the escalating war in Vietnam and showing solidarity with decolonizing struggles around the world.[72]

SNCC included female members who participated in important capacities, some even assuming leadership roles, such as its founder Ella Baker.[73] The TWWA's founder and former SNCC member Frances Beal remembers SNCC as advanced when it came to the treatment of women. Though their roles were not "for the TV cameras", women were nonetheless organizationally important beyond "handling the coffee and the cake."[74] The women of the SNCC engaged with the men and each other in debates about liberation, equality, and injustice, and being involved in the movement gave them chances to take an active part in organizing, protesting, even going to jail alongside the men.[75] However, despite some exceptions, leadership positions were out of their reach. For the most part, women were assigned clerical work or relegated to a housewife role as maids, cooks, or cleaners.[76] Some SNCC leaders held misogynistic views and came out with statements that foretold the gradually changing attitudes, such as Stokely Carmichael's infamous "The position of women in SNCC is prone!"[77]

Following the Mississippi Freedom Summer project to grow the Black electorate in 1964, the membership of SNCC grew rapidly, which gave rise to heightened racial tensions and debates over the organization's ideology and structure.[78] Concurrently, the focus of SNCC and the civil rights movement was shifting from the South to Northern cities. These shifts resulted in an internal division within the organization, between the proponents of a continued decentralized, non-hierarchical structure and those who advocated for a move

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[72] For example, SNCC members visited decolonizing nations in West Africa. See Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 162.
[73] Anderson-Bricker, "'Triple Jeopardy,'" 50.
[74] Beal interview, 35.
[75] Beal interview, 35; Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism,* 81.
[76] "Third World Women's Alliance: History of the Organization," undated, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[77] Anderson-Bricker, "'Triple Jeopardy'", 49; Romney, *We Were There,* 46.
[78] Anderson-Bricker, "'Triple Jeopardy'", 51.

towards Black nationalism, which included a more centralized and disciplined approach.[79] A growing emphasis on Black consciousness troubled white SNCC members, who felt their positions threatened and would have preferred to keep SNCC nonstructured and open to a range of issues and concerns. For white women, this included women's rights.[80] In 1964, Casey Hayden and Mary King wrote and circulated an unsigned memo concerning the oppression of women in SNCC. Their later memo, titled "Sex and Caste" circulated within the New Left organization Students for a Democratic Society as well.[81] Historian Sara Evans considers the efforts of Black and white women within SNCC as the earliest challenge to gender hierarchy in the movement.[82]

Alienated by the rise of Black nationalism in civil rights organizations, many white women migrated to the New Left. There, their ideas found fertile ground among female members. The years after 1967 saw an increase in the publication of feminist critiques of the New Left. They reiterated the critiques of women being excluded from leadership roles. Further, they denounced the prevalent "sexually liberated" relationships in which women were defined by who they dated and could face ostracism if a man got tired of her.[83] Wary of the divisive power of feminist critique, many leftist men and women shunned the feminists. The hostility they experienced further convinced white feminists that patriarchy was an all-encompassing force that could not be fought as a secondary focus. They abandoned the idea of reforming the New Left from within, separated, and developed to be its own, autonomous movement for a broader audience.[84]

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[79] Black nationalism was a movement which preceded Black Power but influenced it greatly, and Black Power adopted many Black nationalist ideas. Black nationalism advocated for racial pride and against assimilation with white America. For example, see Ward, 123-124.
[80] Ibid., 53.
[81] Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism,* 52.
[82] Sara M. Evans, "Sons, Daughters, and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation," *The American Historical Review*, 114, no. 2 (2009): 339.
[83] Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism,* 54-5.
[84] Ibid., 67-9.

When the ideas of Black nationalism, the empowerment of Black communities and the strive for self-sufficiency, gained support within SNCC in 1964, all white members were expelled.[85] Moreover, many Black nationalists emphasized masculinity and favored restricted roles for women. A contributing factor was the 1965 publication of the Moynihan report, which conducted sociological research into the causes of Black employment and introduced the idea of "the Black matriarchy," suggesting that women held disproportionate power in Black families. The report sparked a wave of outrage in Black communities, but it also provoked some men to seek to reclaim their sense of manhood, advocating for a return to more traditional gender roles, with women as homemakers and nurturers for the next generation.[86] However, although the masculinist culture within Black liberation movements served as a significant catalyst it did not immediately prompt Black women to develop a feminist consciousness – nor were they interested in the separatist brand of feminism popular with white women. Most Black women in the civil rights and Black nationalist movements were deeply invested in the liberation of Black communities and considered that cause more important.[87]

In 1968, Black nationalism underwent another transformation, as activists began to direct their attention to the global system of white supremacy. Influenced by decolonization movements, the war in Vietnam, and the rising popularity of Marxism and Maoism, the ideology of Black nationalism expanded to incorporate a broader critique of American society and a comprehensive, anti-imperialist ideology.[88] This shift can be seen as a continuation of a long tradition of Black anti-imperialist activism, which connected the liberation of Black

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[85] Ibid., 84.
[86] Ibid., 85-6.
[87] The situation paralleled other nationalist movements, such as the Chicano movement where, despite participating in great numbers, women were not treated as equal actors. Most Chicana feminists sought a more influential role in the movement, not to separate and unite with feminists of other races. See Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism,* 130.
[88] Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left,* 92.

Americans to liberation movements abroad.[89] SNCC, too, experienced a leftward turn and adopted a more pronounced focus on Third World solidarity.[90] Their emphasis on the Third World was part of a larger movement that extended to other racial, ethnic, and nationalist groups, including Chicano and Asian organizations. Historians have referred to this collective movement as the Third World Left. It gave rise to numerous grassroots organizations with a Marxist orientation, with both male and female members, who sought to connect the struggles of American communities of color against oppression by the state to the global fight for liberation against a racist and capitalist world order. Through cultural production and political activism, they created links to the developing world, shared knowledge and fostered solidarity with Third World communities within and outside the United States.[91]

This leftward turn and the development of a Third World, anti-imperialist perspective within Black nationalist groups enabled Black women to start incorporating a feminist critique into their activism. They began to identify with women from oppressed communities all over the world, such as Vietnamese women, and looked to them for guidance and inspiration. Black men were not the enemy, but allies in the larger struggle, and women of color often did not see the need to separate from mixed-gender organizations.[92] The women of the Black Panthers, for example, felt they could best advocate for women (and the revolution) from within the organization.[93]

Within SNCC, too, women began to address and challenge sexist structures. For Frances Beal, the main issues of the time were abortion rights and women's healthcare.[94] Some men in the Black nationalist movement argued that abortion was genocide against the

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[89] John Munro, *The Anticolonial Front: the African American freedom struggle and global decolonization, 1945-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 3-4. See also: Kelley and Esch, "Black like Mao."
[90] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 162.
[91] Young, *Soul Power*, 3-4.
[92] Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism," 45-6.
[93] Springer, *Living for the Revolution,* 27.
[94] Beal interview, 35-6.

Black race and should be prohibited, but for women like Beal, who had witnessed the dangers of unsafe abortions and knew of Black and Puerto Rican women being sterilized against their will, it was a question of women's bodily autonomy.[95] In 1969, she published the widely circulated pamphlet titled "Double Jeopardy: To be Black and Female," which extended her critique beyond reproductive justice, arguing that the interactions of racism and sexism created concerns and experiences which were particular to Black women. Influenced by SNCC's anti-imperialism as well as her own experiences studying in Paris, where she had become familiar with the liberation struggles in Algeria, Beal believed eliminating imperialism and capitalism was key. According to her, the downfall of imperialism would lead to the elimination of all forms of oppression, and since women of color were the most oppressed, their participation in the struggle was essential.[96]

Influenced by conversations with Beal and other women, SNCC established a Black women's caucus in 1968. The Black Women's Liberation Committee had the primary objective of addressing women's specific issues, developing a political philosophy surrounding the role of Black (working) women in the Black liberation movement, and promoting women's political participation.[97] In preparation for a general SNCC women's meeting in Atlanta, the leaders formulated discussion questions. These questions centered Third World solidarity, asking, for example, whether Black women could learn from other Third World women and women in socialist countries, and whether the Third World concept was useful or if Black women's oppression was distinct and they should organize separately. They also discussed methods and strategies for their fight for liberation, including whether

[95] Romney, *We Were There,* 50; Beal interview, 36.
[96] Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, 8.2, (2008): 171, 175-6; Ward, "The Third World Women's Alliance," 122-3.
[97] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 167.

they should take up arms. These discussions influenced the direction the TWWA would later take.[98]

The Committee soon attracted interest from Black women outside SNCC. The members recognized their potential audience went beyond the organization and included, among others, "welfare mothers, community workers and campus radicals."[99] In 1969, the Committee separated from SNCC and evolved into the Black Women's Alliance.[100] This transformation was driven, in part, by the financial struggles and inner conflicts which were undermining SNCC's support.[101] The newly formed Black Women's Alliance maintained the focus on developing a revolutionary ideology to address and improve Black women's conditions. While the organization lacked ongoing programs, it hosted regular "rap sessions" to foster discussion and raise consciousness.[102] It became one of the earliest Black women's groups that separated and developed independently of a mixed-gender organization.

