

Angels and Anti-Pornography Feminists: A Comparative Analysis of Civilian Public Safety Organizations

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Abstract: Late 1970s New York, rife with fear of crime and low trust in government to keep people safe, was a fertile ground for civilian public safety activism, which channeled people's anger at the city's situation into action to change it. The Guardian Angels and Women Against Pornography (WAP) were two of the best-known examples of this trend. Though rarely taken up together, this article places them in dialogue with one another in order to examine how racial, gender, sexual, and economic anxieties influenced the perception and possibilities of anti-violence community organizations at this time. I argue that while the predominately young, male, and nonwhite Angels were seen as belligerent, WAP's adherence to the state's social norms of acceptable female activism and sexual reformism facilitated their broader acceptance. The same social hierarchies that colored perceptions of the two organizations also shaped the available sources of partnerships, legitimacy, and funding, incentivizing both groups to undermine the most radically inclusive aspects of their missions in order to secure the resources they needed to continue operating most effectively.

In February 1979, two new civilian organizations emerged in New York City to fight crime and violence in the city for which these had become hallmarks. The Guardian Angels, led by Curtis Sliwa, set out on nightly patrols to keep New Yorkers safe on the notoriously dangerous subways. Women Against Pornography (WAP), on the other hand, was most concerned with seedy Times Square and the threat it posed to women. Both organizations sought to keep non-elite New Yorkers safe from forms or sites of violence they felt the state had overlooked, and they promised relief from the interminable aura of fear saturating the city. Despite these commonalities, they have been siloed into distinct historical

trends, namely urban vigilantism and second-wave feminism. Almost all existing literature on the Angels consists of sociological studies concerned with whether or not their crime fighting was successful (Kenney; Pennel et al.).¹ Similarly, most of the literature on Women Against Pornography contextualizes the group within histories of second-wave feminism (Bronstein; Strub). This strict division not only obscures the relationship between urban vigilantism and second-wave feminism in general but also prevents an analysis of why these two organizations received such starkly different treatment. In this paper, I compare the Angels and WAP as contemporaneous examples of civilian public safety organizations in order to illuminate the reasons for these differences, which were deeply informed by perceptions of race, class, gender, and sexuality. This, in turn, helps demonstrate the mechanisms by which both organizations quickly reneged on the most inclusive aspects of their missions to provide safety to all.

The Guardian Angels and Women Against Pornography were founded in the wake of two decades of social change along several fronts. The Civil Rights Movement had achieved notable gains, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964. However, the Civil Rights Movement was not the only civil rights movement of its time. Contemporaneous was second-wave feminism, usually dated from the mid '60s to the mid '80s, and a new era of post-Stonewall LGBTQ activism. While these movements were empowering for many, those who benefited from the old system were anxious about what the changes would mean for them. This conservative backlash drew on the instability caused by the fiscal crisis of 1975 that left New York on the verge of bankruptcy and on confusion over the US's identity and place in the world after the failures of the Vietnam War (Bailey and Farber 4-6).

This was the context for perceptions of violent crime in New York, which by the late 1970s was thought to be omnipresent and uncontrollable. Both news media and popular culture represented New York as primarily dirty, sleazy, and dangerous. New Yorkers did not trust the government or city infrastructure to keep them safe and were pessimistic about their future. Though official statistics indicated rising crime rates beginning in the '60s, increasing crime on its own did not fully account for the pervasive popular link between New York City and violence (Lynn). New York's crime panic may have been caused, in part, by the social upheavals and resulting

¹ A notable exception is Reiko Hillyer's insightful article, "The Guardian Angels: Law and Order and Citizen Policing in New York City," which uses the Guardian Angels to help analyze city dwellers of color's responses to urban fear and tough-on-crime policy.

anxieties discussed in the previous paragraph. As Elizabeth Hinton argued, urban issues which could no longer be approached with the rapidly disappearing welfare state were increasingly addressed using carceral strategies, making poverty and wealth inequality legible as crime. Regardless of its causes, the prevailing mood in the city, as the *New York Post* put it in a full- and front-page headline, was that “no one is safe” (“No One”).

