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Young American Women and Politics in *Seventeen* Magazine, 1944-1970



Seventeen, September 1944.

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the political engagement of young American women between 1944 and 1970, as presented in the popular teenage magazine *Seventeen*. The study focuses on the letters-to-the-editor column of the magazine and the articles discussed therein. The first popular magazine aimed at teenage girls, *Seventeen* fulfilled a variety of purposes ranging from agony aunt to entertainer. However, political articles also frequently featured amongst such content and prompted plenty of reader-responses. Using these sources, this thesis assesses how, and to what extent, young American women engaged with various political issues; specifically, those concerning formal politics, the politics of prejudice, and gender politics. Investigation into the political engagement evidenced within the magazine also incorporates discussion of any changes and/or continuities over the course of the period studied. Why did the political engagement of young American women vary? To answer this question, this thesis draws on historical context, concepts of framing, and also the notion of female teenage agency. Young women are noticeably absent from most histories of American politics, or if mentioned they are referred to in passing and often denied authority or credibility in their thoughts and actions. This thesis seeks to contribute towards the existing scholarship on the history of girlhood by documenting the multiple and varied ways in which young American women engaged in politics between 1944 and 1970. In doing so I hope to present the voices of those who have been overlooked within this area of the discipline.

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Author

Tessa Mazey-Richardson

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Introduction

What are we going to do about the Korean War? About all of the Far East? About aid to Europe? About Civil Rights at home? About the high cost of living? The American people are free to choose the candidate who supports their views on these issues... Maybe you don't believe the people get what they want. Maybe you've heard about 'boss rule' and think those nasty, corrupt politicians set up this whole production and individual backing doesn't count. But hold on a minute. Chances are that I can't-do-anything-about-it idea came from some character who doesn't know his part. Let us stop right here long enough to say you'd better get yourself some convictions. And we don't mean that because your uncle thinks unions are evil, you are convinced that unions are evil. We mean *enlightened* convictions. Read books or articles on both sides of a problem.¹

In September 1952, in the lead up to the 42nd United States presidential election, *Seventeen* magazine featured the article, 'You and that Best American Custom,' from which the above excerpt is taken. There is no doubt as to the motivations of this article – to encourage readers to be politically aware, and to impress upon them the importance of educating themselves on contemporary political issues. This work was designed to prepare young readers for participation in 'that best American custom,' the democratic vote. The repeated rhetorical questions and imperative language leave little room for dispute: *Seventeen's* editors clearly viewed this task as an essential responsibility, if not duty, of its readers. Neither the fact that their audience constituted mainly teenage girls (a demographic traditionally overlooked within the history of American politics), nor the multiple goals of the magazine (which was classified as both a service *and* fashion magazine) deterred editors from including political content.² Thus, although primarily

¹ Laura Voorhies, 'You and that Best American Custom', *Seventeen*, September 1952, p.133.

² Service magazines such as *Woman's Day*, and *Ladies Home Journal* generally contained content relating to homemaking and community involvement, whereas fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* were comprised of fashion spreads. (Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine*, Walnut Creek, 2010, p.20.)

sources of cultural history, teenage magazines such as *Seventeen* also constitute valuable historical sources for examining young American women's awareness of and engagement in politics during the period 1944-1970.

In the above quotation, *Seventeen* had positioned – or framed – voting, and more specifically democracy, as a pivotal part of American politics. This instance is just one example of how *Seventeen* confronted the challenge of framing political content.

Researching the political content of *Seventeen* during the period 1944 to 1970 enables the historian to trace the frames presented to a predominantly female, teenage audience.

Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman, Martin Rein and Donald Schön argue that frames can be compared to stories: “Each story conveys a different view of reality and represents a special way of seeing...Things are selected for attention and named in such a way as to fit the frame constructed for the situation.”³ Applying this approach, we can question the representation of political issues within *Seventeen*, historicizing the findings by locating them within the relevant social, political and cultural context. It is important to note, however, that Rein and Schön discuss frames within the setting of public policy and not a teenage magazine. This distinction is key as the framing of public policy is largely an *intentional* construction, whereas the framing utilized in teenage magazines leans more towards the subconscious and is driven by different factors. This is not to say that teenage magazines such as *Seventeen* did not have an agenda, far from it, but rather that we ought to take care when attributing too much intent to the framing of specific political issues. Alone, a historical analysis of the representation of political issues within *Seventeen* is not enough. To leave the analysis

³ Martin Rein, and Donald A. Schön, *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies*, New York, 1994, p.26.

at that would be to overlook a major facet of the cultural phenomena that is the teenage magazine, specifically, the readers themselves.

To understand fully the political engagement of young American women, one must also consider the voices of readers themselves in relation to the framing of political issues. The article discussed above was in fact cited by editors in their response to the following letter:

...how can politics be made more interesting to our young women? Politics are rather dull, so how can we pep them up? It's up to our teenage girls of today – “the women of tomorrow” – to get the women on top in politics.⁴

This example highlights the exchange relationship that existed between readers and editors and the importance of listening for and investigating the thoughts that those ‘consuming’ the frames expressed. Accepting that framing comprises the process of “making sense of complex, information-rich situations,” in which, “Interests are shaped by frames, and frames may be used to promote interests.”⁵ It is inevitable that people will hold different, at times conflicting, opinions on a certain political issue.⁶ Many of the politically inclined articles featured in *Seventeen* prompted heated debates in the letters-to-the-editor feature. Rein and Schön state that *policy forums* serve as “institutional vehicles for policy debate.”⁷ I contend that *Seventeen* magazine constituted a policy forum of sorts, facilitating the engagement of teenage girls in political debate in post-war America.

In this sense, this thesis is very much a social history. I do not wish merely to present the perceptions and ideals regarding young women’s engagement in politics as

⁴ F.P., Detroit, Mich., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, October 1952, p.4.

⁵ Rein and Schön, p.29.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp.29-30.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.32.

prescribed by adult editors and contributors. Rather, I hope to bring to the fore voices that historians of American society have until recently either failed to acknowledge, or to which they have failed to give sufficient credence. By so doing, I aim to depict a *socio-political* history of *Seventeen* magazine that incorporates both the creators and consumers of the cultural artefact. Introducing a collection of essays on the new cultural history, Lynn Hunt describes the origins of cultural history as stemming from social history, typified by its intent to depict ‘history from below’.⁸ Building on the developments of social history, cultural historians seek to ‘listen’ for the voices of those who have “effectively been silenced by historical neglect.”⁹ It is with this in mind that I utilise a source that in many ways embodies the meaning of culture, to investigate the political history of young American women between 1944 and 1970.

Social history, the emergence of second-wave feminism during the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of US women’s history as a valid field of scholarly research has generated a sizeable body of research material on women’s cultural history. Unfortunately, the history of teenage American girls has received less attention. This gap in the historical record represents an important omission. The history of youth – little that there is – has predominantly been a history of male youth and development, though, as Sharon Mazzarella and Norma Pecora note, this masculine focus is now beginning to change.¹⁰ Growing interest in the history of gender and the development of women’s studies during the 1990s has led historians to acknowledge the need to

⁸ Lynn Hunt, ‘Introduction’, in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley, 1989, p.4.

⁹ Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, p.xiv, quoted in Karen Halttunen, ‘The Art of Listening’, in James W. Cook, Lawrence B. Glickman, and Michael O’Malley, eds., *The Cultural Turn in US History: Past, Present, and Future*, Chicago, 2008, pp.417-424.

¹⁰ Sharon R. Mazzarella, and Norma Odom Pecora, eds., *Growing up Girls, Popular Culture and the Construction of Identity*, New York, 1999, p.1.

understand how teenage culture contributes to shaping child and adult gender roles. Sherrie Inness argues that teenage cultural discourse, “in a wide variety of formats...helps to form a girl’s experience of what it means to be a girl and, later, a woman.”¹¹ Researching female teenage culture is, therefore, a valuable contribution to the history of American culture in general, and to the history of American women in particular.

The period 1944 to 1970 is a fairly popular time span for those looking into the history of teenage culture. This period encompasses much of Grace Palladino’s seminal work, *Teenagers: An American History*, and for good reason.¹² These decades witnessed an explosion of youth culture, aided by the rise of mass media, the consumer age, increasing high school populations, and the sheer number of teenage baby-boomers. Furthermore, this period was also one of immense cultural and political change. World War II had had an irrevocable impact on American foreign policy, thrusting a previously isolationist government into the global arena as global superpower and moral leader, charged with promoting American ideals of freedom and democracy around the globe.¹³ WWII had also significantly influenced the experiences of women in the workplace. Though many women who had occupied ‘men’s’ jobs during the war were subsequently forced back into the home to make way for returning veterans, their wartime experience of work had a lasting impact on how these women perceived their own capabilities and worth.¹⁴

¹¹ Sherrie A. Inness, ‘Introduction’, in Sherrie A. Inness, ed., *Delinquents and Debutantes, Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures*, New York, 1998, p.2.

¹² Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*, New York, 1996.

¹³ Michael Kazin, Rebecca Edwards, and Adam Rothman, eds., *The Concise Princeton Encyclopaedia of American Political History*, Princeton, 2011, p.253.

¹⁴ Dorothy Sue Cobble, ‘More Than Sex Equality: Feminism After Suffrage’, in Dorothy Sue Cobble, and Linda Gordon, eds., *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women’s Movements*, New York, 2014, pp.23-24

Elaine Tyler May's 1988 *Homeward Bound – American Families in the Cold War Era*, argues that post-war America experienced a wave of anti-feminism and fear of communism, prompting widespread demands from mainstream political and public opinion leaders for women to return to the domestic sphere and to conform to traditional gender roles.¹⁵ Simultaneously, rising consumerism coincided with the recognition of women, and more specifically young women, as a prime target audience for consumer marketing – advertisements for clothes, make-up and other gender-specific items increasingly targeted young women.¹⁶ May ascribes these developments to the theory of 'domestic containment' – an overspill of the political policy of containment employed against communism. However, as Stephanie Coontz demonstrates in, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*, attributing all the cultural happenings of the 1950s to 'Cold War culture' dismisses the economic, political, and social developments that would have transpired regardless of the Cold War.¹⁷ Furthermore, employing an umbrella term such as 'Cold War Culture' runs the risk of collapsing multiple, distinct, cultural and political trends into a single, overarching theme.

Undoubtedly, there are fashions and trends concerning teenage culture and the political engagement of young women. Indeed, this thesis proposes much the same point. However, whilst for the sake of clarity there are some chronological delineations, I contend that continuity is as relevant to the history of young American women and politics as change. *Seventeen* featured political content throughout the 1940s, 1950s,

¹⁵ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound - American Families in the Cold War Era*, New York, 1999, p.xxii.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, p.162.

¹⁷ Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap*. New York, 1992, pp.28-29.

and 1960s. Though the nature and frequency of such content undoubtedly changed over time, these shifts were not bounded by cultural ages such as ‘the Sixties.’ This observation fits with recent scholarship, which highlights the importance of continuity as well as change during the 1960s. Similarly, Alice Echols notes that revisionist histories of the 1960s dispute traditional ‘sixties exceptionalism’. Such histories depart from the tradition whereby this decade was treated as, “utterly anonymous and disconnected from the fifties,” advocating instead for continuity and ongoing influence of aspects of the 1950s.¹⁸ That said, the events of the 1960s reflected growing discontent with the unfulfilled promises of domesticity advanced during the 1950s, compounded by fissures in American society along racial, class and gender lines that had been cultivated by the paradoxes of the 1950s.¹⁹ *Seventeen*’s readers did not shy away from voicing their views on issues such as the Vietnam War, the 1968 election campaign, and the move towards co-educated college campus; the letters-to-the-editor are proof positive of a politically aware audience.

During this period, some teenagers began to rebel against traditional expectations concerning gender roles, and some housewives started to challenge lingering contradictory gender expectations. Increasing numbers of women entered the workforce. By 1960, one out of five women with children aged six and younger was in the labour force, though paid employment did not (for the most part), alter society’s expectations of what a wife and mother must achieve within the domestic sphere.²⁰

Aided by Betty Friedan’s 1963 *The Feminine Mystique*, the introduction of the contraceptive pill and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the political salience of women’s

¹⁸ Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The ‘60s Its Aftershocks*, New York, 2002, p.52.

¹⁹ J. Ronald Oakley, *God’s Country: America in the Fifties*, New York, 1990, p.x.

²⁰ Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, New York, 1994, pp.43-44.

issues and gender inequalities gradually increased.²¹ 1944 to 1970 can thus be seen as a period of political and cultural transition, a combination of continuity and change.

Investigation of popular magazines supports this theory, demonstrating that although, “the fifties weren’t the sixties,” (and the fifties were not the forties,) the 1960s were in many ways a product of the 1950s, as the 1950s were to an extent a product of the 1940s.²²

Looking beyond specific events, the study of popular magazines allows historians to critically analyse the social, cultural, and political ideologies of a particular demographic from a more holistic viewpoint. However, only recently have popular women’s magazines attracted academic interest. Dawn Currie suggests that the dismissal of women’s magazines as a valid historical source stems from, “the historical association of women with the private and domestic; femininity is the absent ‘other’ against which our notions of the public and social are constructed.”²³ Utilising the concept of mass media and the depiction of women for the purpose of historical research, Susan J. Douglas’ 1994 evaluation of portrayals of women in mass media provides insight into how mass media raised, socialised, deceived and disciplined young American women. Douglas notes the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of girls and women in television shows, movies and magazines, as well as the ways in which the mass media alienated women from their bodies whilst trivialising the lives and achievements of women.²⁴ Although Douglas presents some compelling arguments, her book examines mass media in general, affording women’s magazines only a brief analysis, and at times generalising from this source in too broad a manner. The

²¹ David Farber, *The Sixties: From Memory to History*, Chapel Hill, 1994, p.152.

²² Echols, p.60.

²³ Dawn Currie, *Girl Talk: Adolescent Magazines and Their Readers*, Toronto, 1999, p.22.

²⁴ Douglas, p.10.

inclusion of women's magazines as a chapter, or subset of a wider study within women's and/or youth culture as opposed to positioning popular magazines as worthy of a stand-alone study, is unfortunately commonplace.

Nevertheless, attempts have been made to analyse women's magazines.²⁵ A key debate within the study of women's magazines is whether they are a tool for the reproduction of patriarchal gender identities, or merely, "vehicles of female pleasure not to be mistaken for reality."²⁶ For both approaches the central issue is to whom should power be attributed? Marjorie Ferguson's concept of the 'cult of femininity' fostered by women's magazines places power firmly in the hands of the editors, whom she terms 'high priestesses'. As agents of socialisation, editors assist in the, "wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time."²⁷ This debate highlights the need to be aware of the prescriptive nature of popular magazines, as well as raising a second point of interest: what purpose did popular magazines serve? Were they primarily sites for indulging in whimsical fancies of fashion and homemaking, or did they possess more serious aims? These two considerations must be applied when studying popular magazines, both those aimed at women and teenage girls.

Despite some historical research into women's magazines there remains a paucity of material concerning popular teenage magazines, sometimes termed 'teenzines', particularly for the period of 1944 to 1970. Currie argues that the neglect of teenzines as a 'distinctive cultural genre' stems in part from the (arguably mistaken)

²⁵ See Nancy A. Walker, *Shaping Our Mothers' World – American Women's Magazines*, Jackson, 2000.

²⁶ Currie, *Girl Talk*, p.53.

²⁷ Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever Feminine: Women's Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, London, 1983, pp.1-5.

belief that they constitute simply a younger version of women's magazines.²⁸ Recently the study of teenzines has gained some traction. Perhaps owing to its enduring popularity, or its status as the first among many, *Seventeen* magazine is the subject of most historical inquiries into teenzines. Evans and colleagues conclude that *Seventeen* adheres to traditional ideals of womanhood, emphasising self-improvement through fashion and beauty, and forming identity through heterosexual relationships.²⁹ Whilst I do not disagree with this statement, I would argue that it disregards the considerable political content discussed in this thesis. Studies focused on *Seventeen*'s more recent history have been particularly critical of its role in body shaming as well as its stance regarding sex and sexuality.³⁰ Kelly Massoni's 2010 work, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine*, the first book-length study of *Seventeen*, examines the magazine's role in locating teenage girls in the consumer world, as well as taking into account factors such as race, class and culture.³¹ Through her comparison of the magazine's early and later content, Massoni interweaves a behind-the-scenes history of the magazine itself, championing the valuable contributions of Helen Valentine, the magazine's first editor-in-chief. To understand the significance of *Seventeen* as a valid source of historical inquiry regarding the political engagement of young American women, one must first examine the role of the magazine.

Brainchild of Editor-in-chief Helen Valentine, *Seventeen* debuted in September

²⁸ Currie, *Girl Talk*, p.19.

²⁹ Ellis D. Evans, and Judith Rutberg, 'Content Analysis of Contemporary Teen Magazines for Adolescent Females', *Youth and Society*, 23, 1, 1991, pp.110-111.

³⁰ See Leslie W. Ballentine and Jennifer P. Ogle, 'The Making and Unmaking of Body Problems in *Seventeen Magazine*, 1992-2003', *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, v.33.4, 2005, pp.281-307.; Laura M. Carpenter, 'From Girl's into Women: Scripts for Sexuality and Romance in *Seventeen Magazine*, 1974-1994', *Journal of Sex Research*, 35, 2, 1998, pp.158-168.

³¹ Kelley Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers: A Cultural History of Seventeen Magazine*, Walnut Creek, Calif., 2010.

1944, quickly becoming an icon of American teen culture.³² Grace Palladino notes, “The magazine sold out its first edition of 400,000 copies in only two days, its second of 500,000 in the same short time, and within 16 months, circulation topped the 1 million mark.”³³ *Seventeen* recognised the niche provided by girls who were no longer children, yet were not quite adults. Neither a purely ‘service’ nor ‘fashion’ magazine, *Seventeen* provided a balance between the two with content ranging from beauty tips and relationship advice, to fictional stories and opinion pieces.

During the period discussed, the role of editor-in-chief was held by two women. As noted above, Helen Valentine occupied the position between 1944 and 1953, at which point Enid A. Haupt filled the position until 1970. Valentine’s departure from the magazine was sadly not an amicable one; her desire to promote a “progressive model of service and citizenship,” which included messages of “gender and racial equality, religious freedom and tolerance” conflicted with the aims of magazine-owner Walter Annenberg.³⁴ Annenberg’s primary concern was profit, and he raised concerns over articles portraying racial integration and the potential offense they may cause towards advertisers.³⁵ Massoni argues that upon Valentine’s resignation and subsequent departure, the character and content of *Seventeen* altered significantly, a suggestion that may go some way to explaining certain trends evidenced in this thesis.³⁶ Although the aims and the content of the magazine fluctuated in accordance with those of the editor-in-chief, *Seventeen*’s popularity remained consistent. As such, it provides a useful lens

³² Kelly Schrum, ‘Teena Means Business’: Teenage Girls Culture and *Seventeen* Magazine, 1944-1950’ in, Sherrie A. Inness, ed., *Delinquents and Debutantes, Twentieth-Century American Girls’ Cultures*, New York, 1998, p.134.

³³ Palladino, p.103.

³⁴ Massoni, *Fashioning Teenagers*, p.24.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.172.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.24.

through which historians can examine the dominant attitudes and values held by society. As well as reflecting such attitudes and values, magazines simultaneously shape those of their readers. For this reason, *Seventeen* magazine is a valuable source in examining both the prescribed and actual perceptions and portrayals of young women.

Despite the upsurge in historical academic interest in the culture of ‘girlhood’, and the portrayals of young women, there remains a lacuna in the scholarship surrounding young American women and politics. Unfortunately, current studies of American political history lack the perspective of a significant demographic – namely teenagers, and more specifically, female teenagers. More often than not, teenagers have been assumed to be either politically apathetic or politically radical and summarily dismissed as such. Perhaps because of their predominance as leaders and the latent sexism within political movements, when teenagers *are* studied in relation to political participation the focus is typically on males. Additionally, politics was, and remains to this day, a much gendered profession; politics was considered part of the male domain. Thus, on account of their youth and gender, young American women are notably absent from mainstream scholarly discourse surrounding American political history. However, Jennifer Helgren’s most recent publication, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World during the Early Cold War* signifies a positive shift in the understanding of teenage girls in relation to global politics.³⁷ Helgren successfully utilises sources from girls’ organisations such as the Girl Scouts, as well as girls’ popular magazines – *Seventeen* no less – to demonstrate the increased emphasis on internationalism, democracy and global civic responsibility society placed on young

³⁷ Jennifer Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World during the Early Cold War*, Rutgers University Press: New York, 2017.

American women during the early Cold War.

An invaluable contribution to its field, Helgren's work nonetheless has its own limitations; the focus of the book is primarily on the early Cold War time period, and her discussion of politics is focused specifically on Cold War politics. Naturally, these restrictions confine the discussion to an extent, for example there is minimal discussion of the 1960s thus perpetuating the notion of 'sixties exceptionalism.' Moreover, Helgren has chosen to direct her attention towards 'global responsibility' as opposed to politics in general, largely omitting strands of politics such as gender and prejudice, from discussion. Lastly, Helgren's use of the letters-to-the-editor, although effective, is limited on account of the infrequency with which the letters are utilised. The resultant effect lacks the richness and detail effected via a study centred purely on the letters and related content.

In her 1991 study of popular romance literature, Janice Radway argues that attention to the reception of culture permits a "multi-focused approach that attempts to do justice to the way historical subjects understand and partially control their own behaviour in a social and cultural context."³⁸ The letters-to-the-editor printed in *Seventeen* magazine represent a means to investigate the response of readers to the political messages and portrayals that they were consuming. Specifically, the letters provide a glimpse into how readers interpreted and responded to the text, something that is of great value considering the multiplicity of meanings that can be derived from language. Contextual analysis of readers' letters mediates the top-down approach that cultural historians often pursue. Máire Cross and Caroline Bland contend that letters are

³⁸ Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Literature*, Chapel Hill, 1991, p.6.

a genre for self-expression, empowering invisible agents of political history and evidence of the wish to communicate and express opinions.³⁹ The letters also hint at the existence of a multi-directional type of dialogue – both vertically between readers and editors, and horizontally between readers. Thus, I argue that *Seventeen* served as a platform for young American women to voice opinions and to form bonds of commonality with fellow teenagers. This view removes teenage magazines from their traditional domain of the private sphere and locates them in the public sphere, a domain traditionally reserved for men during this period.

To analyse both the framing of political content within *Seventeen* and the engagement of readers with this content, I examined the letters-to-the-editor of each month's issue for the period September 1944 to December 1970, a total of three hundred and sixteen issues and 4,028 letters. An average of thirteen letters were printed in each issue, though there was some variation in this regard with earlier issues generally containing greater numbers of letters than later ones. Whilst many letters addressed articles featured in a prior issue, others commented on topics of interest more generally, or requested that a certain topic be discussed in an upcoming issue. Approximately five to six topics or articles were discussed in each issue, and on average, two to three letters were assigned to an article or topic. In some instances, for example when a particularly provocative article or letter was published, this number varied.

Scanning microfilm copies of *Seventeen*, I accessed the letters and then proceeded to locate the corresponding content. Upon reading both letters and content, I

³⁹ Caroline Bland and Máire Cross, 'Gender Politics: Breathing New Life into Old Letters', in Caroline Bland and Máire Cross, eds., *Gender and Politics in the Age of Letter Writing, 1750-2000*, Aldershot, 2004, p.5.

filtered out those that did not qualify as ‘political’ in some sense. This was not an easy process, as politics infiltrates practically all aspects of life. To facilitate this undertaking, I narrowed the sample to include just three, broadly defined categories of politics selected on the basis that these types of political issues were the most frequently discussed: formal politics, the politics of prejudice, and gender politics; these categories form the three chapters of my thesis. The structure of these chapters varies. In some instances, a chronological structure worked well; at other times, thematic organisation seemed more appropriate. In the third chapter, I have employed a combination of the two in an attempt to embrace the contradictions and complications of these sources in a more holistic manner in order to provide a comprehensive and coherent analysis of these data.

As a source of evidence for historical inquiry, teenage magazines do possess certain limitations. Editorial influence plays a major role in shaping content, as do the pressures of advertising and the need to maintain sustainable profit margins. Arguably, the printed letters represent only those responses the editors of *Seventeen* chose to publish. Nonetheless, the excerpts referenced throughout this study suggest that *Seventeen* editors were not afraid to print controversial as well as critical letters. Another limitation pertains to representation. I do not claim that the representations within *Seventeen* speak for all young American women of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s – indeed, *Seventeen* did not feature a single African-American model during this period. *Seventeen*’s demographic was white, middle- to upper-middle-class teenagers. In consequence, any conclusions drawn from this analysis are limited largely to this demographic. Nevertheless, it is possible to make some general arguments.

Taken together, the letters-to-the-editor and their corresponding articles within

Seventeen magazine reveal an audience that is interested not only in furthering their own knowledge of politics through reading *Seventeen*, but also an audience that critically engaged with this content. Readers did not passively accept *Seventeen*'s construction of politics. Rather, drawing on their individual experiences and thoughts, readers expressed strong opinions on everything from the atomic bomb to whose responsibility it was to 'say no' on a date. *Seventeen*'s 'Your Letters' column offered readers the chance to debate and contest politics within a public space, a space in which young women from across the country could participate without leaving the home. In addition to the political engagement demonstrated in the letters-to-the-editor, the content itself, much of it written by teenage contributors, illuminates the various ways – opinion pieces, interviews, fictional stories, conferences and so forth – that young American women could, and did, engage with American politics. And so, I argue that popular teenage magazines such as *Seventeen* were far more than reservoirs of make-up tips and personality quizzes; between 1944 and 1970, such magazines were in fact hotbeds of political engagement for young American women.

I.

Chapter I: Education, Participation, and Activism – *Seventeen Magazine* and the Evolution of Formal Politics.

Introduction

The term ‘political’ could be applied to almost any topic featured in the letters-to-the-editor of *Seventeen* if one tried hard enough – after all “politics is everywhere,” but this chapter will address those letters and the relevant articles that cover the kinds of political issues that one associates most readily with politics.¹ By this, I mean to say the aspects of politics that fall within traditional notions of governance, diplomacy and citizenship. These aspects fit into various categories, including political institutions such as the Supreme Court and local governments; political movements; major political parties; war; foreign diplomacy; and ideologies and philosophies.² Admittedly, political topics are rarely so clean-cut. More often than not the lines between the categories blur. It is therefore impossible to avoid an overlap at times, particularly given the significance of concurrent themes and developments within society that influence ‘politics’ in its purest form.

From a historical perspective, 1944 to 1970 was a time of immense political activity. In the 1940s, the Second World War irrevocably altered global politics. America and the Soviet Union emerged as superpowers, both eager to capitalise on the resources of recently decolonised nations. The war also ushered in an age of ‘world citizenship’ in which countries were expected to work together in an attempt to maintain

¹ Joe Painter, *Political Geography: an Introduction to Space and Power*, London, 2009, p.13.

² Michael Kazin, Rebecca Edwards, and Adam Rothman, eds., *The Concise Princeton Encyclopaedia of American Political History*, Princeton, 2011, p.viii.

peace, an idea expressed by the formation of the United Nations, but also demonstrated by the various alliances formed by America in the immediate post-war era.³ The atomic bomb, combined with the rise of Communism during the 1950s fuelled fears regarding said peace, a development reflected in American domestic politics as major political figures questioned the loyalty of American ‘subversives’. Arguably one of the most politically eventful decades in American history, the 1960s witnessed the assassination of multiple political figures; the implementation of ‘The Great Society,’ and the ‘War on Poverty;’ the expansion of the civil rights movement; the student protest movement; and American participation in the Vietnam War. Understanding of these happenings is crucial to any political history of America. Yet many discussions of American political history evidence a glaring omission – consideration of the young women in relation to such political events.

The absence of young American women in the History of American politics is a misrepresentation of the past. Throughout the time period under discussion *Seventeen* magazine featured articles on contemporary politics, both domestic and international. These articles informed readers on matters such as internal public policy, foreign policy, and global politics. Likewise, articles relating to governance imbued readers with a sense of civic responsibility and self-importance that facilitated the political activism of the 1960s. Articles therefore framed formal politics in a way that encouraged young readers to engage with the subject matter beyond reading the article itself. Moreover, reader-responses demonstrate that readers did more than passively read the advice on how to serve their country, or the interviews with political figures. Rather, respondents expressed strong opinions on everything from the United Nations to the New Left. The

³ Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*, Princeton, 2008, p.149.

desire for articles of this kind was also evidenced in the letters-to-the-editor; readers regularly requested more articles on world affairs, defending their presence in the magazine against the occasional letter of complaint. In this manner, young American women actively participated in, and engaged with, matters associated with political institutions, ideas, movements, policies and parties.

'Blueprint for a Better World': *Seventeen* and Political Education, 1944-1950



'Blueprint for a Better World', *Seventeen*, September 1945, p.88.

1944 to 1950 represents a critical time in American politics, on both a national and international scale. World War II imposed an internationalist foreign policy upon the United States, a dramatic departure from its previous inward-looking stance.⁴ As millions of U.S. troops fought, and died, overseas defending freedom and democracy against the forces of Nazi fascism, those on the home front were likewise expected to contribute to the war effort. As the War drew to an end, the United States emerged victorious, a global superpower and one of the few whose economies remained not only intact but booming. Under these circumstances, the responsibility for ensuring long-standing peace – a complex task exacerbated by the creation of the atomic bomb – fell to America. The articles and letters published in *Seventeen* during this period represent

⁴ David Farber, *The Sixties: from Memory to History*, Chapel Hill, 1994, p.2.

the enthusiasm with which American youth embraced their role within American politics. Wartime articles illustrate the extent to which war affected daily life, as well as the various endeavors of *Seventeen* readers to participate in the war effort. In the post-war period articles and letters suggest ways in which American society perceived teenagers and their political engagement. For example, articles explaining major political policies such as the Bretton Woods Plan, the Marshall Plan and the Dumbarton Oaks Plan indicate that *Seventeen* editors understood and acknowledged readers' desire for serious political content – a desire voiced unambiguously in the letters to the editor.

