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# "Not Your Mother's PTA": Women's Political Activism in Twentieth-Century America

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**“NOT YOUR MOTHER’S PTA”:  
WOMEN’S POLITICAL ACTIVISM IN  
TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICA**

by

**JENNIFER LYNN MCPHERSON**

B.A., History, Murray State University, 2008

M.A., Murray State University, 2010

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**History**

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**July, 2017**

*To my parents, Tina and Chris.*

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**“NOT YOUR MOTHER’S PTA”:  
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AMERICA**

**by**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Not Your Mother’s PTA: Women’s Political Activism in Twentieth-Century*

*America* provides the first in-depth study of women’s political activism in the National PTA and its local PTA units. It closely examines how women integrated themselves and their ideas on women’s and children’s welfare reform into government from the 1890s through the 1970s. This project explores the resources, strategies, and methods used by PTA women working for women and children’s interests at the local and national level, primarily in public schools and government agencies. *Not Your Mother’s PTA* challenges the subtext of the PTA mother/housewife and shows how women used the language and identity of motherhood and later parenthood to expand women’s role in government, increase women’s political activism, and its ability to sustain a Progressive-era, female-led maternalist organization in the face of transformative social, economic, and racial changes in the twentieth century.

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## INTRODUCTION

“If only fifty mothers come,” Alice McLellan Birney, a former Georgia schoolteacher and mother of three, wrote to her sister-in-law in 1897, “I shall be satisfied. Yes, even if only twenty-five are there.”<sup>1</sup> Although cautious in her letter, Birney must have been delighted to see over two thousand white, middle- and upper-class women, and no more than half a dozen men, show up for the first gathering of the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) on 17 February 1897 in Washington, D.C. On that brisk and windy February morning, women from across the nation flooded in “like a tidal wave” into Arlington Hotel—Washington, D.C.’s premier-politicians’ hostelry. Birney’s fear that the “large banquet hall might appear empty and depressing to a handful of delegates” proved unfounded.<sup>2</sup> Organizers turned away several hundred attendees and directed them to an overflow area set up at the First Baptist Church just blocks away from the conference hotel. Several members of the press reported the Congress’ proceedings from the church’s baptismal basin. Those women, and the select few men lucky enough to find a seat in the Arlington, waited to hear from Birney, president of the newly formed congress and they craned their necks to catch a glimpse of the “grande dame of the capital,” Phoebe Apperson Hearst who was there to accept the position of vice-president of the Mothers’ Congress. For the first time in the history of the United States, American women organized a democratic assembly mobilizing the “mothers of the nation” as

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<sup>1</sup> Alice McLellan Birney quoted in *Golden Jubilee History, 1897–1947* (Chicago, IL: National Congress of Parent and Teachers Association, 1947), 10.

<sup>2</sup> “In Retrospect,” in “In Tribute to Phoebe Apperson Hearst, Founders Day Observance, February 17, 1958, hosted by National Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, California,” fol. 130, box. 22, series 3, National Parent Teacher Association Records (PTAR), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago (hereafter cited as PTAR / UIC Archives); Alice McLellan Birney quoted in *Golden Jubilee History*, 10; and, “The Weather Today,” *Morning Times* (Washington, D.C.), February 17, 1897, 4.

a nonpartisan counterpart to the partisan, all-male U.S. Congress.<sup>3</sup> Women's overwhelming turnout for the first Mothers' Congress, which surprised even its convener, represented women's increasing demand for political participation in a republic that continued to deny them full citizenship rights on account of their sex.

The women who crammed into the 600 seats and filled the hotel corridors, I argue, found organizing around motherhood a powerful pathway towards securing greater political rights and authority for women. Indeed, the first national delegates to the Mothers' Congress identified themselves as mothers, which they argued should be a political and protected class of citizens. They castigated the government for failing to represent or consult with mothers on a wide range of issues concerning women's and children's welfare and offered their Congress as a solution.