As demonstrated by the media coverage of the 1977 citywide blackout, which blamed the attendant looting and arson on black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers, race was a major subtext of New York’s crime panic. The combination of the Second Great Migration, Operation Bootstrap, and white flight meant that by 1970, New York’s population was more than one-third black and Latino. Demographic change alone did not explain why increasing numbers of black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers and increasing crime were associated with one another; for that, one must look to the racialized discourses of crime and deviance of the time. These included the 1965 Moynihan report, which described poor black urban families as living in a “tangle of pathology” (29). Similarly, conservative ‘underclass’ discourse described poor urban communities of color as deviant, irrational, and responsible for their own poverty. According to Macek, changing urban demographics in dialogue with these popular racist discourses and widespread belief in an irreversible urban decline recontextualized many of the city’s biggest problems, including violence and fiscal deficit, as the fault of its poor residents of color (103). Criminality in particular had a long history of ascription to black communities in northeast urban centers (Muhammad). New York’s crime panic was no exception to this history, in that it both drew on and fed into racialized discourses of deviance and danger.

Times Square, known as the “pornography capital of America,” was a flashpoint of the crime panic, perceived as particularly dangerous due to its visible sexual economies, drug trade, and petty crime (Lederer 93). Crime rates in Times Square were not in fact particularly high for such a crowded tourism and commuter center. However, the increasing visibility of different forms of sexuality in the area, including commercial sex work and queerness, caused it to be seen as unsafe. 1960s liberalizations in obscenity and civil liberties laws, combined with anti-arcade zoning policy, left Midtown overrun with sex emporiums, topless bars, pornography theaters, massage parlors, and graphic advertisements. The NYPD concluded that there was a “direct connection between the easy atmosphere created by widespread prostitution and the commission of many other crimes,” including homicide

(Arnold 1). This presumed relationship between sexual economies and violent crime was widespread (cf., e.g., Kornblum).

Fear of rampant crime, mistrust of government to do anything about it, and reactions to social change all came together in an angry explosion of community-based alternatives to traditional public safety. Neighborhood patrols, a common example, counted more than 150,000 participants in New York City by 1980. The majority of civilian patrols nationwide consisted of white middle- and upper-class homeowners whose goals were to either gentrify neighborhoods or prevent their integration. However, those associated with black radicalism, which were at least equally concerned with protecting community members from police, extralegal violence, and racism as from crime, were met with the most alarm (Marx and Archer). The Angels and WAP became two of the best-known civilian public safety organizations of their time, eventually attaining international reach. Though WAP did not use patrols, they combined anti-oppression activism with do-it-yourself safety, in part inspired by gay neighborhood patrols (Hanhardt 108). Similarly, the egalitarian Guardian Angels engaged in traditional patrols in order to provide and argue for inclusive and high-quality public safety.

In the following chapter, I will provide a close analysis of perceptions of and responses to the Guardian Angels, in order to demonstrate that these were influenced by negative stereotypes about poor young men of color. Then, in the third chapter, I will analyze WAP to show that, in contrast to the Angels, their general adherence to white and middle-class norms of appropriate activism and sexuality facilitated their broad, though by no means complete, acceptance. Finally, in the fourth chapter, I will compare the development of the two groups in their early years and argue that both faced and succumbed to pressure to diminish the inclusivity of their missions. Overall, I will place WAP and the Guardian Angels in dialogue with one another in order to examine how racial, gender, sexual, and economic anxieties influenced the perceptions and possibilities of civilian public safety organizing in late 1970s New York City. I will use this comparison to argue that while the predominately young, male, and nonwhite Angels were seen as on the verge of violence, WAP's adherence to norms of acceptable female activism and sexual reformism allowed them broader legitimacy. The same social hierarchies that colored perceptions of the two organizations also shaped the available sources of partnerships, legitimacy, and funding, incentivizing both groups to undermine the

most radically democratic aspects of their missions in order to secure the resources they needed to continue to operate.