Although geographically distant from the physical effects of war, American teenagers were not exempt from the impacts of war, a fact that prompted political engagement in various forms. For most Americans the impacts of war were less severe than for those living in Europe, but participation in a world war undoubtedly shaped American society and politics, ultimately filtering through to teenage life. This idea is evidenced by the topics addressed in *Seventeen* during the war. Fictional stories, a regular feature of the magazine, were one of the ways in which editors addressed the topic of war. In March 1945, the fictional story 'That's How It Was,' narrated the experiences of Madame Bernard, an elderly woman living in Nazi-occupied France during WWII. The story valorized British and American troops, depicting them as heroic saviors, and praised the French people who continued to resist German forces despite harsh living conditions. In contrast, German officers were de-humanized, typified as drunken, noisy "swine".⁵ Responding to the story, one reader wrote: "It made me feel that the troubles we go through here in America are very trivial in comparison. If there are more brave and inspiring people like Mme. Bernard in the war-torn

⁵ 'That's How it Was', *Seventeen*, March 1945, p.64.

countries, we should have no fear for their futures.”⁶ This response suggests that although fictional, the story nevertheless gave readers cause to examine America’s position in relation to the war. Moreover, the characterization of the different nationalities presented within the story provides evidence for how entrenched American propaganda was. Stories such as this helped to frame American teenagers’ image of and attitude towards foreign nations.

American propaganda was a significant feature of society during the war, urging every person to do their bit for the war effort. Scholar Jennifer Helgren notes, youth organizations such as Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls, alongside youth-orientated literature such as *Seventeen*, actively encouraged teenage girls to volunteer towards the war effort. In September 1944, *Seventeen* printed the article, ‘What Are You Doing about the War?’ providing information on how readers could participate in volunteer programs such as nursing, child-care and the Cadet Air Patrol. Editors praised the efforts of teenagers, “[raising] money to buy ambulances, jeeps and planes, and for the Red Cross, the National War Fund and other causes, holding salvage drives, caring for children, working on farms and victory gardens, selling foods and cookies, organizing rummage sales, and giving shows.”⁷ Interestingly, whilst the majority of the ‘jobs’ listed fall into a stereotypically female category, the responding letter requested more information about the Cadet Air Patrol, a training program for teens to learn aviation from the ground.

Evidently the call for volunteers did not fall on deaf ears, as in the following year the magazine featured an article imploring teens to stay in school, as opposed

⁶ B.M., Oceanport, N.J., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, May 1945, p.6.

⁷ ‘What Are You Doing About the War?’, *Seventeen*, September 1944, p.54.

dropping-out in order to ‘do one’s duty.’⁸ This development suggests that American teenage girls were active participants in war-time volunteering programs to such an extent that school drop-out numbers had reached an alarming high. But did these eager, young volunteers comprehend fully the context of their volunteering? Was their enthusiasm to participate grounded in any appreciation for global politics, or was it simply a desire to conform to popular trends? The articles and letters of *Seventeen* suggest that young American women were, in fact, presented with information regarding post-war global democracy as well as national politics, and as such can be assumed to have gained some level of understanding concerning these matters.

At the close of WWII, the desire to maintain peace led to an outburst of global diplomacy and a series of diplomatic meetings, conferences and ‘plans’, many of which were addressed in the pages of *Seventeen*. In March 1945, the article, ‘The Dumbarton Oaks Plan’ outlined the proposed plan for the formation of the United Nations. The declaration: “The plan is for keeping the peace of the world after this war – and the success or failure of it begins with you, all of you. World Peace depends on you...that’s what we said,” affirms that the article intended to inform readers so that they might participate in debates and activities regarding world affairs in a knowledgeable manner.⁹ The author went on to explicitly state that teens ought to “...watch [their] congressman, mayor, senator...let them know how you feel, what you want, and that you intend to get it.”¹⁰ Responses to this article featured in two further issues and were mixed in their opinions. Along with praise from a representative of the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) were two other readers expressing gratitude for the inclusion of

⁸ ‘Unkindest Cut of All’, *Seventeen*, August 1945, p.61.

⁹ Alice Thompson, ‘The Dumbarton Oaks Plan’, *Seventeen*, March 1945, p.81.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

an article of this calibre. One reader wrote: “I mean your article on Dumbarton Oaks – it was really great. Please have more on current events,”¹¹ whilst another gushed “Congratulations for being smart enough to realize that we can take a dose of seriousness along with the more pleasurable fashions, beauty articles etc.”¹² However, not all readers appreciated the inclusion of such articles:

Why, oh why, must you print articles on world affairs in a magazine that a girl looks to for advice on clothes, charm and personality? I’m sure (and I’m speaking for our gang) that when a girl feels like boning up on the brain food that she would turn to a magazine devoted to politics and world affairs.¹³

Whilst the letter printed above demonstrates that articles addressing world affairs were not universally popular, the following letters, printed in response to the one above, suggest that some readers resented the attitudes of teenagers such as J.S. of Detroit, Mich., as these attitudes played up to the image of a politically apathetic youth.

That letter in your June issue...about *not* liking to see articles on world affairs in *Seventeen* makes me mad. I think (and I’m speaking for our gang) that seven out of ten teen-age girls don’t know half as much as they should about world affairs. I very seldom bother to read or even look at a news magazine...Too many teenagers, like myself, are wrapped up completely in their own teen-age world and know little or nothing of what goes on outside of it. *Seventeen can and must* create a teen-age interest in world affairs. You *can* by putting more and more of this type of article in *Seventeen*. You *must* for the sake of our nation and world of tomorrow.¹⁴

My friends and I appreciate your recognition of our interest in world-wide politics. Most adults seem to think that teen-agers have no views on politics and should not try to learn anything about them. So you see we deeply appreciate someone asking our opinions and explaining complicated, but essentially important, things in *our* language.¹⁵

¹¹ N.E.S., Jackson Heights, N.Y., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, June, 1945, p.6.

¹² P.G., Corning, N.Y., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, June, 1945, p.7.

¹³ J.S., Detroit, Mich., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, June, 1945, p.6.

¹⁴ N.A., Albany, N.Y., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1945, p.6.

¹⁵ K.D., Huntington, W.Va., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August, 1945, p.6.

Ignoring occasional letters bemoaning articles on world affairs, *Seventeen* continued to print articles on topics such as the Bretton Woods Plan, the San Francisco conference, the United Nations Charter and inflation. Responses to these articles were largely positive, those letters that criticized such articles were generally rebutted in the following issue, demonstrating the ongoing dialogue between readers. Although the language utilized within these articles remains casual and accessible to teenagers, there is a distinct lack of condescension that one might expect from an article attempting to explain political matters to a teenage audience. The repeated emphasis on achieving and maintaining world peace lends a serious tone toward the pieces, almost as if the authors intended to shock readers into engagement. Writing on the Bretton Woods Plan for Cooperation, John Ashworth stated: “The factories and transportation systems of many countries have been crippled by war. Loans are needed not only to put them on their feet but also as part of the program to prevent unemployment and depression in the United States.”¹⁶ Ashworth went on to assert, “But Bretton Woods means something more important than profits or even jobs. It means peace, it aims to prevent wars, not by taking action after aggression has begun, but by removing those economic dislocations that cause wars.”¹⁷ In response, one reader wrote: “The Bretton Woods article was grand. How about one on San Francisco? According to the papers, too many people have got an entirely wrong idea about that conference.”¹⁸ The reader’s response not only shows an appreciation for an article on current affairs, but also evidences a wider engagement with political events that had yet to be mentioned in *Seventeen*.

¹⁶ John Ashworth, ‘The Bretton Woods Plan for Cooperation’, *Seventeen*, May 1945, pp.94-95

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.136.

¹⁸ A.R., Baltimore, Md., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, July, 1945, p.6.

The extent to which editors at *Seventeen* listened to the voices of their readers is exemplified by the subsequent article ‘Blueprint for a Better World,’ a lengthy piece on the San Francisco conference and the United Nations Charter. Optimistic and patriotic, the article provided detailed information. Discussions covered the failure of the League of Nations, the development of the Charter and its basis on unity, the parties involved, and the problems that remained— namely the issue of German firms in Argentina that had yet to be liquidated, and the matter of ‘trusteeship’ and the cooperation of “native peoples.”¹⁹ The article painted the Germans and Japanese in a negative light and depicted the Soviet Union as a potential hindrance to the smooth running of the United Nations, thus influencing how readers perceived foreign nations. In this way, ‘Blueprint for a Better World,’ serves as a prime example of framing within *Seventeen*, presenting America’s foes in a specific light in keeping with contemporary political narratives. In their response, one reader argues, “Teenagers like to read about world events in their very own magazine. After all, these things will affect us more in the long run than they will the readers of more adult publications.”²⁰ The notion that decisions made by adults would affect teenagers more than their older contemporaries in the long run may be a result of the previously mentioned emphasis placed on teenage responsibility to maintain peace. Jennifer Helgren’s recent work elaborates on this notion, proposing that during the early Cold War, young American Women were encouraged to take up roles of global citizenship.²¹ This idea of future citizenship and the desire to be informed is reflected in further letters, praising *Seventeen* for treating its readers as intelligent, engaged young adults interested in more than just fashion:

¹⁹ John Ashworth, ‘Blueprint for a Better World’, *Seventeen*, September 1945, p.88.

²⁰ E.W., New York, N.Y., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, November 1945, p.6.

²¹ Jennifer Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World during the Early Cold War*, New York, 2017, p.20.

Although I am thirteen, I feel that I am not too young to think seriously about the part I am to play in this great postwar world. We who are to be citizens in the world tomorrow need such a magazine as yours, which can give us information on all the problems common to us in such a clear, concise and readable manner.²²

Why, oh why is all the accent on clothes today? Why at this crucial moment in our country's history is there a mad rush to the nearest store for the latest thing? I am practically seventeen and I adore clothes as most normal girls do and, also like most normal girls, I devour *Seventeen*. I have cheered again and again on finding in your marvelous magazine articles meant for kids who *think!*²³

One of the most polarizing political articles printed during the 1940s was 'Atomic Energy...Fearful Miracle,' an article written with the aid of Dr. Osgood, Head of the Physics and Astronomy Department of Michigan State University and Dr. Smyth, author of *Atomic Energy*. The article covered the science of atomic energy and what its discovery could mean for the future. The comments surrounding the control of atomic energy and the potential to harness it for military objectives appear eerily accurate:

It would hardly be possible for [the production of atomic bombs] without the sanction of [a country's] government. So if all governments agree not to manufacture the new bombs, atomic energy can perhaps be diverted to peaceful uses. It would not be enough to outlaw the use of atomic bombs, for then every nation would try to keep a supply on hand, just in case the other fellow had some too...And in any case, the United States would put itself in a very embarrassing position if it first used atomic bombs to win a war and then cried loudly that such bombs should be outlawed for future wars.²⁴

The following reader responses further evidence a readership that was, for the most part, actively engaged in political events with strongly held opinions on matters such as the atomic bomb. Critiquing the piece, one reader wrote: "I think you should have more articles on shyness and put in some more movie stars, too. Stories like those

²² A.M., Cambridge, Mass., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1945, p.6.

²³ V.S.H., Pittsburgh, Pa., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1945, p.6.

²⁴ Thomas H. Osgood, 'Atomic Energy...Fearful Miracle', *Seventeen*, February 1946, p.85.

on Atomic Energy are *very* boring.”²⁵ Included beneath this letter was a response from the editor, replying: “If enough world citizens are similarly bored by atomic energy, we fear that teenagers may find themselves with no dates left to worry about, no boys to be shy with.”²⁶ This withering editorial response suggests that on this occasion, such disinterest in politics was in opposition to the aims and goals of *Seventeen*. The criticism of the piece was vehemently shut down by other readers whose rebuttals were printed in a subsequent issue:

Obviously, this girl has no sense of responsibility and is living in a dream world of her own construction. May I suggest that she wake up to the fact that she is living in a fast-moving world and soon will realize that the world has passed her by?²⁷

It upset us to think that a fellow teen-ager could be so blind to the happenings in the world today. We extend a plea for more and more articles about the atom and other affairs of the world in your every issue, every month and every year.²⁸

The magnitude of its effects means that it is in many ways unsurprising that WWII, and the politics surrounding it, impacted the lives of young American women in the 1940s. This notion was represented in *Seventeen* by means of propaganda, calls for teenage participation in the war effort and the printing of informative articles on global diplomatic efforts. The letters-to-the-editor responding to such features depict an audience that enjoyed political content and eagerly undertook the duties outlined in *Seventeen*. Readers were appreciative of being recognized as a group with something to contribute toward society. Mindful of the ramifications of political ignorance, and wary of the destructive effects of new military inventions, *Seventeen*'s readers saw political education as the duty of their generation. In order to maintain the peace that their elders

²⁵ M.M., Brooklyn, N.Y., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, April 1946, p.6.

²⁶ Editor, ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, April 1946, p.6.

²⁷ N.L.G., Pittsfield, Mass., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, June 1946, p.6.

²⁸ P.L., B.F., D.D., T.C., S.M., (U.S.N.), Philadelphia, Pa., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, June 1946, p.6.

had worked so hard for, young American women needed to be informed and politically knowledgeable. The inclusion of articles on world affairs did, however, give rise to some complaints. In turn, others hotly defended current affairs articles. Such debate suggests that in its fledgling years, *Seventeen* faced the task of catering to a broad audience with varying ideas of what exactly the magazine provided. Regardless, the ongoing dialogue amongst readers demonstrates *Seventeen*'s role as a facilitator to the political engagement of young American women, where teenagers across the country felt comfortable voicing differing opinions.

'You and that Best American Custom': *Seventeen* and Political Participation, 1951-1960

'You and that Best American Custom', *Seventeen*, September 1952.

Between 1951 and 1960 America witnessed a variety of significant global and domestic political shifts. As the United States competed with the Soviet Union for the allegiance and resources of newly independent peoples, leaders faced the conundrum of how to secure these assets without imposing much-detested colonialism. The answer – “Asserting instead the right of the United States to lead the “free world,” [through] global economic integration via modernization and development.”²⁹ The resulting examination of America’s position as a global superpower is demonstrated by the trend

²⁹ Kazin, Edwards, and Rothman, p.256.

towards articles reminding readers of the crucial role America and its citizens fulfilled regarding global politics. Linked to this idea was the rise of anti-Communism and the idealism afforded to democracy, evidenced by an increase in articles covering national politics and the ways in which teenagers could participate in democracy at a local level. Towards the end of the decade, we see the effects of increased involvement in national politics as ‘party politics’ emerge, with articles drawing readers into presidential politics. Within this time span, the discussion of key issues such as the Iron Curtain and Communism, the atomic bomb, the role of government, and presidential figures hint at an audience still very much aware of the need for an informed voter base.

In the early 1950s, *Seventeen* featured several articles covering what it meant to participate in a democracy and the value of being an informed voter. Articles encouraged readers to learn the American system of governance prior to reaching voting age by means of community involvement and mock-elections. In this way, readers were imbued with a sense of civic responsibility. For example, in March 1950, the article ‘The Town You Live In,’ described the efforts of six hundred Chicago teens to mobilize an investigation into the running of their city. “Right now, you may not know all the answers. But the day isn’t far off when you’ll have a big share in what your city does. You’ll have a vote. And these functions of your city government – housing, lighting, garbage disposal, traffic – will certainly be your concern.”³⁰ The implicit reference to teenagers as future-voters as evidenced in this article was an ongoing theme during the early 1950s. In 1952, one reader wrote in to comment on the lack of female representation in politics following the 1952 political conventions. The editor’s response corrected the respondent, noting that “The Democratic Party nominated two

³⁰ Shirley Tucker, ‘The Town You Live In’, *Seventeen*, March 1950, p.81.

women – India Edwards and Judge Sarah Hughes – for vice-president, though neither of them was finally chosen as the party candidate.³¹ In addition, the editor directed the reader to articles on democracy and mock elections which they believed promoted politics as both interesting and something that teenage girls could and should get involved in.³²

Participation in politics was not only presented as an appropriate activity for readers, but an essential one on account of the mounting concern as to the potentially harmful effects of atomic energy. Commenting on the state of global politics and war in his 1951 article, ‘Atomic Peace – The Chain Reaction of Good,’ Professor Harold C. Goddard employed allegories and metaphors. Citing religion; imagination; and poetry as ways to combat war in the age of the atomic bomb, Goddard stated: “WANTED: a force for good as potent as the atom bomb is for evil, a force...not of disintegration and destruction, but of integration and creation.”³³ The force Goddard references here is indeed that of American youth. As to how American teenagers ought to mobilize their political power, Goddard commented, “The United States, we are told, is the strongest and greatest nation on earth. We are might. We do everything on a vast scale. We believe in Bigness...But there is another American way of life as opposite to all this as the North Pole to the South...it is quite another to come to believe in a bigness that has grown out of a million little things, like an oak.”³⁴ The underlying critique of the assertion of American dominance through ‘Bigness’ – i.e. military power – may reflect

³¹ Editor, ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, October 1952, p.5.

³² See Laurah Voorhies, ‘You and that Best American Custom’, *Seventeen*, September 1952; Ann Parshall, Jean Smits, and Sandra Perlman, ‘It’s All Yours’, *Seventeen*, September 1952, p.128.

³³ Harold C. Goddard, ‘Atomic Peace – The Chain Reaction of Good’, *Seventeen*, December 1951, p.53.

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.105.

the early stirrings of anti-nuclear sentiment that would later come to fruition. Instead, Goddard suggests that each individual contribute towards a peaceful society on a smaller level as ‘leaveners’ in the, “secret conspiracy of goodness.”³⁵ The positive reader-responses suggest that Goddard’s tone struck a chord with both teenage readers and more mature readers:

It’s the kind of article that many adults would pass up and the one that teenagers would look to for summaries...for thought-forming content. Our world today is a little too complex for us teen-agers to understand...We don’t want the complexity of nations’ problems for character building – we want what has passed the test of time – imagination, humanism, love, wisdom and spiritual belief to profit by and serve as the judging factors in our future. Give us more of these articles and help us to help ourselves.³⁶

The article impressed one mother to such an extent that she purchased twenty-three copies of *Seventeen* in order to distribute the article to, “friends – teachers, business associates, three ministers, the President of the local council of churches,” and other members of her community. Summing up her letter, she concludes: “I thank God that [the article] reached thousands through your lovely magazine and that I was able in a small way to set up my own chain reaction for good.”³⁷ The article and the reader-responses represent another example of the way in which American teenagers were called upon to not only educate themselves regarding political issues such as the atomic bomb, but take steps to become active participants in politics at a local level through the dissemination of political rhetoric.

By positioning government and politics as something that readers should involve themselves with, *Seventeen* expanded the political engagement of young Americans

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.106

³⁶ F.G., Chicago, Ill., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1952, p.4.

³⁷ M.T.T., Evansville, Ind., ‘Thank you for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1952, p.4.

beyond education. Articles such as the 1956, 'Girls in Government,' piece indicate *Seventeen's* promotion of active teenage participation in and exposure to local and national politics. Teenage author Kathleen O'Connor recounted her experience as a member of the Washington Student Citizenship Seminar; a ten-week program involving twenty-six students, sponsored by the National Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Association in order to "bring young people to the capital city and show them the United States government from the inside." As part of the program, members "...sat in on sessions with Congressional committees, had discussions with such high-ranking officials as Doctor Arthur S. Flemming, director of the Office of Defense Mobilization, and Eleanor Dulles (sister of our Secretary of State)."³⁸ The author's recollection that, "Some evenings we just lolled on our front steps all hours discussing our ideas on politics, religion, careers (one issue: is a woman's place really in the home?)"³⁹ reveals a group interested in, and aware of, key political figures and topics. It should be noted, however, that the articles referenced, whilst supporting youth political engagement, all did so in a manner following a clear, pro-America agenda. Perhaps reflecting the rising anti-Communist fear, there is little discussion of political dissension or youth-mobilised political participation. Following *Seventeen's* framing of political participation, teenagers *should* participate, but only under careful supervision and with the right mindset regarding the American political system in relation to that of other countries.

Alongside articles encouraging active participation in local and national politics, *Seventeen* also printed articles aimed at furthering the knowledge of American youth in regards to foreign affairs and global politics. These articles prove useful when analysing

³⁸ Kathleen O'Connor, 'Girls in Government', *Seventeen*, February 1956, p.89.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.112.

the portrayal of America in relation to other countries in the post-war era. The affluence and power of post-war America did not always align with traditional American values of freedom and democracy, a critical assessment of Red countries served to alleviate feelings of disquiet.⁴⁰ Such articles were facilitated by initiatives such as student exchanges and youth conferences organised by groups such as the American Friends Service Committee. In 1958, one reader related the experience of visiting her hometown in Russia and attending the graduation ball at her old school. Although the article might prove most useful in examining the cultural differences between the two countries, the reader responses hint at the political climate concerning Russia:

I wish there would be more articles on Russia, a country that seems to be so different from ours, yet that we are always, seemingly, at war with.⁴¹

I've always thought that Russians couldn't be as hard-hearted as most people believe them to be, although I still prefer a good American prom. Let's hear more about the "unknown" parts of the world.⁴²

The editors at *Seventeen*, eager to please readers, printed another two articles on Russia in 1960, one entitled "Moscow: a Russian Girl's Life," the other, "Moscow: An American Boy's Visit." The article concerning the Russian girl's life depicted life under communist rule as harsh, with gruelling study and work schedules; overcrowded and low-quality housing; and little time for fun. Meanwhile the American boy's report gives insight into how Americans viewed life under the Soviet system – repressive and lacking in freedom.⁴³ In the responses, readers expressed gratitude for "...the wonderful privileges of living in America," as well as surprise at how strict life under Soviet rule

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Cobbs-Hoffman, *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*, Cambridge, Mass., 1998, p.45.

⁴¹ J.M., Rolling Hills, Calif., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, August 1958, p.4.

⁴² F.S., New York City, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, August 1958, p.4.

⁴³ 'Moscow: A Russian Girl's Life', *Seventeen*, March 1960, p.129; and 'Moscow: An American Boy's Visit', *Seventeen*, March 1960, p.128.

was.⁴⁴

Another avenue through which global diplomacy was tracked in the pages of *Seventeen* was through the United Nations and its significance. In 1959, *Seventeen* devoted its March issue to a focus on the UN, featuring five articles on the international organization. ‘The YOU in the UN,’ provided information on how teenagers could get involved with the UN, whilst ‘There Have Been Some Changes,’ focused on the achievements of the UN; boldly stating: “The UN helped save your world from possible war (most recently in the Middle East.)”⁴⁵ ‘Inside the UN,’ featured interviews conducted by two teenagers who had visited the UN headquarters. Charles Malik, then president of the General Assembly, asserted that, “Although the UN doesn’t move fast enough for many Americans, it does move as fast as human nature will allow,” perhaps suggesting that by 1959 the initial widespread enthusiasm for the United Nations had begun to dwindle.⁴⁶ Linda Salzman’s piece, ‘I Worked for the UN,’ documented her time working at the headquarters over the summer. Salzman noted that, “[During the Lebanon crisis] the UN was an active, readily available forum at a time when a ‘cooling-off’ place was needed, and because the UN was such an international focal point, it could exert certain moral pressures.”⁴⁷ In ‘Dag Hammarskjold Answers Your Questions,’ Hammarskjold argued that, “The organization has not been able, always, and fully, to master the great difficulties it has had to face. But it should in justice be said that it has paved the way for peaceful solutions of most of the conflicts on which it has been called upon to try its strength.”⁴⁸ All six of the responses to these articles were

⁴⁴ D.H., Waverly, Pa., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, May 1960, p.4; and J.L., London, England, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, May 1960, p.4.

⁴⁵ ‘There Have Been Some Changes’, *Seventeen*, March 1959, p.27.

⁴⁶ Gerda Jensen, ‘Inside the U.N.’, *Seventeen*, March 1959, p.17.

⁴⁷ Linda Salzman, ‘I Worked for the U.N.’, *Seventeen*, March 1959, p.130.

⁴⁸ ‘Dag Hammarskjold Answers Your Questions’, *Seventeen*, March 1959, p.89.

positive, praising *Seventeen* for its focus on the organization. The favourable responses suggest that readers had listened to messages in previous articles and were happy to read about politics in a magazine that was also the go-to guide for fashion and popular culture.

The emergence of party politics as part of popular teenage culture as a result of years of cultivating teenage interest in local and national politics is evidenced by articles such as ‘Hear Your Heroes.’ Printed in 1960, the piece featured interviews with six popular personalities. Alongside the celebrities was Senator John F. Kennedy. That Kennedy came under the classification ‘hero’ goes some way to demonstrating the degree of teenage engagement with national politics. Kennedy was the first presidential candidate to tap into the youth demographic, a newly recognised group of future-voters made visible by the expansion of consumerism, youth-culture and the development of ‘the teenager.’ In the interview, JFK is presented as the relatable politician; distanced from the corrupt, sombre characters that preceded him. Quoting Kennedy, the article stated, ““Voting and politics are crucial to a democracy. Yet according to one poll, seventy-three per cent of American mothers do not want their children to have anything to do with politics.” Senator Kennedy hopes to be living proof of the fact that ‘politician’ is not a dirty word.”⁴⁹ Kennedy’s further assertion once again demonstrates both a recognition of American teenagers as a viable political force, and a belief in the obligation of youth to embrace this responsibility:

Young people can – and really must – help to disprove Khrushchev’s prophecy by participating in their government. Anyone who is fifteen or older can work at Democratic or Republican headquarters. They can ring door bells and remind people to vote, they can baby-sit with children while mothers vote, they can address envelopes – most of all they can find out what politics is all about.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Pepe Ferrer, ‘Hear Your Heroes’, *Seventeen*, March 1960, p.92

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Another example of party politics in the pages of *Seventeen* is the October 1960, 'I Believe' feature in which readers voiced opinions on a topic of their choice. In this particular example, Patricia Nixon and Lynda Johnson talked about their experiences as daughters of political figures.⁵¹ At the time of publication, Richard Nixon was the Republican vice-President, whilst Senator Lyndon B. Johnson was the Democratic candidate for vice-President in the 1960 election campaign. In both interviews, although the figures being discussed were political in some of the most explicit senses, there was almost no mention of policies or political agendas. Politics was side-lined in order to discuss less controversial topics such as the interests and hobbies of the girls. Nevertheless, the reader-responses provide insight into the political engagement of American teenagers. Responding to Patricia's interview, one reader wrote: "Even though I am strictly a Democrat, Tricia Nixon sounds as if she'd be a lot of fun...She's the only Republican I approve of."⁵² Another reader noted, "As a 'Young Republican,' I just had the pleasure of meeting the Vice President himself, and I thrive on anything written by him or his family."⁵³ Although one of the responses to Lynda's interview praised the girl's "down-to-earth personality," another reader declared, "I disagree with Lynda Johnson when she says that family history "...gives you a yardstick to measure yourself by." Why should the past accomplishments of your family be a criterion for your own achievements? I believe your standards should be set according to your own desires and capabilities."⁵⁴ Readers were well-informed about the election campaign and

⁵¹ Frances Lewine, 'I Believe...Patricia Nixon', *Seventeen*, October 1960, p.48; and Betty McNabb, 'I Believe...Lynda Johnson', *Seventeen*, October 1960, p.49.

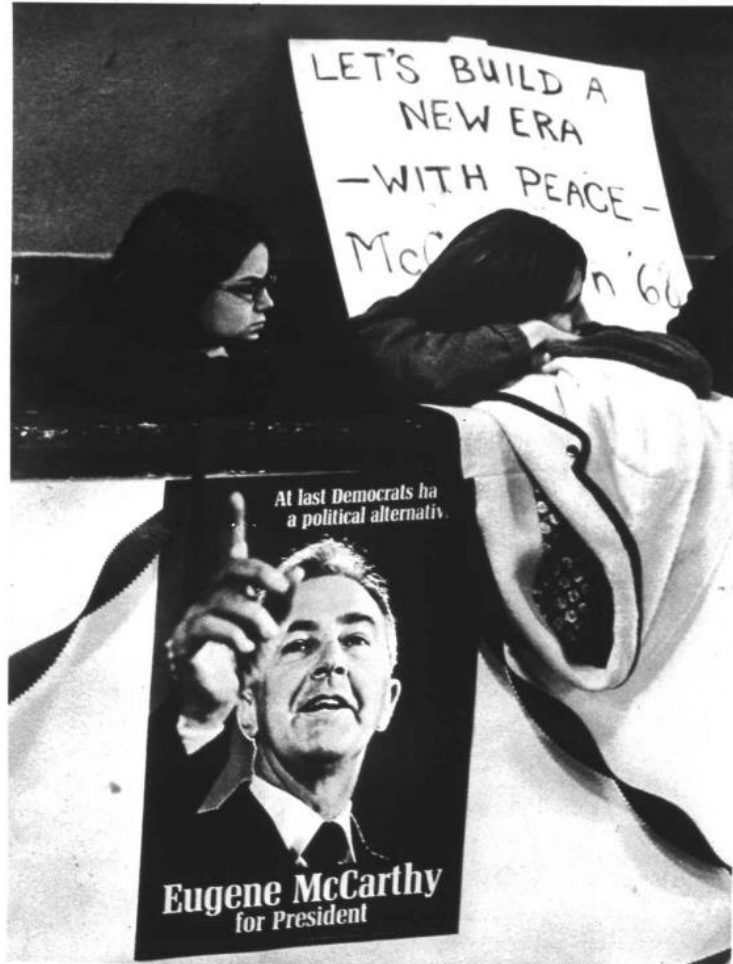
⁵² A.C., Vass, M.C., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1960, p.4.

