

## Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s (Women in Culture and Society)

By Amy Swerdlow

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*Women Strike for Peace* is the only historical account of this ground-breaking women's movement. Amy Swerdlow, a founding member of WSP, restores to the historical record a significant chapter on American politics and women's studies. Weaving together narrative and analysis, she traces WSP's triumphs, problems, and legacy for the women's movement and American society.

Women Strike for Peace began on November 1, 1961, when thousands of white, middle-class women walked out of their kitchens and off their jobs in a one-day protest against Soviet and American nuclear policies. The protest led to a national organization of women who fought against nuclear arms and U.S. intervention in Vietnam. While maintaining traditional maternal and feminine roles, members of WSP effectively challenged national policies—defeating a proposal for a NATO nuclear fleet, withstanding an investigation by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and sending one of its leaders to Congress as a peace candidate.

As a study of a dissident group grounded in prescribed female culture, and the struggle of its members to avoid being trapped within that culture, this book adds a crucial new dimension to women's studies. In addition, this account of WSP's success as a grass roots, nonhierarchical movement will be of great interest to historians, political scientists, and anyone interested in peace studies or conflict resolution.

"Swerdlow has re-created a unique piece of American political history, a chapter of the international peace movement, and an origin of the modern feminist movement. No historian, activist, or self-respecting woman should be without *Women Strike for Peace*. It shows not only how one group of women created change, but also how they inevitably changed themselves."—Gloria Steinem

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### **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

This history of a women's antiwar group suffers from the looseness of structure that characterized the group itself. Women Strike for Peace evolved after a protest held in November 1961. But while she describes its founders, its relations with other peace groups and its investigation by HUAC, Swerdlow, a history and women's studies professor at Sarah Lawrence and a founding member, has problems defining the group's activities and accomplishments. The book works best when it gives an overview of women's involvement in antiwar protests in general and against the Vietnam War in particular. Stories like that of Evelyn Whitehorn, who attempted to obtain a restraining order through legal channels in order to keep her 18-year-old son from being drafted, testify to the women's collective political power, although Whitehorn drew WSP's attention through her actions rather than the other way around. Unfortunately, the question of why these women--such as Dagmar Wilson, a children's book illustrator, and Eleanor Garst, a longtime peace activist--insisted on presenting themselves as mothers and housewives is never answered satisfactorily.

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From Library Journal

Swerdlow (history & director of Women's Studies, Sarah Lawrence) was a founding member of Women Strike for Peace (WSP). In this engrossing, thoughtful account of middle-class housewives' strike for peace on November 1, 1961, she describes the Cold War tensions that spurred women to use motherhood as a rationale for a well-covered media event. Although the strike was rooted in conventional sex roles, second-wave feminists such as Bella Abzug emerged from WSP. Problems inherent in WSP's lack of structure and its racial and class divisions were keenly felt. Sidetracked by the Vietnam War and confronted by Congressional red-baiters, WSPers nevertheless dignified homemakers while proving that women were not trapped in traditionalism. Swerdlow contributes a valuable, well-researched insider's study of an overlooked chapter in our history. Strongly recommended for academic and larger public libraries.

- Donna L. Cole, *Leeds P. L.*, Ala.

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From the Back Cover

In this, the only historical account of the ground-breaking Women Strike for Peace movement, the author restores to the historical record a significant chapter in American politics and women's studies.

### **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Karen Lawless:**

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**Lana Spalding:**

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