THE GUARDIAN ANGELS

The Guardian Angels began as a curiosity on the subways, a group of red-bereted youngsters who said they could achieve what the police had failed to deliver: safety for New York's notoriously dangerous transit system. Their mission, to fight the "aura of fear" in the subways, earned the Angels striking popularity across a diverse swath of New Yorkers (Armbruster 45). For example, a 1982 survey found that 74.5% of subway riders supported the Angels, including 80% of women and 77% of black riders (Kenney 81). Anecdotal evidence corroborated these results, with broad agreement that most of the public really did see the Angels as their guardians. However, when out of uniform, many Angels would have been assumed to be troublemakers. Nine out of ten Angels were black, Latino, or Chinese American, all but two dozen were men, and most were in their late teens (Edelman 52). In other words, they fit the profile of those assumed to be the source of crime in New York. As one middle-aged man explained, his normal response to encountering a group that looked like the Angels would be to "toss [his] wallet at them and run like hell" (qtd. in Cobb C6). Even while on patrol, the Angels' good intentions and broad popularity were not enough to protect them from assumptions that, rather than upholding public safety, they were menacing it. Because the group's majority young, male, and nonwhite membership coincided with popular images of criminality, the Guardian Angels were perceived as always on the verge of violence.

Police in New York, some of whom resented the Angels' encroachment on their responsibilities, argued that the group was a threat. NYPD spokespeople repeatedly voiced concern that the Angels would "probably assault someone," though they did not have past misdeeds to back up these claims (Stoltz 51). The most severe example that Transit Patrolmen's Benevolent Association president William McKechnie could find was a single incident in which an Angel handcuffed an alleged graffiti artist for forty five minutes (Orbach 13). Instead of concrete misbehaviors, police spokespeople used racialized gang language to stir up fear about the Angels' propensity to violence. For example, in an article for *Police Magazine* in 1981, Bernard Edelman introduced the Angels as "a cross between a Special Forces military squad and a street gang" (51). Later in the article, he described Angels as

wearing “martial arts outfits or jungle fatigues” (51), quoted members using their patrol nicknames, and called Sliwa their “supreme commander” (56). This, in conjunction with repeated references to the fact that the Angels were a group of young men “from the poorest, toughest sections of the city,” served to paint the group as a street gang (52).

Even people who were explicitly supportive of the Angels assumed that the group’s members had inherent violent tendencies because of their racial and class background. They supported the Angels precisely because the young people in it would turn to crime if they did not have the group as a distraction. As Hofstra law student Ron Frier explained in the student newspaper:

Hard core inner city youth grow up facing a problem. Frustration about the evil world around them often turns to anger and anger to violence. The Guardian Angels offers these young people a choice. They can join the group and have a positive effect on the evil and thereby become worthwhile individuals. (6)

Frier, and many others, simply assumed that the neighborhoods in which poor young people of color grew up in were “evil,” and so, though not necessarily their own fault, these young people would almost inevitably become violent. Sliwa provided an alternative by creating a group they could join in order to become “worthwhile” as people.² Considering the police’s and other opponents’ use of even cruder racial stereotypes in their condemnation of the Angels, the group had little wiggle room in maintaining a fragile and contested legitimacy, which may have been why some Angels also made this argument. For example, Orlando Ortiz, a sixteen-year-old from Spanish Harlem, told a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* that if he had not joined the group he would be “in the streets [...] doin’ bad things” (Cobb C6).

The argument that the Angels were a legitimate and successful public safety organization in that they prevented the crimes that members would otherwise end up committing, though made in favor of the group, also presented the Angels as always on the verge of violence. In fact, the police were happy to admit this benefit of the Angels, in order to further argue that the thin forces holding them to lawfulness were about to snap and unleash chaos on the subways. Robert Keating, the city’s coordinator for criminal justice, agreed that Sliwa “might be the first real

² For further examples of this perspective, see the “Letters” section in the December 12, 1980 issue of *New York Magazine*.

leader that [the Angels have] encountered” and their only “conduit to something outside the ghetto” (qtd. in Edelman 54). However, the *Police Magazine* article in which he was quoted nonetheless concluded that tolerating the Angels was likely to lead to “a chaotic collection of semi-autonomous gangs competing with the police in every aspect of law enforcement” (56). This dystopian prediction was predicated on the assumed criminal tendencies of the majority poor, male, and nonwhite Angels.