In its official call for delegates, the NCM had asked for "every city and town and village" to send at least one representative to Washington. Two hundred ninety-three delegates representing twenty-seven states showed up.<sup>4</sup> Not every women's organization sent female participants, although the vast majority did. The Mothers' Club of San Francisco, California, nominated one young man, a recent graduate of San Francisco State University to represent them.<sup>5</sup> Female delegates to the first Mothers' Congress were clubwomen, teachers, nurses, reporters, writers, and educational theorists. They represented the nation's literary

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<sup>3</sup> "The Congress of Mothers; First Session of the Convention Held in the Arlington Hotel, Washington; Address of the President; To Prepare the Child for its Future the Most Important Duty of Mothers—The Delegates Received by Mrs. Cleveland," *New York Times*, February 18, 1897, 1.

<sup>4</sup> "List of Delegates," Appendix, in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers; First Annual Session; Held in the City of Washington, D.C., February 17, 18, and 19, 1897; Including the Journal of Proceedings, the Addresses, and Discussions, and Other Miscellany of the Meetings* (NY: D. Appleton & Co., 1897), 258–269; and "Official Call to the First National Congress of Mothers," leaflet reprinted in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, vii–ix.

<sup>5</sup> "No Hats Will be Worn; That and Other Reforms at the Mother's Congress," *Kansas City (KS) Star*, February 17, 1897, 5.

and cultural organizations, women's societies and clubs, state branches of the General Federation of Women's Clubs (GFWC), the Woman's Suffrage League, the National Association for Colored Women (NACW), the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), the women's committee for the YMCA, mothers' and teachers associations, city kindergarten associations, public library associations, the Fröebel Institute, medical and legal societies, and the National Press Association.<sup>6</sup> Few if any of them had policymaking, legislative, or managerial experience in governmental affairs, but many drew on their organizational experience from those groups as they founded the NCM.

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For more than a century, the National PTA, the successor to the National Congress of Mothers, has advocated for increased federal support of public education and lobbied Americans, in particular women, to become more involved in their neighborhood schools as an extension of civic responsibility. Progressive Era clubwomen Alice McLellan Birney and Phoebe Apperson Hearst established NCM in 1897 as a maternalist organization and an apolitical counterpart to the U.S. Congress but soon after its founding, however, the NCM became incredibly political. The political changes of the 1920s, especially the woman suffrage amendment, altered NCM's strategy of organizing around motherhood. This change is most visibly recognizable in members' decision to change its name in 1924 to the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT).<sup>7</sup> Prior to suffrage female organizers depended on

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<sup>6</sup> "Greetings," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 268.

<sup>7</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I shift between NCM, NCM-PT, NCPT, and the National PTA to refer to the association at key moments in its national history. In 1907, the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) established a department of parent-teacher associations and incorporated the division into its official name by 1908—the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations (NCM-PT). By 1924, the organization dropped the work "mother" from its name and has since been

women's common bond of motherhood and their affiliation with multiple women's clubs to direct women's energies and political interests. Afterwards, the organization came to rely almost exclusively on local parent-teacher associations to create entry points for women to join the political process. Since then the NCPT has been informally known as the National PTA and has continued to create space in American government, not only in public schools but also in state and federal agencies, for women to implement and manage government programs and services directed at children's health, education, and welfare.

Current literature that does acknowledge the National PTA makes small nods toward its establishment in 1897 as a national maternalist organization but has not explored its development over the course of the twentieth century. Scholars such as Nancy Cott, Theda Skocpol, Seth Koven, Sonya Michel, Linda Gordon, and Molly Ladd-Taylor have all acknowledged the PTA's development from the 1890s to the 1920s but have declined to examine the organization's changing role in American society and women's political activism in the association beyond the 1920s.<sup>8</sup> For example, in *The Grounding of Modern*

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formally known as the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT) and branded as the National PTA. If speaking generally about the organization I will use "National Congress" or "National PTA." When discussing local, county, and state PTAs, I will reference the school, city, county, or state-name associated with the specific PTA unit. For historical shifts in the association's naming see National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, *Twenty Years' Work for Child Welfare, 1897-1917* (n.p.: National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, 1917); and, National Congress of Parent and Teachers Association, *Golden Jubilee History, 1897-1947* (Chicago, IL: National Congress of Parent and Teachers Association, 1947).