The Third World Women's Alliance – 1969-1979

In 1969, the Black Women's Alliance was approached by some Puerto Rican women who were looking to join as members. At the time, there was no comparable organization available to advocate for Puerto Rican women's issues or provide a space for conversations and support. This sparked a debate within the Alliance. Once again, the members had to navigate the question of which issues were specific to Black women and whether they could form an

[98] Ibid., 160.
[99] "Third World Women's Alliance: Our History, Our Ideology, Our Goals," 1971, in Histories, 1971-1980, TWWA Bay Area Records, 4.
[100] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 171.
[101] Beal argues that the decline of SNCC can be attributed to its failure to adapt to new challenges after achieving its primary objective of dismantling Jim Crow. According to Beal, the organization did not effectively respond to new, evolving challenges and so was unable to maintain its momentum and relevance. See Beal interview, 38.
[102] "Preparation for the Mobilizing Meeting on June 23, 1974," TWWA Bay Area Records, 2.

alliance with Puerto Rican women. They agreed that, despite certain differences, their experiences were comparable. Beal recalls:

> [W]hen we looked at the Puerto Rican sisters, we saw that they were trying to deal with both their national oppression of living within the United States and a kind of racial and class thing that was separate from just being a part of America as a whole, and then how does your gender fit in when you have this other overriding oppression. And then black women were essentially trying to deal with the same thing: how do you deal with the question of race and class and gender, in terms of what kinds of inter[sections] —[103]

The members recognized that Black and Puerto Rican were united in struggle as Third World people, as women and as workers. They concluded, as Beal had, that racism and sexism were byproducts of imperialism/capitalism, which, to her, were interchangeable. Thus, their focus should not be the destruction of the patriarchy but the destruction of imperialism. The group made the pivotal decision to open its membership to all women of color and, as a reflection of this new awareness and composition, changed its name to the Third World Women's Alliance.[104] This transformation signaled that it was no longer a Black nationalist organization, but rather an inclusive alliance encompassing women from diverse backgrounds.[105] The women of the TWWA blurred the boundaries between identities. While influenced by the principles of Black nationalism, they departed from the isolationist approach to Black liberation, and instead, developed further the internationalist perspective of organizations like SNCC.[106] They imagined that they would become "much more effective

[103] Beal interview, 39.
[104] "History of the Organization," undated, in Histories, 1971-1980, TWWA Bay Area Records, 3.
[105] For the rejection of Black nationalism: "Preparation for the Mobilizing Meeting," 2.
[106] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 167.

and unified by becoming a third world women's organization," and fight in the belly of the imperialist beast.[107]

The Third World Women's Alliance did not label itself as a feminist organization, nor did they prioritize dismantling patriarchy like white feminist groups. For the Alliance, patriarchy was a legacy of economic exploitation and the system of private ownership of property. When they faced skepticism from other revolutionary nationalist groups who believed a separate women's organization would weaken the overall movement, the women of the TWWA argued that such an organization could reach women who might otherwise be left behind, engage them in political activities, provide education, and offer a safe space for open discussions about their unique issues.[108] As the most oppressed group, they argued, Third World women would "become a leading force" in the struggle if they became aware of their oppression.[109]

They did not work together with white feminist groups, who usually failed to take into account the experiences of lower-class and impoverished women.[110] In "Double Jeopardy", Beal states that "[a]ny white group that does not have an anti-imperialist and anti-racist ideology has absolutely nothing in common with the black women's struggle."[111] She further criticizes the white feminist movement for its middle-class focus and single-minded pursuit of destroying the patriarchy, while disregarding other forms of oppression.[112]

By 1970, the New York chapter had already participated in the Women's Liberation Day parade and had a growing membership and ongoing community programs.[113] Their main publication, *Triple Jeopardy*, circulated widely in the U.S.[114] The newspaper served as a

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[107] "History of the Organization," 3.
[108] "History, Ideology, Goals," 5.
[109] "Handout, June 23, 1973."
[110] "History, Ideology, Goals," 5-6.
[111] Beal, "Double Jeopardy, 174.
[112] Ibid., 174-5.
[113] Ward, "The Third World Women's Alliance," 136.
[114] The name "Triple Jeopardy" (as opposed to Beal's "Double Jeopardy") shows how their focus has shifted form the intersections of race/gender to race/gender/class.

platform for editorials, interviews, and news articles about issues concerning Third World communities in the US and abroad, in English and in Spanish.[115] For instance, the inaugural edition featured articles about mistreatment of prisoners, a section titled "Anatomy and Physiology" that explained the female reproductive system in detail, and an interview with a Maryland factory worker shedding light on the intolerable conditions working women suffered under.[116] Throughout its existence, the New York chapter's activism was guided by a continuous analysis of the intersections of class, race, and gender discrimination and their impact on the members' lives. During their meetings, they covered diverse topics from the Anti-War movement to nutrition.[117] They participated in demonstrations and rallies for solidarity with the global liberation struggles and formed coalitions with local organizations such as the Black Panther Party and Union Latina.[118] The New York Chapter functioned until the late 1970s. Some members, like Beal, later joined the Bay Area chapter.[119]

Whereas the New York chapter of the Alliance originated within SNCC, the Bay Area chapter was indirectly brought together by the Venceremos Brigade, an anti-imperialist solidarity project which sent volunteers to work and study in Cuba.[120] Cheryl Johnson, a member of the New York chapter, relocated to the Bay Area to be with her partner, whom she had met while working on sugarcane fields in Cuba. Johnson's time with the Brigade inspired her, and as soon as she settled on the West Coast she began meeting with local activists with the goal of establishing a new chapter there.[121] To attract interested women, she organized

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[115] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power,* 174.
[116] *Triple Jeopardy* Vol. 1 No. 1, 1971 p.14.
[117] *Triple Jeopardy*, Vol. 1 No. 1, 1971
[118] Farmer, *Remaking Black Power*, 172-3; Ward, "The Third World Women's Alliance," 136.
[119] Beal interview, 47. There is an FBI file on the New York TWWA, and it is possible they were infiltrated, or faced with interference. The file is available in the TWWA Bay Area Records.
[120] The Cuban revolution was one of the most important catalysts for the Third World left, Young argues. It served as a source of inspiration, with Fidel Castro emerging as a revolutionary hero and symbol. For many, going to Cuba marked a turning point in their identification with the Third World, and they carried that sense of solidarity into their work in the U.S. See Young, Soul Power, 8. Additionally, Cuba was a place for young people of color to meet each other, since it gave priority to recruits of color. See Elbaum, "What Legacy," 50.
[121] Romney, *We Were There,* 133-136.

consciousness raising sessions that covered a range of topics including birth control, marriage, and child care.[122] The initial meeting held in September 1971 drew fourteen women, most of whom were involved with the Brigade, while others worked for abortion rights or in the committee to free Angela Davis. The informal gatherings gradually evolved into a more structured format after a core group formed and started political education. By 1972, the meetings addressed a wider range of political issues, such as the role of women in socialist countries, and included film screenings about liberation struggles.[123]

In its early years, the Bay Area chapter faced multiple challenges. Communication with the New York chapter was difficult and irregular, and the two chapters were at times unaware of the way the other was developing.[124] The miscommunication became evident in confusion surrounding the newspaper *Triple Jeopardy*; the New York chapter told the Bay Area women to contribute, but never gave any further instructions as to how.[125] Furthermore, many members were already committed to various causes within their own communities, and acting as bridges between (local communities and causes) them proved exhausting.[126] As a result of these issues, they struggled with maintaining a clear focus. During a retreat that lasted from January to June 1973, they studied organizational methods and worked on defining their goals. Following the retreat, they became a formal chapter of the TWWA.[127] The two goals, as presented in a newsletter in the summer of 1973, were to "involve sisters in

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[122] "History of Recruitment Phase," 1973, in Mobilizing meetings, 1973-75, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.
[123] Ibid., 2.
[124] At around the same time as the Bay Area chapter got started, another member moved to Seattle and hoped to start a chapter there. The Seattle group also struggled with communication and stopped contact with New York after about a year. The group never became an official chapter, but they did hold consciousness-raising meetings for some time. See Romney, *We Were There*, 131-3.
[125] "National Report, Bay Area Chapter, March 1973," in Bay area chapter, 1973-75, Reports, TWWA Bay Area Records; "National Report, Bay Area Chapter, April 1973," in Bay area chapter, 1973-75, Reports, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[126] Romney, *We Were There,* 142.
[127] "History of the Third World Women's Alliance: presented to potential new members – April 1974," in Histories, 1971-1980, TWWA Bay Area Records.