As a further demonstration of the relevance of race to the criminalization of the Angels, their founder and leader Curtis Sliwa, who was white and privately educated, was often represented as an exception to these assumptions of inherent criminality. While other Angels were gang-like and dangerous, Sliwa was lauded as a powerful and charismatic leader, extremely media-savvy, even if megalomaniacal. His main flaw was that he hid the true, sinister nature of his group from the public, in order to feed his need for publicity. The risk was not that Sliwa would misuse his position of leadership, but rather that he would disavow or lose it, leaving the other Angels to “degenerat[e] into bands of bullies” (McQueeney NJ31). While most people were more confident in Sliwa’s commitment and ability to maintain control, they still considered him the only line of defense between the young men of color who formed the majority of the Angels’ membership and their propensity to violence.

The Angels were self-aware of these public perceptions. As a biography of the Angels pointed out, as a group of “mostly young, mostly male, and mostly black and Hispanic” people “prowl[ing] the most dangerous streets at night,” public perception as a gang would be unavoidable. To reclaim this label in the interests of public safety, the Angels sometimes rebranded themselves as a “good gang” (Haskins 3). Lieutenant Governor Mario Cuomo also pointed out the racist and classist nature of concerns about the Angels’ risk of violence. “If these were the sons and daughters of doctors from Great Neck or Jamaica Estates, would people be calling them vigilantes?” he asked rhetorically. If the Angels were predominately white and upper-class, he predicted, “everyone would be giving them medals” (qtd. in Cummings E6). It was clear at the time, then, as it is now, that the fact that the Angels were predominately poor young men of color led to perceptions of the group as violent, despite their goal of making New York safer.

WOMEN AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY

Unlike the Guardian Angels, the civilian public safety organization Women Against Pornography was not concerned with crime as traditionally defined but rather with patriarchy, the national culture of violence against women. To them, pornography was a preeminent example and driver of patriarchy. It depicted women as vapid, submissive, sexual, and objectified stereotypes, and thereby encouraged men to treat them as such. As Gloria Steinem put it at WAP's first conference, pornography "is not sex [...]. It is violence and domination"; it "is the instruction [and] rape is the practice" (qtd. in Bennetts Bro). In addition to provoking physical assault, degrading images of women were symbolic violence, undermining women's power to self-represent as individuals and as a class. Though this was a radical argument, WAP enjoyed broad popularity. By September 1979, only a few months after their founding, the group had a distribution of over 9,000 on their paid mailing list, more than one hundred active members, collected \$25,000 in donations, and enjoyed close ties with officials in the city government (Brooke 24). WAP's widespread acceptance, and ability to quickly gain members, funds, and key relationships, was facilitated by their adherence, for the most part, to social and state norms of acceptable female activism and sexual reformism.

These norms dated back to the Progressive Era image of white middle-class women reformers, an image that fit the majority of WAP's active membership. Though the group counted a few renowned black activists among their ranks, including writer and poet Audre Lorde and educational director of the Urban League Amina Abdur Rahman, much of WAP's leadership and membership was white and middle-class. Further, their tours and protests often attracted college students and nonworking women. WAP's leadership explicitly recognized the group's racial and socioeconomic homogeneity as a problem, though they refrained from reducing membership and event fees and did not offer translations of materials, calling into question their actual commitment to diversifying participation (Brooke 26). More important than actual membership demographics, however, were WAP's activist strategies, goals for New York, and definitions of violent sexualities, all of which fell within social and state norms.

WAP's primary activist methodology in their early years was awareness raising, which was perceived as purely representational and therefore nonviolent and legitimate. WAP organized regular biweekly tours of sex-related businesses in

Times Square, bringing women to sex emporiums, burlesque shows, adult bookstores, and topless bars. For those who could not participate in the tours, WAP put together slide shows to bring examples of degrading and pornographic imagery to women's and youth groups. They also organized conferences, open to public participation, to study and teach about the issue. WAP wanted to raise awareness about pornography because they believed that many women, and some men, tolerated it out of ignorance of its true nature. Once they saw it for themselves, they would recognize its violence and join the fight against it. Awareness raising was perceived as legitimate activism because it did not interfere with traditional state roles. Further, interventions in the representational sphere were seen as less significant and liable to violence than those in the physical one, making it an appropriate plane for civilian and particularly female activism. This was deeply ironic, as WAP's argument against pornography was premised on the equal importance of representational and physical violence. However, their privileging of representations was misunderstood as sticking within the bounds of respectable feminine civilian activism.