<sup>8</sup> For scholars writing on the National Congress of Mothers and the National Parent Teacher Association, see Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press/Harvard University, 1992); Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of the Welfare State* (NY: Routledge, 1993); Linda Gordon, *Pitied But Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (NY: Free Press, 1994); Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Charlene K. Haar, *The Politics of the PTA* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002); Anne Meiss Knupfer and Christine Woyshner, eds., *the Education Work of Women's Organizations, 1890-1960* (NY: Palgrave

*Feminism*, Cott contends that the decline of women's membership in the National Woman's Party, GFWC, National Consumers League, and the National Women's Trade Union League, following suffrage did not "mean that women's political interest and activism were decimated." Rather, Cott points out "where one large or vital pre-1920 women's organization declined or ended, more than one other arose to take its space, if not its exact place." Cott notes that the National Congress of Mothers and its successor the National Congress of Parents and Teachers "gathered a massive membership" following suffrage, but she doesn't follow their story.<sup>9</sup> I expand on this literature by demonstrating first that while the National PTA began as a maternalist organization, the NCM had a larger reach than previous scholars have given it credit for. Second, I show how the National PTA evolved into a powerful national advocacy and lobbying network as women's political access changed during the twentieth century.

There are few investigations that examine the National PTA beyond its founding and early activities during the Progressive Era.<sup>10</sup> One major study has looked at the origins of the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT) and the role of race in developing a parallel organization to the National PTA in the twentieth century. Education scholar Christine Woysner's *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970*

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Macmillan, 2008); Christine Woysner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 86-7. Fellow women's historian Kathryn Kish Sklar also argues that by the 1920s women's interests and activism in social-welfare work began to decline and notes the increase in NCM's membership and activities despite the decline elsewhere in women's voluntary organizations. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Historical Foundations of Women's Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930," in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, eds. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (NY: Routledge, 1993), 43-5.

<sup>10</sup> For scholars who have written specifically on the National PTA see Woysner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement* and Haar, *The Politics of the PTA*; and, Knupfer and Woysner, eds., *The Education Work of Women's Organizations*.

demonstrates the key role race played from the organization's beginning and examines the bottom-up development of local black PTAs in the American South.<sup>11</sup> However, no current study examines the overarching local and national development of the National PTA over the course of the twentieth century.

My dissertation, *Not Your Mother's PTA: Women's Political Activism in Twentieth-Century America*, uncovers collaborations between suffragists, early feminists, and clubwomen who merged motherhood rhetoric, women's rights, and suffrage demands to generate greater opportunities for women to participate in the political system.<sup>12</sup> Other scholars have described PTA women as "sentimental maternalists" with little to no engagement with suffragists and suffrage organizations. Instead I contend that women, especially those in the NCM, deployed maternalism as a tool to broaden women's political spaces. Women tended to participate in multiple groups and the NCM and later the National PTA used these networks to build a broad membership base of highly trained, educated, and politically connected women.

Unlike previous scholars, I find evidence of women's suffrage activity in the NCM at the national and state level, especially in state congresses in the West. For example in this project, I examine the role of Colorado suffragists in the founding of the Colorado Congress of Mothers in 1907 and document the role of women's suffrage networks in assisting the National Congress to increase women's participation and activism. To date I have found no

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<sup>11</sup> Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement*.

<sup>12</sup> In *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, sociologist Theda Skocpol describes the actions and work of the maternalist associations, like the NCM, as "symbiotically tied to government," and as sources of "popular power and public leverage in American democracy." See, Theda Skocpol, "How America Became Civic," in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, eds. Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press / New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 55-60.



other scholar who discusses the presence or guidance of suffragists in the NCM. I can only speculate that this is more than likely due to the National Congress' failure to adopt suffrage as part of its national platform policy in 1900.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, western female delegates, especially those in Colorado who had won the right to vote in 1893, moved forward and used suffrage to encourage women's participation in Mothers' Congress. My focus on western suffragists organizing the Colorado Congress of Mothers and assisting in the development of the parent-teacher associations across the state offers current scholars an example of women's strategies and the actions of feminist organizations pre-and post-suffrage.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See, "Suffrage Question is Up; On Which Dissension is Likely Before Congress Ends," *Des Moines (IA) Register*, May 24, 1900; "Mothers' Congress Ends; Equal Suffrage Ignored in the Resolutions," *Des Moines (IA) Register*, May 26, 1900; and, "Remarks by SBA to the National Congress of Mothers," 27 February 1902, in *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony: An Awful Hush, 1895 to 1906*, ed. Ann D. Gordon (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 425-27.