⁵³ D.D.D., Melrose, Mass., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1960, p.4.

⁵⁴ J.K., Windsor, Conn., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1960, p.4; and L.S., New York, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1960, p.4.

some of them possessed strong party ties.

Between 1951 and 1960, *Seventeen* continued to print articles relating to contemporary politics. The politics discussed included local community politics, national party politics, and even global politics. Fears regarding the atomic bomb were voiced, and the tense relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union was evidenced in the unfavourable representation of Russia. Throughout this period, teenage civic responsibility was stressed. As ‘future world citizens,’ readers were urged to become informed participants in democracy. The inclusion of articles depicting teens doing just that, indicates that *Seventeen* was not merely interested in educating readers about politics, but also in promoting active engagement in politics. The influence of this rhetoric can be seen in the emergence of party politics portrayed as part of popular culture. This increased recognition of teenagers as an untapped political demographic may be linked to the rise in youth culture and the consumerism that dominated 1950s American society. From the largely positive responses to them, one can argue that by this stage readers had come to accept the inclusion of political articles and enjoyed learning about political issues.

'Political Pioneers,' *Seventeen* and Political Activism, 1961–1970

'Political Pioneers', *Seventeen*, September 1968.

For many American historians, the 1960's are considered some the most turbulent years in American politics. On the domestic front, the Kennedy presidency; the development of the civil rights movement; the war on poverty; and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., and Robert Kennedy all contributed to rising political awareness. Regarding foreign affairs, the Vietnam War dominated public discourse as each president contended with the issue of American participation in a bloody and unpopular war. Moreover, this period is widely recognised as the first in which teenagers across the world began to assert their political

power.⁵⁵ American teenagers exhibited their political influence in many ways. Whilst some efforts, such as helping in election campaigns and participating in youth-oriented volunteer programs, were endorsed by ‘the establishment,’ others such as student protests and ‘peace suicides’ defied traditional norms and were critiqued and repressed. The increased political awareness of American youth is reflected in the articles and letters of *Seventeen*. Looking at content, it is possible to see a marked increase in the number of politically focused articles, as well a shift in the types of activities readers engaged. Moreover, readers’ opinions, presented in both letters-to-the-editor and reader contributions, were notably stronger than in previous years. As opposed to following attitudes suggested or informed by articles written by adults, readers form their own, at times bold, opinions on matters concerning the running of their country and its policies.

By the 1960s, teenagers had captured the attention of American politicians. Teenage energy and enthusiasm was gradually acknowledged, and the sheer number of them as future voters could no longer be ignored by leading politicians, as reflected by the presence of articles featuring major national political figures.⁵⁶ For example, in the 1962 ‘Hear Your Heroes’ article, the interview with Republican Senator Barry Goldwater, caused controversy amongst readers.⁵⁷ The selection of staunch conservative Goldwater received mixed responses:

Hurray for *Seventeen* and this wonderful article on Barry Goldwater! We need more of the pioneer spirit and independent feeling in America. He is one of the few men in government today who seem to realize this.⁵⁸

Barry Goldwater and his followers in the John Birch Society are doing

⁵⁵ Grace Palladino, *Teenagers: An American History*, New York, 1996, p.208

⁵⁶ See ‘Hear Your Heroes’, *Seventeen*, January 1961, pp.92-95; Helen Thomas, ‘Luci B. Johnson Talks About Her Life’, *Seventeen*, September 1964, p.124; Lucie Baines Johnson, ‘I’ve Been Forced to Grow Up’, *Seventeen*, May 1966, p.166; and ‘Face to Face with a Girl Trying to get her Father Elected President’, *Seventeen*, June 1968, p.107.

⁵⁷ ‘Hear Your Heroes’, *Seventeen*, January 1962 pp.72-74.

⁵⁸ M.S., Bethesda, Md., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1962, p.4.

absolutely nothing to uphold our democracy and promote peace; they are only encouraging more chaos and hatred. Mr. Goldwater is against the United Nations and the income tax, both of which are necessities today.⁵⁹ Instead of choosing Senator Goldwater, *Seventeen* might have done better to choose someone who is working to further the interests and opportunities of American youth. Why not Martin Luther King, who devotes himself to abolishing the indignity of racial segregation? And what is wrong with the eminent scientist Dr. Linus Pauling, who works constantly to lessen the dangers of possible nuclear war?⁶⁰

These responses indicate that readers were not only well-informed about the views of key politicians, but they were also capable of voicing contrary opinions. The expression of these conflicting opinions within the letters-to-the-editor supports the theory that *Seventeen* acted as a policy forum in which young American women could debate conflicting ideas utilising *Seventeen*'s framing of such issues. The notion that readers possessed strong political opinions is supported by the 1962 article, 'Three US Presidents Talk to You.' Commenting on President Truman, the author wrote, "He is one of the most loved and hated men in the country. It is impossible to be neutral about the thirty-third President of the United States."⁶¹ When questioned about his decision to drop the atomic bomb, Truman responded, "I got a lot of advice, but I had no qualms about using it... We faced a half a million casualties trying to take Japan by land. It was either that or the atom bomb, and I didn't hesitate a minute, and I've never lost any sleep over it."⁶² One of the responses to this article, written a few months prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis, indicates how polarizing Truman's actions were:

Some of the views were very inspiring; others deeply disturbing. Mr. Truman is lucky that he can sleep at night – that the lives lost at Hiroshima and Nagasaki do not weigh on his conscience, that he is not concerned about nuclear war... Mr. Truman takes brisk morning walks; I

⁵⁹ J.S., New York City, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, March 1962, p.4.

⁶⁰ E.E., Long Island City, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, March 1962, p.4.

⁶¹ 'Three US Presidents Talk to You', *Seventeen*, April 1962, p.62.

⁶² Harry S. Truman, 'Three US Presidents Talk to You', *Seventeen*, April 1962, p.62.

get my exercise on picket lines and peace marches.⁶³

Although many teenagers *were* politically active in the early 1960s, Harry Belafonte's 1962 article 'The Changing Role of Youth Today,' hints at a reluctance on the part of some teens to instigate political and social change. The piece, essentially a 'call to arms', urged teens to take an active role in politics, to educate themselves and get involved. Belafonte contended that whilst historically it was young people who were the "provocateurs, the centers of controversy and change, with the mass of this energy leaning toward a liberal philosophy," by 1962, this was no longer the case – or at least not to such an extent. Citing fears of atomic war as causation, Belafonte argued that "The rallying cries of the conservative and reactionary elements seem to be affording a sort of discipline and direction to the young... They seem to be offering, in lieu of progress and hope, a sort of 'security; which has a static philosophy and "stay-putism" as its basis."⁶⁴ Of the four reader-responses, three praised the article for its belief in the potential of teenagers to exert change in the direction of liberal progress. One respondent, however, criticised Belafonte's assessment of conservatism:

I beg to differ with Mr. Belafonte's statement that conservatism offers a direction that is "backward and fraught with disregard for the humanities." As are most generalizations, this is a misrepresentation of the true picture... To be a conservative who is rebelling against the initiative-restricting bonds of a liberal society does not necessitate being an extremist right-winger any more than being a liberal necessitates being a Communist!

This letter demonstrates clearly both the increasingly partisan nature of American politics at this time (an effect of the conflict surrounding the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War), and that these conflicts spilled over into teenage culture.

Readers' strong sentiments regarding political figures was clearly evidenced in

⁶³ V.R., Brooklyn, N.Y., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, April 1962, p.4.

⁶⁴ Harry Belafonte, 'The Changing Role of Youth Today', *Seventeen*, June 1962, p.112.

the responses to the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In February, 1964, half of the letters-to-the-editor featured tributes to the late president. One reader credited Kennedy with the increased political engagement of American youth: “For us, the war children, life was always sunshine, popcorn and cotton candy. But we grew up with him as his campaign and election took place and we began to take an interest in our country and what makes it run.”⁶⁵ Another recalled an event at which the President spoke to a group of teenagers, “In one sentence he said what all teen-agers long to hear – that we are really important people – and he made it clear that we were the greatest asset that the United States possessed.”⁶⁶ In addition to the letters, *Seventeen* also printed two tributes – a poem and a story – within the September 1964 issue.⁶⁷ The impassioned responses from readers demonstrates the extent of teenage political engagement during the 1960s.

As teenagers demonstrated their increasing political awareness, they became the target of party politics, with both main parties seeking favour with one of the largest demographics in the American population.⁶⁸ During the 1964 election campaign, *Seventeen* featured two articles detailing the ways in which teens could get involved. In ‘Your Help is Wanted in Politics,’ politics was framed as youth-centred: “The truth is that in politics today the accent is on youth, and it has been ever since John F. Kennedy demonstrated in the Presidential campaign of 1960 how effectively the energies and ideals of young people could be channelled into a political campaign.”⁶⁹ The article cites population statistics, noting that “by 1966 half of the people in the United States will be

⁶⁵ B.H., and M.H., Spring Valley, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, February 1964, p.4.

⁶⁶ P.F., Vista, Calif., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, February 1964, p.4.

⁶⁷ ‘Two Teens Pay Tribute to President Kennedy’, *Seventeen*, September 1964, p.43.

⁶⁸ Palladino, p.195.

⁶⁹ ‘Your Help is Wanted in Politics’, *Seventeen*, September 1964, p.132.

under twenty-five,” and discusses the “mounting pressure around the country for lowering the voting age.”⁷⁰ As examples of how readers could get involved with the election campaign, the article concluded with descriptions of both the ‘Teen Dems’ and ‘Teen-Age Republicans’ (TARS) program. It is, therefore, reasonable to argue that *Seventeen*’s editors positioned formal politics in such a way that emphasised the value of youth engagement.

The same issue included the article, ‘Two Open Letters to Teenage Girls’, in which representatives from both parties outlined their respective parties’ goals in a bid to gain teenage support. Emphasising the Democratic Party’s liberal, progressive attitude with a highlight on increased gender equality, Margaret Price, Vice-Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, stated, “...young women certainly know that the party which has the imagination and adaptability to meet changing needs with programs such as the Peace Corps and the War on Poverty is the party which represents their generation best.”⁷¹ Elly M. Peterson, Assistant Chairman Republican National Committee, sketched the key policies of the Republican Party whilst smearing the Democratic Party in the process:

[TARS members] will learn which party believes that the fifty sovereign states have the obligation, the duty, the responsibility, to manage their own affairs and which party believes the government should exercise parental control. They will learn which party believes in trying to live as nearly as possible within our Federal income and which one believes ‘charge it’ are magic words and that there is no tomorrow when the bills come due. They will learn which party believes that Americans have pride and courage, ambition and know-how, and want to work out their own plans for their future and which party believes it is the duty of the Federal government to “take care of everything” for us.⁷²

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ ‘Two Open Letters to Teen-age Girls’, *Seventeen*, September 1964, p.232.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.234

Participation in election campaigns became a popular form of political engagement during the 1968 election campaign. In the 1968 article, ‘Political Pioneers,’ Senator Eugene McCarthy detailed how, “The energy and commitment of young citizens – many of them not old enough to vote – literally changed the course of history in 1968 and brought to life in America a new kind of politics.”⁷³ Commenting on how teenagers differed in their approach to politics, McCarthy stated, “[Young people] suggested that the political process in America be tested, that knowledge and reasoned judgment be applied to the problems of life and history. They suggested this at a time when it was said to be somehow disloyal or unpatriotic, or at least futile, to do so.”⁷⁴ McCarthy’s vision of “a new kind of politics – a politics of personal responsibility, based on knowledge and reason,” appealed to the younger generation, many of whom were tired of ‘the establishment’ and disillusioned with traditional politicians.⁷⁵ With his support, large numbers of students took time off from their study to help canvas for McCarthy, contributing to the positive outcome in New Hampshire. Responses to the article were resoundingly positive, applauding “the humility and greatness of the Senator,” and reaffirming the need to “establish a new dimension in politics.”⁷⁶

As well as participation in election campaigns, American teenagers demonstrated political engagement via youth volunteer efforts. America was not alone in embracing youth volunteerism – this development was mirrored across the globe. However, America *was* the first nation to incorporate youth volunteerism into its foreign policy.⁷⁷ Government-organised youth volunteer programmes such as the Peace

⁷³ Eugene McCarthy, ‘Political Pioneers’, *Seventeen*, September 1968, p.143.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.240

⁷⁶ B.G., Bronx, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, November 1968, p.4; and B.B., Union City, N.J., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, November 1968, p.4.

⁷⁷ Cobbs Hoffman, p.8.

Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the Head Start Project were popular means by which teenagers could contribute to the broader political aims of the United States. Youth volunteerism represented a way for America to compete for the allegiance of newly independent nations, whilst simultaneously mitigating feelings of discomfort regarding America's expansionist foreign policy and global power. Such matters disturbed many on account of the imbedded "recognition of the corruption effects of power on political virtue" within the nation's history.⁷⁸

Between 1961 and 1970 discussions of volunteer programmes featured regularly in the letters-to-the-editor, with readers praising the efforts of volunteers and expressing gratitude towards the programs as enablers of good-will amongst teenagers. The article, 'Project Head Start: Come Take My Hand,' detailed the experiences of volunteers for the Head Start project, a program launched in 1965 with the aim of, "...helping the 'lost' children of the poor catch up with other children."⁷⁹ One reader explained that as part of their training, volunteers "were shown poverty as more than a lack of money... a missing parent, living with six brothers and sisters in a one-room apartment, a mother so preoccupied with her own terrible troubles that she literally cannot speak a loving word."⁸⁰ Volunteers also discussed the poor living conditions, physical abuse, and lack of education; revealing a side of American society that was previously absent from the pages of *Seventeen*. This development represents an example of frame reflection within *Seventeen* regarding how the magazine depicted America and American politics.

Previously domestic poverty, although present within American society, was nonetheless omitted from discussion. Perhaps owing to the fact that via volunteerism,

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.1.

⁷⁹ 'Project Head Start: Come Take My Hand', *Seventeen*, December, 1965, p.98.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

readers would inevitably encounter these issues, editorial staff opted to end the radio silence regarding these matters. In doing so *Seventeen* can be said to have reframed elements of formal politics in response to the outcomes of initiatives that they themselves had positioned as acceptable forms of political engagement.

The presence of multiple articles recounting the experiences of teenagers tackling the effects of unemployment, poverty and poor education within the United States suggests that such issues were of increasing political salience during this time period. This idea is supported by reader-responses to articles such as ‘Report from Appalachia,’ an article detailing the efforts of a VISTA member stationed in a region with “...huge unemployment, grinding poverty and an economic future so bleak that the majority of young people regularly leave the area right after high school.”⁸¹ In response, one reader wrote: “I had no idea that VISTA existed. I, like Nancy, wanted to join the Peace Corps but now I’d rather help my own country.”⁸² These responses conflict with previously discussed notions of global unity. Instead, the letter indicates a newfound appreciation for volunteer programs focused on domestic rather than foreign issues, perhaps evidence of both a resurgence in American liberalism, and a reactionary force in response to growing concerns regarding American foreign policy.⁸³

A contentious aspects of American foreign policy during the 1960s was the Vietnam War. Linked to Cold War politics, American involvement in the Vietnam conflict began in the early 1950s under the guise of assisting French allies maintain colonialist power against anti-imperialist, and later communist, Vietnamese nationalist

⁸¹ Nancy Krell, ‘Report from Appalachia’, *Seventeen*, January 1966, p.92.

⁸² G.D., Stonewall, Okla., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1966, p.4; and M.O., Woodland Hills, Calif., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1966, p.4.

⁸³ Terry Anderson, *The Sixties*, New York, 2012, p.27.

groups.⁸⁴ Not until 1965 did America begin sending significant numbers of combat troops to Vietnam, and much of U.S. foreign policy regarding the war in Vietnam was hidden from the American public. Arguably it was for these reasons that public sentiment regarding the Vietnam War remained as favourable as it did for so long.⁸⁵ As the number of American casualties, the financial impact and the secrecy of the American government were revealed, public opinion began to alter and a strong anti-war movement emerged. By late-1967, following persistent U.S. bombing of South Vietnam, 46% of those polled said that the country had “made a mistake sending troops to Vietnam,” an attitude reflected by the October 1967 anti-war rally in Washington.⁸⁶

Articles referenced in the letters-to-the-editor between 1961 and 1970 discussing Vietnam differ in their treatment of the war and its relevance to American patriotism. Earlier articles, such as, ‘A Visit to Vietnam,’ tended to portray the more human elements of the war, focusing on America’s efforts to provide aid.⁸⁷ The article doesn’t pass judgment either way, but focuses on the plight of the Vietnamese, perhaps as a means of justifying American presence, an idea reflected in the reader-responses: “It makes you feel good to know that a teen-age boy will devote his time to so great a cause, I wish more of us could do something to help.”⁸⁸ In contrast, later articles explicitly reference the anti-war movement and the political implications of American involvement in relation to global politics. In ‘Face to Face with a Soldier Home from Vietnam,’ nineteen-year-old Neal Vrotsos recounted his experience fighting in Vietnam:

We didn’t really discuss the anti-war demonstrations back home. Our attitude

⁸⁴ Kazin, Edwards, and Rothman, p.258.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Alexander Ives, ‘A Visit to Vietnam’, *Seventeen*, February 1967, p.150.

⁸⁸ P.H., Riverside, N.J., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, April 1967, p.4.

was: We're here, so what can we do about it?...You're not really scared. They train you and train you so that by the time you leave the States you feel pretty sure there's no way they can kill a soldier. You're psyched into thinking you're invincible.⁸⁹

Responses to this piece indicate that the author's bravado and indifference toward the impact of the war were not necessarily representative of all teenagers:

I was infuriated and sickened by Neal Vrotsos' account of Vietnam. My brother is there and his is not the life of "listening to records, writing letters or playing cards." He writes: "I'm probably more scared now than I've been since I came. It seems that the longer you're here, the more you know about what can happen. One of those 122mm rockets landed fifty yards from my barracks last night...Another convoy was hit today – the same one I rode in last month. It's kind of like Russian roulette..." I think the terror behind my brother's letter is closer to the reality of Vietnam.⁹⁰

Closely linked to the Vietnam War was the development of the anti-war movement and increased student activism. Pacifist sentiments were likewise exhibited in the pages of *Seventeen*. In 1967, the magazine printed an article about eighteen-year-old pacifist Suzanne Williams, who had been jailed on six occasions for her anti-war beliefs and activities amongst which included "taking peace walks, standing on vigil lines, [and] participating in civil disobedience."⁹¹ Reader-responses were mixed, with one reader arguing that, "If Americans had been pacifists earlier in American history, Suzanne would not have the privilege of being one now," and another citing her ability to walk to and from school unfollowed as an example of peaceful living unobtainable in Communist countries.⁹² A more extreme example of the ways teenagers protested the war is the 1970 'peace suicides.'⁹³ The article reported the suicides of teenage-couple

⁸⁹ 'Face to Face with a Soldier Home from Vietnam', *Seventeen*, May 1969, p.86.

⁹⁰ S.K., Cleveland, Ohio., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, July 1969, p.4.

⁹¹ 'Face to Face with a Girl Who Has Gone to Jail for what she Believes', *Seventeen*, September 1967, p.153.

⁹² L.K., New York, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, November 1967, p.4; and M.S., Cleveland, Ohio, 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, November 1967, p.4.

⁹³ Eliot Asinof, 'The Peace Suicides', *Seventeen*, May 1970, p.174.

Joan Fox and Craig Badiali, locals of Blackwood, New Jersey. According to the letters left by the couple, the act was one of political expression, an intended wake-up call for the rest of society to make a change. The article received numerous responses, to the extent that the editors chose to devote the entire letters-to-the-editor column to the comments. Respondents admired and criticised the couple in equal measure. Many viewed the suicides as a waste of the couple's energies, whilst others pledged to do justice to the couple's plea for peace.⁹⁴

The employment of the draft caused teenagers to voice concerns regarding their status as citizens. Deemed old enough to die for their country, yet too young to vote to end a war they didn't believe in, students across the nation protested the inequity of this situation. This debate was articulated in the 1967 piece, 'In My Opinion Eighteen-Year-Olds Aren't Ready to Vote.' The author noted that "If a boy is old enough to fight, he's old enough to vote," goes one argument. 'Enlarging the electorate will result in a truer democracy,' says another."⁹⁵ Her argument against lowering the voting age rested on the fact that eighteen-year-olds, just leaving the shelter of the family home, had yet to form their own, informed opinions on political matters, (an idea that this chapter hopefully discredits.) The critical responses to the piece suggest that the author's opinion was far from representative of that of *Seventeen's* readership. One respondent argued, "By the time today's teen-agers are eighteen they can hold a job, earn money, pay taxes, marry, have children; they are not judged in juvenile courts and can be subjected to capital punishment; the boys can be drafted. Since young people today assume responsibilities of citizenship, they should be able to vote."⁹⁶ Despite the strong stance adopted, this

⁹⁴ See 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, May 1970, p.4.

⁹⁵ Betsy Glasgow, 'In My Opinion Eighteen-Year-Olds Aren't Ready to Vote', *Seventeen*, September 1967, p.266.

⁹⁶ C.R., Nashville, Tenn., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, November 1967, p.4.

article represents one of the milder forms of public engagement with political issues in contrast to other tactics pursued by teenagers wishing to demonstrate their political awareness.

Student demonstrations, particularly those held on university campuses, were a major feature of American politics during the late 1960s, and another avenue through which teenagers could engage in politics in a public arena. The subject of the demonstrations varied, but popular topics included freedom of speech and the anti-war movement. Sparked by the suspension of a group of Iowa teenagers for wearing black armbands of mourning to protest the Vietnam War, in 1969 the Supreme Court was forced to issue a formal decision regarding high school protests.⁹⁷ That *Seventeen* printed an article reporting on this event suggests that editors recognised readers' interest in this matter, an idea supported by the positive reader-response: "The Supreme Court decision has at least taken us a step forward in making our schools more democratic... Hopefully there will soon be less infringement on our freedoms... and more understanding between the system and the students."⁹⁸

Another example of student demonstrations featured in the pages of *Seventeen* is the article, 'Behind the Headlines with a Witness from Kent State.' The article provided a brief report from eye witness Barry Levine on the Kent State shootings of May 4th, 1970. During the protest National Guardsmen, having been ordered to police students on the Kent State campus, shot and killed four students and wounded eleven others whilst attempting to break up a demonstration.⁹⁹ The article received two responses, one decrying the "...sorrowful loss, but [also] a country that allows horrifying events like

⁹⁷ Kazin, Edwards, and Rothman, p.258.

⁹⁸ 'Freedom of Speech for Students', *Seventeen*, May 1969, pp.54-54; and V.W., Salt Lake City, Utah, 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, July 1969, p.4.

⁹⁹ 'Behind the Headlines with a Witness from Kent State', *Seventeen*, August 1970, p.156.

this to occur,” and one slightly sympathetic towards the guardsmen, noting that, “Tear gas cans were hurled back at the National Guard, students were repeatedly urged to clear the area and they deliberately held an assembly when none was permitted.”¹⁰⁰

The anti-war campus protest movement is often associated with the broader political movement of the New Left. Emerging in the early 1960s, catalysed by the efforts of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), initial New Left activists “sometimes talked and wrote as if they mostly wanted American liberals to pursue the liberal agenda...with increased zeal.”¹⁰¹ However, at times New Leftists disagreed with conventional liberal politics, resenting the compromises made with conservative forces. In the late 1960s and 1970s, frustration led some members of the New Left to engage in progressively militant protest tactics which ultimately signalled the beginning of the end for the political movement.¹⁰² The trajectory of the New Left, and the impact of the protest movement on its popularity was expressed by the 1969 article ‘In My Opinion the New Left is a Paste Gem.’ The author acknowledged that she once aligned herself with the movement on account of its, “...image of courageous young people determined to end racial strife and the war in Vietnam. Its appeal to instant democracy seemed so idealistic, so right.” However, the practice of “...infringing on the very freedoms they are trying to secure...[and] advocating wanton lawlessness” had turned her fascination into repulsion.¹⁰³ The author went on to voice her annoyance at the lack of alternatives for voters whose views lined up with neither the radical liberals of the New Left nor “ultra-right wingers” of the Republican Party. Comments responding to the article

¹⁰⁰ Lis Schaen, Flushing, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, October 1970, p.4; and D.B., Munroe Falls, Ohio., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, October 1970, p.4.

¹⁰¹ Kazin, Edwards, and Rothman, p.366.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p.367

¹⁰³ Margaret Cain, ‘In My Opinion the New Left is a Paste Gem’, *Seventeen*, July 1969, p.160.

conveyed a similar dissatisfaction with the state of American politics, despairing at the lack of viable political representation.

Formal politics is well-represented in the letters-to-the-editor between 1961 and 1970. Discussion of major political figures, alongside appeals from representatives of both major political parties, illustrates the increased recognition afforded to American teenagers as future voters. Articles detailing ways in which readers could get involved with election campaigns and the potentially high degree of influence their participation might have, also gives credence to the argument that teenagers were increasingly political active during this time. Teenagers also engaged with broader domestic public policy regarding issues such as poverty and poor education through the efforts of government-organised youth volunteer programs. In stark contrast to these ‘approved’ forms of political engagement were the student protests, ‘peace suicides’ and pacifism that surfaced during the late 1960s as part of the New Left movement, itself a by-product of American foreign affairs. These later developments in teenage political engagement suggest a dissatisfaction with contemporary politics – the enthusiasm to change the world dimmed by the failure to make an impact.

Conclusion

Of the three time periods under discussion, that of 1961 to 1970 is the one in which American teenagers were most engaged in formal politics. The increased political content of the magazine as represented in the letters-to-the-editor serves as an indicator of teenage interest in political matters. As with any form of supply and demand, the supply would not exist without consumer demand. Given that popular magazines such as *Seventeen* not only helped shape, but were shaped by, popular culture, one can therefore surmise that during the 1960s formal politics was a significant part of popular teenage culture. However, this increased enthusiasm for politics did not occur overnight. The acceptance and celebration of political content between 1961 and 1970 required some preliminary exposure to the subjects discussed. Indeed, letters from the early years of *Seventeen* complaining about articles relating to politics and world affairs confirm that readers did not universally appreciate such articles. Nevertheless, editors continued to feature political articles – perhaps indicating the extent to which they believed readers should be exposed to politics – and in time the complaints petered out.

Time and cultural context play important roles in this process of preparing an audience. The groundwork for the political activism of youth during the 1960s was laid during both the 1940s and 1950s. In regards to this case study alone, by framing teenagers as future-citizens with a duty to be informed about the world they lived in, and offering advice on how readers could acceptably participate in politics on a local, national and global scale, *Seventeen* helped set the scene for the political activism of the 1960s. The independent thought and initiative of teenagers evidenced by some of the articles between 1961 and 1970 demonstrate that after decades of education in the

workings of government, citizenship and democracy, and repeated messages of youth civic responsibility; American teenagers were capable of participating in politics on a scale that many failed to foresee. Moreover, once teenagers did embrace their political power, they outgrew the traditional boundaries set by ‘the establishment.’

Readers’ possession of strong opinions concerning political matters such as the United Nations, elections, Communism, and the Vietnam War, is critical when understanding American teenagers as not only politically informed, but politically engaged. As a demographic, teenagers – particularly female teenagers – have often been overlooked in discussions of political history beyond the confines of 1960s student activism. Young American women were in fact active political participants in a way that reached beyond the boundaries of the private sphere from as early as 1944. Through *Seventeen*, female teenagers entered into a public space in which they expressed political opinions as well as learnt about political matters and how to get involved with them. *Seventeen*’s framing of ideal forms of teenage political engagement within formal politics was by no means static however. Rather, the evolution from political education to political participation and, finally, political activism demonstrates the dynamism of ideals regarding the political engagement of young women. Representative of the exchange relationship between readers and editors, as well as cultural shifts over time, *Seventeen* evidenced reflection and adaptability in its stance regarding political engagement. Nevertheless, in all cases, the question of readers’ political engagement was never one of if, but how.

II.

Chapter II. 'I'm Not Prejudiced, But...': *Seventeen* Magazine and the Politics of Prejudice, 1944-1970



'What Kind of World Do You Want?', *Seventeen*,

Introduction

Few, if any, countries can lay claim to a history devoid of racial and religious tension. America is no different. Indeed, numerous historians have analysed the often violent history of racial and religious prejudice within America.¹ Moreover, this topic remains at the forefront of American politics to this day. Between 1944 and 1970, racial and religious prejudice was an inescapable part of life for the majority of Americans. The Oxford Dictionary defines prejudice as: “dislike, hostility, or unjust behaviour deriving from preconceived and unfounded opinions.” Such prejudice manifested itself in a variety of ways, impacting on the social, political, and economic lives of those it affected to name but a few.

Although many expressions of prejudice take the form of personal interactions

¹ See Jonathan J Bean, *Race and Liberty in America: The Essential Reader*, Lexington, 2009; Eric Foner, Clayborne Carson, David J. Garrow, Gerald Gill, Vincent Harding, and Darlene Clark Hine, Eds., *The Eyes on the Prize Civil Rights Reader: Documents, Speeches, And Firsthand Accounts From the Black Freedom Struggle, 1954-1990*, 1991; Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle*, Baltimore, 2001.

within social situations, many more expressions of prejudice evidence themselves within an explicitly political forum. For example, legislation that enabled and at times enforced racial and religious prejudice stems from a fundamentally political institution – the Supreme Court. The span, and subsequent power, of such legislation was (and still is,) vast. In this way, prejudiced legislation affected multiple facets of life – education, housing, and health to name but a few. Supreme Court Decisions regarding the constitutionality of laws promoting racial and religious prejudice were consistently politically salient between 1944 and 1970. In addition to the Supreme Court, the President’s power to pass executive orders and federalize the National Guard were also ways in which political institutions shaped racial and religious tensions. Perhaps one of the most significant arenas of ‘politics’ that affected racial and religious prejudice within America between 1944 and 1970s was that of social-political movements. The long struggle for racial and religious equality involved various groups and ideologies, for example the non-violent Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King Jr., and the Black Power Movement coordinated by the Black Panthers. These groups and ideologies were not always in agreement on the goals and/or strategies by which they sought to achieve equality, and as such the struggle faced internal as well as external conflicts. Trends evidenced by political institutions and movements were not isolated, but were influenced to an extent by domestic and global political events.