WAP also organized protests and boycotts, which, unlike their awareness raising, were often represented as overstepping the bounds of legitimate civilian activism. One of WAP's first large-scale events was a march on Times Square in October 1979, which attracted more than 5,000 participants from around the country. Though the protest was against pornography in general, its catalyst was the screening of *Snuff*, a soft-core supposed snuff film, in Times Square theaters. This, along with future protests and boycotts of New York theaters showing pornography, led to backlash by Feminine Rights to Erotic Expression (FREE), an organization formed directly in response to WAP. FREE urged people to "protect the First Amendment!" by counterpicketing WAP's offices because "censorship is obscene!!!!" (FREE). WAP faced similar backlash in the fall of 1979, when they petitioned the Sloan's supermarket chain to stop selling *Hustler*, *Oui*, and *Playboy* magazines, with success in the first two cases. WAP was flabbergasted by this position, pointing out that private boycott and protest, far from infringing on free speech, was precisely what the First Amendment intended to protect. Additionally, at least in their early years, WAP was stridently against censorship and most legislative solutions to pornography. The ACLU, reflecting more recent consumer-oriented understandings of the First Amendment, disagreed, and the two organizations were often in conflict (Wheeler 241). Because WAP's boycott and protest campaigns

threatened the pornography business, they were sometimes represented as suppressing free speech and therefore as inappropriate activism in a way that their awareness-raising campaign was not.

Though the city and local business leaders were also wary of WAP's economic strategies, all three shared a key end goal, namely a Times Square free of sex-related businesses. This encouraged the state and local businesses to tolerate and even partner with WAP. They had a good relationship with the mayor's office and NYPD from the outset, often facilitated by the Mayor's Office of Midtown Enforcement (OME). Carl Weisbrod, the OME's director, explained that though WAP's "means and ends may not be exactly the same [as those of the city], obviously the issue of pornography is a matter of concern to both the city and the feminists" (Dullea A12). Weisbrod himself showed WAP leaders around Times Square's sex-related—what the city termed 'undesirable'—businesses in June 1979, providing them with the framework for their later tours. Moreover, he implied that going no further than "trying to raise public consciousness" was precisely what made WAP a "legitimate group" in the eyes of the state (Dullea A12). This demonstrates that WAP's awareness-raising strategies as well as their goals helped them achieve state support and legitimization. This also applied with respect to local businesses. In 1977, Broadway Theater owners organized a rally called "Stamp Out Smut" in Times Square. While it was quite similar to WAP's march two years later, it drew minimal participation (Klemesrud). Excited about the potential for WAP to achieve its goals of a 'clean' and consumer friendly Times Square, the League of Broadway Theater Owners promised WAP a donation of \$10,000 shortly after their founding. Because WAP's end goal, if not their reasoning behind it, was also appealing to the city and local businesses, they had ample opportunity to find support, partnerships, and acceptance.

Part of the reason for this convergence in mission was that, although WAP's definition of violent sexuality was driven by a radical feminist agenda, it nevertheless aligned with traditional ideas of deviant sexuality. For WAP, while "people really making love" was a positive and integral aspect of the human experience, commercial, anonymous, kinky, public, aesthetically driven, nonmonogamous, or purely libidinous sexual acts were pornographic (Lederer 21-25). Even though WAP counted lesbian membership and was very explicit in their support for lesbian and gay rights, their narrow definition of nonviolent sexuality only left room for otherwise normative queer people and relationships. The

outcome of these definitions, though likely not the goal, was that WAP privileged sexualities that were oriented toward the nuclear family. These were fairly normative sexual politics, and in fact surprisingly similar to the position of right-wing conservative Christians, who WAP directly opposed on most other fronts. This line between appropriate and violent sexuality, in effect, challenged little of the traditional conceptions, helping them gain broad support even from unexpected corners. Overall, WAP's majority white and middle-class membership, in conjunction with their legitimized forms of activism and definitions of appropriate sexuality, provided them and their projects with an optics of respectability and nonviolence, helping them obtain legitimacy and support from the public and city government.