<sup>14</sup> In labeling PTA women's political activism as *feminist* I follow the work of women's historian Linda Gordon in applying the term to U.S. women's activities prior to 1910 and argue a feminist agenda evolved out of the ideologies of childwelfare and maternalism. Gordon has written extensively on the two ideologies as feminist reform, particularly in her examination of the events surrounding a 1904 abduction of Irish orphans by "vigilante" white mothers in an Arizona mining camp and in the development of the U.S. Children's Bureau in 1912, see Linda Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Gordon finds it "hardly surprising" that women introduced child-rearing responsibilities as woman's civic obligation into "organized political activity" in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Childwelfare ideology, she cautions, "is by no means exclusively a women's or feminist point of view," but it does underscore both perspectives. "Putting-children-first," Gordon argues, has always closely linked women's civic virtue, political power, and motherhood together. In this regard, Gordon traces the use of childwelfare ideology, "putting-children-first," back to the mid-nineteenth century when arguments for "moral suasion" began to shift towards a more pragmatic "political" discourse. Gordon identified four distinct stages of women's philanthropic work over the course of the nineteenth century that influenced women's political ideologies in the twentieth century: early nineteenth-century benevolence organizations; antebellum social reforms; increased patriotism and organizing on behalf of the Union during the Civil War; and activism spurred by immigration and urbanization in the decades following the war. Gordon challenges historians to consider these four periods of increased women's activism not as separate movements or epochs but rather as a continuation of women's political tradition. By extending the legacy of feminist action and finding roots in early benevolent work in the mid-nineteenth century, Gordon argues historians should consider childwelfare work and by extension, maternalists as "(generically) feminists." In struggling to find a term to encompass a legacy of women's activism, Gordon admits that while "some historians argue to restrict *feminist* to apply to a new, early twentieth-century perspective, and to a time when the word was used by women activists themselves. . . . I think there is a need for a generic word that identifies continuities across

Examining the dynamics between the National PTA and its local PTAs also offers opportunities to assess how women's political access changed during the twentieth century and thus to address recent scholarship on the political changes at mid-century. In the PTA liberal and conservative women confronted each other within the same organization over issues of school desegregation, federal aid to education, and national affiliation. Sociologist Robert Putnam's hugely influential work on civil society entitled *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* argues that democratic organizations, like the PTA, have been declining since the 1950s as a result of two-income households, suburbanization, and increased distrust in the federal government's ability to meet citizens' needs. Putnam explores the PTA's falling membership in the 1960s and 1970s and attributes the decline to school politics, membership dues, and more importantly to school desegregation.<sup>15</sup> Putnam finds correlation between parents' detachment from the PTA and

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longer historical time . . . among women activists who explicitly sought to raise the status of women, and I know no other term." See Linda Gordon, "Putting Children First: Women, Maternalism, and Welfare in the Early Twentieth Century," in *U.S. History as Women's History*, eds. Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 63-86. Other scholars have also attempted to generalize feminism and to conceptualize a "more dynamic, more supple, and more comprehensive" term. Regrettably no new term has emerged though; rather scholars have developed multiple qualifiers establishing a catalogue of feminism. Karen Offen's grappling of the term has influenced my own understanding of the feminist work of the National Congress of Mothers. In 1988, Offen proposed two new categories to conceptualize a broader, more inclusive understanding of feminist action before 1900—relational and individualist feminism. She posits, "relational feminism emphasized women's rights *as women* (defined principally by their childbearing and/or nurturing capacities) in relation to men. [Relational feminism] insisted on *women's* distinctive contributions in these roles to the broader society and [women] made claims on the commonwealth on the basis of these contributions." Conversely, she argues that individualist feminism "downplay[ed], deprecate[ed], or dismiss[ed] as insignificant all socially defined roles and minimize[ed] discussion of sex-linked qualities or contributions, including childbearing and its attendant responsibilities," Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1988), 120, 136.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 56-57. For more on civic engagement as social capital see Skocpol and Fiorina, *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*.