the anti-imperialist struggle thru [sic] a step by step process comprised of work, criticism and study," and to "promote Third World solidarity."[128]

To achieve their objectives, the Bay Area chapter members dedicated significant time to study and self-criticism. The main platform for political education was the General Alliance meeting, which took place every two months. The meetings usually featured guest speakers, film screenings, and Alliance presentations.[129] Sharing knowledge was one of the principal ways the TWWA sought to advance Third World solidarity. They wanted to equip the members with the necessary skills to challenge discrimination in practice, in their everyday lives. The pursuit of knowledge extended beyond the Alliance meetings – the members attended the meetings of local organizations, including the Brigade, the Korean committee, the Filipino organization Kalayaan, and the African Support Committee, both to learn from them and to demonstrate solidarity.[130]

Internationalism played a central role within the Alliance, as it recognized the interconnectedness of liberation struggles. Members who traveled abroad presented detailed accounts of their experiences to educate and inspire fellow activists, and to foster a sense of political sisterhood. For example, after a member visited China, she presented the history of the country at a consciousness-raising session, talking about the role of women in a communist society. She also showed photographs she had taken.[131] Sometimes, they shared creative writing and poetry. A member wrote a poem about her experience in Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade titled "An Island Small Becomes the World," in which she praises the

[128] "Handout, June 23, 1973."
[129] "Mobilizing Meeting Presentation: Levels of Participation", Undated, in Mobilizing meetings, 1973-75, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[130] Romney, *We Were There,* 145.
[131] "Report on Conciousness-raising sessions: January 1973," in Bay area chapter, 1973-75, Reports, TWWA Bay Area Records.

beauty of the island's nature, its peoples' life full of joy and peace, and the hope it gives the rest of the world.[132]

The core group was constantly developing the organization's political line. The diversity of the TWWA brought inevitable differences of opinion, and it was through political education that a commonality of cause was cultivated. The political education committee's main task was to "clearly perceive the major questions facing the TWWA at a given period and develop ways to help the whole organization approach and begin to resolve those questions."[133] They wanted to keep everything grounded in concrete work, away from the abstract. In practice this meant that, for example, when they wanted to learn better organizational skills they read writings by James Forman, SNCC leader and the Black Panther Party's minister of foreign affairs, and when they feared liberal attitudes were gaining a foothold, they read *Combat Liberalism* by Mao.[134] To understand the issue of women from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, they read Engel's "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State."[135] In 1977, they organized a political education program spanning multiple months, delving into material basis of women's oppression and exploring the histories of Chicana, Black, and Asian women in the U.S. Their aim was to highlight their accomplishments and the discrimination they have all faced.[136]

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[132] "Newsletter," Vol.1 No. 2, July 1976, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.
[133] "Newsletter," Vol. 1 No. 1, June 1976, TWWA Bay Area Records, 6.
[134] "Mobilizing Meeting Presentation", 5. Mao's Little Red Book was a staple for the TWWA and other Third World left groups, as were the works of Franz Fanon, Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, and Lenin. One of the prerequisites for a Third World left to form was the development of print culture and technologies which made purchasing foreign books possible even for students of lesser means. See Young, *Soul Power*, 9.
[135] While the TWWA was influenced by Marxism, it did not consider itself a Marxist/Leninist organization. What mattered was taking the core ideas of Marxism/Leninism and applying them to relevant issues. A recurring motif in the TWWA writings is the reluctance the label of Marxism for fear it would scare potential members off or make the organization too rigid. While learning from the texts was important, the TWWA emphasized approaching ideas and problems independently and critically instead of "running to see what Marx and Engels had to say about it." See "TWWA meeting 1/29/75", in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1; quote on page 6.
[136] "The Woman Question," 1977, TWWA Bay Area Records.

The Bay Area chapter organized and participated in a wide range of events and coalitions centered around Third World solidarity. Some initiatives focused on local concerns, such as their involvement in maintaining the International Hotel, a residence for immigrants, including many retired men without a family. In 1973, they sponsored a forum titled "Women in Labor Struggles in the U.S.," which featured speakers from the United Farm Workers, the Farah Strike Support Committee, and Kalayaan.[137] Additionally, they collaborated with the United Farm Workers to organize several "workbrigades" to Agbayani Village, a project to construct housing for retired Filipino farmworkers.[138] Other efforts were internationally oriented. For instance, the chapter celebrated South African Women's Day to raise awareness about apartheid and its effects on women. They invited South African women to speak of their own experiences.[139] They also supported Puerto Rican independence and participated in a committee raising signatures for the release of Lolita Lebron, a Puerto Rican nationalist incarcerated for participating in a shooting at the U.S. Capitol in 1954. The coalition with the largest impact was the coalition to organize annual International Women's Day celebrations, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.[140]

Throughout its existence, the Bay Area chapter struggled with its relationship with white activists and organizations. In its early years, organizing among women of color was deemed necessary given the historical context. However, when white leftists attended TWWA events or collaborated with them in coalitions, some of the Alliance members began to question whether segregation was necessary if the white activists shared their anti-racist and anti-imperialist goals.[141] As a result, the Alliance began to identify more strongly as working-

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[137] "Third World Women's Alliance: History January 1973 to March 1974, Prepared for the General Meeting 6/23/74," 1974, in Mobilizing meetings, 1973-75, TWWA Bay Area Records, 2.
[138] Ibid., 2-3.
[139] Burnham interview, 21.
[140] Women's health and reproductive justice also held a central role within the TWWA. The Coalition to Fight Infant Mortality was impactful and many TWWA members were active within it. However, the TWWA as an organization did not have as big of a presence in the coalition as, for example, in the coalition to organize International Women's Day. See Romney, *We Were There*, 154.
[141] Burnham interview, 23-24.

class individuals. This was not a great leap for them, as the terms "Third World" and "working class" had been closely associated, even conflated, since the organization's beginning. In 1974, they wrote:

> We have to begin to see Third World people less as just cultural groupings or common victims of racism, and more as working people with working-class aspirations. As such, we must be united with other working-people of all backgrounds in a constructive way. Even as we organize among Third World women we must not separate ourselves totally from our men or from other working people as a whole.[142]

As Young has noted, the fallacy that all Third World people were working-class – common on the Third World left – ignores the existence of a middle-class and an elite in Third World countries, as well as among people of color in the United States.[143] Over time, this created confusion and debate in the Alliance. Some members saw a fundamental contradiction in being a mass organization while excluding a big part of the population. In the second half of the 1970s, they started taking steps towards a more "explicitly Marxist formation" and towards a political line which would include a broader base and allow for more flexibility to unite with other revolutionary political forces. This included white women and white leftist groups.[144] By 1980, the TWWA had abandoned revolutionary nationalism and the idea of a unified Third World community. That year, they transformed into the Alliance Against Women's Oppression (AAWO). A Marxist organization dedicated to "the full liberation of women of all aspects of life", the AAWO began to accept white members.[145]

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[142] "History January 1973 to March 1974," 4.
[143] Young, *Soul Power*, 13.
[144] "Alliance Against Women's Oppression: Our History and Our Political Line," 1980, Linda Burnham papers, Sophia Smith Collection, SSC-MS-00736, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, MA (hereinafter Linda Burnham papers,) 11-12. Quote from Burnham interview, 24.
[145] "Alliance Against Women's Oppression: Working for the Rights of All Women," Undated, Linda Burnham papers.

The 1960s and 1970s saw an unprecedented surge of women's organizing, influenced by the long Civil Rights Movement. Both white women and women of color formed their own organizations, but whereas white women separated from mixed-gender organizations and developed into a movement of its own, most Black, Latina and Asian women's activism remained rooted in questions of race and class oppression. They developed a theory of intersecting forces which created unique situations for women of color, who were simultaneously oppressed under capitalism, racism, and sexism. Feminisms of color emerged around the same time as the Third World left, a movement that identified strongly with liberation movements in decolonizing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Many feminist groups, too, were internationally oriented.

The Third World Women's Alliance took the Third World idea further than most organizations. Originating from Black Power roots, it evolved into a multiracial group with a strong anti-imperialist and class-conscious agenda. While advocating for self-sufficiency and revolutionary nationalism, the members were committed on finding commonalities across borders to free all people from all oppression. Their Third World identity was closely tied to their working-class background, which eventually led to their transformation into the Alliance Against Women's Oppression, which operated until 1990. Two members then founded the Women of Color Resource Center, which further carried on the TWWA's legacy.[146]

While the AAWO's focus shifted from Third World unity to a broader alliance of working women, they persisted in their celebration of International Women's Day. Each year, they celebrated the achievements of women all over the world in the fight for liberation, as the TWWA had before them. In this way, the International Women's Day celebration was the most tangible legacy the Alliance left behind. The next chapter will explore the International Women's Day celebrations organized by the TWWA to understand how they put theory to

[146] Beal interview, 47.

practice and, as a women's Third World leftist alliance, sought to foster Third World unity and solidarity within and across U.S. borders.