When discussing key political events between 1944 and 1970 in regards to American racial and religious prejudice, there are some clear stand-outs. America’s participation in World War II and subsequent status as global super-power had a major impact on American race and religious relations. Additionally, the post-war influx of

European refugees played a key role in shaping racial and religious prejudice.² The Cold War and the accompanying anti-Communist fear similarly influenced the practices of political prejudice within America; as leader of the free world, bastion of democracy and peace, America could ill-afford racial and religious tension in its own cities. As the Civil Rights Movement developed, the violence of white resistance, such as that of Birmingham, Alabama, shocked American and international audiences. Mass migration to northern cities contributed to increasing poverty, exacerbating pre-existing racial and religious tensions and culminating in violent riots.³ On an international scale, the Vietnam War and the draft played a key role in mobilising anti-prejudice sentiment amongst young Americans.⁴ The opinions and ideas surrounding these events were well documented within *Seventeen*, enabling an historian to gauge how young American women engaged with the politics of prejudice between 1944 and 1970.

Seventeen's coverage of the politics of prejudice provides evidence of the ways in which young American women were expected to engage with this aspect of American politics. By 'politics of prejudice', I refer to the policies and discourse surrounding the issue of prejudice rather than prejudice itself. Engagement with the politics of prejudice by no means equated to the exhibition of prejudice; indeed much of the engagement demonstrated was predicated on ideals of anti-prejudice. There are some distinct patterns in regards to such content – most noticeably the sharp drop in the number of articles discussing racial and religious prejudice during the 1950s – as well as shifting trends concerning the responses of readers to such articles. What arises from

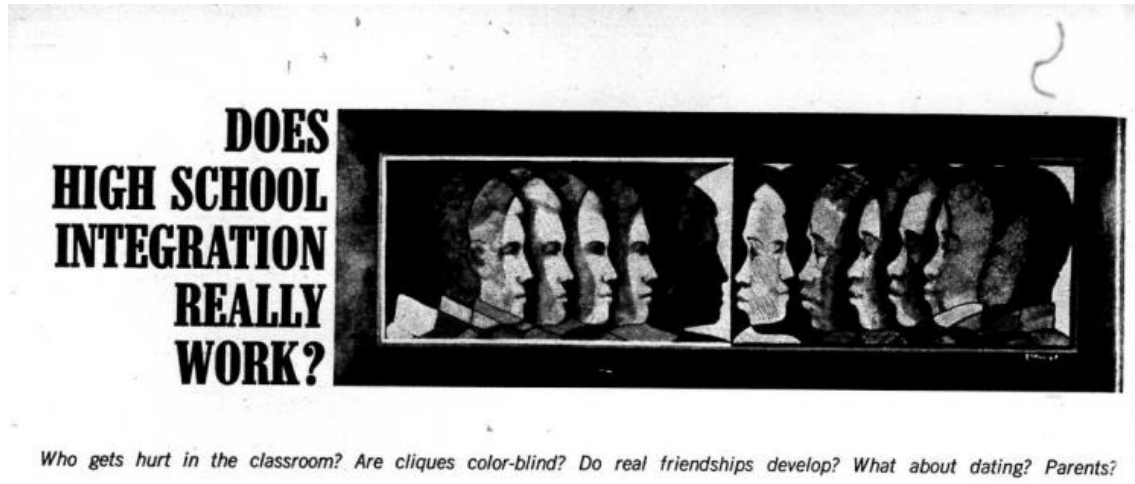
² Jennifer Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World during the Early Cold War*, New York, 2017, p.53.

³ Paul Boyer, *Enduring Vision: A History of the American People*, Fourth Edition, New York, 2000, pp.845-846.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.864.

an assessment of *Seventeen*'s framing of content concerning prejudice is a clear anti-prejudice, or pro-tolerance attitude. Whilst editors took care to print the negative as well as the positive reader-responses – thus providing a policy forum in which readers could debate conflicting ideologies or frames – the magazine's largely liberal agenda persisted. Articles addressed themes such as de-segregation and inter-faith dating, sparking heated discussions amongst readers. Furthermore, the magazine sought to include 'on-trend' articles and features on topics such as the 1968 riots and black power. Despite *Seventeen*'s seemingly good intentions, on occasion editorial approaches towards issues of prejudice came across as ignorant and insensitive, something that reader-responses were quick to pick up on. Readers were therefore encouraged to engage with the politics of prejudice through an education in anti-prejudice, and via articles urging readers to spread the ideals of tolerance and brotherhood that they had received through the pages of *Seventeen*. Lastly, references to changes in legislation, as well as reports on the Civil Rights and Black Power Movements, evidence a sense of responsibility to inform readers on developments within the politics of prejudice.

'Does High School Integration Really Work?' Education, Tolerance, and Ignorance:
Seventeen and the Politics of Racial Prejudice, 1944-1970



'Does High School Integration Really Work?' *Seventeen*, November 1967

America has a long history of racial diversity and has often been referred to as a melting pot of people of all backgrounds – indeed its indigenous peoples, the Indian Americans, represent but one of the many different cultural and ethnic groups living in America. African Americans, Hispanic, and Latin Americans are also key groups within the American population. Lastly, historic immigration gave rise to a sizeable European immigrant population within America.⁵ These four demographics comprise those most discussed in regards to racial prejudice in *Seventeen* between 1944 and 1970. However, owing to the predominant representation of African Americans in articles concerning racial prejudice, it is this group that I will structure my arguments around. This is not to minimise the racial prejudice that others living in America suffered, but rather to avoid inadequate discussion of issues deserving of a full and detailed analysis.

Within *Seventeen*, issues of prejudice against African Americans were by far the most commonly addressed. Between 1944 and 1949, eleven articles featured in the

⁵ Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility*, pp.52-53.

letters-to-to-editor discussed prejudice against African Americans. The impact of World War II on race relations within the United States was twofold. Firstly, whilst fighting against the Nazi regime of ethnic and racial cleansing, Americans condemned their openly racist enemies and promoted ideals of democracy and the 'four freedoms'. Many African Americans struggled to reconcile these messages with the discrimination and prejudice they experienced within the U.S. Secondly, the experiences of African American troops, both overseas and within America at training camps, strengthened their determination to instigate change.⁶ Discrimination within the military continued throughout the war, whether it be in regards to the draft, segregation, hiring of officers, or disciplinary matters. Nonetheless, the war did produce some positive outcomes, for example in 1948 President Truman issued two executive orders: 9980 ordering an end to discrimination in the federal government and establishing the Fair Employment Board within the Civil Service Commission, and 9981 to bring equality of treatment and opportunity into the armed forces.⁷

These events had conspicuous impacts on the framing of African-American race-relations in *Seventeen*, evidenced by the inclusion of several articles promoting 'brotherhood' and condemning prejudice. The notion of war as a means of uniting disparate groups against a common enemy was exemplified in the 1945 article, 'What Kind of World do You Want?' Referring to brothers who had fought in the war, the article commented: "When he first left home, your brother may have had some petty, narrow-minded prejudices against the very men who are know his comrades...Just as his buck-gawkiness wore off in training, your brother's muddled prejudices have worn

⁶ Neil A. Wynn, *The African American Experience during World War II*, New York, 2010, p.43.

⁷ *ibid.*, p.87.

off in battle.”⁸ The following reader-response touched upon the issue of recognition, or lack thereof, of African American participation in the war, as well as the discrepancies between propaganda and reality:

I wish I could really tell you how I feel. You see, I'm a Negro, and my people are one of the many victims of prejudice...Could you have an article written on the part the colored boys are taking in this war? They're not all smiles the way the pictures show them. They work hard. They sweat and shed blood too. They give their lives, and above all, they're human.⁹

Citing the atrocities of Hitler's regime as a warning of the potential outcomes of racial prejudice, *Seventeen* implored readers to assess their attitudes towards African Americans and make adjustments accordingly. In the 1945 article, 'Is Your Club a Secret Weapon?' the author demonstrated how the selective nature of some school and community clubs fostered the kind of prejudice that had helped facilitate the Holocaust. Using examples from recent history such as Hitler Youth, Women's Hitler Groups, Brown Shirt uniforms, and mountain-top ceremonies, the articles demonstrated how seemingly innocent groups and rituals could enable larger, more explicitly negative forces to gain momentum. The following language stands out for its emotive language and imagery, urging readers to heed the author's warning:

The evil thing we call Nazism found rich earth in which to grow...Nazism roused dislike into murder, bad temper into madness, love of power into love of torture. It turned children into killers, doctors into poisoners, young people's organizations into armies of corrupt and ruthless savages...It has revealed that we have been too tolerant of our 'little' failings, our 'small' vices.¹⁰

As well as articulating the possible dangers of prejudice in fueling violent attacks on racial groups, *Seventeen* attempted to address, and debunk some of the myths and

⁸ 'What Kind of World Do You Want?', *Seventeen*, February 1945, p.60.

⁹ T.F. Chicago, Ill., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, April 1945, p.6.

¹⁰ 'Is Your Club a Secret Weapon?', *Seventeen*, August 1945, p.98.

preconceived ideas regarding racial stereotypes. Articles such as 'Charlie McCarthy is a Dummy' impressed upon readers the cost of repeating fallacious racial stereotypes. The article likened those who parroted racial slurs to the popular ventriloquist dummy Charlie McCarthy: "...gradually you repeated the actions so often that they became how *you* felt – because few of us are honest enough to admit we're merely repeating someone else's words." Detailing what these 'words' comprised, the article gave the following example. In this way, *Seventeen* offered readers a snapshot of how many Americans framed issues of race relations, and proposed that readers take the opportunity to reflect on this outlook, proffering instead a conflicting, more progressive attitude:

'Sure, there are some – with lots of white blood in them – that are different, but most niggers are...' Write in any ugly charge – immoral, dirty, stupid, don't know their place, trying to take advantage, charming when childish, bad-smelling, irresponsible...None of the charges is true for a whole race – nor any large percentage of a race. If they were true, it would be amazing how many white people survived when every bit of the food they ate was cooked by these dangerously stupid people, when every bit of clothing was put on them by those dark hands, when most of the roads were made, the fields planted and harvested, the homes built and tended by this race. And how these critics dismiss the great musicians, scientists, educators who are Negroes.¹¹

Author Alice Beaton went on to explore the roots of this prejudice, noting its origins in nineteenth-century slavery. In this way, teenagers engaged with the politics of prejudice by confronting and questioning contemporary prejudices. Positive reader-responses to this article suggest that readers agreed with the anti-prejudice messages presented. For example, one reader wrote, "...The wrong part of following others was exemplified by Hitler and his regime. The people of the *world* should realize what they are doing when they play Charlie!"¹² The link back to World War II demonstrates the

¹¹ Alice Beaton, 'Charlie McCarthy is a Dummy', *Seventeen*, January 1946, p.106.

¹² D.J.F., New Orleans, La., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, March 1946, p.6.

impact the war had on American conceptions of prejudice. This idea is reinforced by the inclusion of a letter entitled 'One School's Fight.' In the letter the author described the efforts of their school to tackle prejudice, including a trip, "to see a movie showing just what [their] parents [were] trying to do to stop racial and religious prejudice." The reader stated that, "Since the atom bomb has been discovered, the people of this world are going to have to get along with each other, the only other alternative is another, more terrible war."¹³ The references to WWII and the atomic bomb reflect readers' growing political education concerning global political matters, something the articles of *Seventeen* at least partly contributed to.

What is perhaps surprising, particularly given the inclusion of articles pertaining to global diplomacy at this time, is the lack of discussion of legislative prejudice. For all its condemnation of discrimination based on race, between 1944 and 1949 *Seventeen* failed to address the inherently prejudiced legal system of the United States. The one exception to this paradox is the 1949 article, 'Youth Needs.' The article comprised letters written by readers regarding their opinions on the problems they considered most urgent and deserving of attention at the forthcoming President's White House Conference on Children and Youth. One such letter praised the recent ruling of the Supreme Court banning Restrictive Covenants, and lambasted those who resented legislative moves towards racial equality.¹⁴ Aside from this article, none of those sampled between 1944 and 1949 make reference to the discriminatory laws affecting African Americans. This omission may reflect editors' perceptions of the political engagement of readers. Perhaps readers were not considered informed or indeed powerful enough to engage with political

¹³ C.H., Detroit, Mich., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1947, p.6.

¹⁴ Carl L. Cain, 'Youth Needs', *Seventeen*, May 1949, p.156.

legislation during this period.

Although discussion of *legislative* racial discrimination was lacking in the letters-to-the-editor between 1944 and 1949, issues of racial intolerance and prejudice were nevertheless frequently discussed. This is a stark contrast to the period of 1950 to 1956. In these years, only two of the articles discussed in the letters-to-the-editor addressed racial prejudice of any kind.¹⁵ One way to interpret this silence vis-à-vis racial prejudice is as a reluctance to explicitly address the racist practices of the American legal system at a time when it was not deemed politically expedient for America to do so. In the 1950s, competition between America and the Soviet Union began to escalate. At the time, American politicians perceived the Soviet Union as a serious threat to plans to expand the sphere of American influence.¹⁶ In order to contend with the rising tide of Communism, American politicians sought to propagate the vision of America as upholder of peace and equality, provider of 'the good life.' Discussion of widespread racial discrimination in a popular teenage magazine with an international readership was hardly conducive to fostering the image of America as the front-runner of democracy and freedom. Moreover, domestic politics ensured that the voices of liberals, who might otherwise have stimulated discussion of racial prejudice, were swiftly silenced.

The absence of discussion concerning racial prejudice in the letters-to-the editor ended abruptly in December 1957, at which point the topic of racial prejudice against African Americans re-emerged as a central issue amongst reader-responses. This 'second-wave awareness' was most likely sparked by controversial legislative changes. Namely, the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court ruling in favour of

¹⁵ Robert Levine, 'At the Movies', *Seventeen*, May 1950, p.30; Sylvia Plath, 'The Perfect Setup,' *Seventeen*, October 1952, pp.102-104.

¹⁶ Michael Kazin, 'Preface', in Michael Kazin, Rebecca Edwards, and Adam Rothman, eds., *The Concise Princeton Encyclopedia of American Political History*, Princeton, 2011, p.255.

desegregation of public schools, and the subsequent white-backlash, such as the 1957 Little Rock Crisis.¹⁷ Two articles within the space of one year reporting on integration prompted strongly-worded letters from readers.¹⁸ In the December 1957 article 'Teens in the News,' a regular feature documenting newsworthy teenage activities, *Seventeen* reported on the efforts of high school students in Washington D.C. towards integration. The brief excerpt described these teenagers as, "Shapers of History – the center of world-wide attention and respect...acting with courage and decency to make integration work."¹⁹ The divergent opinions expressed in the reader-responses to this article highlight one of the most popular ways in which teenagers engaged with the politics of prejudice – utilising their freedom of speech to voice conflicting thoughts and attitudes. The following letters represent the two sides proffered in the letters-to-the-editor:

Here in Atlanta we have our share of courage and decency with the difference that we *believe* in segregation! After attending school here for eight years I feel with all my heart and soul that integration is *not* possible in the South...I ask you, have you really tried to look at segregation from the Southerner's point of view? We are deeply disturbed by this problem and it hurts us deeply to have other teen-agers of our country feel we our disgracing our country.²⁰

I was delighted to discover that *Seventeen* has a mind as well as a heart. Congratulations for a correct interpretation of most American teen-agers' feelings.²¹

The controversy and division that followed any article discussing integration was most obviously demonstrated in the responses to another 'Teens in the News' feature. The 1958 article praised the pro-integration stance taken by student-council

¹⁷ Boyer, pp.817-181.

¹⁸ 'Teens in the News', *Seventeen*, December 1957, p.124; 'Teens in the News', December 1958, p.112

¹⁹ 'Teens in the News', *Seventeen*, December 1957, p.124.

²⁰ S.T., Atlanta, Go., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, February 1958, p.4.

²¹ O.G., Boylston, Mass., 'Thank you for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, February 1958, p.4.

president, "Brave" Angie Evans, at an anti-integration organized by parents.²² The initial article received mixed responses, but one in particular, (printed below), sparked a slew of responses from readers who disagreed with the following letter:

'Brave' Angie Evans is just too much. I believe that the Negroes should have anything equal to what we have, but *separately!* If God had wanted us to mix, he would certainly have made us the same color, wouldn't he? As for 'Brave Angie Evans.' I think the reason she disagreed was to get herself a little publicity. Am I right, Angie? I only hope that someday she will wake up and realize how wrong she is. That goes for everyone who believes in integration. I do not expect to see this in print. You haven't got the nerve.²³

So numerous were the responses to this letter that editors felt the need to issue a disclaimer, noting that the number of letters received was unprecedented, and that those printed represented merely a sample. This exemplar illustrates the 'exchange relationship' that existed between readers and editors. Through letters-to-the-editor, readers could participate in what was essentially a policy forum to voice opinions on political topics, and in doing so, form bonds of commonality with other readers. This process exposed readers to different ways of thinking about, or framing, racial prejudice. Through *Seventeen* readers were therefore made aware of opinions beyond those of their local community, hence broadening the political discourse with which they engaged.

As the 1960s progressed, articles covering prejudice against African Americans and the politics surrounding racial prejudice began to discuss aspects of the 'classic' civil rights movement. For example, sit-ins, Freedom Rides, Freedom Schools and voter registration drives were all featured in articles discussed in the letters-to-the-editor.²⁴

²² 'Teens in the News', *Seventeen*, December 1958, p.112.

²³ M.L., Birmingham, Ala., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, February 1959, p.5.

²⁴ 'Teens in the News', *Seventeen*, June 1960, p.151; 'Teenagers Talk about Race, Religion and Prejudice', *Seventeen*, October 1961, p.112; Earnestyne Evans, 'Report from Mississippi', *Seventeen*, January 1966, p.90.

Thus, readers were exposed to a social-political movement. Several of these articles were in fact penned by teenage contributors, often writing about their own experiences; alternatively some articles reported on the activities of teenagers themselves. Articles thusly provided a relatable way for readers to engage with a contemporary political issue. For example, in the 1960 article 'Teens in the News', *Seventeen* did a profile on teenager Ezell Blair Jr., a member of the Greensboro Four. On 1st February 1960, along with three other African American students; Blair sat down at a segregated Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The article praised the efforts of other teenagers who went on to follow suit, and described the violent white-backlash they faced: "In the South many teen-agers are following Ezell's example of non-violent resistance to segregation despite the fact that some have been expelled from school, fined, soaked with fire hoses and tear gassed for trying to defy tradition."²⁵

Arguably the language of the piece, although positive, nonetheless downplays the seriousness of the discrimination exhibited. Despite legislative changes in favour of integration, African Americans still faced considerable racial discrimination in many aspects of life. One crucial area in which African Americans continued to face oppression during the 1960s was in exercising their right to vote. In a 1966 article, 'Report from Mississippi', African American teenager Earnestyne Evans recounted her experiences with both the Freedom Schools and voter registration drives in Mississippi, strategies employed by civil rights groups to tackle African American disenfranchisement. Referencing the obstacles African American voters faced, Evans recalled the fear, "that if one tried to register he might be beaten up or fired from his job or put off the land he worked as a tenant farmer." Additionally, African Americans were

²⁵ 'Teens in the News', *Seventeen*, June 1960, p.151.

required to, “fill out a long and complicated form and then prove [their] literacy by interpreting a passage from the constitution – with the local official the final judge of whether or not the interpretation was “correct.””²⁶ Evans went on to describe her experience as both a pupil and a teacher at a Freedom School. Amongst the purposes for these schools Evans listed “giving voting information to adults and helping children and teenagers learn about Negro history.”²⁷

Reader-responses to this article and others discussing civil rights activities provide insight into how articles reporting on the efforts of the civil rights movement affected readers. For some, the positive representation of African Americans in a popular teenage magazine provided inspiration. One reader wrote: “Especially revealing were the parts concerning the Freedom Schools and the children who attend them...After reading the article, I too look forward to a better future for the race to which I proudly belong.”²⁸ Other responses demonstrate the limits of understanding or sympathy some readers possessed regarding racial equality. For example, another reader commented, “Voter registration campaigns are basically worthy civic projects but shouldn't be extended to one race only. As I see it, registration drives only for the Negro could well be classified as un-American activities.”²⁹ The varied responses of readers reflects the mixed success and the unfulfilled goals of the broader civil rights movement during the mid- to late-1960s.

During the mid- to late-1960s, articles referenced in the letters-to-the-editor concerning African American discrimination possess a reflexive tone, assessing the

²⁶ Earnestyne Evans, ‘Report from Mississippi’, *Seventeen*, January 1966, p.90.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p.134.

²⁸ B.G., Washington, D.C., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1966, p.4.

²⁹ G.S., Haraham, La., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, March 1966, p.4.

accomplishments of the civil rights movement thus far.³⁰ This idea was most clearly exemplified in the 1967 article, 'Does High School Integration Really Work?' Over a decade on from the *Brown* decision, the article reviewed the effectiveness of enforced integration with regards to friendship and learning outcomes. In interviews with teenagers the general consensus was that in most cases integration had yet to see positive outcomes for many. One student noted:

Catching up is difficult, sometimes impossible. As a result some Negro teens sit silent and bewildered in the back of classrooms, over-shadowed by better-prepared white students. Others are shunted into vocational classes or lower tracks and continue an essentially segregated education. Some retreat into lethargy or simply drop out of school. Or they become a discipline problem.³¹ Other factors cited as inhibitors to successful integration included the matter of the draft, prejudice from students and teachers alike, and logistical difficulties such as low income and living far away from school. The article provided proof that legislative change did not necessarily translate into social change, and framed education as only one of the many challenges facing African Americans striving for equality.

Discussion regarding the pitfalls of interracial relationships, both platonic and romantic, also highlighted the personal effects of centuries of political prejudice. Thus, 'Does High School Integration Really Work?' and other similar articles demonstrate how the politics of prejudice could be framed in ways relatable to teenage readers – through discussion of the practical and emotional effects of legislation regarding the politics of prejudice on the day-to-day lives of teenagers.³² Utilising the words of teenagers themselves was an effective way for readers to engage in a meaningful way

³⁰ Jeanne Contini, 'Sororities: Do They Still Swing?', *Seventeen*, August 1966, p.296; 'My Parents are so Narrow-minded!', *Seventeen*, March 1967, p.164; 'Does High School Integration Really Work?', *Seventeen*, November 1967, pp.160-161.

³¹ 'Does High School Integration Really Work?' *Seventeen*, November 1967, p.160.

³² *ibid.*; 'My Parents are so Narrow Minded', *Seventeen*, March 1967, p.210.

with political issues of great importance.

The employment of teenage voices to describe teenage experiences of engaging with the politics of prejudice became a central component of articles discussed in the letters-to-the-editor during the late-1960s. At this time, the black power movement and the affiliated group, the Black Panthers, were gaining increasing popularity amongst African Americans. Frustrated by the lack of real progress and disillusioned with the strategies of the non-violent Civil Rights Movement, the increasingly militant and self-empowered attitude of the Black Power movement appealed to many civil rights activists.³³ Perhaps recognising that writing about the experiences of African Americans from a solely white perspective was no longer apposite, *Seventeen* began to increase the number of articles written by, and spotlighting, African American teenagers.³⁴ This idea is supported by the 1968 articles, 'I Knew it was Coming,' and 'Why Did it Happen Here?' The articles described the 1967 Detroit Riot from the perspective of an African American girl and a white girl living in Detroit. From the titles alone it is evident that the two girls, though from the same town, had very divergent outlooks on race relations in Detroit and the circumstances surrounding the riots.

From the below excerpts, highlighting the girls' experiential differences, we can better understand how two teenage girls living in the same city could maintain such disparate frames – subconscious or intentional – regarding racial prejudice:

I hear boys at school talking about another riot...Mayor Cavanagh's trying to get some programs under way, but they haven't started building the houses we need. They haven't started fixing all the things wrong with my school. They

³³ Boyer, p.858.

³⁴ Azrell Brown, 'I Knew it was Coming', *Seventeen*, January 1968, p.128; Tania Diachenko, 'Why Did it Happen Here?', *Seventeen*, January 1968, p.129; 'Face to Face with a Black Power Advocate', *Seventeen*, August 1968, p.277; 'Face to Face with Miss Black America', *Seventeen*, March 1969, p.151; Gloria Andrews, 'In My Opinion, It Isn't enough Just to Wear an Afro', *Seventeen*, May 1969, p.248.

haven't made it any easier for a Negro to get a good job or even to pay the same groceries that white people do.³⁵

...I know that if I were a Negro from a lower-income family than my own, we'd probably have a worse life than we do. But some things are the same whoever you are. The public schools here are all pretty much alike and I don't think anyone in Detroit is starving, though some don't have enough clothes.³⁶

Although well-intentioned, some articles covering the politics of prejudice, such as the 1968 piece, 'What You Can do About Riots,' missed the mark and as such caused strong reader-responses. Following a summer in which rioting had been a major issue throughout urban America, 'What You Can do About Riots' addressed the causes of race riots and how readers should behave in the event of one, as well as providing tips on how to prevent them in the first place. Author David Klein dismissed various negative African American stereotypes as being unfounded and detrimental to American race relations.³⁷ Although the article received some positive feedback, the below responses from African American readers indicate that for some, the article lacked sensitivity and contributed to issues of racial prejudice.

Many Negroes...are hurt and humiliated daily by the little things that whites do subconsciously – such as writing an article entitled “What You *Can* Do About Riots” and addressing it to only *white* teen-agers!³⁸

I, as a young female black, resent this article very much. Mr. Klein writes like a 1956 liberal. He seems to understand very few of the feelings and problems of blacks in this country...I would never want a white teen-ager to try to become friends with me because I am black. What a bigoted, hypocritical thing to do!³⁹ The reference made in the second letter to the notion of befriending African American teenagers as a way to better race-relations was something exhibited in several other

³⁵ Azrell Brown, 'I Knew it was Coming', *Seventeen*, January 1968, p.129.

³⁶ Tania Diachenko, 'Why did it Happen Here?', *Seventeen*, January 1968, p.130.

³⁷ David Klein, 'What You *Can* do About Riots', *Seventeen*, July 1968, p.74.

³⁸ S.L., New York, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, September 1968, p.4.

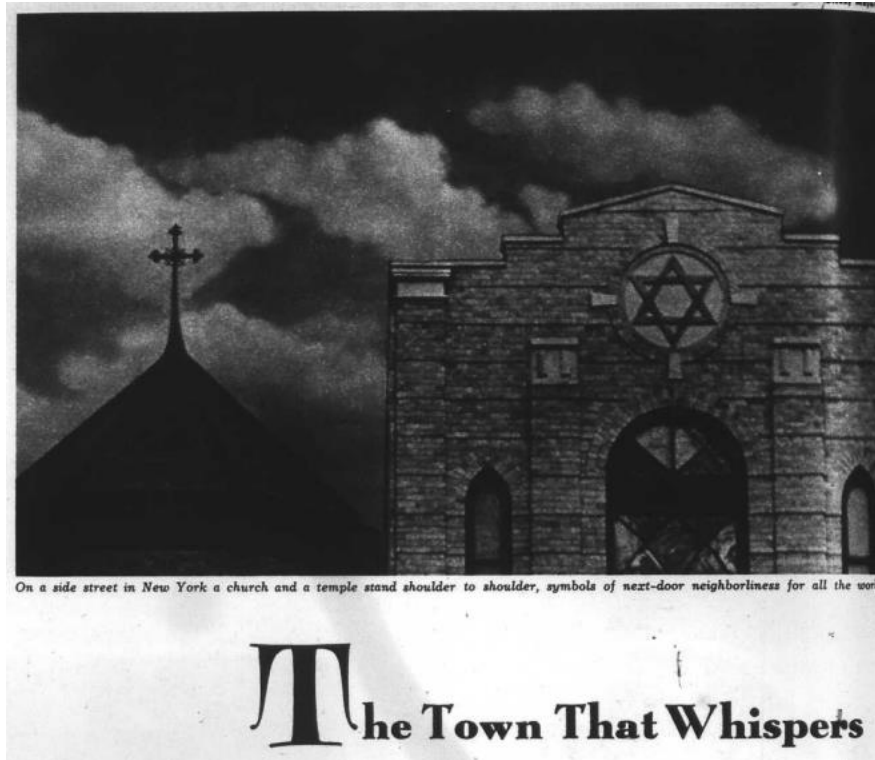
³⁹ P.H., Mahopac, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, September 1968, p.4.

articles throughout the period of 1944 to 1970.⁴⁰ Thus, readers were encouraged to engage with the politics of prejudice on a personal level, forming friendships across racial divides.

Although *Seventeen* did report on and condemn racial prejudice during the periods 1944 to 1950 and 1957 to 1970, the way in which it framed ideal reader engagement with the politics of prejudice was generally through education rather than activism. The articles covering youth-activism were for the most part positive, yet refrained from urging readers to directly participate in this activism. In order to better understand this somewhat restrained position in regards to political engagement in comparison to that discussed in the previous chapter, one must look to the reader-responses. Reader-responses to articles discussing the politics of racial prejudice evidence much greater debate and controversy than articles discussing other political issues. Articles specifically promoting legislative racial equality, such as those concerning integration, polarised readers as demonstrated by the letters-to-the editor. Although clearly dedicated to reducing racial prejudice by means of positive representation of African Americans and the propagation of pro-tolerance messages, *Seventeen* was nonetheless a business first and foremost. Wary of alienating readers – a very real concern if some of the reader-responses are to be believed – editors at *Seventeen* may therefore have tempered their advocacy regarding anti-prejudice activism.