DEVELOPMENT INTO THE '80s

As argued in the two preceding chapters, because the Guardian Angels were predominately young men of color, they were perceived as always on the verge of violence and therefore both a threat to public safety and an illegitimate civilian organization. Women Against Pornography, on the other hand, fit better with white and middle-class defined norms in their membership demographics, strategies, goals, and sexual politics. Therefore, they were usually considered good for the safety of the city and a legitimate example of civilian organizing. These perceptions had material effects on the sustainability of and resources available to both organizations. For example, in May 1979, the Office of Midtown Enforcement and 42nd Street Redevelopment Organization worked together to lease WAP office space at 579 9th Avenue for token rent. Local stores offered furniture and paint, and the new organization was quickly up and running.³ The Guardian Angels, lacking this goodwill from the city and local businesses, were obliged to organize patrols out of Sliwa's apartment or his workplace, a McDonald's in the Bronx, even though they had requested city help in securing a more central headquarters (McFadden B3). As this example demonstrates, public acceptance and partnership carried significant benefits, which were often denied to the Angels. Though the race, gender, and class background of most Angels was fairly immutable, the group could build legitimacy and acceptance by changing its priorities, actions, and strategies in response to

3 Before the OME shut it down, this space had been a soul food restaurant and community gathering place for black sex workers and transgender locals (Dullea).

racial, gender, sexual, and economic norms. WAP, though already in the city's good graces, similarly faced incentives to make their radical feminist agenda more palatable in order to gain further support and resources. The same social and economic hierarchies that shaped perceptions of the Angels and WAP, then, also structured available sources of partnerships, legitimacy, and funding, encouraging both organizations to develop in ways that undercut the most inclusive aspects of their missions. Though in no way an inevitable process, these incentives helped shift the Angels' and WAP's priorities in ways that harmed more marginalized New Yorkers. These organizations faced a catch-22 where in order to secure the resources they needed to continue pursuing their missions, they had to undermine the most democratic aspects of those missions.

Although the Guardian Angels critiqued the state's provision of public safety as disproportionately concerned with the city's elites and so "set out to give the subways back to the people," who was included in "the people" became narrower as time progressed (Stoltz 51). Though originally conceived as a way to provide safety for all, particularly those without wealth and power, the Angels constrained this mission to gain the legitimacy and resources that would allow them to continue providing safety, albeit to more select groups.

On December 22, 1984, a white man named Bernhard Goetz shot and seriously injured four young black men on the IRT 2 subway after they had asked him for five dollars, exploding long-standing issues of race, crime, and safety in New York (Berger). The Angels supported Goetz, although many might have easily imagined themselves in the positions of the teenagers.⁴ Soon after Goetz's arrest, they started a fundraiser for his bail, raising \$700 in one day (Chambers 25). That the Angels were better able to identify with Goetz than his victims demonstrated that their mission as well as its legality and legitimacy were more important to them than fighting the violence faced by criminalized people of color. The Angels, like Goetz, had been accused of vigilantism by Mayor Ed Koch, among others. However, in some ways, they were hit by this charge even harder, even though they were strictly unarmed, because they were not able to lean on a deep cultural repertoire of images of heroic white frontier vigilantes, as Goetz could. Therefore, it was even more important for them to argue for the social and legal acceptability of so-called subway vigilantism by supporting Goetz and his actions. As argued in section two,

4 In fact, Goetz's lawyers recruited four black Guardian Angels to play the roles of the young men who were shot in a trial reenactment of the subway scene (Hillyer 902).

from the Angels' earliest years they were already willing to reiterate stereotypes about the criminality of poor young men of color in order to gain public legitimacy and support, stereotypes that could have incredibly serious consequences, as the Goetz case demonstrated. In supporting Goetz over his victims, the Angels further traded criminalized youth out of their mission for democratic safety in return for public legitimacy.