Chapter 3: International Women's Day – 1974-1979

On March 10, 1974, a crowd of hundreds gathered at the Black Panthers' Community Learning Center in Oakland. As the clock neared six in the evening, a group of women got up on stage, a band playing behind them, and joined hands in a symbolic gesture of solidarity and friendship. They began to sing, and were joined by children and then the whole room. "*Que una gota con ser poco, con otras se hace aguacero* [One drop alone may be little, but joined by others it becomes a downpour].[147] A culmination of months of meticulous planning and hard work, the moment marked the end of the first International Women's Day celebration organized by the Third World Women's Alliance, and the start of a tradition that would go on for sixteen years.

Former Alliance members remember International Women's Day as the "primary focus" or "signature work" of the Bay Area chapter.[148] The organization dedicated considerable time and effort to ensure its success, and it reached a wide audience and brought women together in a spirit of a common celebration. However, it served as more than just a celebration. Like everything the Bay Area chapter did, the International Women's Day celebration was closely related to the organization's two key objectives: to involve women in political work, and to foster Third World solidarity.[149] Third World solidarity was essential because their struggle against oppression was the same and could not be won without unity. From the organizing process to the programming, which combined political resistance with cultural creation, Alliance members strove to advance their central mission: the destruction of the triple oppression of imperialism, sexism, and racism. The celebrations embodied the

[147] For International Women's Day songs see for example: International Women's Day Program, 1975, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[148] Romney, *We Were There,* 177.
[149] They also sometimes used the slogan "Combat Racism; Build Third World Unity." For example: "International Women's Day 1977 Program," in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 4.

concept of women of color coming together, transcending racial and ethnic divisions, and fighting to tear down the very structures of society.

This chapter examines how the Bay Area TWWA advanced its goal of fostering Third World solidarity and unity through organizing the International Women's Day celebrations. It argues that they approached the task in three ways. Firstly, they engaged people in community work. The organizing process spanned several months, allowing volunteers and Alliance members to build a sense of community and bring together women and men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. They formed coalitions with other organizations and incorporated political education into their work, introducing new people to the idea of Third World solidarity. Secondly, they emphasized and highlighted the shared experiences and commonalities between people of color in the United States and those in Third World countries. By recognizing the common oppression they faced as people of color and the working class, as well as acknowledging (and constructing) a shared history, they fostered a sense of connection. Thirdly, they challenged stereotypes through education and positive representations. They aimed to break down prejudices, mobilize women by educating them about other cultures, liberation struggles, and the everyday challenges faced by working-class communities of color.

The interest in organizing an International Women's Day celebration in the Bay Area was ignited when the members read a book by Clara Zetkin, a German socialist, in which she recounts her meetings with Lenin.[150] Studying the book and Zetkin's other writings, the women of the TWWA related strongly to her ideas and discovered a model in the activism of the international working women's movement in the early twentieth century.[151] Indeed, the

[150] The first English translation of Clara Zetkin's *My Recollections of Lenin* was published in 1956 by Foreign Languages Publishing House in Moscow.
[151] "History January 1973 to March 1974," 5.

first National Woman's Day was organized by American socialist women in 1909 advocate for women's right to vote, the ten-hour workday, and an end to child labor. In 1911, the celebration was adopted and transformed into International Women's (plural) Day in Europe, owing much to the influence of Zetkin, then active in the German Social Democratic party.[152]

Fueled by newfound inspiration, the Alliance members wasted no time in reaching out to their contacts in order to form the organizing committee. As was customary for the chapter, they established their principles and political perspective early on. The unifying principles for the inaugural Women's Day in 1974 were to celebrate women's achievements in the history of the United States and their contributions in the workforce and workers' movements. The principles varied slightly from year to year, but always centered on solidarity with Third World women, solidarity with all working peoples, and bringing attention to the integral role of women in the struggle.[153] However, while they professed to stand for all working women, they chose not to collaborate with white women in the organizing process. They believed they needed their own space to best advance their specific needs and goals, and since no true freedom for working women could be achieved without eradicating racism.[154]

The TWWA emphasized the socialist roots of International Women's Day, while also asserting that Third World women were involved in these early labor struggles, but "because so much history has been kept from [them], it is difficult to know the extent of that role."[155]

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[152] Temma Kaplan, "On the Socialist Origins of International Women's Day," *Feminist Studies* 11, No. 1. (1985), 164-7. The history of International Women's Day was always recalled and reclaimed in every International Women's Day celebration and fundraising event. However, the history presented by the TWWA was partly based on legend. According to the TWWA, the day was created by Clara Zetkin to commemorate striking garment worker women striking, and the date, March 8th, was chosen because of two historic events in women's history. The first was a demonstration by New York city's garment and textile industry workers, mostly women, against poor working conditions in 1857. This demonstration has not been proven to have taken place. Kaplan attributes the story to French Communists in the 1950s. The second event was an almost identical, spontaneous demonstration in 1908, when thousands of women took to the streets for the right to form a union, for ten-hour workdays, and for a law against child labor. There was a demonstration on that day, which cemented March 8th as International Women's Day, but, according to Kaplan, it was organized by the Socialist Party of the United States and focused on suffrage.

[153] "Alliance Presentation #1," 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.

[154] "International Women's Day 1977 Program," 4.

[155] "International Women's Day, 1979," in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.

They were aware that the celebration held a greater significance in many socialist countries, and celebrating International Women's Day on or around March 8th together with women in these countries was itself an act of solidarity.[156] Their goal was to popularize the event, not only within their own communities or in the United States, but on a global scale. As women living in America, they understood the importance of their role in the struggle. A draft of a speech for the 1975 celebration captures their sentiment: "We know that women all over the world have special expectation of us in the U.S. They do not begrudge us for lagging temporarily. We will act and the world is moving with us."[157]

In the Fall of 1973, the Alliance established a committee named the Third World Women's Committee to Celebrate International Women's Day. By the third celebration, the coalition had disbanded and the event became a Third World Women's Alliance initiative.[158] The impact and effectiveness of the Alliance leadership was undeniable. The inaugural celebration attracted hundreds of attendees. The *Guardian*, a radical newspaper, reported on dozens of small celebrations and protests organized by unions, socialist political organizations, and students' groups around the Bay Area and across the country on the March 8th weekend. However, with "a rousing program of fantastic food, hilarious skits and speeches", the Alliance's celebration was considered the highlight of the weekend, drawing

[156] Committee Speech Draft, 1975, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1. The Alliance often made the connection between socialist countries where women's rights were protected and celebrated along with workers' rights, in contrast to the United States.
[157] Committee Speech Draft, 1975, 4.
[158] It was not an official TWWA committee but a coalition of women from various groups. However, TWWA members took on leadership roles within the committee due to their experience and expertise.[158] They also chaired the steering committee, which connected all subcommittees together and was responsible for storing materials between celebrations, managing the funds and handling correspondence. Some newspapers credited the TWWA alone for the 1974 celebration, which the TWWA rushed to correct. In 1974 and 1975, it was important to them to make the distinction between the organizing committee and the Alliance. See "Third World Women's Alliance Evaluation and Look Towards the Future: March 23, 1974," in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 2-3.

over a thousand attendees.[159] Many attendees were affiliated with other leftist organizations, and were primarily people of color.[160]

The 1974 event was a triumphant start of the tradition. Each year, a day of celebration was organized on or around March 8th. The venue varied, ranging from the Black Panther Party Learning Center to churches and school auditoriums. The event featured music and singing, short plays, speeches, and food. Over time, it gained recognition from other local organizations and received endorsements from elected officials.[161] During its first phase, the celebrations were large mass events. As the Alliance experienced a surge of new members in 1975, they had to scale down the event for next two of years, focusing on integrating new members. The celebrations regained their scale and significance toward the end of the decade. During this period, there was a greater emphasis on campaigns that the Alliance was engaged in at the time.[162] The last International Women's Day celebration organized by the TWWA took place in 1979. At the 1980 event, the newly formed Alliance Against Women's Oppression introduced themselves and their goals.