⁴⁰ Helen Beal Woodward, 'Crazy Monday', *Seventeen*, September 1960, pp.192-200; 'Two Nice Girls', *Seventeen*, April 1964, pp.238-245; David Klein, 'What You Can do for Human Rights in Your Own Home Town', *Seventeen*, May 1965, p.130; Carolyn Sidlosky, 'Six Blocks from Velco's', *Seventeen*, January 1969, p.110; M.J. AMFT., 'Yes () No () Check One', *Seventeen*, May 1969, p.139.

'The Town that Whispers,' Interfaith Friendships: *Seventeen* and the Politics of Religious Prejudice, 1944-1970



'The Town That Whispers', *Seventeen*, December 1947.

Religion has always played a significant role in American history, and has at various stages played a specifically noteworthy role in American political history.⁴¹ Scholar Frank Lambert notes that as per the 1787 Constitutional Convention, America does not have a federal religious establishment, “giving the government no power over religion and religion no official role in the state.”⁴² However, this separation of church and state by no means relegated religion to an unimportant or private concern. As Lambert asserts, “religion does have, and always has had, a public dimension.”⁴³ Building on this idea, one can discern an inextricable link between religion and politics

⁴¹ Boyer, p.902.

⁴² Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History*, Princeton, 2008, p.1.

⁴³ *ibid.*

within America. Marie Eisenstein argues that “it is counterintuitive to think that religious individuals “can, in any meaningful way, divorce themselves from their beliefs when behaving as a political actor.”⁴⁴ Thus, religion remains an important component in the study of American politics.⁴⁵ As such, a discussion of the political history of America would arguably be incomplete without reference to religion. Moreover, a chapter dedicated to the politics of prejudice that did not address issues of religious prejudice would undoubtedly be deficient.

Religious freedom is enshrined in the American Constitution, yet religious prejudice permeates American history, including American political history. From 1944 to 1970, Jews and Catholics were the target of much religious prejudice. This prejudice manifested itself in a variety of ways, ranging from restrictive housing covenants to religious quotas at American universities. This argument is well-documented in the letters-to-the-editor and the corresponding articles within *Seventeen*. Although not as well-represented as racial prejudice – perhaps on account of the absence of a major political movement comparable to the civil rights movement – religious prejudice was nonetheless a topic of concern amongst readers. It should be noted, however, that in much the same way that letters addressing racial prejudice petered out during the 1950s, the same can also be said for letters concerning religious tolerance. Lynn Neal and John Corrigan note that when analysing religious intolerance, anti-Semitism being of particular prominence; one must not overlook the differences in the portrayal of a faith

⁴⁴ Marie A. Eisenstein, ‘Rethinking the Relationship Between Religion and Political Tolerance in the U.S.’, *Political Behaviour*, 28, 4, 2005, p.5.

⁴⁵ Marie A. Eisenstein, ‘Religion and Political Tolerance in the United States: A review and Evaluation’, in Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and James L. Guth, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Oxford, 2009, p.427.

as a religion versus the depiction of followers as a racial-ethnic category.⁴⁶ The similarity between racial and religious prejudice in terms of patterns of representation within the letters-to-the-editor may provide cause for re-examination of the definition of anti-Semitism within this historical context, and the basis upon which such prejudices were formed.

Seventeen documented clearly the impact of the Holocaust and World War II on American anti-Semitism during the immediate post-war years. Religious historians have noted that religious prejudice, particularly anti-Semitism, “crested in America during the half-century preceding World War II.”⁴⁷ Looking to explanations for increased American anti-Semitism, scholars have cited factors such as competition between socioeconomic and religious groups leading to the creation of stereotypes, as well as societal crises such as international war, domestic immigration, and urbanization as the cause for, “intensified hostility towards perceived outsiders.”⁴⁸ In contrast, articles during and immediately after WWII framed Nazi cruelty and slaughter as warnings against anti-Semitism, emphasising that without tolerance, America could not lay claim to being truly democratic. For example, the 1945 article, ‘It Happened in Springfield,’ discussed the experiment undertaken in Springfield schools involving the teaching of tolerance and the inclusion of multiple cultures and faiths into the school environment. The article opened with the statement: “Anti-Semitism and anti-Negroism have been labelled for what they are – a menace to America and all that our country stands for... In the Springfield schools even the youngest children are made aware of the truth that

⁴⁶ Lynn S. Neal, and John Corrigan, eds., *Religious Intolerance in America: A Documentary History*, Chapel Hill, 2010, p.151.

⁴⁷ Jonathan D. Sarna, ‘American Anti-Semitism’, in David Berger, ed., *History and Hate: The Dimensions of Anti-Semitism*, Baltimore, 2010, p.122.

⁴⁸ Neal and Corrigan, p.150.

there can be no real democracy if there is suspicion and distrust between neighbors.”⁴⁹ As such, readers engaged with the politics of religious prejudice by locating the issue within a broader geopolitical context such as the Second World War.

As well as decrying the undemocratic nature of anti-Semitism, articles in *Seventeen* also aimed to decrease religious prejudice by enlightening readers to its emotional and psychological impacts. The 1945 fictional story, ‘The Way the World Ends,’ narrated the attempts of Carol, a Jewish girl, to befriend a Gentile girl named Janet. Upon accepting an invitation on behalf of her daughter to a play-date at Carol’s house, Janet’s mother confides to a friend, “Janet will *kill* me when she hears what I’ve gotten her in for! She’s told me about this girl – a little Jewess – who follows her around like a dog. And she will never forgive me for accepting this invitation – she can’t bear the girl!” Unbeknownst to Janet’s mother, Carol overhears the conversation, and the story ends with Carol concluding that, “The conversation had been not only disillusioning but ugly...It made her feel as though she had touched something hideous and loathsome.”⁵⁰ The article received mixed responses. One reader noted that, “[the article] has made me realise how many girls’ feelings I have probably hurt because of our differences of religion or nationality. No story I have ever read or will read will stick with me and do me as much good as this one.”⁵¹ Others were left confused and felt that, “the swift ending of the story [brought] no resolution either of the subject of the crush or the prejudice...Your aim is to make the reader aware of these problems, which may occur in her own experience. But you should also help her resolve them.”⁵²

Responding to the confusion amongst readers regarding *Seventeen*’s framing of

⁴⁹ ‘It Happened in Springfield’, *Seventeen*, June 1945, p.28

⁵⁰ Anne Clark, ‘The Way the World Ends’, *Seventeen*, July 1945, p.91.

⁵¹ J.K., Cincinnati, Ohio, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, September 1945, p.6.

⁵² Mrs. C.A., New York, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, September 1945, p.6.

anti-Semitism in, 'How the World Ends,' *Seventeen's* Editor-in-Chief, Helen Valentine, issued a firm response stating the magazine's intolerance of religious prejudice:

Did you read 'the Way the World Ends,' in our July issue? Do you agree that it is "a moving story against anti-Semitism"...and are you as bewildered as we by some of the comments we received? The story was written – and published – in a spirit of good will...The fact that Carol's religion was mentioned seemed to us to prove that Janet Ames and her snobbish mother were superficial in their judgment and warped in their thinking. Yet a few of our readers felt that the story was anti-Semitic. To them we say that we are profoundly sorry...and somewhat disappointed. If they had been reading our magazine carefully, they could not escape the fact that we have boldly attacked prejudice of all sorts.⁵³

Subsequent articles and letters promoting attempts to combat anti-Semitic prejudice and the obstacles faced in doing so reinforced Valentine's assertion that *Seventeen* was against anti-Semitism. For example in 1947, as part of the Christmas issue, *Seventeen* included the script of a radio-play entitled 'The Town that Whispers,' that had aired the previous year. Printed with the intention of providing readers with, "suitable material for [their] school's radio program or holiday assembly or club show," the play highlighted the discord created by prejudiced remarks within a school environment.⁵⁴ The play demonstrated how many people were subconsciously prejudiced, and attempted to get readers to question their own behaviour. In this way, between 1944 and 1950, teenagers were encouraged to engage with the politics of prejudice by assessing their own actions and words and, in the case of the play, disseminating this idea amongst their peers.

As mentioned previously, from 1951 to 1957 none of the letters-to-the-editor made reference to any articles covering religious prejudice of any kind. When it comes to historical source material, silences are equally telling as presences, therefore it is

⁵³ Helen Valentine, 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, September 1945, p.6.

⁵⁴ Ira Marion, 'The Town that Whispers', *Seventeen*, December 1947, pp.116-117.

important to briefly consider the whys of this gap in *Seventeen's* record on religious prejudice. Some scholars have posited the argument that for many Americans, the 1950s was a period of economic boom and relative political stability. These factors facilitated prosperity for many, and in times of stability and prosperity, religious conflict is generally less likely to occur.⁵⁵ Another possible explanation may be that in the wake of WWII, American anti-Semitism that had previously been passed off as general suspicion or dislike was no longer deemed socially acceptable. Thus, to some extent overt displays of anti-Semitism diminished during the 1950s. In this way, one might argue that in its lack of reader-responses discussing religious prejudice, *Seventeen* was mirroring wider socio-political trends. However, this is not to say that underlying feelings of prejudice disappeared during the 1950s.

Eisenstein contends that, "To a casual observer, it might seem that in every generation religion invades the public square. However, religion is always in the public square because it never left; it is merely 'rediscovered' periodically by new observers."⁵⁶ Within reason, this argument can be mapped onto the situation discussed here. During the 1950s, Judaism and 'Jewishness' lost some of the political salience it had possessed during the War, but in the late-1950s the two were 'rediscovered' again. This 'rediscovery' may be linked to the re-emergence of discrimination as a topic of political significance due to legislative changes, or perhaps the release of the 1959 film 'The Diary of Anne Frank,' which once again drew attention to the anti-Semitism of the 1930s and 1940s. Whatever the cause, there is a clear upswing in the number of articles referenced in the letters-to-the-editor that address anti-Semitism in the late-1950s and

⁵⁵ Boyer, p.814.

⁵⁶ Eisenstein, 'Religion and Political Tolerance in the United States', p.427.

early 1960s. These articles interested readers, often generating an array of responses demonstrating the divergence of reader experiences in this realm.

The 1959 fictional story 'The Fence,' was the first article covering religious prejudice to be discussed in the reader-responses for nearly eight years. The story followed a fairly formulaic plot concerning the relationship between a young Jewish girl and a Gentile boy. Recent arrivals to the neighbourhood, the girl's family faced hostility and exclusion from their Gentile neighbours. For example, "The members of the Community Club had a special meeting and passed a resolution against letting the Levins into the Club."⁵⁷ The young boy, initially confused by this hostility, nevertheless takes care to keep the relationship discreet, and doesn't question such discrimination until prompted by a falling out with the girl. When he takes the time to consider things, the young boy recalls, "He had known, he realized thinking back, that there was a community resolution against selling houses to Jewish people."⁵⁸ The boy's realization peaks with the statement: "Doing nothing was just as bad as doing the wrong thing, by keeping quiet he, too, had helped to drive them out."⁵⁹

Reader-responses to 'The Fence' illustrate the various levels of engagement and comprehension that readers possessed regarding the politics of prejudice and anti-Semitism. Praising the story, one reader observed, "Being a Christian, I never really knew the problems that Jews must face. However I have lately come to understand the true feelings of the Jewish people in a Christian society."⁶⁰ This letter gives credence to the notion of a re-emergence in awareness of anti-Semitism, as well as shedding light on how teenagers perceived the religious make-up of America. Another reader noted that

⁵⁷ Don McKinney, 'The Fence', *Seventeen*, April 1959, p.145.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.192

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.193

⁶⁰ J.B., Devonport, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, June 1959, p.4.

whilst they appreciated the inclusion of a story addressing anti-Semitism, "...it didn't give a clear picture of Jewish home life. It made the Jewish people seem rather off and different from the other members of the community. From experience, I know this isn't so."⁶¹ This letter evidences a similar sentiment to the previously discussed letters critiquing *Seventeen's* treatment of the Detroit Riots. Here, the reader acknowledges *Seventeen's* attempt to combat anti-Semitism, but also argues that the inaccuracies in their framing of Jewish life might contribute more towards the othering of Jews than was intended.

Lastly, one reader questioned the realism of the story overall: "Is there actually as much opposition to Jews as shown in the story? That is are people actually driven out of town because they are Jewish? I cannot imagine such a feeling of superiority in people that they cannot live in the same town with people of a different nationality."⁶² This response is illuminating in two ways. On the one hand, it's naiveté in its estimation of the severity of American religious prejudice in comparison to other letters demonstrates the heterogeneity of *Seventeen's* audience. Secondly, the usage of the term nationality when referring to Jews reveals the extent to which some Americans considered Jews as racially different to Christians. Teenage readers were again engaging with the politics of religious prejudice – learning about it via fictional stories and utilising the letters-to-the-editor as a forum to express conflicting views on *Seventeen's* representation of religious prejudice.

Perhaps the most explicit example of engagement with the politics of religious prejudice, was the 1961 article, 'Teens Talk About Race, Religion and Prejudice'. The

⁶¹ T.J.S., St. Louis, Mo., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, June 1959, p.4.

⁶² J.R., Racine, Wis., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, June 1959, p.4.

article was based on a transcript of a discussion hosted by The Panel of Americans who appeared in front of two hundred high school students in Caldwell, New Jersey.

Comprised of a mix of Americans, universities sponsored the panel with the objective of “bringing together people of varying racial, religious and cultural backgrounds so that they may examine their differences and similarities as citizens of the United States.”⁶³ The following exchange exemplified the belief, held by some Americans, that because of their religion Jews were less patriotic, or that their allegiances were divided. In contrast, Gordon’s answer gives more weight to an image of the American Jew as being fully assimilated, and signals a strong sense of kinship with Americans regardless of their religious affiliations:

Q: “I’d like to ask Gordon how much allegiance he feels toward Israel. What I mean is, if this country and Israel should ever go to war, which side would he fall on?”

A: “I’m an American. I’d be sore if Israel and the United States were enemies, but naturally, my loyalties would be with my country.”⁶⁴

Asked later in the article for his thoughts on why anti-Semitism remained an issue in America, Gordon cited the historical basis with regards to money lending, but argued that, “bigoted people distort – or don’t know – the facts.”⁶⁵ This article therefore demonstrates another way in which American teenagers could engage with the discourse surrounding anti-Semitic religious prejudice – by participating in and/or attending such panels. The opinions and ideas presented were also subsequently discussed in the letters-to-the-editor, enabling the conversation – not just of anti-Semitism, but of religious prejudice more broadly – to continue and to also be more widely circulated.

⁶³ ‘Teenagers Talk About Race, Religion, and Prejudice’, *Seventeen*, October 1961, p.112.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.184.

Between 1944 and 1970, another religious group to face oppression and prejudice within America were Roman Catholics. Anti-Catholicism has a long history in America, stemming from sixteenth-century religious persecution in Europe which resulted in many European religious groups, Catholics amongst them, immigrating to British North America.⁶⁶ Perhaps most notorious of the anti-Catholic organizations is the Ku Klux Klan, relaunched in Georgia in the early 20th century.⁶⁷ By this time there was already an established anti-Catholic strand running through American culture; moreover the influence of this sentiment was not limited to culture, but also pervaded American politics. In 1928, American Catholic Al Smith won the Democratic nomination for president sparking what some scholars have termed a “flashpoint for anti-Catholicism of all sorts.”⁶⁸ Indeed, when John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960, the issue of his religious beliefs was most definitely a topic of concern for some, and posed a major obstacle to his bid for the presidency. Thus, anti-Catholicism, although less violent than some expressions of anti-Semitism, was nevertheless a part of American politics of prejudice, and was accordingly referenced in *Seventeen*.

In comparison to that of anti-Semitism, *Seventeen*'s coverage of Catholicism and the religious prejudice American Catholics faced between 1944 and 1970 is decidedly sparse. Some of the articles from the 1940s, such as ‘What Kind of World do You Want?’, and ‘What Girls Belong in Your Club,’ reference Catholics briefly, grouping them with other minorities as part of a broader argument for religious and racial tolerance. The 1946 article ‘Charlie McCarthy is a Dummy,’ elucidates on the exact nature of American anti-Catholicism during the 1940s. Citing a commonly voiced

⁶⁶ Neal and Corrigan, p.49.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp.51-52.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.53.

stereotype surrounding Catholics, Beaton quoted: "Well of course there are some intelligent ones, but everyone knows that Catholics [are] dictated to by the Pope, superstitious, clannish, reactionary, a large percentage of the criminal class."⁶⁹ In their reader-response, a Catholic teenager acknowledged the religious prejudice Catholics faced, stating, "...I am Catholic and know what many people think of our creed. If this country truly is a democracy why can't people have their own creed?...As you say, many people are like dummies – repeating only what they hear and not their true opinions."⁷⁰ Readers were engaged with the politics of religious prejudice enough to understand the glaring inconsistencies between a democracy whereby church and state are officially separated, and the lived experiences of Catholics during the 1940s.

As previously mentioned, there is a lacuna in *Seventeen's* coverage of racial and religious prejudice for the majority of the 1950s, and it was not until 1961, with the publication of the article, 'Teenagers Talk about Race, Religion and Prejudice,' that the topic of anti-Catholicism was broached. When asked about his thoughts on the causes of anti-Catholicism, panel member Gerry responded with the following statement:

...people never have rational reasons for prejudice. For instance under the First Amendment to the Constitution the right of any religion to set up its own educational system is guaranteed – yet some people dislike Catholics simply because the Catholic Church has chosen to exercise this right.⁷¹

Gerry's response touches on a highly controversial element of religion in American politics – its role in education. Scholars Kenneth Wald and David Leege contend that the, "centrality of public education as a venue of cultural transmission accounts for the

⁶⁹ Alice Beaton, 'Charlie McCarthy is a Dummy', *Seventeen*, January 1946, p.106.

⁷⁰ J.Y., Jackson, Mich., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, March 1946, p.6.

⁷¹ 'Teenagers Talk about Race, Religion and Prejudice', *Seventeen*, October 1961, p.84.

sometimes ferocious political conflicts that arise in this domain.”⁷² Indeed, approximately a year after the publication of this article the U.S. Supreme Court banned mandatory prayers in all public schools.⁷³ One could argue, therefore, that *Seventeen*’s coverage of anti-Catholicism and religious prejudice was a fairly accurate barometer of the contemporary socio-political climate.

If it is indeed the case that *Seventeen*’s coverage of religious prejudice reflects that of American society, it is noteworthy that explicit mention of anti-Catholic prejudice only occurred during and immediately after WWII, and at the very beginning of the 1960s – just after the election of President Kennedy. This observation is in keeping with the argument posited by Eisenstein’s theory of rediscovery.⁷⁴ In this way, it is possible to argue that, through means of an external facilitator – in this case *Seventeen* magazine – readers received information and ideas surrounding anti-Catholicism through similar frames as their elders. In this instance at least, *Seventeen* seemingly conformed to popular trends when determining how newsworthy a topic was. Based on the evidence sampled, anti-Catholicism did not feature as strongly as other forms of racial and religious prejudice. Moreover, discussion of anti-Catholicism lacks some of the more explicitly political content of articles pertaining to anti-Semitism or African American prejudice. Instead, such articles tend to cover more personal topics.

A more personal aspect of the politics of religious prejudice raised at regular intervals during both the 1940s and 1960s was the topic of inter-faith dating. In all

⁷² Kenneth D. Wald, and David C. Leege, ‘Culture, Religion, and American Political Life’, in Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and James L. Guth, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Oxford, 2009, p.148.

⁷³ Ted G. Jelen., ‘Religion and American Public Opinion: Social Issues’, in Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, and James L. Guth, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and American Politics*, Oxford, 2009, p.228.

⁷⁴ Eisenstein, ‘Religion and Political Tolerance in the United States’, p.427.

instances, articles addressing inter-faith dating provoked strong reactions from readers, perhaps because this was an aspect of prejudice in which more teenagers had experience. One theme that repeatedly surfaced was the situation of parents preaching religious tolerance, but failing to implement these ideals when it came to their children dating someone with different religious beliefs. This idea is evidenced in the 1949 article, 'My Mother Amazed Me'. In the article, a girl asked for advice on dealing with her mother's reluctance to allow her to date a Jewish boy despite purporting to promote religious liberalism. Author Jacqueline Lidner's advice to the girl in question was to "expect progress to be very slow," ultimately recommending that in this case the girl defer to her mother's wishes.⁷⁵ The 1961 article, 'Interfaith Dating,' "A soul-searching report by an anonymous teen-age girl on her bittersweet experience in inter-faith dating," followed a similar format wherein the relationship ended in part due to disapproval from parents and peers.⁷⁶ Intriguingly, the resolution of each article appears at odds with the messages of religious tolerance promoted in many of *Seventeen's* other articles on religious prejudice. There does not appear to be an immediate answer as to why this is, and the reader-responses do not necessarily indicate uniform agreement.

Many of the responses to articles such as 'Interfaith Dating,' specifically those recounting experiences of interfaith dating, were lacking the usual identifiers of the author's initials, hometown and state. From this absence we may infer that interfaith dating was relatively controversial, and that many readers chose not to disclose such relationships to their parents. Generally, reader-responses were fairly positive in regards to the topic of interfaith dating, even if the relationship in question had ended. For

⁷⁵ Jacqueline Lindner, 'My Mother Amazed Me', *Seventeen*, April 1949, p.131.

⁷⁶ 'Interfaith Dating', *Seventeen*, March 1961, p.160.

example, one reader noted, "I think the experience of having had a boyfriend of a different religion...not only helped me to grow in faith, but helped me to know more about how to get along with those who have been reared differently from me." Another reader detailed the impact that interfaith dating had had on her own religious beliefs, stating, "I have acquired not only a completely different attitude towards his faith, but have begun to have serious doubts about my own. As a result, I am strongly considering converting."⁷⁷ A third letter argued that, "A parent who resists interfaith dating or marriage on the basis of outmoded taboos withholds opportunities to develop many meaningful relationships."⁷⁸ The difference between *Seventeen's* framing of interfaith dating in the 1949 article and the 1961 article (and also within the respective responses) is primarily that in the first, the teenage reader was asking for advice, whereas in the second, the matter was up for debate amongst readers – *Seventeen* itself neither explicitly condemned nor condoned the practice of interfaith dating. One could argue that is evidence of change over time with regards to the framing of interfaith dating. The issue was no longer considered as taboo, and readers were more willing to express opinions in favour of the practice.

Despite the constitutional separation of church and state, religion nevertheless played a key role in American political life. Although officially religious freedom was supposed to be guaranteed, religious prejudice persisted throughout American history. Between 1944 and 1970, the articles and letters-to-the-editor in *Seventeen* demonstrate how external factors such as war, legislative change, and political movements impacted on the visibility, or political salience of religious prejudice. Much like that of racial

⁷⁷ P.T., Newark, N.J., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, May 1961, p.4.

⁷⁸ E.B., Chicago, Ill., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, May 1961, p.4.

prejudice, the politics of religious prejudice were brought to the forefront of the American public's consciousness during and immediately after World War II. The latent anti-Semitism that had been an ongoing aspect of American society for centuries could no longer go ignored. Similarly, though to a considerably lesser extent than it did to anti-Semitism, the promotion of democracy and freedom also drew attention to anti-Catholic prejudice. These ideas were reiterated in a number of articles referenced in the letters-to-the-editor, and reader-responses were overwhelmingly in agreement with *Seventeen's* condemnation of anti-Semitism and anti-Catholicism. In keeping with the trend evidenced by articles concerning racial prejudice, there was a marked lack of reporting on religious prejudice during the 1950s, but by the late 1950s such articles began to re-emerge. One again, *Seventeen* advocated for religious tolerance and acceptance.

Seventeen enabled readers to engage with the politics surrounding religious prejudice by means of education in what editors deemed the correct attitudes to such issues, as well as providing readers with the opportunity to voice their own opinions via the letters-to-the-editor. This education took various forms, such as short stories, teenage panel discussions, and self-reflexive pieces that urged the reader to examine their personal actions and words. In addition to this education, *Seventeen* provided readers with the tools to spread this religious tolerance through vehicles such as Christmastime radio plays. However, although *Seventeen* sought to engage readers in the politics of religious prejudice, it was largely in terms of socio-cultural politics. Aside from initial references to WWII, there was little commentary on religious prejudice within a formal political setting. Moreover, whereas articles reporting on racial prejudice tended to emphasize the civil rights that racial prejudice denied and the

more public efforts to change this situation, articles covering religious prejudice presented a more emotional or personal response to the politics of prejudice, for example the struggles of interfaith dating. Reasons for this may stem from the inherently personal nature of religion – to enforce any one attitude or opinion upon readers when discussing religion might in itself have contributed towards religious conflict, particularly given how subjective interpretations of religion can be.

Conclusion

Seventeen magazine clearly did not shy away from discussion of prejudice. Thus, through the articles featured in *Seventeen*, teenage readers were exposed to an array of types, forms and expressions of prejudice that they might not otherwise have encountered. This idea is significant for several reasons. Much of *Seventeen's* demographic comprised white, middle class teenagers who would perhaps have been unlikely to experience prejudice – racial prejudice in particular – on a first-hand basis. As such, these readers' framing of prejudice, and their engagement with the politics of prejudice, might well have remained unchanged. However, content pertaining to prejudice did in fact cause readers to question, and at times re-frame, their outlook on prejudice. Moreover, from the responses to this exposure, one can draw conclusions as to how influential such content was. The letters sampled demonstrate, using the words of teenage readers themselves, the power that popular teenage culture possessed in regards to impacting upon political engagement. Rarely were responses ambiguous in their reaction to discussion of prejudice. Reader-responses exhibited a mix of guilt, illumination, opposition and support; such diversity amongst responses hints at the multitudinous reactions and sentiments concerning the politics of prejudice within America more broadly. With this in mind, it is pertinent to consider *Seventeen's* framing of the topic of prejudice and how this altered over a course of twenty-six years.

Seventeen's early promotion of brotherhood and tolerance is somewhat expected given the upsurge in anti-prejudice sentiment following American participation in WWII. However, during the 1950s the topic of the politics of prejudice is conspicuously absent in the letters-to-the-editor. Admittedly, this does not necessarily mean that there were no articles published on this topic. Either such articles were published, in which

case the lack of discussion within reader-responses is telling in that readers felt less inclined to engage in public conversation surrounding the politics of prejudice; or there was indeed a lacuna in reportage of prejudice during the 1950s. To an extent, this second explanation is in keeping with the contemporary domestic and international political situation as the Cold War heated up. Additionally, we might also attribute this lacuna to the change in staff at *Seventeen*. In the early 1950s editor-in-chief Helen Valentine was under increasing pressure from Walter Annenberg to reduce the amount of anti-prejudice content owing to fears concerning financial support from advertisers. Upon Valentine's departure, with his sister installed as editor-in-chief, Annenberg arguably had a greater ability to limit the publication of controversial content regarding the politics of prejudice.

During the late-1950s, discussion of both racial and religious politics resurfaced within the letters-to-the-editor, a trend that continued with zest as the 1960s progressed. Reasons for this may include flow-on effects of legislative changes concerning racial discrimination such as the *Brown v. Board* decision. Although legislative changes themselves were rarely explicitly addressed within *Seventeen*, the subsequent impacts on the day-to-day lives of readers brought about by legislative change were addressed frequently. The means by which *Seventeen* facilitated reader engagement with the politics of prejudice similarly reflect this disengagement with the more formal aspects of politics.

In contrast to the articles discussed in Chapter I, those reviewed within this chapter refrain from endorsing political activism as an acceptable form of political engagement to the same extent. In regards to the politics of prejudice, *Seventeen* sought to engage readers through educational and thought-provoking pieces that gave readers

cause to question their own behaviour. This is not to say that *Seventeen* did not take a strong stance against racial and religious prejudice – it is evident from the editorial responses to letters questioning *Seventeen*'s framing of prejudice that *Seventeen* was firmly against racial and religious prejudice. Nevertheless, the variance between how reader engagement was idealised in regards to formal politics as opposed to the politics of prejudice is noteworthy. Unlike messages of political participation and activism advanced in articles covering formal politics, the political engagement advocated in articles covering issues of prejudice, was education with the intent of disseminating anti-prejudice attitudes. The tentative nature of such proposed engagement with the politics of prejudice evidenced in the letters and articles of *Seventeen* may be indicative of how controversial the topic was amongst the wider American public. In this way, *Seventeen* can be seen to adhere to the socio-political climate of its time, and therefore was to an extent limited in its ability to shape the political engagement of readers when it came to specific political issues.

III.

Contradiction, Confusion, and Criticism – Navigating the Murky Waters of Gender Politics and *Seventeen* Magazine, 1944-1970

Introduction

The politics of gender was a significant topic of discussion within *Seventeen* between 1944 and 1970. Although it is now accepted that the term ‘gender’ encompasses far more than traditional binary notions of masculinity and femininity associated with the female and male biological sexes, to apply such thinking to this case study would be ahistorical in many ways. As a mainstream piece of popular culture, *Seventeen* adhered to fairly limited ideas of what gender and sexuality involved. Although the same material may benefit from other readings which do investigate the possible presence of identities linked to more modern concepts of gender; this analysis will focus on the politics of gender as defined by ideals of femininity and masculinity within a predominantly presumed heterosexual society.