disengagement in public schools as a sign of decreasing social capital in America.<sup>16</sup> *Not Your Mother's PTA* takes up this line of argument by exploring the decline of parent involvement and the PTA more closely in the National PTA's engagement with ultraconservatives in the 1960s and its struggle to combat racism and discrimination within its local and state chapters.

In the 1990s, the field of women's political history saw a major *focus* on women's politics in the Progressive Era and recently there's been a major *focus* on conservative women in the 1950s and 60s. In line with these interests scholarship that has addressed the National PTA has mainly *focused* on its beginnings in the Progressive Era and in a select few cases, on the ultraconservative takeovers in the 1960s and early 1970s. *Not Your Mother's PTA* offers an understanding of how women's political activism, both liberal and conservative, between the Progressive Era and the rise of modern conservatism are connected. Recognizing how women's political activism from 1930s and 1950s bridged these two periods of extreme transformation in women's political work is necessary to reveal how the early and mid-century are connected. Studying the PTA during this period reveals a massive blossoming of local women's activism that emerged from Progressive-era organizations and laid the groundwork for conservative grassroots networks in the second-half of the century.

Indeed, this long view of women's politics allows me to engage with a growing scholarship on conservative women's political activism. Historians have examined conservative women's activism and the rise "housewife populism" in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s during the rise of the New American Right.<sup>17</sup> Historians Lisa McGirr and Michelle

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<sup>16</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 302.

<sup>17</sup> See Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012). For more on women's

Nickerson both examine conservative women's grassroots organizing in Southern California and situate the development of the New American Right at the kitchen tables of white, middle class suburban mothers and fathers. McGirr and Nickerson both acknowledge that the political transformation of conservatism during this period was accompanied by an increase in ultraconservative organizations such as the John Birch Society (JBS). Each historian cites JBS's targeted attacks on local PTAs and identifies the PTA as a point of entry for JBS to overrun public schools. Indeed, the attacks on liberalism in the 1960s by the John Birch Society severely weakened the PTA's national relationship with its local units resulting in organizational discord.

Up to this point, however, scholars have not addressed exactly why PTAs fell so easily to JBS and ultraconservatives. A long view of the PTA's history reveals the mounting tensions between local communities and the national government and exposes the PTA's weaknesses that the organizations like the JBS so easily manipulated. Thus, this study pursues that question and more clearly shows why liberal-leaning PTAs failed to stop ultraconservatives from decimating their organization.

Where I can, I have sought to discover the everyday concerns of PTA members on the local level in comparison to the interests of the leadership at the national level. In particular I explore ultraconservatives' impact on democracy, public schools, and communities. Organizations like JBS succeeded in taking over PTAs because they used racism and the language of individual rights as a weapon to flip PTA members against "big government," public welfare provisions, and the National PTA itself. By examining the anxieties and fears

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political activism and in the 1950s and 1960s see Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1994); and Daniel Horowitz, *Betty Friedan and the Making of the Feminine Mystique: The American Left, the Cold War, and Modern Feminism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998).

of PTA members on the right and left, *Not Your Mother's PTA* attempts to understand how women in the PTA viewed themselves and their civic responsibilities in this period.