Organizing International Women's Day was an undertaking that required months of effort and involved approximately half of all Alliance members as well as numerous local volunteers.[163] One of the primary ways in which the TWWA fostered solidarity between Third World people in the United States was by bringing them together to organize the celebration. For the Alliance, solidarity meant "active solidarity" or "solidarity in terms of positive action." The committee wanted to involve women from as many racial/ethnic groups as they could and

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[159] Ann Rockwell, "Women demand equality," *Guardian*, March 20, 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[160] "Steering committee report: evaluation of the day itself," 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.
[161] For instance, a Congressman from California, Ronald V. Dellums, sent a letter of endorsement for the 1974 celebration. See Romney, *We Were There,* 184.
[162] "Proposal to Celebrate IWD '80," Undated, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.
[163] Romney, *We Were There,* 184.

tried to make the event accessible, for example by printing advertisements and brochures in both English and Spanish. The initial meetings always took place at the homes of the members, where participants gathered around a table to eat and discuss their life experiences and aspirations for the celebration. Personal relationships were the foundation of a strong community. "We are working together for a change and that change can not come when we don't really know through conversation who each of us are," the Publicity Committee noted in their evaluation of the 1975 event.[164] The biggest success of International Women's Day, recalls former Alliance member Patricia Romney in *We Were There*, was the sense of collective accomplishment and sisterhood that working together created.[165]

The gatherings were designed not only to recruit workforce for the organizing of International Women's Day, but to create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere that encouraged quieter participants to voice their perspectives and enabling more experienced women to share their skills.[166] Indeed, a key aspect of the Alliance's work was reaching out to women who might not otherwise be engaged in political activism or who may have felt intimidated by the idea of joining an organization with male activists.[167] After the participants had been recruited, they had the opportunity sign up to a variety of tasks and committees, including fundraising (baking for bake sales, making cold calls), photography, making slides and photo displays, preparing and serving food, singing and acting in skits, speaking to the press, writing press releases and distributing leaflets.[168] By being part of the organizing committee, the TWWA leadership hoped, the women would develop skills that would be

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[164] "Publicity Committee Evaluation," 1975, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 5.
[165] Romney, *We Were There,* 180. "In preparing for this celebration we have developed a sense of self-reliance and a unity amongst third world women," the 1975 Committee speech declared. "Committee Speech," 1975, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 3.
[166] Romney, *We Were There,* 182; "Alliance Presentation #1", 2-3.
[167] "History, Ideology, Goals," 5.
[168] "Task sign-up," undated, 1-2, in International Women's Day Celebrations, 1974-1990, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie papers, Sophia Smith Collection, SSC-MS-00719, Smith College Special Collections, Northampton, MA (hereinafter Miriam Ching Yoon Louie Papers), 1-2.

valuable in their everyday lives and work. They hoped the women would carry what they had learned into their own communities and organizations, which may not have previously focused on women's issues or even considered the subject, and that way bring new women into the movement. In the Alliance speech at the 1974 event, they voiced the hope "that the committee experience has given those sisters the opportunity and ideas to provide leadership within their organizations, particularly in dealing with women's issues and developing collective work style."[169]

The members also viewed committee work as a means of broadening personal political perspectives.[170] They wanted to nurture a political consciousness among the participants and promote their revolutionary, socialist agenda. Though their primary aim was not recruiting new members, they always presented a short history of the Alliance at the celebrations.[171] International Women's Day was also an opportunity to lead by example. In 1979, the event was dedicated to women of Southern Africa, aligning with the Alliance's ongoing Southern Africa solidarity campaign. Three days before the celebration they organized a picket in front of the South African Consulate to show their support to the struggles for self-determination and to protest US involvement – to "bring out the 'active' aspect of a commemoration."[172] For the picket, they collaborated with other local solidarity movements (i.e. Chilean, Nicaraguan, and Vietnamese,) to foster collaboration between different groups. By participating in the picket, they hoped to motivate participants to stand up against racism domestically and engage in international solidarity work.[173]

All Women's Day celebrations were family-oriented and inclusive of children and men. As Third World women, the members recognized how hardships in their histories, such

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[169] "Alliance Presentation #1", 3. The celebrations drew in a lot of people, as evidenced by the rapid growth in their membership after the 1975 celebration.
[170] "Publicity Committee Evaluation," 4.
[171] "TWWA meeting, 1/29/75," in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 3.
[172] "International Women's Day, 1979," 2.
[173] Ibid., 2-3.

as the legacies of migration restrictions, slavery, life on reservations, and child labor had affected their communities. Consequently, they placed great importance on uniting families.[174] The celebrations provided opportunities for men to contribute, such as serving as security guards or by participating in skits. At the end of the day, men joined the women and children in singing together, showcasing a sense of community, political unity, and self-reliance.[175] This inclusivity reflects the fundamental differences between the Alliance (and the activism of women of color during this time) and white radical feminists. While white feminists formed their organization separate from men, women of color were fighting for the advancement of their whole communities. The Alliance believed that men were essential in bringing about political change. Women's liberation was in their best interest too, since "the oppression of women sets one half of the human race at odds with the other. It exerts a downward tendency on wages, affects the life of the family and the outlook of future generations."[176] Third World unity encompassed every age and gender, and events like the International Women's Day, which was organized by women and supported by men, exemplified the TWWA's commitment to it.

Like other Third World Left groups, the Alliance's primary concern lay with the well-being of own communities. They demanded improved living conditions, better housing, healthcare, education, childcare, and an end to state oppression. However, they saw imperialism as a worldwide oppressive force that could not be defeated on a single front. On International Women's Day, they emphasized the importance of multicultural, international alliances. "International Women's Day is a day not only of struggle for our specific rights and of the general struggles of our people," *Triple Jeopardy* wrote in 1972, "but also of solidarity and

[174] "Dedication," 1975, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[175] "Steering committee report," 2; Romney, *We Were There;* 184.
[176] International Women's Day Brochure, 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 10.

friendship among the women of the world, supporting one another, exchanging experiences and advancing towards more and better organized and coordinated struggles on a world scale."[177] They believed that by fighting racism and protesting U.S. military interventions abroad, they could contribute to the liberation efforts of decolonizing and developing countries and form a unified resistance. Individual actions alone would not be sufficient; collective efforts were needed to achieve meaningful change.[178]

To unite Third World people in the United States around the struggle, the members faced the challenge of constructing the category of the "Third World woman." This was not a straightforward task, given the range of life experiences and identities within the Alliance.[179] To bridge these divides and to create a space for convergence, the members looked for commonalities among themselves and with the women in developing countries.[180] The Women's Day celebrations were a platform for them to showcase, celebrate, and at times construct these commonalities. The members went about this in various ways. They emphasized a collective identity as women, daughters, sisters, mothers, and workers. They created visual representations that emphasized their unity and sisterhood, and meticulously crafted and presented a narrative of shared history for all minority racial/ethnic groups in the United States. Through the recognition of shared struggles and the acknowledgment of similar aspirations, they envisioned a shared destiny.

The emphasis on unity was reflected in the celebration's publicity materials. Posters, brochures, and programs featured graphics and drawings depicting women of different races and ages, symbolizing unity not only between ethnicities and races but also between

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[177] *Triple Jeopardy*, February-March 1972, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[178] "Committee Speech," 3.
[179] Furthermore, a Third World ideology was not always easily accepted by the people the Alliance wanted to attract. There were times International Women's Day attendees voiced confused about the meaning of Third World, and told Alliance members that they felt their identity as Black or Chicana as more important. This made the members even more determined to educate about the advantages of cross-racial unity. "TWWA Meeting, 1/29/75," 2-3.
[180] Young, *Soul Power*, 4.

generations. For instance, the 1974 poster features four images positioned diagonally on the right side of the page, showing a child, a young woman, a mother with a child, and an older woman wearing a scarf. All the characters have black hair and features that suggest a non-white racial background.[181] The program for the 1975 event features three women on the cover, with a Black woman in the center, placing her hands on the shoulders of an Asian woman and a Latina woman.[182] The language used in official notices, letters, and leaflets, also reinforced this sense of unity. Phrases such as "our people's struggle" and "the daily heroism of our women" were commonly employed.[183]

Occasionally, building common ground resulted in sweeping generalizations. For the celebrations, the committee asked members to bring "ethnic type food", with no further specification.[184] In the program for an "Evening of Third World Culture," a fundraising event for the International Women's Day, they wrote: "We have chosen a menu that reflects our experience as Third World people in the United States. For economic reasons, beans and rice has been a common staple in all of our diets, with meat and chicken reserved for special occasions."[185] While the choice of menu may seem like a nonissue, it reflects the Alliance's emphasis of everyday experiences as markers of unity. On the other hand, it shows that promoting unity ran the risk of erasing the unique features and diversity within the cultures they sought to celebrate.

The teaching of history played a significant part of the celebrations. During a speech at the 1976 event, a representative of the TWWA declared, "We have come together today to reclaim our true history."[186] Their aim was to uncover hidden narratives and to highlight the

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[181] International Women's Day Poster, 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[182] International Women's Day 1975 Program.
[183] "Letter to the People: International Women's Day," undated, in International Women's Day Celebrations, 1974-1990, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie Papers.
[184] See "Subcommittee Food Evaluation," 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[185] An Evening of Third World Culture Program, 1977, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[186] Untitled Speech, 1976, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.

contributions made by women of color to both the liberation movements and the history of working people. The improvement of the U.S. education system was a focal point of the Third World left, and university campuses saw some of the most active and successful Third World leftist alliances. The student activists demanded access for people of color to study at universities and the inclusion of Black, Latino, Asian-American, and Native American history in school curricula. The Third World Liberation Front managed to get the first Ethnic Studies program established at San Francisco State College in 1968.[187] In line with this movement, the Alliance had a keen interest in uncovering their own history. However, they specifically focused on demonstrating how the histories of all Third World women had followed similar trajectories.