Discussion of gender often follows one of two pathways depending on one’s personal beliefs. In the past, gender was strongly tied to assumed innate, often biological, differences between men and women. This kind of thought process, known as gender essentialism, was used to justify much of the status quo surrounding accepted gender roles. However, this theory has faced challenges throughout history, gaining momentum in the second half of the twentieth century as a result of the women’s movement, and resulting in the publication of Judith Butler’s 1988 essay ‘Performative

Acts and Gender Constitution.’¹ Outlining how gender is in effect a socially constructed identity capable of being altered, Butler’s essay irrevocably disrupted notions of gender essentialism. Elements of both theories are exhibited in the articles and letters of *Seventeen* examined between 1944 and 1970, demonstrating clearly the ways in which gender intersects with conventional ideas of politics.

As with variables such as class and race; gender plays an integral part in shaping the political. A key element of formal American politics comprises the rights and opportunities afforded to citizens as individuals. Within gender politics, this ideal manifests itself most visibly as women’s rights within the public sphere. Although certain groups of American women were granted the right to vote in 1920, it took sixty years until women voted in presidential elections at rates equal to men.² Indeed, it was not until the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill and the 1965 Voting Rights Act that “Women’s suffrage [was] finally extended to many left out in 1920.”³ Furthermore, women faced discrimination in numerous other areas of public life. For example, in the workforce – already segregated into ‘female’ and ‘male’ occupations – women were relegated to the clerical pool or low-level management. The mere act of participating in the workforce as a woman – especially a married woman with children – was cause for critique and judgment.⁴ The types of careers propagated within *Seventeen* and the discourse surrounding ‘working women,’ as well as the reader responses to such articles

¹ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory’, *Theatre Journal*, 40, 4, 1988, pp.519-531.

² Margaret Conway, ‘Gender and Political Participation’, in Sue Tolleson-Rinehart and Jyl J. Josephson, eds., *Gender and American Politics: Women, Men and the Political Process*, London, 2005, p.65.

³ Dorothy Sue Cobble, ‘More Than Sex Equality: Feminism After Suffrage’, in Dorothy Sue Cobble, and Linda Gordon, *Feminism Unfinished: A Short, Surprising History of American Women’s Movements*, New York, 2014, p.58.

⁴ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, New York, 2011, p.11.

provide insight into the engagement of young American women with the politics of gender in the public sphere.

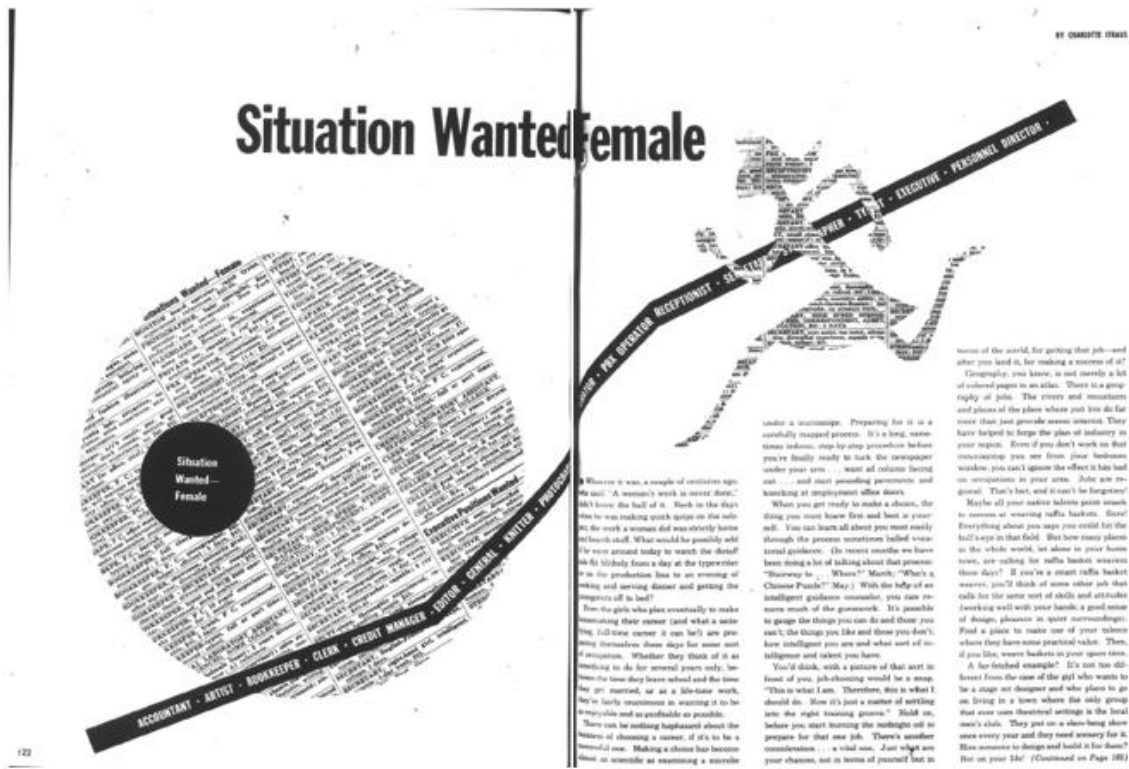
Another aspect of gender politics connected to the opportunities and rights afforded to an individual is the power balance between men and women. This balance, or imbalance, as is the case for this time period, was exhibited in both the public sphere and the private sphere. Within teenage relationships, accepted gender roles and dating conventions served to emphasise and entrench differences between men and women.⁵ Such conventions were discussed at length within *Seventeen* throughout the period under observation. For example, articles delineating the appropriate behaviour regarding dates, sex, and marriage abound. The prescriptive and proscriptive tones of such articles serve as a barometer for how seriously such matters were taken. Similarly, the acceptance and/or rebuttal presented in the reader responses acts as a gauge for how true-to-life the framing of gender politics in such articles was, and indeed how willing readers were to accept these prescribed behaviours and roles.

The politics of gender, whilst perhaps not always explicitly recognised as such, was nevertheless a consistent theme articulated in both the articles and letters of *Seventeen* between 1944 and 1970. The content of the articles, and the responses of readers varied over time in accordance with external factors such as World War II, the Cold War and the rise of the civil rights movement. Readers demonstrated political engagement with gender politics by way of requests for more information on particular topics, for example sex, jobs, and college; by critiquing the status quo; and by participating in debates with readers and writers alike. Naturally this political

⁵ Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in twentieth Century America*, Baltimore, 1988, p.4.

engagement had its limits. To an extent, social conventions and norms dictated the accepted level of defiance of custom. Additionally, parental authority and control, although at times ridiculed, nonetheless influenced attitudes of readers. Lastly, education and exposure to the politics of gender was an important factor that determined how active readers were, as well as informing their views on the politics of gender.

'Situation Wanted – Female': *Seventeen* and Gender Politics in the Public Sphere, 1944-1970



'Situation Wanted: Female', *Seventeen*, June 1946

Regarding the discussion of gender politics within the public sphere, *Seventeen* magazine is a useful source for examining the expectations surrounding American women and the workforce. Between 1944 and 1970, the number of American women undertaking paid work increased dramatically, albeit at varying rates. At the time of consumption, readers of *Seventeen* may not necessarily have been looking for full-time work; however the numerous articles advising on potential careers and how to get a head start in them suggests that readers did envisage themselves as moving into paid work at some point. Attitudes towards women as workers altered considerably over the course of the twenty-six years studied and women workers were variously praised or condemned for their actions. Analysis of the different kinds of jobs endorsed by

Seventeen, as well as the articles discussing college education for women, allow one to draw certain conclusions as to the prevailing gender expectations. Additionally, examination of the dialogue on gender discrimination within the workforce and how this was framed proves useful in determining the level of political engagement of readers with gender politics in the public sphere.

A significant factor contributing to women's entry into the workforce was the manpower shortage caused by American participation in World War II. As increasing numbers of American men departed for service overseas, large numbers of women were called upon to fill their shoes, undertaking traditionally 'male' jobs such as mechanics and ship-fitters. Over the course of the war, the female labour force increased by nearly 60 per cent; moreover three-fourths of those newly entering the workforce constituted married women.⁶ Certainly, for some women wartime work was their first experience participating in paid labour, however this was not the case for most. The majority of 'Rosies' were women previously employed in low-income, low-status 'women's' jobs. Nevertheless, women's experiences of wartime work left a lasting impact: "More women knew that they could in fact do a 'man's job' and therefore deserved the wages, respect and union protections enjoyed by men."⁷ Consequently, whilst many women were forced to leave their wartime jobs upon the return of veterans, the realisation that women could in fact perform equally well at 'men's work' irreversibly altered gender expectations within the workforce in the eyes of many women.

The impact of WWII on gender expectations within the workforce was, at times, explicitly discussed in *Seventeen* articles. In the 1944 article, 'For Seniors Only,'

⁶ Stephanie Coontz, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, New York, 2011, p.47.

⁷ Cobble, 'More Than Sex Equality', pp.23-24.

readers were cautioned that, “A marriage license is no longer a stay-at-home guarantee. Your only real security is what you go out and get for yourself.” The article warned that if one was, “planning on a profession that needs concentrated technical training [for example] medicine, law, science, engineering, [or] journalism,” a college degree or an apprenticeship would be advantageous. The article concluded by noting that, “You can get a job with little more than a sweet smile and a willing heart – if you’re lucky and the manpower shortage is still acute. But you won’t go very far with them.”⁸ Although advocating for women in the workforce, this article positioned paid employment as a means to provide oneself with security in lieu of guaranteed financial provision by way of a husband. Exemplifying widely held beliefs regarding gender expectations, the article also inferred that without the manpower shortage, women would not find employment based on their pre-existing abilities but would need to ‘up-skill’ to the same level as that of their male counterparts.⁹ In contrast, the 1945 article ‘World of Fabrics,’ celebrated these presumed gender differences as reasons *for* women’s success in the workplace. The article noted: “Women’s wartime success in technical jobs has taught backward employers a lesson; femininity will not bar you from technical work.”¹⁰ While arguably a more positive take on presumed gender differences and participation in the workforce, the article nonetheless identifies femininity not only as a key attribute of the female gender, but also as a potential obstacle to participation in the workforce.

In the immediate post-war years, *Seventeen* continued to publish articles offering information on potential jobs in the paid workforce. These jobs varied considerably,

⁸ Alice Beaton, ‘For Seniors Only: Some Thoughts for the Beginning of that Important Commencement Year’, *Seventeen*, December 1944, p.61.

⁹ Terry Anderson, *The Sixties*, 4th ed., Boston, 2012, p.7.

¹⁰ Darrell Huff, ‘World of Fabrics’, *Seventeen*, February 1945, p.86.

ranging from professional careers working in medicine and law, to stereotypically ‘feminine’ jobs such as nursing and teaching. Alongside such articles were pieces such as ‘Send Yourself to College,’ advocating higher education for women and positioning it as an attainable goal. Analysis of how jobs were framed in relation to the other roles expected of women suggests that although a woman might be permitted, or even encouraged, to participate in the paid workforce, she was nevertheless expected to prioritise marriage and motherhood. When examining the framing of paid employment presented in *Seventeen*, it is important to keep in mind the fact that until the mid-1960s employers were still well within their rights to hire and fire based on a woman’s marital status.¹¹ The emphasis placed on marriage, and the focus on jobs which permitted women to continue work once married, is therefore unsurprising.

The articles, ‘Nightingale Fever,’ and ‘Nurse: Someone Needs You,’ printed in 1946 and 1948 respectively, highlight this notion of marriage and motherhood as constituting the expected aspirations for young women. In ‘Nightingale Fever,’ when discussing marriage possibilities and nursing, author Ella Howard argued that, “the profession develops attractive ‘wife qualities’; and when a girl does find the right man, the powers-that-be don’t object to a husband...More [nurses] every year continue to hold their jobs after marriage.”¹² In a similar vein, in 1948 readers were informed that as a nurse, “You can have your wedding cake and your job, too, if you like. Or you may decide to bid your work good-bye. In either case, you discover that nursing was the best preparation you could have had for marriage and motherhood.”¹³ The proliferation of ‘career’ articles during the 1940s, and the overwhelmingly positive reader-responses to

¹¹ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, p.8.

¹² Ella Howard, ‘Nightingale Fever’, *Seventeen*, February 1946, p.120.

¹³ Eileen Murphy, ‘Nurse...Someone Needs You’, *Seventeen*, August 1948, p.113.

them suggests that the notion of women undertaking paid employment in professional careers was not entirely alien to readers and that *Seventeen* was catering to the needs and wants of young American women who envisaged their future as encompassing both paid employment – for at least some part of their life – *and* marriage and motherhood.

Although most *Seventeen* articles promoting careers for women during the 1940s skirted the issue of gender discrimination; on occasion gender discrimination in the workplace was explicitly addressed. Exposure to open acknowledgment of gender discrimination in the workplace was one of the ways in which readers, often too young to have experienced this themselves, could engage with the politics of gender in the public sphere. For example, the 1946 article, ‘Situation Wanted, Female,’ discussed job opportunities for women and factors to consider when looking for a job. It is significant that the article is prefaced with the caveat, “Even the girls who plan eventually to make homemaking their career (and what a satisfying, full-time career it can be!) are preparing themselves these days for some sort of occupation,” lest the article come across as too aggressive in its endorsement of women in the workforce. The article recalled the “high fence around certain jobs, with an invisible but obvious sign that read ‘Men’s Work’” of the past, but optimistically assured readers that “the fence, where it still stands, is very much lower than it used to be.” The article did not, however, deny that gender prejudices still existed. Rather, the following sentence demonstrates how such prejudices were framed as an unavoidable nuisance which was at times justified: “...there are still prejudices about women in various fields. Sometimes logical reasons lie behind the prejudices, often custom...logical or not...is the only dictator.”¹⁴

Much like other articles that commented on gender discrimination in the

¹⁴ Charlotte Straus, ‘Situation Wanted, Female’, *Seventeen*, June 1946, p.123 and p.185.

workplace, the tone of ‘Situation Wanted, Female,’ evidenced a mixture of optimism concerning new opportunities, and resigned acceptance of the status quo regarding expected gender roles and the struggles faced by those who dared to oppose them. The responses to such articles reveal that whilst some readers were simply happy to see articles providing “vocational information,” others resented the simplistic way in which *Seventeen* framed the challenges faced by women in the workplace. The following dialogue between reader and editor suggests that during the 1940s, although *Seventeen* was willing to spawn some kind of discussion on gender discrimination in the workplace, the conversation was fairly one-sided. The editor’s dismissal of the reader’s grievances indicates a lack of understanding of the entrenched gender inequality within American society:

Frankly, I don’t think Charlotte Straus has any idea of what a woman is up against in trying to forge ahead in her chosen field. It’s all very well to encourage teen-agers, but don’t fail to tell ‘em some of the twenty-foot walls with barbed wire on top they’ll have to scale. Before the war I had a mediocre but foot-in-the-door job in advertising. Then I joined the navy. That was back in 1942 when I was twenty. I am very familiar with aviation as I attended a technical school and was long-attached to a squadron as head-“man” on the office staff. Now all I can seem to get is a typist’s job at \$22 and \$24.¹⁵

Almost every woman who has a good job has hit that hurdle that you are hitting now. There are a number of fields, particularly technical ones that are especially difficult for women to “crash.” You can either become very bitter, or, without losing any or your real femininity, be very tenacious...It is difficult not to get scrappy, but let’s be fair. Historically, women are fairly new at business.¹⁶

Moving into the 1950s, *Seventeen*’s coverage of potential careers for readers maintained a distinctly scientific motif, promoting careers in science and engineering. This trend may seem at odds with the traditional assessment of the 1950s as a period of

¹⁵ M.S., Haddonfield, N.J., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1946, p.6.

¹⁶ Editor, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1946, p.7.

stagnation regarding women in the workplace, reflecting the return to the home of many women previously employed in wartime work.¹⁷ Elaine Tyler May makes a compelling argument for the connection between U.S. containment policy during the Cold War and the idealization of domesticity and traditional females roles in response to growing concerns over national security.¹⁸ Indeed, as demonstrated later in this chapter, in many ways *Seventeen* did conform to this theory in its framing of gender expectations. However, it is important to remember that, “the ‘containment’ metaphor can be taken too far when presented as a barometer for reality.”¹⁹

In Joanne Meyerowitz’ anthology of essays in which authors seek to place, “the domestic stereotype in historical context and questions both its novelty and pervasiveness in the post-war years,” Susan Hartmann notes that “In an era marked by...the celebration of domesticity by public figures and popular culture, increasing numbers of women were seeking employment outside the home.”²⁰ Indeed, Stephanie Coontz notes that by 1955, “a higher percentage of women worked for wages than ever had during the war...the employment of wives tripled and the employment of mothers increased fourfold.”²¹ The articles and responses of *Seventeen* during the 1950s exemplify this disparity between the perceived ideal and the reality of women in the workplace, encouraging readers to pursue careers in traditionally ‘male’ fields, despite

¹⁷ Michael Kazin, Rebecca Edwards, and Adam Rothman, eds., *The Concise Princeton Encyclopaedia of American Political History*, Princeton, 2011, p.234.

¹⁸ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound – American Families in the Cold War Era*, New York, 1999, pp.11-13.

¹⁹ Kyle A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Culture in the Cold War*, New York, 2005, p.xx.

²⁰ Joanne J. Meyerowitz, ‘Introduction’, in Joanne J. Meyerowitz, ed, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-war America 1945-1960*, Philadelphia, 1994, p.2.; and Susan M. Hartmann, ‘Women’s Employment and the Domestic Ideal in the Early Cold War Years’, in Joanne J. Meyerowitz, ed, *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Post-war America 1945-1960*, p.84.

²¹ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, p.59.

fears they might have had apropos the suitability of science as a career for a woman.

Articles publicising careers in science and engineering exposed editorial awareness of the gender discrimination that existed within these fields. The 1954 regular feature, 'Training for Your Future', typified *Seventeen's* acknowledgment of unfounded, pre-conceived ideas of women's innate 'unsuitability' for jobs in science. The following extract demonstrates the way in which *Seventeen* discredited certain aspects of this fallacy, yet simultaneously conceded that some barriers of gender segregation were warranted: "Perhaps you are still hearing "Girls don't know anything about science. Why, they can't even add. Leave that to men." You shouldn't be listening...Handicapped [girls] are not, mentally that is. Of course, there are jobs in science...that call for the strong arm and kind of rugged constitution that only males are blessed with."²² Thus, within the same article *Seventeen* presented conflicting frames regarding the politics of gender discrimination in the workplace - expounding the mental capabilities of women whilst maintaining that biological differences necessitated certain limitations.

Similar articles such as 'Engineering a Big Future', reveal the impact of such rhetoric on teenagers themselves: "Helen thinks that girls often overestimate the mathematical or scientific ability necessary for an engineering career. She says she has known many girls who have gone into more crowded fields who might have been engineers but thought engineering "too hard" or had heard that it was a "man's profession."²³ As was the case with many articles endorsing careers in science or engineering, the positive responses to 'Engineering a Big Future,' exhibited gratitude to

²² 'Training for Your Future', *Seventeen*, February 1954, p.190.

²³ Hilda Slautterbach, 'Engineering a Big Future', *Seventeen*, April 1954, p.187.

Seventeen for assuaging doubts as to how achievable and indeed acceptable such a career was for a young woman. One reader wrote: “Just before your article was printed...I began to have all sorts of doubts, because my parents, teachers and friends were suggesting that, as a girl, I wouldn’t stand a chance either at college or in finding a job. It was all so confusing. Your article came at a critical time and was really most encouraging.”²⁴

Between 1960 and 1970, as the number of American women attending college steadily increased, colleges across the nation began the process of co-education. Accompanying this transition was a re-assessment of expected gender roles in conjunction with the purpose of attending college. By the 1960s, it was generally accepted that a white, middle-class girl could, and should, get a college degree in order to get a job and earn her own money – at least prior to marriage and motherhood.²⁵ Moreover, after the 1957 launch of *Sputnik*, America could no longer afford to limit its intellectual resources to men only.²⁶ However, articles discussing college education were often littered with contradictions as to the purpose of attending college; on the one hand college was positioned as a springboard to a career, whilst simultaneously being held up as the ideal means to find a husband, at which point no one would seriously question your decision to drop out.²⁷

In addition to the contrary messages espoused by *Seventeen*, articles such as ‘In My Opinion...Girls Have Their Place, but it’s Not on My College Campus,’ evidence push-back from males towards the changing gender expectations associated with co-ed

²⁴ R.C., Baltimore, Md., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, July 1954, p.4.

²⁵ Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts: Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture*, Bloomington, 2006, p.183.

²⁶ *ibid.*

²⁷ See, ‘Face to Face with an Accomplished Optimist’, *Seventeen*, May 1960, pp.80-82; and Judith Groch, ‘Junior Year is Dull’, *Seventeen*, February 1958, p.92.

colleges. Eighteen-year-old John Gibbs argued that, “there can’t be unity on campus when half the people are mentally and emotionally different from the other half,” noting that, “Everything about girls is different – needs, hopes, interests, values, temperament, problems.” As his *pièce de résistance*, Gibbs concluded that, “there’s the matter of brains and a man’s tender ego when his intelligence is concerned... Whether it’s right or wrong, the fact is that most boys are pretty sensitive about being bested intellectually by a girl.”²⁸ The following response, one of five decrying Gibbs’ article, denoted the reality: gender roles of the past in which women were deemed intellectually inferior and valued primarily on their role as a spouse were fast disappearing.

...I don’t condemn his pride in his all-male school. I can see merits in not turning co-ed. What I do condemn is his ridiculously asinine view of college women. Are we to be thought of only as playthings, objects of weekend flings? Aren’t co-eds capable of lending insight to classroom discussions? Do we get no credit for intelligence, ideals? What can we expect of our society if young men continue to nurture corrupted and immature impressions of the opposite sex?²⁹

In October 1963, perhaps in reaction to the unavoidable reality of women’s increasing presence in the workplace and the sentiment sparked by the publication of Betty Freidan’s *Feminine Mystique*, *Seventeen* published the article ‘Are You the New Kind of Girl?’ Penned by psychologist and science writer Morton M. Hunt, the piece acknowledged that women’s roles were shifting; “using such tricks and techniques as cooperative baby-sitting pools, part-time help, the liberal use of the mother-in-law, day nurseries and schools,” more women outside of the working-class sought to ‘have it all’ and combine paid employment with motherhood. As part of his argument for women in the workplace, Hunt evaluated the ideologies surrounding femininity. Citing results

²⁸ John Gibbs, ‘In My Opinion...Girls Have Their Place, but it’s Not on My College Campus’, *Seventeen*, April 1965, p.266.

²⁹ C.W. and J.P., Iowa Wesleyan College, Mount Pleasant, Iowa, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, June 1965, p.4.

from psychological and sociological interviews in which “many girls [admitted] that they resent and dislike the boys who make it necessary for them to be deceptive and falsely stupid;” Hunt discouraged young women from downplaying their intelligence due to, “[fear] that to do so is ‘unfeminine.’” He went on to propose that contrary to popular discourse, ‘femininity’ was not, “timeless and unchanging,” but multifaceted and dynamic: “According to the standard view, which is made up of clichés and ancient traditions, a woman is by nature soft, warm, a trifle stupid, clinging, maternal, gentle, home-loving and yielding. But don’t let anyone fool you: that’s only one of the many ways femininity has been defined by the human beings who have trod the earth.”³⁰ Admittedly this article stands out for its bold stance regarding gender politics in the public, and by no means is it a feminist manifesto – occupations endorsed remained stereotypically female and motherhood is accepted as a given – yet it nonetheless denotes a changing attitude towards gender politics in the workplace as discussed in *Seventeen*.

The responses to this article shed light on how new ideas regarding gender expectations and women in the workplace were received by readers. The majority of responses elicited by the article’s endorsement of life beyond marriage and motherhood were positive. For example, one letter, highlighting generational differences concerning the ideal roles for young women, reads: “Sometimes when I talk about careers, Mother asks if I’ve thought about marriage. With college ahead and my wish to see more of the world, I hope marriage *won’t* be the foremost idea in my mind yet. Thanks for an encouraging article.”³¹ Conversely, the following letter reflects the transitional nature of

³⁰ Morton M. Hunt, ‘Are You the New Kind of Girl?’, *Seventeen*, October 1963, pp.164-168.

³¹ B.M., Middletown, Ohio, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, December 1963, p.4.

this period with regards to the acceptance of working mothers and perceived ideals encircling marriage and gender roles:

I couldn't believe my eyes when I read that Mr. Hunt actually approves of 'such tricks and techniques as cooperative baby-sitting pools, part-time help, the liberal use of the mother-in-law.' Hence, 'seven million women now work although they have children who are not yet grown up.' How could he possibly consider this good and right? To be a successful wife and mother is *my* goal in life.³²

This divergence in opinions expressed by readers, in addition to the continued publication of articles propagating stereotypically female occupations, indicates that although discussion of gender politics in the workplace had become a topic worthy of serious consideration, the discussion was far from settled. The conflicting frames presented in the reader-responses correspond with Coontz's argument that 1960s America was not as liberal or uniform in its thinking with regards to gender expectations as is often cited in popular memory.³³

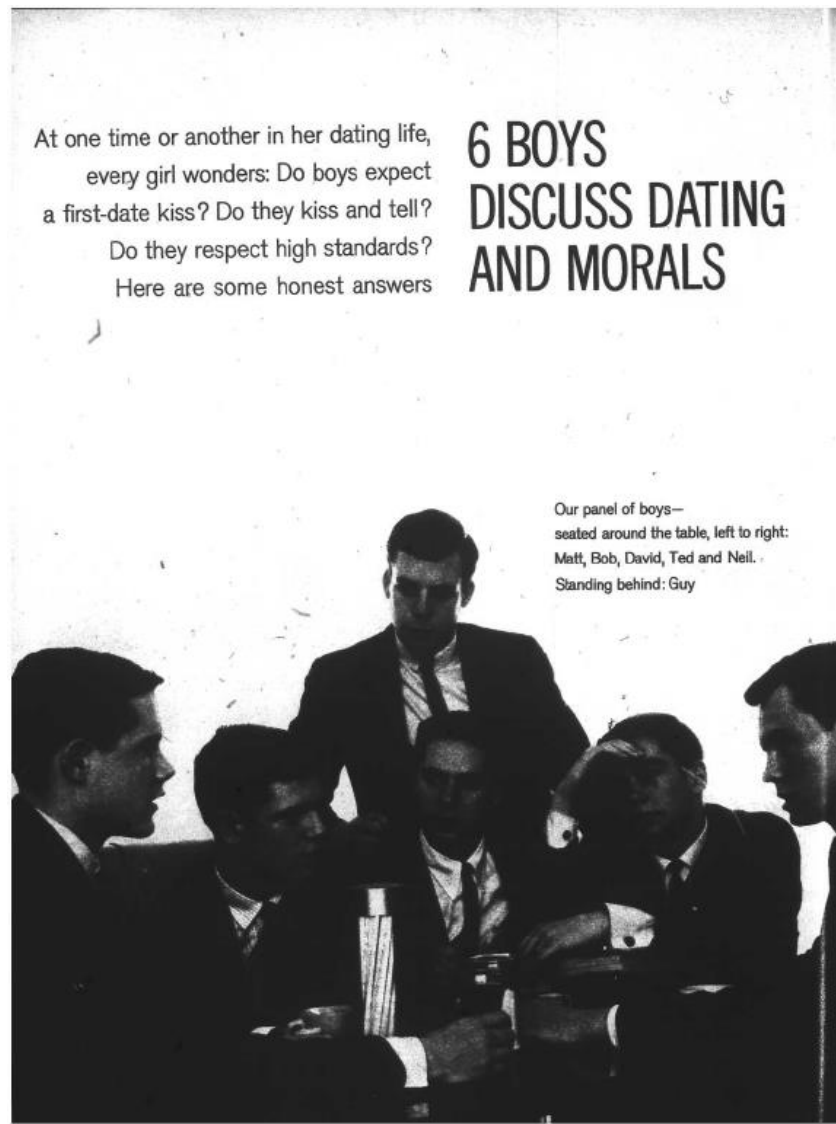
Focusing on women in the workplace, this examination of gender politics within the public sphere establishes that between 1944 and 1970, *Seventeen* and its readers engaged with broader trends in gender politics within America, several of them influenced by external political factors. Central to gender politics within the workplace is the question of socially acceptable gender roles and to what extent these altered or remained the same. During the 1940s, the impact of WWII necessitated that women be employed in what was deemed 'men's work'. Although many women left these jobs – often unwillingly – to make way for returning veterans, the experience of succeeding in work previously considered beyond the scope of female capability could not be

³² M.M., North Wales, Pa., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, December 1963, p.4.

³³ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, p.5.

forgotten, neither by women nor society in general. Accompanied by the rise of the Cold War and competition with the Soviet Union, the wartime work of American women and the consequent impacts on the social acceptability of working women contributed to the encouragement of young women to pursue science and engineering careers during the 1950s.

Considerations of gender expectations and gender discrimination within the workplace accompanied this trend, for as more women entered traditionally male occupations, the tensions between idealised gender roles and reality became ever more evident. This said, despite acknowledging gender discrimination and freely admitting to the unfairness of it, the tone of these articles was one of resigned acceptance. Yes, women could enter traditionally male professions, but they must accept the challenges their gender posed as par for the course. Moreover, the notion of discontinuing paid employment upon marriage and motherhood remained the norm. Only during the 1960s, with the dramatic rise in female college students and the surge in co-educated colleges, were women's roles and gender politics in the public sphere brought to public attention. Although infrequent and contested, *Seventeen* did publish articles advocating for working wives and mothers. However, enduring gender expectations entrenched in American society permitted the perpetuation of gender discrimination within the workplace throughout the 1960s, and indeed beyond.