Four years later and still searching for a headquarters, the Angels were provided a space on Restaurant Row by the 46th Street Block Association. Hurt by a downturn in business, local restaurants offered the Angels the old Café de France and regular meals in return for patrolling 46th Street between 8th and 9th Avenue. As criminologist James Q. Wilson explained to the *New York Times*, the area had become home to everyone except “ordinary, middle class people” (qtd. in Purdum B2). These “ordinary” consumers increasingly avoided an area with visible drug use, particularly of crack, and sex workers, particularly transgender women. Within a week, the Angels had changed people's attitudes about the street, drawing delight from theatergoers, tourists, and local residents (Clarity). Civil libertarians were more critical, noting that drug addicts and sex workers had as much right to be on the street as anyone else. The NYPD was also unhappy with the patrols, in part due to embarrassment that the restaurants did not call on them to deal with the problem, and arrested two Angels their first week on the job. In addition to these issues, the Angels were likely pushing most people that they confronted into nearby, lower-income neighborhoods, such as Clinton (Erlanger). The Angels, then, were not only targeting homeless drug addicts and transgender women sex workers for the benefit of the middle class, but were also prioritizing the interests of a business district over those of a low-income residential neighborhood. This would seem to be a far cry from their original goal of providing high-quality public safety to everyday New Yorkers rather than “big money interests” (Orbach 13). However, the Angels' partnership with Restaurant Row, and prior support for Goetz, provided them with legitimacy and concrete resources that allowed them to continue working towards a safer city, at least for some of its residents.

Like the Angels, WAP shifted the focus and constrained the scope of their mission to fight violence against women in return for funding and partnership opportunities. At their start, WAP did not take an official stance on sex work but instead focused on popular magazines, such as *Playboy*, and sex emporiums, like

Show World, which were making significant profits from pornography.⁵ The city government, on the other hand, was mostly concerned with outdoor sex workers, transgender people, the food and entertainment establishments they frequented, and the optics this gave the city's tourist center. WAP shifted their priorities to better match those of the city in order to partner with them and take advantage of the resources this provided, such as the leased office space. Already by July 1979, their mission against pornography had expanded to include the five brothels operating in Midtown, brought to their attention by the Office of Midtown Enforcement. Of particular concern was the Dating Room, which the OME hoped to close that November, in what was likely to be a lengthy legal battle. WAP noted that the Dating Room employed mostly undocumented, non-English speaking women, who appreciated working at the establishment although the owners exploited them economically (*Dating Room Report*). Though closing the brothel would push these women into more dangerous outdoor sex work or more exploitative establishments, and had little to do with WAP's original focus on the trade in pornographic imagery, WAP quickly added it to their tours as an example of sexist violence in order to mobilize public and feminist opinion against the establishment prior to the OME's attempt to shutter it. WAP took the stance that the brothel was pornographic and violent against women, and therefore should be shut down, regardless of the impact this would have on the women for whom it was the best or safest way to make a living.

In addition to their campaign against brothels, WAP began focusing on outdoor sex work as pornographic violence, aligning their work with city and local business desires to get rid of prostitution. In a 1979 map of pornography in Midtown, WAP included a two-block stretch of 8th Avenue titled "Hooker Stroll," in addition to the locations of sex-related businesses, indicating that outdoor sex work was also violence against women that should be eliminated (*Map of Pornographic Businesses*). This mirrored maps produced by the city and City University of New York sociologists documenting businesses, behaviors, and people that they considered "undesirable" in the Midtown area (Weisbrod et al. 3; Kornblum 27). Further, the 46th Street Block Association, who would later call on the Angels, reached out to WAP in 1984 for their help in preventing outdoor sex workers, displaced from the 42nd Street area due to aggressive city policies, from working or

⁵ As WAP noted, the bulk of these profits were enjoyed by men, who held the vast majority of upper-level positions in sex-related businesses (Cook).