For example, the Alliance emphasized the hostilities and hardships all women of color had to face, stemming from their race, gender, and class. All of them carried shared a sense of rootlessness, they argued, whether they had migrated from far-away countries, across oceans or across the Southern border, form the South to the North, or off the reservation.[188] They had been exposed to poverty, challenging living conditions, oppressive working environments, and painful separation of families. These themes are captured in a poem that was read at the 1977 celebration:

we are the women whose communities
are ravaged by poverty, disease and crime
our hearts are torn and bleeding as our
people struggle against alcohol and drugs.
(...)
we have picked cotton, built houses,

[187] Elbaum, "What Legacy," 43.
[188] "Letter to the People: International Women's Day."

stood guard and tended the fires

of each succeeding generation of warriors.

We are women of the third world

We stand united with each other.[189]

While the poem recognizes the deep anguish the women have felt, it also asserts their resilience and strength. It acknowledges their historical contributions in building and sustaining their communities, and their important role as mothers. Despite facing hardships, they all possess a deep love for their communities and families. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of women standing together, supporting one another, and finding strength in their shared experiences.

In another similar example, in 1974, the members performed a scene involving five women of different races and ethnicities. They spoke one after the other, sharing their personal history. "I was brought here to work the tobacco fields of Virginia, and I been here working ever since," the Black woman began. "You continue to build your road of imperialism against my sisters in Mexico, Central and South America, and against their families," continued the Latina woman. "In 1890 I was massacred at Wounded Knee." "In the Philippines I was a skilled nurse. Here I work as a domestic." As the performance reached its conclusion, the women stood side by side and delivered a collective message: "With the eyes of a past rich in struggle, we see our children rising. Rising with courage, to right what is wrong. Rising together, leaving no one behind."[190] Despite their unique experiences, the women have all endured the oppression of the American state and the consequences of imperialism. These experiences have given them an awareness of societal injustices and the strength to work in pursuit of justice.

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[189] Ellice Parker, "We Are Women of the Third World," in "International Women's Day 1977 Program," 6.
[190] "Scene I – 1974 Skit," in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records. This performance, they later reported, got an especially good response from the audience, and they planned to perform it again at a suitable event. "Steering committee report," 1.

In addition to a shared history, the emphasis on working-class struggle served as a unifying force that transcended cultural differences within Third World women in the U.S. The impact of the recession and rising inflation disproportionately affected working-class Americans, with women often being the first to face layoffs. Women of color experienced particularly exploitative and demoralizing working conditions in the garment industry, factories, healthcare, as domestic workers, and farm laborers.[191] They worked in large numbers to support their families since one paycheck was often not sufficient to cover the expenses. The Alliance recognized the challenges faced by working mothers who not only had to fulfill their responsibilities in the workplace but also shoulder the burdens of chores and childcare.[192] However, they reminded their audience, women should not simply demand equal pay and equal status with men, but instead "transcend that and recognize [their] role is to collectively, with [their] men, transform [the] inequitable oppressive conditions."[193]

Considering all Third World communities as working-class was another generalization which ignored many undeniable differences among them. Furthermore**,** the emphasis on working-class issues, regardless of their intentions or their desired outcome, brought them closer to white leftist activists. This created inevitable confusion, especially when organizing events such as the International Women's Day. Over time, the presence of white attendees increased, and by 1979, the TWWA had officially renamed its celebration as the "International Working Women's Day."[194] This evolution signaled the choice they made to identify with working-class women across racial lines and reflected the organization's

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[191] "Committee Speech," 1; International Women's Day 1974 Brochure, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 7.
[192] The TWWA considered stay at home mothers as working class too, as they were, together with the unemployed, "forced out or excluded from the labor market". See "Committee Speech," 2.
[193] "Committee Speech," 2.
[194] International Women's Day 1979 Program, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.

commitment to global solidarity with working women around the world, paving the way for its transformation into the Alliance Against Women's Oppression in 1980.

As women's liberation was becoming mainstream over the course of the decade, the portrayal of (white) women was changing in media. A new "liberated" image appeared alongside the more traditional view of (white) family life, exemplified by women such as Billy Jean King who defeated Bobby Riggs on the tennis court in the 1973 Battle of the Sexes. In contrast, women of color faced a different treatment. For them, the Alliance argued, there was only "either a complete vacuum of material or the most backwards of stereotypes capable of arousing only self-hatred or pity. The concept of the 'Black emasculating female' (…) persists alongside the myths of the servile, passive Latin or Asian woman and the stereotypes surrounding the Indian 'squaw'."[195] Women of color were not celebrated for their advancements or recognized for their contributions; instead, they were depicted as constantly striving to emulate the white, middle-class ideal but never truly attaining it.[196] The TWWA wanted to challenge these stereotypes by promoting positive representation of women and their diverse cultures. Their goal was to instill hope, provide strong role models, boost self-confidence, and foster pride among women of color. They aimed to create a new image of the Third World woman – one who asserted herself, actively worked to change her circumstances, and courageously fought against oppression.

At the International Women's Day celebrations, the Alliance educated and inspired their audience through the portrayal of freedom-fighting Third World women in the United States and abroad. At the 1974 celebration, they put together a display which showcased the history of women from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, including Black, Asian

[195] 1974 Brochure, 2.
[196] Ibid., 2.

(making a distinction between different groups such as Korean, Hawaiian, Chinese, and Samoan,) Latina, and Native American. The display utilized photographs, interviews, and captions to illustrate the key role they have played in U.S. history.[197] For example, the Asian section highlights Asian-American contributions, such as their involvement in building railroads, their entrepreneurial successes, businesses, and schools.[198] Additionally, it included a photo essay on the National Welfare Rights Organization, based on a personal interview with one of its members. This segment was meant to "show the positive results of a struggle based on the desire and ability to cause radical social change."[199]

The International Women's Day committee frequently invited speakers from other organizations to educate the audience about their respective struggles and show the interconnectedness of all liberation movements, but also to inspire by their example. In 1974, they had Johnnie Tillmon from the National Welfare Rights Organization and Sister My Loc from the Union Vietnamese speak at the event. My Loc discussed the connections between the Vietnamese liberation movement and the fight for women's liberation. In 1975, Digna Sanches from the Puerto Rican Socialist Party shared insights on the Puerto Rican independence struggle, and a message from the American Indian Movement was read by Fern Mathias.[200] In 1979, the event was organized in coalition with the Josina Machel Committee and dedicated to solidarity with Southern Africa.[201] The organizing committee invited women who had recently returned from the "Conference on Women's Affairs" in Mozambique to raise awareness about the apartheid system and the history of Southern African countries that

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[197] "Display Committee – Third World Women's Committee to Celebrate International Women's Day," March 10, 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records 2, 5-6. They note that at least the Native American section was weak, because they only found a Native American representative to work on it last minute.
[198] "Outline for Asian Display," 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[199] "Outline, Photoessay on a local struggle: National Welfare Rights Organization," 1974, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[200] International Women's Day 1975 Program, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[201] The Josina Machel Committee was focused on raising material aid to the women of children Southern Africa. See 1975 Program.

were formerly under colonial rule and still governed by white minority regimes with the support of international corporations.[202]

The concept of internal colonies drew parallels between marginalized communities of color in the United States and the experiences of colonized people abroad. The International Women's Day programs and speeches highlighted the common struggles against racial and sexual oppression faced by women of color in both contexts. In the program for the 1979 celebration, they wrote: "U.S. corporations and banks make investments and loans to help prop up (…) repressive regimes. These same institutions are not responsive to the needs of Third World communities (...) in the U.S."[203] An important part of the internal colony theory was the pervasive state violence faced by urban communities of color. Violence was present in the daily lives of Alliance members. Police brutality and the assassinations of Black political figures and activists filled the news alongside the horrors of the Vietnam War.

The International Women's Day 1979 programs and brochures featured photographs of Southern African women in uniform carrying rifles, with captions that highlighted their roles working in healthcare and education, as well as the sacrifices they had made to overthrow colonial rule.[204] While there was a gun in the TWWA symbol, the members never armed themselves. Romney recalls the gun as "a symbol of the revolution and of women's agency."[205] Although they called for the right of women to bear arms and celebrated militant women, their understanding of armed struggle was romanticized and slightly naïve.[206] The women fighting in decolonizing struggles were at the same real-life time role models and distant symbols.