'Six Boys Discuss Dating and Morals': *Seventeen* and Gender Politics in the PrivateSphere, 1944-1970

'6 Boys Discuss Dating and Morals', *Seventeen*, July 1964

Alongside gender politics in the public sphere, of equal significance when studying the gender politics present in *Seventeen* is consideration of the gender politics evidenced within the private, or personal sphere. Although a largely artificial construct, this dichotomy of public and private sphere serves as a useful frame through which to delineate the different areas of life that gender politics is experienced. In this study, the

personal sphere chiefly comprises issues concerning the conventions of dating and the power (im)balance that existed within heterosexual relationships. Examination of these elements of the personal sphere, asking questions pertaining to prescribed performative gender acts and the acceptance or rejection of such behaviours as articulated in letters-to-the-editor, is crucial to an understanding of how young American women engaged with gender politics between 1944 and 1970. Articles addressing topics such as dating, sex, and marriage represent a significant proportion of the articles examined as part of this research. To be worthy of such extensive coverage, one might surmise that dating and the appropriate behaviours that accompanied it were considered a significant part of a young woman's life. This notion is in itself a compelling reason to analyse the responses of readers as well as the articles themselves in an attempt to gauge how and to what extent young American women engaged with the politics of gender as evidenced in the personal sphere.

An important factor determining the power dynamics of heterosexual relationships between American teenagers throughout the period of 1944 to 1970 was the economics of dating – specifically who paid for the date. By the mid-1940s, as the purchasing power of teenagers increased, it was generally accepted that by definition a date necessitated the purchasing of entertainment of some form. Moreover, it was increasingly expected that this entertainment occur outside of the home. Whether it be a dance, a Coke date or a movie; although still very much a personal experience, dating had also become a public act.³⁴ In this way, many of the conventions of dating became linked to performative gender acts, undertaken in an effort to be seen as conforming to circumscribed gender ideals. At the forefront of these ideals was the notion of the male

³⁴ Bailey, p.3.

as provider. Within the realm of dating, this meant that boys were expected to pay for the date, thus placing boys in a position of power.³⁵ As noted in the 1957 'From a Boy's Point of View,' article: "...since he is the Treasurer and Director of Transportation and Planning on all dates, [the boy] has the privilege of being the one who makes the first move."³⁶

Although this model was for the most part accepted, on occasion *Seventeen* did publish articles that challenged the status quo, advocating instead for the practise of 'going Dutch.' Following this custom, the boy and girl would each pay half the cost of the date. Reasons proposed for why the 'Dutch custom' should be adopted varied. Earlier articles listed the potential for more frequent dates and the prevention of girls from missing out on dates because of a boy's lack of funds, as well as viewing it as proof of genuine affection. Some of the later articles cited calls for gender equality to be extended to include payment of a date.³⁷ The connection between paying for a date and gender ideals was explicitly addressed in the following extract. Here, the male author acknowledges the connections but just as quickly dismisses them:

Maybe you're dubious about paying your way, thinking "If I offer to help a boy with our dating expenses, his male pride may be hurt, and he'll lose interest." To that I reply "Humbug"...Maybe you're the kind of girl who believes in that other old saw...namely: It's a Man's Duty To Pay the Way. Well, dear girl – all I can say to that is you must have plenty of time to catch up on your knitting...Boys steer clear of a girl who's got a dollar sign for a heart.³⁸

A set-up whereby boys financed dates was in fact a double-edged sword. Not only did it leave boys responsible for asking girls on dates, but it also engendered a system that left girls

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.23.

³⁶ Jimmy Wescott, 'From a Boy's Point of View: It's Valentine', *Seventeen*, February 1957, p.30.

³⁷ 'An Old Dutch Custom', *Seventeen*, September 1950, pp.40-41; Jimmy Wescott, 'From a Boy's Point of View: Let's Go Dutch', *Seventeen*, April 1965, p.14, Jeff Shumsky, 'In My Opinion...Girls Should Pay Their Own Way on Dates', *Seventeen*, June 1968, p.180.

³⁸ Jimmy Wescott, 'From a Boy's Point of View: Let's Go Dutch', *Seventeen*, April 1956, p.18.

feeling indebted to boys. Resulting feelings of obligation towards a boy manifested themselves as concerns as to whether or not a girl ought to kiss a boy at the end of the date. Queries of this kind were raised multiple times throughout 1944 to 1970, yet the ambiguous and at times contradictory answers offered little by way of clearing the murky waters surrounding a girl's reputation. For example, the 1948 article 'What is a Kiss,' offered the following advice: "There is everything wrong and nothing right in a kiss that is used as a bribe, another way of saying "Thank you for taking me to the party," or as a curiosity-satisfier...Kissing is "right" when you and the boy have a mutual tenderness for each other *as special individuals*."³⁹ The following advice, offered by a fifteen-year-old male, demonstrates that almost twenty years later, the same issue plagued American teens:

A kiss given as a thank-you is like shaking hands. Boys regard a kiss as a sign of *extra* affection, and unless you mean it – just shake his hand. To kiss a boy on his first date is very risky for a girl...If the boy is mad about you, you are taking away a lot of the challenge. Also, he will wonder if you kiss *all* the boys on the first date, and a girl of the world" image won't do you any good.⁴⁰

However, one reader's retort that, "How can I trust your magazine when you tell us that a kiss on a first date is "risky for a girl"? The boys I know are, for the most part, very gentlemanly and *they* think a girl is a jerk if she doesn't kiss them good night. After all, we are not living under Queen Victoria," serves as a reminder that the prescriptive and proscriptive advice proffered in *Seventeen* was not necessarily always a reflection of actual dating behaviours.

The discrepancy noted above did not only exist with regard to articles versus reader-responses, but also in the articles themselves; conventions of dating were modelled on perceived gender differences, yet several articles openly admitted the artificiality and bigoted nature of these differences whilst simultaneously promoting the perpetuation of inequitable dating behaviour. Following this approach, *Seventeen* published articles such as the 1946 fictional story, 'Bicycle Built for Two.' Adhering to

³⁹ Betty Booth, 'What is a Kiss?', *Seventeen*, March 1948, p.112.

⁴⁰ Henry Makow, 'A Boy's Advice on Coping with Boys', *Seventeen*, January 1965, p.92.

the typical boy-girl fictional romance, the story narrates one girl's transition with regards to gender expectations within the realm of dating. Initially, the protagonist voices resentment regarding the conventions of dating:

...even in a thing like going to the beach, a girl [has] to manoeuvre a man into asking her to go. *They* [can] go where they pleased and ask whom they pleased, but a girl [has] to sit and wait. It seemed to her the men had the upper hand in everything. She had to be roundabout to extract an invitation, even. It seemed degrading...⁴¹

Nevertheless, when given the opportunity to prove her superiority in a swimming contest, she comes to the following conclusion:

She wasn't so eager now for the moment when she would show him how much better she was at diving than he. Yet, she thought, he'll still feel superior if I *don't* show him. He'll still be patronizing about women... He seemed pathetically eager for her approval, she thought... All for me; it's all to impress me – to get my admiration, she thought. "You were simply *wonderful*," she said, and a lump rose in her throat.⁴²

Thus, *Seventeen* directly addressed feelings of resentment towards dominant gender expectations, yet indirectly urged readers to adhere to them nonetheless.

Another way in which *Seventeen* attempted to maintain the status quo with regards to inequitable gender expectations was by emphasising the differences between accepted male and female behaviour, praising those who succeeded in maintaining their 'femininity' despite changes in ideologies surrounding gender expectations. For example, 'It's Great to be a Girl...and it's Pure Bliss When You're Good at it,' expounded the benefits of being a girl:

The most gorgeous thing about being a girl is that it's a man's world. There the dear boys are, appropriating most of the tiresome work like earning a living, winning track meets and having summit conferences, leaving us girls free to have babies, wear lipstick and bind up the wounds of the heroes who have been winning (or losing) track meets.

⁴¹ Freda Thompson, 'Bicycle Built for Two', *Seventeen*, February 1946, p.93.

⁴² *ibid.*, p.144.

Lamenting the fact that, “Regrettably, not all females are feminine;” the author proceeded to examine what exactly constituted femininity: “her warmth and gentleness, her quality of pride under duress, her social tact.”⁴³ The article could not, however, ignore reality. As previously discussed, with increased representation in the paid workforce, women were no longer universally financially and socially dependent on men. Acknowledging such shifts – both concrete and ideological – the article stated:

Today, the American woman has more power and more independence than ever before in history. How can you keep the vote and the clothing allowance, and yet convey the illusion of one who has difficulty negotiating a door handle?...This kind of winsome balance takes thought, practice and constant vigilance.⁴⁴

Although the majority of reader-responses to the above article elicited positive comments, one reader commented, “I think being feminine to the extent you describe is being hypocritical. You should have left some room for a girl who has ideas. Hurrah for the feminine girl who can think!”⁴⁵ This suggests that ideological shifts concerning gender expectations present within the adult sphere, were also filtering through to younger audiences.

Between 1960 and 1970, the articles and reader-responses published suggest changing attitudes regarding gender expectations and the conventions of dating. New outlooks incorporated changes in what it meant to be a woman (and indeed a man). Ideals of gendered behaviour evidenced within *Seventeen* were to a much lesser extent concerned with the hard/soft or powerful/submissive model previously championed. Moreover, there was a move towards more independent thinking being advocated for

⁴³ ‘It’s Great to be a Girl – and It’s Pure Bliss When You’re Good at It’, *Seventeen*, February 1960, pp.96-97.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ A.L., New York, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, April 1960, p.4.

young women. For example, in the 1962 article, 'The Girls I Cherish', Vance Packard, American journalist, social critic and author, discussed the traits he found most admirable in women. He recounted how he met and subsequently fell for his wife, noting that her honesty and ability to be content being herself were the things that attracted him to her. "Thus it is that I say that the trait I adore most in girls is a stubborn, strong-willed pride in self. Do the very best you can in life, but be glad you are yourself."⁴⁶ Gender expectations were also re-evaluated for boys, as demonstrated by the 1969 article, 'In My Opinion...Boys Should Cry Too!' Sixteen-year-old author Connie Hrdlicka asserted that, "Feelings of joy, elation, sadness, pain and loneliness are common to both men and women. Why, then, should girls be permitted to express emotions while men must keep them under tight control?"⁴⁷

In addition to changes in accepted gendered behaviours, articles published during the 1960s also demonstrated changing expectations of relationships themselves. Whereas earlier articles posited dating as a means to demonstrate one's popularity, or perhaps as a way to prepare for marriage, later articles emphasised the importance of friendship and trust when forming romantic relationships. This sentiment was expressed clearly in the 1969 article, 'In My Opinion...Dating is Not a Game,' in which the author articulated her desire for "pure relationships, not ugly ones."⁴⁸ Reader responses expressed indignation that such relationships were not already the norm, arguing that, "...pure, honest relationships could be expected, not sought after."⁴⁹ However, another reader's comment that, "...many girls feel as Barbara does, and those who are unafraid

⁴⁶ Vance Packard, 'The Girls That I Cherish', *Seventeen*, May, 1962, p.158.

⁴⁷ 'In My Opinion, Boys Should Cry Too!', Connie Hrdlicka, *Seventeen*, October 1969, p.202.

⁴⁸ 'In My Opinion...Dating is Not a Game', Barbara Katzenberg, *Seventeen*, August 1969, p.480.

⁴⁹ A.L., Freeport, N.Y., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, October 1969, p.4.

are rebelling against those archaic ‘unspoken rules’ of dating that often end up delaying or destroying meaningful and honest relationships,” implies that this was not always the case.⁵⁰

This change in what a relationship involved necessitated an alteration in how authors conceived of, and presented boys to their readers. Boys were no longer cast as subjects of investigation, an alien species that required dissection. Faced with the following statement, the panel of teenage girls canvassed in ‘The Great Date Debate,’ demonstrated an eagerness to be assessed by more than just their looks, popularity or adherence to traditional ideals of ‘femininity’ when venturing into the realm of dating:

The old clichés about men and women are rapidly disappearing. The beautiful but dumb girl and the muscular, Superman are no longer ideals. Instead, boys and girls are looking at each other as individuals and they are meeting everywhere on a more equal footing. How has this movement towards equality of the sexes affected male-female relationships? What kind of boy does the New Girl really want?⁵¹

An important aspect of teenage dating and gender politics present with *Seventeen* between 1944 and 1970 was the matter of sex. Throughout the period surveyed, articles covering sex and sex education provoked controversy and debate amongst readers. Although some features of articles addressing sex differed both in treatment and response, other facets of discussion remained largely consistent. Chief amongst these issues was the inextricable link between sex and a young woman’s reputation. Numerous articles articulated the idea that a woman’s desirability as a prospective partner was intimately tied to how ‘easy’ young men perceived her to be.⁵²

⁵⁰ A.P. Manhattan Beach, Calif., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, October 1969, p.4.

⁵¹ ‘The Great Date Debate’, *Seventeen*, August 1969, p.332.

⁵² See ‘What Every Girl Should Know’, *Seventeen*, July 1958, p.58; ‘What Girls Think about Sex’, *Seventeen*, July 1959, p.75; and ‘Six Boys Discuss Dating and Morals’, *Seventeen*, July 1964, p.87.

Interconnected with this idea were a number of other generally accepted philosophies. Namely, the belief that, “boys [were] expected to try. They try without necessarily expecting anything to happen – but they try because they think this is the role they must play,” and the situation whereby girls were expected to apply the brakes to any sexual activity.⁵³ Whilst one could argue that in some sense this responsibility placed young women in a position of power, more often than not this was not the case, as ‘saying no’ had its own set of consequences – being classed as a prude, or causing offense for example. Together, these two philosophies resulted in statements such as the following, co-authored by Daniel Sugarman and Rollie Hochstein: “In our society, it’s the girl who has ultimate control. I’ve never met a girl who was seduced without somehow having “asked for it.”⁵⁴ The authors went on to acknowledge the inequity of this system, noting:

You may think this is an unfair, and even hypocritical, way for boys to behave. Yet it is a fact that most boys lose respect for an ‘easy mark,’ and after a torrid affair, are quite likely to decide that the young woman is ‘not the kind of girl I want to be the mother of my children.’ Despite all the talk to the contrary, our society is still caught up in the ‘double standard,’ by which the young man expects to have pre-marital contacts and, at the same time, prefers to marry a virgin.⁵⁵

The acceptance of the model discussed above, demonstrated in both articles and reader-responses, was in part supported and upheld by misconceptions such as the belief that a male’s sex drive was stronger than a female’s.⁵⁶ Additionally, dominant gender expectations played a significant role in maintaining the status quo. For example, in the 1967 article, ‘What Makes Boys So Different,’ author Alice Lakem observed, “A father who tells his daughter to remain chaste means every word he says. But, often without

⁵³ ‘Love and Sex’, Daniel Sugarman and Rollie Hochstein, *Seventeen*, July 1965, p.128.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ ‘What Every Girl Should Know’, *Seventeen*, July 1958, p.59.

putting it into words, he applauds a son's sexual conquests. Even a mother may secretly rejoice at rumors of her son's sexual prowess, for it relieves a major worry (a worry she seldom has about a daughter) – that he may have homosexual tendencies."⁵⁷

A major pitfall of these combined philosophies concerns the treatment of sexual harassment, a subject only vaguely hinted at within the letters and articles concerned. Articles such as the 1968 piece, 'The Feminine Art of Self Defense,' written by Ernest Gordon, then Dean of the Chapel at Princeton University, indicate that young men frequently overstepped the boundaries of consent.⁵⁸ Written in the form of a script, this article presented a typical scenario in which a young man tries to persuade his date to 'go further' despite her repeated refusals. The story concludes with the boy asking the girl on a second date *because* of her refusal, however the publication of such an article suggests that saying no was neither as easy nor effective as presented. The following recollection from a teenage girl printed in an article published a year later reinforces the argument that sexual harassment of young women, whilst still very much a taboo subject, was nonetheless a common occurrence:

Q: What was the most traumatic experience you ever had on a date?

Sheila: ...Jim and his date were in front. All evening his friend was practically attacking me, and nothing I could do or say would make him stop...Finally he drove home at 2.30am and my mother was waiting for me – furious because it was so late. I couldn't tell her what had happened because she was so friendly with Jim's mother, and it would mean ill feelings all round.⁵⁹

The editorial decision not to explicitly reference rape may be linked to the limited opportunities for justice available to female rape victims during this period. In addition to the ability to impeach a woman's testimony on account of previous consensual sex or the claim that she had 'invited' the rape by wearing 'revealing' clothing, many judges

⁵⁷ Alice Lake, 'What makes Boys So Different?', *Seventeen*, October 1967, p.176.

⁵⁸ Ernest Gordon, 'The Feminine Art of Self Defense', *Seventeen*, February 1968, pp.132-133.

⁵⁹ 'The Great Date Debate', *Seventeen*, August 1969, p. 454.

required eye-witness corroboration. Subsequently, despite society's dictate that women were responsible for 'saying no'; owing to legislative and cultural discrimination, young women were in fact lacking significant control over their sexual destinies.⁶⁰

The potential physical repercussions, specifically pregnancy, for young women who engaged in pre-marital sex between 1944 and 1970 – consensual and non-consensual – were key topics within the field of gender politics in the private sphere. *Seventeen* authors strongly discouraged pre-marital sex, citing illegitimate children as the prime reason amongst others. Fearmongering was a tactic frequently employed in several articles as a means to deter readers from pre-marital sex. For example, in 1951 an article entitled 'How to be a Woman,' affirmed, "We're not going to talk about sex outside of marriage. You know the answer despite the convenient arguments... You pay in fear – fear that lives with you in the present and in the future. You pay in the loss of a boy's respect, in his cherishing you. You pay in a deep sense of guilt that has its roots in our whole society and can't be reasoned away."⁶¹ Despite its condemnation, articles featuring panels of teenage authors as well as the letters-to-the-editor offered readers the opportunity to engage with the topic of teenage pregnancy. For example, responding to the 1967 article 'Teen-agers and Sex: A Student Report,' one reader wrote: "I am an eighteen-year-old and have had an illegitimate baby. I think if just one girl who has suffered this tragedy could even begin to tell of all the sorrow involved with illegitimacy, no one could ever indulge in premarital intercourse again."⁶² During the

⁶⁰ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, p.11.

⁶¹ Alice Thompson, 'How to be a Woman', *Seventeen*, July 1951, p.71.

⁶² Initials withheld, Phoenix, Ariz., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, September 1967, p.4.

1960s, a number of letters told similar stories of the sorrows of illegitimacy.⁶³

A comparison of the treatment of un-wed mothers and un-wed fathers is enlightening with regards to the gender politics in existence at this time. Although some of the responses to articles and letters concerning teenage pregnancy exhibited sympathy and at times empathy for the un-wed mother, the general tone was one of reprove. In keeping with the gender expectations surrounding the enforcement of society's expectations regarding sex, many viewed un-wed mothers as being at fault. Such women, for whom society deemed virginity the ideal to which they must adhere, were considered failures in their duty as young, virtuous women. In contrast, the 1970 article, 'The Secret Wish of Unwed Fathers,' presented the young men as being driven by "an inner force" in their desire to father illegitimate children. Young men were afforded excuses such as the oedipal complex, fears of homosexuality, and simply, "...a desire for revenge against all women."⁶⁴

Author Lester David went on to reflect that the contemporary focus on un-wed mothers had resulted in "all our resources and our sympathy [being] directed toward understanding and helping *her*." To add insult to injury, David concluded that, "A fairly sizeable number [of boys are] fooled by the girl, who pretended to have used a contraceptive but, for reasons of her own, wanted to become pregnant."⁶⁵ Perhaps understandably, responses to this article questioned David's logic, critiquing "those who will have nothing more to do with the unwed mother... They take off expecting to get out of the whole mess without a scratch while the girl has to go through one of the worst torture tests in the world! If our laws stop excusing these unwed fathers, there just might

⁶³ See 'I Am an Unwed Mother', *Seventeen*, November 1968, p.128; and 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, January 1969, p.4.

⁶⁴ Lester David, 'The Secret Wish of Unwed Fathers', *Seventeen*, October 1970, p.190.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, pp.129-130.

be fewer unwed mothers.’⁶⁶ Thus, readers were not only aware of the double standards surrounding socially accepted conventions of dating, but also actively questioned such standards and *Seventeen*’s framing of these issues.

The focus on pre-marital sex is also revealing in that with the exception of one or two instances, articles in which sex is discussed posit marriage as an assumed rite of passage for a woman. This reflects the pervasive gender identities that existed between 1944 and 1970 in that marriage was considered a crucial part of what constituted ‘being a woman.’⁶⁷ For example, in the 1951 article ‘How to be a Woman,’ the author stressed, “You as a woman...are a partner of a man. You are not his rival, his enemy or his plaything. Your partnership in most cases will produce children...This is your basic career, and all the apparently new ideas and modern ways haven’t changed that basic.” In addition to promoting marriage as the expected course that a woman’s life should take, the article also championed the career housewife. Note the dismissive reference to changing public attitudes regarding working wives during the post-war years:

What other job will ever bring the glow and sparkle you see in your own mirror over even the little rewards of womanhood...What profession offers the daily joy of turning out a delicious dinner, of converting a few yards of fabric, a pot of paint and imagination into a “new” room, of seeing a tired and unsure man at the end of a working day become a rested lord of his manor? It was very fashionable a few years ago to belittle these things. But there is no office, lab, or stage that offers so many creative avenues or executive opportunities as that everyday place, the home.⁶⁸

Whilst the notion of marriage as a predetermined part of a woman’s life remained persistent throughout the period under discussion, in later years *Seventeen*

⁶⁶ Kay Eagen, Electra, Tex., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, December 1970, p.4.

⁶⁷ Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, p.xxi.

⁶⁸ Thompson, ‘How to be a Woman’, p.71.

articles stressed the importance of the pursuance of other goals and interests in *addition* to marriage in order to lead a full and satisfying life. This change appears to be linked to the dramatic increase in teenage marriage, something that *Seventeen* discouraged on many occasions.⁶⁹ ‘In Due Time,’ a fictional story, presented a tale of two sisters. The elder sister, beautiful and smart, married young and as such was forced to set aside her college dreams in order to look after her new-born. The younger sister, slightly awkward and shy, spent her youth cultivating her various hobbies and interests, dating a variety of boys but never settling down. The following extract served as a deterrent to readers thinking of marrying young:

A week later Trudy saw her nephew. He was red and angry, screaming his lungs out. His father was locked in the bathroom with cotton in his ears, trying to study for his last final of the term. His mother was in the miniscule kitchen, overpowered by tons of baby paraphernalia. Rene was crying. She was hot and tired and her stitches hurt...It was stifling in the third-floor walk-up apartment, and the worn upholstery on the dirty second-hand couch was scratchy.

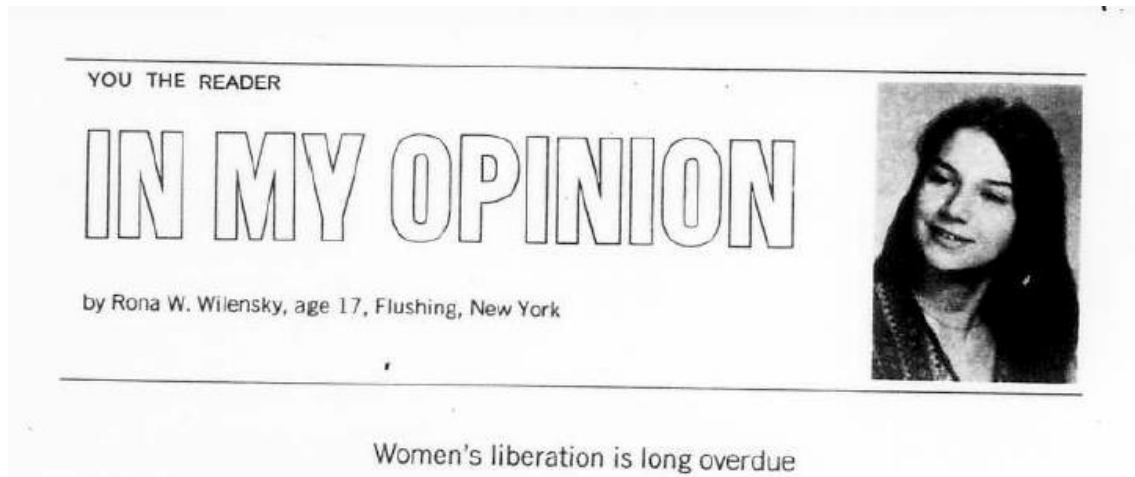
This example demonstrates the delicate balance that readers faced as they attempted to find clarity in the murky waters of femininity and womanhood as a teenager via the pages of *Seventeen*. As with many aspects of gender politics within the private sphere, young women were subject to constantly fluctuating, and at times contradictory advice about marriage and its place in ‘womanhood.’

Dating and boys were evidently an important topic of concern for young American women reading *Seventeen* throughout 1944 to 1970. The abundance of articles relating to this topic, and the messages contained within infer that dating, and later marriage, were central to what it meant to be a woman. This in turn enables one to draw conclusions pertaining to gender politics that were in place through examination

⁶⁹ In 1960, fifty per cent of all American women marrying did so whilst in their teenage years (Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*, p.51.)

of expected gender roles and any changes in these. In terms of the power balance between males and females within the realm of dating, young women were at a clear disadvantage. For reasons relating to the economies of dating and society's double standards when it came to sex, young women were often placed in a predicament in which they were damned if they did and damned if they didn't. This sentiment was only enhanced by the contradictory messages, particularly concerning women's roles as mothers and their increasing representation in the paid workforce, contained within *Seventeen*. This said, it is possible to notice a slight shift in the attitudes of readers with regards to this imbalance of power. Increasingly letters expressed frustration and even defiance towards the unequal expectations placed on young women. In this way, through their questioning of the status quo and campaign for change, readers engaged with the politics of gender within the private realm; by the end of the 1960s, readers of *Seventeen* were starting to display the beginnings of what would become the Women's Rights Movement of the 1970s and 1980s.

'In My Opinion... Women's Liberation is Long Overdue': *Seventeen* and Gender Politics – The Interweaving of Public and Private, 1944-1970



'In My Opinion... Women's Liberation is Long Overdue', *Seventeen*, June 1970

Whilst the model of the public and private spheres is convenient and undoubtedly valuable when assessing gender politics, in reality life is rarely so black and white – the public and private are interwoven at every level, some might say especially so when discussing gender politics. The following articles and responses demonstrate an acknowledgment of explicit gender discrimination, and recognition that gender politics present within the private sphere had implications for gender politics within the public sphere and vice versa. A marked difference between articles and responses concerning gender politics and those concerning formal politics and the politics of prejudice is the lack of political activism evidenced in content regarding gender politics. *Seventeen* offered readers relatively little encouragement to actively change contemporary gender roles. When it came to gender politics, political engagement as demonstrated by *Seventeen* comprised voicing dissatisfaction by calling out society (and *Seventeen*) on pervasive gender inequality. At times readers expressed a desire – occasionally in a fairly demanding manner – for change, however this kind of

sentiment is largely limited to the latter years of the 1960s.

Although the majority of articles and letters, voicing discontent and awareness of gender inequality occurred in the second half of the period studied, there were some outliers. During the 1940s, features such as, 'It's a Boy's World,' and, 'It's a Girl's World,' addressed the unfair state of gender roles and expectations in American society. The positive responses are perhaps unsurprising given the increased visibility and recognition of women in the paid workforce in the wake of WWII. The following excerpt, taken from 'It's a Boy's World,' proves enlightening. For the greater part of the article, sixteen-year-old Joan Henley focused on the inequity within dating. Yet this piece demonstrates a wider, more holistic understanding of gender politics extending well beyond the private sphere:

Though there are undeniable advantages to belonging to the weaker of the sexes, independence is not one of them... Though women's independence in the world of business has been loudly shouted from the rooftops since the days of Susie B., the facts just do not agree... Though it has been frequently discussed, the possibility of a woman president does seem a bit remote. But public-minded womanhood has far more important things to concern itself with at the moment. For instance, the lady doctor seems to have been assigned her own particular rut... babies, for which she might have well have gotten married, or other women, which goodness knows is the last subject of interest to most women.⁷⁰

The arguments of eighteen-year-old Herb Pike, author of the counterpart to this article, seem trifling and mediocre in comparison. Pike complained of the limiting wardrobe options afforded to men, as well as the notion that men were tasked with being the breadwinners. In a token gesture of fairness, Pike mockingly conceded: "Oh, yes, I'll admit that some of the girls work for the money to buy these things at such grueling, harrowing, tedious tasks as baby sitting etc." The negative feedback towards

⁷⁰ Joan Henley, 'It's a Boy's World', *Seventeen*, May 1949, p.152.

this piece suggests that readers not only resented the laughable comparisons drawn between the hardships faced by a woman to those faced by a man, but also disputed the minimal value attributed to supposedly ‘women’s work’ within the home.

During the 1950s, articles rebuking gender discrimination and inequality within American society were a rarity within *Seventeen*. Whilst multiple articles explicitly acknowledged the different behavioral expectations and gender roles assigned to young women, this did not lead to claims of inequity or calls for change. Rather, articles during the 1950s tended to glorify or elevate traditional gender roles. Historians of gender and American culture have linked this trend to the broader cultural phenomenon of Cold War culture and the Cold War Containment theory. Following the rise of the Cold War, American foreign policy and domestic culture became increasingly inward-looking, seeking to find security in long-held traditions. This led to an idealization of the nuclear family, and more specifically of traditional, domestic roles for women and girls.⁷¹

This position may seem at odds with the previous analysis of the types of careers promoted for readers of *Seventeen*, and indeed it is. On the one hand, in order to keep pace with Soviet scientific advances, America could not afford to limit its scientific training to boys only. On the other hand, American women were at pains to distance themselves from the harsh, ‘unfeminine’ image of Soviet women.⁷² This idea was exemplified in the 1957 article ‘Flirting Fair and Square.’ Written by the Editor in Chief herself, this piece advised: “...just as in business and in marriage, someone has to be the leader. And in a man-woman relationship, I doubt whether any woman can boss a real

⁷¹ Tyler May, p.113.