spending time on Restaurant Row (Strouss). Outdoor sex workers were more likely to be poor, nonwhite, and transgender in comparison to their indoor counterparts, and they faced disproportionate violence. For example, while on average fewer than 400 arrests were made per year for indoor sex work, close to 10,000 arrests were made per year for outdoor sex work. Furthermore, transgender women of color in public space were often simply assumed to be or conflated with sex workers by the police and public, meaning that crackdowns on outdoor sex work had an impact on them regardless of their employment (Weisbrod et al. 37, 45-46). Therefore, by turning their attention to outdoor sex work, WAP was supporting the policing, harassment, and displacement of some of New York's most marginalized women. WAP's condemnation of brothels and outdoor sex work, which had little to do with their original agenda of opposing businesses profiting from pornography, facilitated the further economic, political, and physical exploitation of sex workers. This did harm to marginalized women, rather than to the patriarchal cultural and economic powers that WAP originally identified as the root causes of violence against women.

Both the Guardian Angels and WAP, then, excluded marginalized New Yorkers from their originally democratic goals of safety for non-elites and women, respectively. This process, though heavily incentivized, was certainly not inevitable, and may have been made easier or more likely by both organizations' leaderships, who were not personally impacted by the issues they chose to sidestep, even if their membership may have been. Regardless of the reason, however, both the Guardian Angels and Women Against Pornography faced a catch-22 in seeking to make New York safer. The public legitimacy, potential for partnerships, and access to resources that they needed in order to pursue their missions could be most easily secured by undermining the most radically inclusive aspects of those missions. The fact that these two quite different organizations had similar trajectories in this regard lends strength to the conjecture that this may have been a broader phenomenon impacting civilian public safety organizing. Both understandings of violence itself, then, and the potential for civilian involvement to counter it, were influenced by racial, gender, sexual, and economic anxieties and prejudices. The Angels and WAP did not fall entirely to one side of the trade-off this engendered; rather, they compromised on some of their principles in order to make New York safer and more inclusive for some, but not for all.

CONCLUSION: CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE PRESENT

As argued above, while the Angels' majority young, male, and nonwhite membership caused the group to be perceived as always on the verge of violence, WAP's closer adherence to norms of acceptable feminine activism and sexual reformism facilitated their acceptance as legitimate and nonthreatening. These same gendered, racialized, and sexualized forces that shaped perceptions of the Angels and WAP also impacted the sources of partnership, legitimacy, and funding available to them, encouraging both organizations to develop in ways that undercut the most inclusive aspects of their missions. These incentives helped shift the Angels' and WAP's priorities in ways that harmed more marginalized New Yorkers, particularly poor young men of color, sex workers, drug addicts, and transgender women of color. Both groups faced a conundrum in that in order to secure the resources they needed to continue pursuing their missions, they had to undermine the most democratic aspects of those missions.

Revisiting the Guardian Angels and Women Against Pornography, at a time when these once household names have been widely forgotten, and placing them in dialogue with one another, when they are usually siloed into nonoverlapping historical trends, provides insight into broader questions about civilian activism. These include: How can civilians play a role in public safety? Where does the acceptability of that role end? And in what ways do racial, gender, sexual, and economic hierarchies shape both? The experiences of the Angels and WAP indicated that the higher organization members fell in social hierarchies and the closer they adhered to normative notions in their activism, the more legitimacy they had, where legitimacy was itself an important resource in pursuing their missions and paved the way for further benefits. Regardless of their original goals, organizations faced pressure from the social, political, and economic context in which they were embedded to alter their missions and actions.

This indicates that individual or organizational racism, classism, transphobia, or other discriminatory outlooks were not required for organizations to act in ways that harmed people of color, poor people, transgender people, or other marginalized groups. Because these oppressive systems structured the social, political, and economic context in which they were operating, organizations received concrete rewards such as housing, information, partnerships, and funding for aligning themselves with them. This may help resolve the paradox that two organizations

who were considered radical in their own times have by and large been defined as conservative forces in the historical record (Hillyer; Potter). The relationship between the trajectory of civilian public safety organizations and their social, political, and economic context calls for research beyond the two case studies presented in this paper. However, the considerable differences between the Angels and WAP and their striking similarity with regards to the trade-offs they faced points to this being a broader phenomenon with important lessons for proponents of, participants in, and scholars investigating civilian public safety activism.

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