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[202] International Women's Day 1979 Program, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.
[203] 1979 Program.
[204] 1979 Program; Romney, *We Were There,* 227-228.
[205] Romney, *We Were There,* 227.
[206] Ibid., 228.

For the Alliance, as for the entire Third World left, cultural expression and political activism were not contradictory but rather served to complement each other.[207] As argued in the Cultural Committee Evaluation,

> What we must remember is that the most cultural presentations are just as ideologically loaded as speeches. If we don't function this way, and fall into thinking that a dance is just a dance, then we will continually be unpleasantly surprised. Do we want to demoralize our audience with the depiction of a succession of depressing stereotypes, or can we see the possibility of uplifting our audience with a better understanding of the origins and reasons for such gross distortions and how to combat them?[208]

By incorporating culture into their celebrations, they made a political statement about the significance of embracing their own cultural heritage and their rejection of a white, middle-class ideal. They challenged the notion that culture belonged only to privileged and dominant groups. The act of celebrating culture, according to the TWWA, could foster a sense of resistance, planting "a seed of opposition to enhance the inalienable rights of every people to their history."[209] For example, the program for the 1975 event featured Vietnamese Poetry titled "Memoirs of a Young Girl," and dance performances with the names "Danza Negra" and "Asian Women."[210] They often read poetry, either written by the members themselves or by poets such as Pablo Neruda. The songs they sang came from all over the world, such as Guinea Bissau and Angola, and in languages like Tagalog. They always sang "The Internationale" in Spanish and English.

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[207] Young, *Soul Power*, 4. The TWWA wrote: "We view culture and the cultural expressions of our people not only as the performing aspects, but also as the food we eat, the shelter we create and the lifestyles we live." See Evening of Third World Culture Program.
[208] "Program Committee Evaluation." Undated, in Committee evaluations, TWWA Bay Area Records, 2.
[209] Evening of Third World Culture Program.
[210] International Women's Day 1975 Program, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records.

Though their speeches featured the "legendary valor of the women of Vietnam" and the "heroic women of Guinea Bissau," it was not only revolutionary heroes that the Alliance wanted to represent.[211] The New York chapter's first published platform included a section on mass media, demanding that "third world people when appearing on shows depict situations and events that are common to the masses of our people. We want to see bus drivers, taxi drivers, women on welfare (…) showing problems they have to endure."[212] The celebrations tackled this challenge. A central component of the celebrations was the performance of short plays written and performed by the members. While the plays were not as experimental in nature like some political theatre groups of the time, such as the San Francisco Mime Troupe, they were always inherently political.[213] Through relatable and easily understandable scenes, they aimed to connect everyday problems to larger socio-political issues and broader systemic injustices and inspire action to address them.

An example can be found in the skits performed at the 1975 event titled "Lines." This series depicted people waiting in different lines, such as at the unemployment office and the food stamp line. One of the skits took place in a federal employment line. A man remarks that he hopes the jobs aren't given to the women "to fill some quota or something." The women confront him, asking him if his wife works. "Yeah, she works," the man replies. "But she's not taking no jobs away from any men. She's a clerk typist. Men don't usually do that kind of work." "Cus the pay is too low," another man counters. "Man, you sound like you're from out of the stone age or something. You know a lot of these women are out here trying to support their families alone. And on less than we make."[214] This situation highlights several social

[211] Excerpts from the Third World Women's Alliance's International Women's Day Speech on March 13, 1977, printed in *Union W.A.G.E.*, March-April 1977, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 3.
[212] "History, Ideology, Goals," 8.
[213] Sharyn Emery, "'Were They the Ones We Were Waiting for?' The TWWA and the Performance of Solidarity," *Cambridge University Press Theatre survey* 61, no. 1 (2020), 29.
[214] "Federal employment line," in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 1.

problems. It touches upon the issue of affirmative action, which was an important topic in Alliance's activism.[215] Additionally, the skit sheds light on gender-based pay disparities and the challenges faced by women who are trying to support their families on lower wages compared to men. A recurring theme in the plays was the lack of understanding among men about women's struggles. However, through dialogue with both women and other, more informed men, the male characters are made to reconsider their opinions. By portraying women who stand up for themselves as well as supportive men, the plays provided positive representation of both sexes.[216]

By depicting situations onstage where women and men work together to challenge oppressive systems, the plays were meant to inspire the audience to do the same in their own lives. As Sharyn Emery has argued, the skits performed at the Women's Day celebrations served as a form of instruction manual for women of color, providing them with strategies on how to interact constructively with each other and society.[217] The Federal employment line skit concludes:

> 1st woman: "Everybody who needs work should get work. But that's not what's happening. (…) It's bad enough to have to fight the man for a few crumbs. Why do I have to fight you too?"
>
> 1st man: "Cuz as long as we're fighting for crumbs we'll be fighting each other. When we get it together and bake our own cake it'll be a different story."[218]

Rather than continuing to assign blame to each other, the characters become conscious of the divisive nature of capitalism and recognize the power of collective action. They realize that their aspirations extend beyond mere employment; they instead seek a world they "can live

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[215] For example, they protested the Supreme Court ruling on the Bakke case, which challenged the legality of affirmative action in California. See Romney, *We Were There*, 152-153.
[216] Romney, *We Were There,* 187. Some of the men even found playing male chauvinist roles helpful to understand and learn the experiences of women.
[217] Emery, "'Were They the Ones We Were Waiting for?'" 28.
[218] "Federal employment line," 2.

in, not just survive." The TWWA aimed to connect with their audience by presenting such positive representations and encourage a shift in consciousness towards empowerment and systemic change.

The Third World Women's Alliance was radical in their cross-racial organizing and anti-imperialist focus, and they understood their primary mission as revolutionaries was to involve women in the movement. They recognized the everyday challenged women faced, such as childcare, work, and discrimination both within and outside the movement, which often hindered their participation in political activism. In their efforts to make revolutionary ideas tangible in everyday life, the Alliance attributed significance to seemingly small things like the food they ate and the songs they sang. They transformed a school auditorium into a symbolic space of solidarity with Cuba, Angola, and Vietnam. They connected women rights at home to armed resistance in other parts of the world, reshaping the meaning of womanhood and women's liberation. Through International Women's Day, they bridged the gap between revolutionary ideas and everyday reality.

As part of the Third World left, the TWWA held a perspective which Young describes as "[walking] a tightrope between analysis and idealization, between sophisticated differentiation and crude reduction."[219] While they sought to critically engage with issues important to them, their ideas were often contradictory and not fully developed. The TWWA sought to unite all working people in overthrowing oppressive forces, while simultaneously finding it difficult to work with white leftist groups. They aimed to be an alliance for all Third World women, while failing to acknowledge the diversity within "the Third World." In pursuit of unity, they downplayed significant differences among themselves, and in envisioning a worldwide alliance, they minimized their own privileges as residents of a

[219] Young, *Soul Power*, 15.

developed, wealthy country. They idealized violent struggles in decolonizing countries and idolized militant women while not taking up guns themselves. Despite their efforts to learn, the realities of an armed struggle remained abstract.

Although their goal of popularizing the International Women's Day celebration in the United States did not fully materialize, the Alliance Against Women's Oppression continued the tradition until 1989. Furthermore, the TWWA made a significant contribution in raising awareness about the holiday. In 1975, during International Women's Year, the United Nations first declared March 8th as International Women's Day. Today, the day's socialist roots have been largely forgotten, even as the idea of global unity among women persists. In 2010, Michelle Obama organized the first International Women's Day celebration in the White House, and they have been celebrated there ever since. However, as Romney remarks, the occasion is rarely recognized at a local level, especially in communities of color.[220]

From 1974 to 1979, the Alliance used International Women's Day celebrations as a platform to inspire solidarity and unity among Third World women and men. The vibrant celebrations drew in hundreds of volunteers and attendees over the years and introduced the ideas of the TWWA to the public. Many decided to join as members after working on the committees, and the Alliance gave them access to political work. Through community engagement, they fostered a sense of solidarity and sisterhood which opened new possibilities for forming alliances across racial and ethnic lines. At the events, they celebrated the achievements of women of color and working women, breaking down harmful stereotypes and representations. Furthermore, they emphasized shared experiences and histories among people of color living in the U.S., fostering a sense of connection through music and skits.

[220] Romney, *We Were There,* 246.

The men, women, and children that came together at the celebration left feeling a sense of collective accomplishment.

The International Women's Day celebrations did not strive to foster unity only within the U.S., however, but also across national borders. The celebrations featured speakers who offered insights into liberation struggles in other parts of the world. By sharing the challenges and triumphs experiences by women in different countries, the Alliance sought to educate and inspire attendees about the global nature of their struggle for liberation and promote a sense of global sisterhood. While the concept of Third World unity had diminished by the end of the 1970s, the Alliance Against Women's Oppression continued to invite speakers from various backgrounds, including Palestinian, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, and South African women, to their International Women's Day celebrations for another decade.