⁷² *ibid.*, p.13.

man... Show that you are proud to be with him by listening to what he says, deferring to his judgment about where to sit, [and] letting him order for you.”⁷³ The overt encouragement of young women to submit meekly to male power – both in the private and public sphere – was received with mixed responses, indicating that such framing of women’s roles was not universally accepted by *Seventeen*’s readers. Instead, readers posited conflicting frames via their letters-to-the-editor.

The degree to which readers during the 1950s were engaged with the topic of gender politics can be seen most clearly in the letters-to-the-editor. For example, in September 1951, one reader sent in the following letter:

As teen-agers of today are voters of tomorrow, my civics class would like to know what they think of this question: “Will the women of the United States ever have enough political power to elect a woman president?” We believe that women should have a much greater part in our national government. What do your readers think?⁷⁴

The letter prompted multiple responses, both for and against a female president. The responses printed below represent responses from each side:

...On a ‘vote potential’ basis, women *do* have the stronger voting power of the two sexes, since women of voting age outnumber men of voting age. But I don’t think it’s a question of women having political power. If we ever have a lady president, she won’t be elected because she is a woman or because women nominated and elected her; she’ll be elected president for her leadership, persuasiveness, determination and, hardly least of all, her political awareness, acute intelligence and keen comprehension of the nation’s affairs, plus the know-how and the party support for a well-run and convincing campaign. But really, aren’t these the very qualities necessary for anyone who runs for president, whether man or woman?⁷⁵

I am female, but I am definitely against women in politics. I will never vote for a woman president, governor or senator. I believe the responsibility too great for a woman. Offices like school board members or something similar are all right for women. But president or governor? Heaven forbid!⁷⁶

⁷³ Enid A. Haupt, ‘Flirting Fair and Square’, *Seventeen*, November 1957, pp.80-81.

⁷⁴ P.P., Detroit, Mich., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, September 1951, p.4.

⁷⁵ A.C., Madison, Wisconsin, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, January 1952, p.4.

⁷⁶ A.A., Baton Rouge, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, January 1952, p.4.

The second response published caused quite a stir amongst readers, who resented the dismissal of women's political capabilities, for two months later the editors issued a statement informing readers that, "January's correspondent, A.A., has received lots of replies. Most of you seem to share at least some of the feeling which the writer of this letter expresses: '...women are as smart, as responsible and as capable of leadership, as men are. For example, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine. She is one of the country's outstanding senators and men of both parties are outspoken in their praise of her fine record.'"⁷⁷ In this way, despite various articles elevating the domestic role of women, during the 1950s some readers nonetheless engaged in heated debate, advocating for the suitability of *public* roles for women in American society, in conjunction with discussions regarding gender expectations.

As the 1960s took hold, some of the articles sampled featured what might be termed 'male backlash,' against the changes occurring with regards to ideals of femininity and participation in public life. Male, teenage authors in particular, sounding off in the regular 'In My Opinion...' pieces, began to use the arguments of proto-feminist young women against the young women. For example, in the 1966 piece, 'In My Opinion...Girls Should be Drafted Just as Boys Are,' eighteen-year-old Jim Stone argued: "Everywhere a male turns these days, he is confronted by militant females demanding – and getting – equality...I say, "Fine. Let them have all the equality they want – and let them take on some of our responsibilities too.'" In a move that arguably undermined his previous nod towards the promotion of gender equality; Stone went on to employ gender essentialism to support his argument, noting, "When the average male is faced with an overwhelming authority, he immediately begins to dream of usurping

⁷⁷ S.D., Cleveland, Ohio, 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, April 1952, p.4.

the power for himself. I gather it's different with girls. They seem to enjoy taking orders and submitting to authority."⁷⁸ Although the underlying themes present within this article do not differ drastically from many of those espoused in issues from previous decades, the article does differ in its unambiguous phraseology. The author did not disguise his opinions as 'how to' dating tips, posing a social commentary on the decline of 'femininity'. Rather, he makes clear from the get-go that gender equality was what was at stake. Moreover, it is not just elements of the article that differ to previous articles, but also the responses of readers.

Whereas in previous decades – when articles written by males expressing similar sentiments were generally accepted, with critiques serving as the point of difference amongst a series of laudatory letters of praise – later articles, such as that mentioned above, received plenty of criticism. Some readers took issue with Stone's preconceived gender ideals, contesting, "Where did Jim Stone ever get the idea that females "enjoy taking orders and submitting to authority?" If it's equality he wants, then what's wrong with female pilots and navigators? Let the men do their own cooking and cleaning!"⁷⁹ Others drew on the burgeoning nationalist feminism: "I agree that girls should be drafted, but not because of a trim uniform or a chance to find a husband. Being able to serve a country as wonderful as ours should be an honor and a privilege."⁸⁰ Several letters mocked Stone's simplistic view of women, pointing out the discrepancies within his ideas of ideal gender roles: "Okay, Jim Stone, but who would write the letters, bake the cookies and raise the families? And who would there be to marry the men who try to

⁷⁸ Jim Stone, 'In My Opinion...Girls Should be Drafted Just as Boys Are', *Seventeen*, May 1966, p.284.

⁷⁹ B.S.O., Temple, Pa., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, July 1966, p.4.

⁸⁰ B.B., Springfield, Ill., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, July 1966, p.4.

dodge the draft?’⁸¹ Interestingly, more than a couple of the young women writing in were themselves serving in the forces in some capacity. Taking this example as representative of broader trends during the 1960s, it is possible to make the case for changing responses of young American women to pre-conceived male ideals of appropriate gender roles for women. Thus, via its letters-to-the-editor, *Seventeen* facilitated the spread of new perceptions and attitudes regarding gender politics, building on the pre-existing youth protest movements and paving the way for further action within the Women’s Movement.

Although the Women’s Movement did not realise its full potential until well beyond the years included in the scope of this research project, articles and letters published towards the end of the 1960s suggest that *Seventeen*’s readers and editors were nevertheless participating in political activism aimed at achieving gender equality. The civil rights movement and student protest movement no doubt played a crucial role in shaping the discourse on women’s rights and gender equality. Many young women had experienced gender discrimination within these movements, motivating a desire to utilise the skills and practices learnt and apply them to the issue of gender equality.⁸² This idea was exemplified in the 1968 article, ‘In My Opinion... We Need a Woman President.’ The teenage author complained:

In this land of the free and home of the brave, where all *men* are created equal, women remain second-class citizens. In the schools, when students fight for greater responsibility and freedom, it’s the boys who lead the battle – while the girls are generally relegated to the lowly position of ‘corresponding secretary... Today thousands of women in business, professions, arts and sciences also manage the roles of wife and mother without losing one iota of

⁸¹ L.C., St. Clair, Pa., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, July 1966, p.4.

⁸² Kazin, Edwards, and Rothman, p.234.

their femininity'⁸³

Evidently, although gender equality was in principle an important goal, the reality was that girls still faced the age-old dilemma of balancing principles with society's expectations that they adhere to the traditional image of 'femininity.' The following letters demonstrate the two frames readers applied when reading the piece:

I am a girl but I completely disagree with 'We Need a Woman President'. I would never vote for a woman for President because I feel that the majority of women lack the physical stamina and emotional stability necessary to successfully carry out the gruelling demands of the presidency. Most women in power have been aided by circumstances – or a man.⁸⁴
 ...a perfect answer to combat every silly argument against future women presidents. We need more people who think like her. Sadly, many of us are content to think that women can't be Presidents. But why not? After all, wasn't this country based on the principle of freedom and equality?⁸⁵

One piece in particular articulated ideas of inherent gender discrimination within American society particularly strongly, making connections between gender expectations within the private sphere and the flow-on effects of these in the public sphere. In her boldly titled 1970 feature, 'In My Opinion... Women's Liberation is Long Overdue,' Seventeen-year-old Rona Wilensky asserted: "...many in our society feel that women are not men's intellectual equals. We do have the right to vote, but very little else. In almost every sector of our society, women are discouraged from competing with men. We're placed in the home to cook meals, clean the house and raise children. From the moment a little girl is old enough to talk, she's brainwashed into believing that the only meaningful role open to her is that of wife and mother." Wilensky went on to

⁸³ Ilcine T. Ringel, 'In My Opinion... We Need a Woman President', *Seventeen*, December 1968, p.180.

⁸⁴ C.S., Rockford, Ill., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, February 1969, p.4.

⁸⁵ W.M., Windsor, Conn., 'Thank You for Your Letters', *Seventeen*, February 1969, p.4.

comment on the challenges faced by those who dared to defy convention, warning that, “She’ll be discriminated against in school, on the job – almost everywhere she turns, even at home. Boys will resent her because she’s ‘aggressive’ and her female friends may find her indifference to ‘girl talk’ downright offensive.” Contrary to previous articles in which *Seventeen* acknowledged gender discrimination but failed to provide any potential solutions, Wilensky proffered a call to arms, declaring: “But if her interests extend further than the latest skirt length, she’s going to have to put up with opposition – and fight it. She’ll take her cue from the women’s liberation groups and join with other girls to analyse the problem and find workable solutions.”⁸⁶

The responses to Wilensky’s piece demonstrate the division that existed amongst readers with regards to gender politics, as well as revealing how feminist rhetoric was received. One reader, who jeeringly refrained from using the pronoun ‘Miss’ when addressing Wilensky “lest she take offense,” resented the modus operandi of “calling [her] (and thousands of others) wishy-washy, propagandized, subordinate girls with absolutely no integrity.”⁸⁷ Another reader exhibited a desire to retain the status quo with regards to gender roles, pointing out that if Wilensky wished “...to be termed man’s equal, [she] must live up to his standards,” – something that could be achieved by, “[marching] right off to Southeast Asia to fight and die with the best of them,” or undertaking, “...fun-filled jobs in sawmills, salt mines, oil wells and fishing boats in Alaska.”⁸⁸ Other readers applauded Wilensky’s attitude. One male reader wrote, “I completely agree...it’s time that women were regarded as complete human beings

⁸⁶ Rona W. Wilensky, ‘In My Opinion...Women’s Liberation is Long Overdue’, *Seventeen*, June 1970, p.198.

⁸⁷ Bonni Levy, Brooklyn, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1970, p.4.

⁸⁸ Lorabeth Staley, Lakewood, Ohio, ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1970, p.4.

and that efforts to improve their position were not looked at with amused disdain.”⁸⁹

Perhaps most revealing of these responses, in terms of engagement with gender politics as part of a broader critique of American society, is the following letter: “Isn’t it ironic that such a well thought out, *true* article should appear in the very magazine most responsible for mesmerizing teen-age girls into the “femininity syndrome”?”⁹⁰ This letter demonstrates not only an awareness of gender politics as a contemporary, relevant issue, but also an awareness of both the contradictions that existed and how American culture enabled the perpetuation of such concerns.

Examination of the articles and letters published within *Seventeen* between 1944 and 1970 that hint at a more activist engagement in gender politics, suggests that the arc of activism within gender politics amongst young American women was not necessarily as clean-cut as one might expect. This conclusion follows two trains of thought. The first relates to the content of the articles themselves. In some ways, the messages espoused by *Seventeen* adhere to the accepted patterns of gender ideals. Articles in the 1940s, overtly identifying and decrying gender discrimination on various levels, seem a logical progression following the experiences of working women during WWII. During the 1950s, the revivification of traditional ideals of femininity demonstrated in *Seventeen* fits with well-documented analyses of American cold-war culture. Moving forward, the dissatisfaction and frustration voiced by teenage authors advocating for change plausibly reflects the effects of simultaneous youth-organised movements. The second train of thought pertains to the responses to such articles. Following the supply and demand theory, the messages present within the articles ought to, to a certain extent,

⁸⁹ Andrew Avrutis, Bronx, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1970, p.4.

⁹⁰ J.R., Flushing, N.Y., ‘Thank You for Your Letters’, *Seventeen*, August 1970, p.4.

reflect the dominant attitudes of the consumers. However, as illustrated in this section, this was not always the case. Perhaps testament to the diversity of *Seventeen's* readership; the letters studied indicate that readers possessed a multitude of varying ideas regarding gender politics and its place in the public and private sphere. Regardless of whether readers agreed or disagreed with the opinions put across by *Seventeen*, the impassioned dialogue present within the letters-to-the-editor confirms the argument for teenage engagement in gender politics by means of expressions of affirmation or discontent concerning contemporary gender roles and expectations.

Conclusion

For the sake of clarity, this chapter has discussed the politics of gender in relation to *Seventeen* magazine and its readers during 1944 to 1970 in a manner that delineates between arguably artificial constructs within the politics of gender. Moreover, for each facet of gender politics, this chapter has attempted to assess and evaluate the change and continuity evidenced over the twenty-six-year period researched. Naturally, reality is not so neatly compartmentalised. It can be easy at times to forget that the various trends and notes of interest that appear when examining individual aspects of gender politics are in fact occurring concurrently alongside those evidenced in other areas. With this in mind, I would argue that the gender politics within *Seventeen* do not present a tidy, uncomplicated trajectory; the pieces of the puzzle do not slot easily into place. Rather, much like the teenage readers themselves, the historian is faced with contradictions when searching for straightforward answers. During the 1940s, despite greater financial autonomy and the experiences of independence offered to some women, articles and responses concerning dating and male-female relationships retained traditional notions of femininity and acquiescence. Similarly, dating and sex-related content from the 1950s that emphasised the significance of traditional gender roles contrasted with articles from the same period that advocated for women's participation in careers in science and engineering. Such contradictions support the theory that major political events and changes, such as those that transpired during 1944 to 1970, had far-reaching effects that culminated in an atmosphere of flux or transition with regards to the lived political experiences of young American women.

Whilst political events in and of themselves, such as war and civil rights movements, may not, at first glance, appear to be all that influential in the realm of gender politics – particularly with regards to teenage girls – they are nonetheless key. In her discussion of the history of gender and politics, historian Joan Scott asserts that in accepting the socially constructed nature of gender identities, historians must, “eschew the compartmentalizing tendency” that can result in issues such as war and constitutional issues being considered purely within the realm of ‘high politics’ and beyond consideration of gender politics.⁹¹ Investigation of articles and responses within *Seventeen* support Scott’s argument. Many of the ideas and attitudes regarding gender politics contained within *Seventeen* evidence strong correlations between broader political events and ideas. For example, several articles during the 1940s make explicit connections between the experiences of women’s success in previously male-dominated fields during the Second World War and feelings of frustration at pervasive gender discrimination relating to gender roles in the workplace despite this success. The responses of readers themselves furthers this argument. During the late 1960s, as letters calling for gender equality and women’s liberation became less ambiguous in their tone and aim, the ensuing dialogue evoked references to politically salient topics such as the draft and the Vietnam War. Arguably the politics of gender is inextricably linked to many, if not all, aspects of politics, therefore the connections present in *Seventeen* to some degree mirrored those of American society between 1944 and 1970.

In comparison to the political engagement of readers demonstrated in previous chapters, the engagement of readers with gender politics may seem relatively lacking. However, I would argue that this is not so. Admittedly, compared with the politics of

⁹¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York, 1999, p.6.

prejudice, there are fewer calls to arms in an attempt to incite change. There is minimal active participation by way of organised groups as was the case with engagement in formal politics. Yet in terms of quantity, letters and articles concerning gender politics by far outnumber those of either formal politics or the politics of prejudice. Throughout the period surveyed, *Seventeen* published numerous articles on topics addressing issues of gender politics. Moreover, these articles elicited numerous letters-to-the-editor, many of them expressing strong opinions. From this, we might argue that gender politics was very much on the political radar of young American women, but that the ways in which they engaged with gender politics were perhaps less overt than those exhibited in previous chapters.

No, for the most part readers were not advocating drastic policy change within the workplace or recruiting members for a youth-led women's rights movement. Nonetheless, to say that the absence of such forms of political engagement lessens the significance of the political engagement demonstrated via the expression of opinions and the participation in a written dialogue, detracts from the value or worth attributed to these politically engaged young women. Instead, one should ask why, given the discontent regarding gender discrimination voiced within the letters-to-the-editor, were there not more explicit or visible means of political engagement for young women with regards to gender politics? The answer to this question, I believe, lies in the articles and letters themselves. For every reader or writer advocating for progressive change in terms of gender roles and expectations, there were two more remonstrating these 'new' ideas.

Conclusion: Sites of Political Engagement

The notion of teenage magazines as sites or venues for political engagement, education and participation may seem surprising given the types of articles that spring to mind when one thinks of contemporary teenage magazines such as *Dolly*, *Creme*, and even today's *Seventeen*. In order to reconcile this apparent discrepancy, one must examine and contextualise the purpose and role of teenage magazines over time. Arguably, during the 1940s, 50s and 60s, *Seventeen* served a similar function to that of social media today. Letters-to-the-editor can be seen as the equivalent of comments on a politically-orientated Facebook post. Major political parties invariably have Facebook pages and Twitter accounts that promote their policies, and national voter-registration campaigns pepper newsfeeds in the lead up to elections. The location of teenage political engagement has shifted, facilitated by technical change, to new and quite different sites. The importance of this major shift in venue is that teenage political engagement has, to some degree moved from an explicitly *teenage* site or venue, to a multigenerational (although indeed largely youth-orientated) venue, thus exposing teenagers to a much more complex set of cultural and political frames.

If current social media cannot be said to be an explicitly teenage site for young women to engage in politics, during the period of 1944 to 1970, *Seventeen* magazine most certainly was. In *Seventeen*, readers found a site of political engagement with which they could identify in a way that was indisputably *theirs*. Certainly, the letters-to-the-editor expressed such sentiment intermittently throughout the years under examination. In many ways fulfilling the role of the cool, older sister in whom they could confide and learn from; *Seventeen* offered more than tips on the latest fashions and recipes for entertaining guests. Amidst the more whimsical features were serious

articles detailing the formation of the United Nations and the consequences for the world if society – teenage girls included – did not adhere to the demands and expectations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Arguably more important is the way in which such content was framed. Throughout the period under examination *Seventeen*'s editors positioned knowledge of, and engagement with, formal politics as a fundamental part of successful teenage development. Writers utilised language that was accessible, yet far from condescending, to explain complex political institutions and ideas to a teenage audience. The reception of such content was by no means universally positive, however negative responses were promptly critiqued, both by readers and the editors' themselves. *Seventeen* therefore, was a site, or venue, at which multiple frames were discussed and at which a degree of frame reflection could take place in a rather dynamic process of exchange. In this way, *Seventeen* can be said to have fulfilled the role of that of a policy forum.³¹²

Accepting that the issues discussed in reader-responses, as well as the responses themselves reflected the interests and opinions of readers, we can observe a certain dynamic in the engagement of readers with formal politics. In the early years of *Seventeen*, readers regularly requested more content relating to political education, a feature in keeping with the magazine's framing of teenage political engagement promoted during the 1940s. This observation fits with the global desire for peace post-WWII, and the contemporary rhetoric concerning America's moral obligation to act as leader of the Free World. In order to be successful participants in this new, international arena young women required a solid education in the workings of domestic and

³¹² Rein, Martin, and Schön, Donald A., *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies*, New York, 1994, p.33.

international formal politics. It seems logical, therefore, that following these years of political education, a period in which political participation was positioned as the ideal form of political engagement might ensue. In the years 1951 to 1960, *Seventeen's* editors adhered to exactly this policy. Readers were encouraged to participate in local and national politics via organisations and institutions established by adults on behalf of teenagers. Political participation, though explicitly encouraged, was 'bounded' in the sense that readers were encouraged to become engaged in *conventional* political participation, rather than the types of unconventional political participation that became very fashionable worldwide in the 1960s. Seemingly disparate from cultural histories that emphasise the theory of containment with regards to prevailing gender expectations during the 1950s, my findings support a political history of young women more in line with revisionist histories of the 1950s.

Although a far cry from 'the Swinging Sixties,' the 1950s were nonetheless formative years for the political engagement of young American women. Furthermore, the political participation evidenced in the 1950s was a necessary stepping stone towards the political activism demonstrated in *Seventeen* during the 1960s. Paralleling the concurrent cultural rebellion, the letters-to-the-editor as well as content written by teen contributors suggests that readers during the 1960s had become frustrated with the avenues of political engagement proffered by adults. Instead, disillusioned by the 'establishment' and impassioned by exogenous political events, young American women chose to embrace fully their potential to effect political change. This political activism within the realm of formal politics can be seen in both the increasingly opinionated letters-to-the-editor and in the articles reporting on events such as the Kent State Shooting and the Peace Suicides, as well as the 'In My Opinion' column, a regular

feature by the end of the 1960s. Debatably, if these kinds of letters and/or articles had been published in the 1940s, they would have appeared at odds with the dominant trend towards political education. The engagement of young American women in formal politics can thus be said to have experienced both continuity, and change: continuity in that readers consistently demonstrated an engagement with formal politics, but also change regarding the manifestation of said engagement.

In contrast to the somewhat logical evolution and progression of the political engagement of young women in formal politics, the engagement of young women with the politics of prejudice as demonstrated in *Seventeen* was far less linear. Whilst content concerning the politics of prejudice, both racial and religious, were topics addressed fairly regularly within the letters-to-the-editor during the 1940s and 1960s, there was a remarkable absence of such discussion during the majority of the 1950s. To make sense of this pattern we must turn to an examination of contemporary political events, such as WWII, legislative changes and the civil rights movement. Equally important is consideration of the cultural impacts of said political events, and the subsequent effects on society's willingness to acknowledge the politics of prejudice as a serious, or pressing issue. With this in mind, one might conclude that *Seventeen's* discussion of the politics of prejudice was more obviously influenced by external factors than was their discussion of formal politics. Reasons for this may well include the personal, and divisive nature of racial and religious politics. Whatever their subsidiary goals, *Seventeen* was nonetheless a profit-making business and was thus subject to the pressures of supply and demand. To present the politics of prejudice as an arena in which young American women ought to actively participate would be a risky move. And so it makes sense that the framing of teenage engagement with the politics of

prejudice would be different to its formal counterpart.

When discussing central themes of the politics of prejudice such as racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Catholicism, *Seventeen* framed these issues as detrimental to American society. The magazine preached tolerance and the promotion of brotherhood, yet how far did they really expect readers to go in their efforts to carry out these ideals? The primary focus of much of the content pertaining to prejudice was to educate readers on the harmful effects of discriminating based on race and/or religion. For instance, fictional stories involving prejudice effectively communicated the negative emotions elicited by intolerant and ignorant attitudes towards race and/or religion. Admittedly, articles often encouraged readers to share this education with peers, family, and wider community. In so doing, *Seventeen* arguably promoted engagement with the politics of prejudice via education and, to a much lesser extent, participation. However, despite the proliferation of youth activism within the civil rights movement, including the existence of multiple organisations in which teenagers could participate, *Seventeen* avoided explicitly endorsing active participation per se. Instead, *Seventeen* encouraged readers to participate by means of letter-writing, reporting, opinion pieces, and Q&A panels. Suffice it to say, readers required little encouragement when it came to expressing opinions on the politics of prejudice, and many of the most ardent letters relate to this topic. The passion that readers and contributors exhibited when commenting on prejudice between 1940 and 1970 can be attributed to the fusion of an intrinsically personal issue and the increasingly public attention paid towards it. It would not be unreasonable to say that *Seventeen's* coverage of the politics of prejudice was noticeably slanted towards the personal element of this issue. Possibly, editors did not view active participation in the public side of the politics of prejudice as an acceptable

or appropriate form of political engagement for young American women. Perhaps exogenous political and cultural factors were at play. I would argue that it was a combination of the two: political and cultural factors helped shape the perceived ideal model of political engagement in the politics of prejudice for young American women. This model was undoubtedly and inextricably tied to the fact that the young women in question were just that – young women.

At the heart of this thesis lies a desire to explore the political engagement of young American women, and so the politics of gender has been a particularly salient undercurrent throughout this work. However, focusing on the politics of gender in and of itself is equally important, especially so given the inherently gendered characteristic of *Seventeen* as a magazine aimed at a specifically female audience. Due to the unequivocally public nature of mass-media, *Seventeen* brought gender politics into the public sphere of teenage culture. The publishing of reader-responses, and the inclusion of teen-authored content enabled young American women to engage in gender politics in a highly visible way. The framing of gender politics within *Seventeen*, as with the other types of political issues discussed, fluctuated over the course of the twenty-six years studied. As desirable as it would be to be able to pinpoint clear moments of change, or pick out a clear and logical trajectory, the primary evidence is instead plagued by contradictions, conflict and inconsistencies.

Regarding content, *Seventeen* oscillated between endorsing the presence of women in the public sphere and reiterating the pitfalls of doing so. Thus, often within a short period of time, readers could expect content proclaiming the advantages of higher education when applying for jobs, followed by articles reminding them that they were

nonetheless expected to set these careers aside to make way for marriage and motherhood. Here, again, we see *Seventeen* as an important site where contradictory and conflicting frames or outlooks could be debated. Content concerning gender expectations within the private sphere evidenced slightly less discord. Traditional ideals of femininity comprising inferiority, duty and delicacy were common throughout much of the time period under consideration. However, as previously mentioned, the public and the private are not separate entities, but interconnected in a myriad of ways. Both teen-authored content and letters, spanning across the period 1944 to 1970, suggest that readers were increasingly aware of the notion that gender politics within the public sphere had effects for those in the private sphere and vice versa,

The teen-authored content and the letters-to-the-editor concerning gender politics constitute not only the majority of *Seventeen*'s politically-inclined material, but also some of the most impassioned sentiments of all those examined. This is not to say that between 1944 and 1970 *Seventeen* readers were trailblazing feminists. Indeed, many of the letters advocate for the strengthening of traditional ideals of femininity and critique harshly suggestions to the opposite. However, as early as 1949 readers were questioning the status quo regarding gender roles and expectations. During the second half of the 1960s, letters and content relating to gender politics evidenced an acute awareness of pervasive gender inequality within American society. Opposition towards the double-standard that women faced in both their private lives, and within the public domain was becoming increasingly explicit. Influenced by other political and cultural factors, readers utilised the public platform the *Seventeen* presented (either by writing letters or contributing content), to engage with contemporary gender politics. Despite this being the case, editors did not, as they had with formal politics, encourage political

participation or political activism when it came to gender politics. Perhaps the editorial team were all too aware that, as one reader pointed out, *Seventeen* itself contributed to many of the issues encompassed within gender politics. If this was indeed the case, encouraging readers to challenge dominant attitudes towards gender expectations and actively attempt to incite change would have been to draw attention to the magazine's own shortcomings.

The extent to which *Seventeen* framed engagement with 'politics' as an integral and positive aspect to a young woman's character varied depending on which element of politics was under the microscope. At different times, young women were encouraged to educate themselves about, participate in, and partake in activism regarding formal politics. The politics of prejudice was, however, slightly more delicate territory considering *Seventeen*'s largely white, middle-class demographic. As such, amidst calls for tolerance and brotherhood in keeping with the magazine's anti-prejudice stance, *Seventeen* also featured content that if published today would be considered highly problematic. Although well intentioned, many of the articles geared towards combatting racial and religious prejudice, lacked due sensitivity and inadvertently contributed towards the issue. The resultant reader-responses prove that readers themselves were in fact aware of this paradox. Rather than overtly encourage readers to participate in the activism of the civil rights movement, *Seventeen* invited readers to engage with this facet of the politics of prejudice via exposure to content authored by African American teenagers, some of whom *had* had experience with such activism. Likewise, the type of engagement that *Seventeen* envisioned for readers with regards to gender politics was arguably less obvious than that proposed for formal politics. Q&A sessions and expert advice on private matters such as sex and dating were

paired with information on colleges and tips on how to enter the workplace. By far the most visible form of political engagement, across all three types of politics, was the letter writing that readers participated in.

The letters-to-the-editor in *Seventeen* magazine are an incredibly valuable site from which an historian can gauge the political engagement of young American women. The voices represented in these letters constitute an important lacuna in the history of American politics, and the history of young American women. Necessarily limited in its scope, this thesis tackles merely the tip of the iceberg. Much would be gained from further research into popular teenage magazines as vehicles for the political engagement of young women. For example, discussion beyond formal politics, the politics of prejudice, and gender politics would enable the production of a comprehensive study of the political engagement of young American women. Additionally, further investigation into the editorial history of *Seventeen* would no doubt shed further light on the decisions surrounding the framing of politics and political engagement. A closer analysis of the letters themselves, with specific attention to the geographical origin of respondents, may also enhance our understanding of why certain readers held the views that they held. Advertisements are a key component of magazines and investigating which advertisements are placed next to which articles could prove enlightening, particularly given the consumerism of American society at this time. Attention to the magazine covers, also, may further illuminate trends in terms of what kinds of articles were featured on the cover. Apropos the articles themselves, examining the placement of articles, both literally and under which category they fell within the contents, might offer insight into what types of articles editors thought most likely to pique readers' interests. Likewise, inquiry into the column inches afforded to each article could

support any arguments drawn from the aforementioned investigations. Despite these absences, it is my hope that this thesis has quashed any lingering doubts as to the political engagement of young American women between 1944 and 1970.

It is paramount that as historians we do not underestimate the ability of young women of the past, both in America and across the world, to assert their political agency and engage in important political issues. Teenagers may not have the ability to pass laws or vote to elect those who do possess that power, yet teenagers carry forward the political, cultural, and social experiences of their youth into adulthood as enfranchised citizens. Teenage experiences were inevitably shaped by public policy, therefore it is imprudent to assume that they did not engage with the politics surrounding such policies. The recent flourishing of youth-mobilised political movements – the latest being the #NeverAgain campaign for gun-control – suggests that the political engagement of young women demonstrated in this thesis is far from a historical phenomenon limited to the period 1944 to 1970. This continuation of youth political engagement emphasises the importance of re-examining traditional considerations of the political engagement not only of young women, but of youth in general.

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