As the popular movements of the 1960s and 1970s began to wane, partly due to the successes achieved, such as the end of the Vietnam War and the independence of former colonies, some members of the Third World Left shifted their focus towards Marxism and socialist revolution. During this period, many compromises had to be made, and alliances with white activists were born around shared issues. Some left full-time activism to pursue higher education or professional opportunities. The Third World Left marked a significant but relatively short-lived period in which diverse groups found ways to transcend their differences in pursuit of an anti-imperialist agenda. The International Women's Day celebrations serve as valuable case studies of the era, as they encapsulate the spirit of innovation, collaboration, and commitment to challenging oppressive structures.

Conclusion

The 1980 International Women's Day celebration was the first Alliance Against Women's Oppression event. At the celebration, they unveiled their new revolutionary political line and direction towards a mass organization. They presented the history of the Third World Women's Alliance, with its successes and errors, and laid out the reasons for uniting with white leftists and changing its primary focus to the material basis of women's oppression.[221] The reason for the Alliance's downfall had been, according to them, their failure to "translate [their] general perspective into the political arena" and for underplaying class differences in Third World communities.[222] Instead of all Third World people, the AAWO planned to invite leftist organizations with whom they shared the orientation towards socialist revolution. The era of the Third World Left was over.

The Third World Women's Alliance was a multifaceted, ideologically hybrid organization with the goal of providing women with the tools to change their circumstances and giving them access to the revolution. Emerging from the disintegrating SNCC, it was a pioneering group; not only was it one of the first Black women's groups to separate from a mixed-gender civil rights organization, but it also stood out for its inclusivity of all women of color at a time when feminisms were primarily developing along racial lines. Instead of focusing on individual identities, the Alliance emphasized the shared experience of oppression. During its ten-year existence, in New York and in the Bay Area, it brought together women from diverse backgrounds, united in their struggle to destroy the intersecting oppressions of imperialism, sexism, and racism.

This study has argued that the Alliance was Third World Left group rather than a Black feminist organization, as it has most often been described in scholarship. Though they

[221] "Proposal to Celebrate IWD '80."
[222] Ibid., 8

did fight for women's rights, they saw imperialism as the main enemy, and all other oppressions as connected to it. Furthermore, one of their main goals was to foster Third World unity. By identifying as a Third World women's organization, the Alliance aimed to transcend racial, ethnic, and national boundaries, viewing themselves as part of a worldwide front united by a common enemy. They believed that working-class women of color, as the most oppressed group, would be essential in the struggle.

The International Women's Day celebrations the Bay Area chapter organized between 1974 and 1979 were one of the main ways they fostered Third World solidarity in practice. This thesis has argued that the celebrations went beyond mere festivities, serving as platforms for the Alliance to advance their goal of dismantling the oppressive structured of imperialism, sexism, and racism. Through community engagement, coalition-building, and political education, they created a sense of unity among a diverse group of women and men. By emphasizing shared experiences and challenging stereotypes, they aimed to bridge the gap between different ethnic groups, as well as between people of color in the U.S. and people in the developing world. Through education and positive representations, they sought to empower women and give them the tools to face challenged in their everyday lives. The celebrations were one of the most tangible legacies of the Third World Women's Alliance, as the AAWO continued the annual celebrations throughout its existence.

The AAWO did not abandon completely the multipronged focus on the "triple jeopardy" of imperialism, racism, and sexism. They strove to be anti-racist and to involve women of color in the movement, and carried on many of the goals of the TWWA, participating in coalitions around abortion rights and infant mortality, as well as having a strong focus on international solidarity, especially with Central America.[223] Still, the change

[223] The AAWO, unlike the TWWA, also addressed issues of sexuality. In the founding stages of the Bay Area, the members had explicitly decided not to include issues of heterosexism on their agenda, which prompted many lesbian members to leave the group. Only when they turned into the AAWO, they added oppression based on sexual orientation to their analysis, and the AAWO was openly an alliance of gay and straight women. Burnham

did not come without resistance. Many members refused to transition over to the new organization, among them Frances Beal, who believed it was still important for women of color to organize separately.[224] However, the end of the 1970s saw the nationwide decline of both Third World left and Black feminist organizations, and the Bay Area chapter knew they faced a choice between changing or going out of operation. Of the Black women's organizations that had sprung up at the same time as the TWWA, such as the Combahee River Collective and the National Black Feminist Organization, most were defunct by 1980.[225] Springer attributes the decline of Black feminist organizations to a lack of funding, worsened by dwindling numbers of active members, activist burnout, and the rise of conservatism nationwide which led to many uniting with white feminists.[226] Broader trends played a part in the decline of Third World left. A significant factor was the unfulfilled promise of a united Third World front against capitalism; as capitalism spread to newly independent states, the potential for a cohesive socialist movement weakened. In addition, the left in the United States struggled to expand and unify. The election of Ronald Reagan and the emergence of the New Right brought forth a formidable opposition to feminist and socialist ideas, working to turn back the tide of the popular movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The 1980s saw the end of many groups who could not adapt to changing circumstances.

The AAWO recognized the shifting socio-political landscape and adapted the International Women's Day celebrations accordingly. They witnessed the weakening of the people's movement and the erosion of hard-fought gains made in the previous decades. Reproductive autonomy, protection against sterilization abuse, affirmative action, and workplace anti-discrimination laws were under threat, and the AAWO highlighted these past

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interview, 23; "AAWO: Our History and Our Political Line," 12. Other groups, such as the Combahee River Collective, did address sexuality and the oppression faced by sexual minorities. The Bay Area chapter members later acknowledged the homophobic attitudes during their early years: see *We Were There,* 226-227.

[224] Burnham interview, 24; Beal interview, 47.

[225] Springer, *Living for the Revolution,* 1-2.

[226] Ibid., 145-5.

achievements during International Women's Day celebrations as a reminder of the progress that had been made and the need to protect it.[227] The AAWO sought to organize the celebrations to provide hope and to revitalize the movement. However, in February 1989, the AAWO sent word to its supporters that it would not be organizing any activity in the Bay Area for International Women's Day. Instead, they endorsed a cultural program held in the San Francisco Women's Building, where their office was located.[228] The following year, the AAWO was dissolved.[229] It brought an end to a tradition that had begun fifteen years earlier with the Bay Area chapter of the Third World Women's Alliance.

According to the wave analogy, the second wave of feminism ended in the early 1980s. While many radical Black and white feminist organizations disappeared, other forms of women's activism were only beginning to flourish. Multiracial, multiethnic feminist alliances, in fact, peaked in the 1980s and 1990s. The decades after the "second wave" saw white activist and activists of color join forces and form coalitions around racial equality in the feminist movement, immigrant rights, women's health, and protection against violence. They saw the rise of transnational feminist organizations and the UN 1985 women's year.[230] The concept of intersectionality, coined in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw to address race and gender-based prejudice in the U.S. legal system and socioeconomic order, has become part of mainstream discourse.[231] All these advances have their roots in the diverse feminist thought of the contemporaries of the Third World Women's Alliance.

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[227] "A Call to Celebrate International Women's Day", 1981, in International Women's Day, 1974-80, TWWA Bay Area Records, 2-3.
[228] Sushawn Robb, Letter to AAWO members, February 15, 1989, Linda Burnham papers.
[229] Two members then founded the Women of Color Resource Center, which carried on the legacy of the TWWA, but did not organize around International Women's Day. See Beal interview, 47.
[230] Thompson, "Multiracial Feminism," 47-48.
[231] See Kimberle Crenshaw. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991).

In 2012, a group of former Alliance members gathered to look back on their time together. One of them described attending an event with a number of former activists. "All of the sisters that came from the Alliance [were] very centered," she remembered. "'I learned how to be a leader.' 'I learned how to have confidence in myself.' 'I learned how to do this I learned how to do that."[232] In the same vein, Patricia Romney writes: "Our most important achievements were our own self-development and contribution to what became an expanded conception of how women could and should participate in the movements of the 1970s and beyond."[233] Although the Alliance did not succeed in its goal of destroying all oppressive structures, the organization thoroughly transformed the lives of those who were involved with it. Most members continued their political activism throughout their lives, and credit their experience with the TWWA. During its existence, many women were attracted to the Alliance precisely because it offered the opportunity to learn, grow, and develop as a leader. International Women's Day celebrations played a significant part in this, because they gave women the access, the tools, and the courage needed to become an activist. When the members look back on the Third World Women's Alliance, they remember this as its most important legacy.

[232] "Remembering the Third World Women's Alliance," 2012, video recording, 2:27:56, in TWWA Bay Area Records. Quote at 1:27:10.
[233] Romney, *We Were There,* 232.

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