My focus on school integration in Denver, the rise of ultraconservatism in the West, and the “white flight” of PTA parents also builds on recent scholarship from Kevin Kruse, Lisa McGirr, Michelle Nickerson, and Thomas Sugrue.<sup>18</sup> The tensions that resulted in the rise of the New Right also impacted the PTA, which saw its numbers fall dramatically after 1963. As scholars of white flight Kruse, Nickerson, and Sugrue have demonstrated the politics of race played a central role in the relationship between urban areas and their suburban communities.<sup>19</sup> These politics also affected the relationship between the National PTA and its local PTAs as well as their responses to ultraconservative opposition to school integration and busing.<sup>20</sup> While their studies focus on Northern and Southern urban areas in which race

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*; Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); and Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (NY: Random House, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Historians discussing the school integration frequently focus on the North, South, or Sunbelt region and emphasize the black-white binary of school desegregation. See J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *From Brown to Bakke: The Supreme Court and School Integration, 1954-1978* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1979); Raymond Walters, *The Burden of Brown: Thirty Years of School Desegregation* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1984); Ronald P. Formisano, *Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Gary Orfield and Susan Eaton, *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (NY: New Press, 1996); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007); Kruse, *White Flight*; and Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*. Recently historian Danielle R. Olden has explored the application of the “black-white” binary in Denver and its impact on Mexican American and bilingual education in Danielle R. Olden, “Becoming Minority: Mexican Americans, Race, and the Legal Struggle for Educational Equity in Denver, Colorado,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 48 (Spring 2017), 43–66.

<sup>20</sup> Kruse, *White Flight*, 7, 11. Urban and political scholars who have linked urbanization to the political resurgence of conservatives in the postwar period include, Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Lassiter, *Silent Majority*; and Michelle Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*.

was seen as a black-white binary, *Not Your Mother's PTA* demonstrates that in some ways white suburban PTA parents in the West used very similar strategies to challenge court-mandated school integration despite the fact that Denver, Colorado, was a multiracial western city with a large Hispanic population.<sup>21</sup> Just as in Atlanta and Detroit, they fled Denver's school districts and city boundaries following compulsory busing mandates. In another way, however, Colorado followed a unique path. In 1974, Coloradans overwhelmingly voted to amend the state constitution. The new amendment, referred to as the Poundstone Amendment, stopped Denver from expanding its city and county boundaries thus eliminating Denver's power to annex territory—primarily white suburban neighborhoods—into the multiracial city. Second, the amendment also prohibited the use of compulsory busing to achieve racial balance in Colorado's schools. The passage of the Poundstone Amendment was seen across Colorado as a victory for white, suburban Coloradans.

Historian Kevin Kruse's *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* provides a useful conceptual model for studying the ideological movement of white flight. In his book, Kruse examines “the lives of ordinary segregationists” and the rise of white suburbia in Atlanta during the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>22</sup> He sets out to determine how

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<sup>21</sup> For a discussion on the American West's “racial frontier” and the multiracial setting in the West, see Richard White, “Race Relations in the American West,” *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 396-416; Patricia Nelson Limerick, “The American West: From Exceptionalism to Internationalism,” in *The States of U.S. History*, ed. Melvyn Stokes (Oxford: Berg, 2002), 285-306; Elliott West, “Expanding the Racial Frontier,” *The Historian* 66 (2004): 552-556; John Mack Faragher, “The Social Fabric of the American West,” *The Historian* 66 (2004): 442-454; and Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights in California, 1941-1978* (NY: Oxford, 2010). Scholars writing on the development of Denver and its urbanization, include Lyle Dorsett, *The Queen City: A History of Denver* (Boulder, CO: Pruett, 1977); Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990); Kathleen Brosnan, *Uniting Mountain and Plain: Cities, Law, and Environmental Change along the Front Range* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); and B. Erin Cole, “R-0: Race, Sexuality, and Single-Family Zoning in Denver's Park Hill and Capitol Hill Neighborhoods, 1956-1989,” (PhD diss., University of New Mexico, 2014).

<sup>22</sup> Kruse, *White Flight*, 8.

segregationists “understood themselves,” how they used positive “rights” to discriminate against black families and communities, and how they created a new landscape of white political resistance.<sup>23</sup> While Kruse and other scholars have acknowledged the role of education in white flight, they have not closely examined the PTA’s response to those educational changes. *Not Your Mother’s PTA* investigates the actions of PTA members on the neighborhood level and reveals complex navigation of white flight and its impact on public schools in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Although the National PTA supported racial integration and favored compulsory busing, local PTA leaders and parents, like those in Ash Grove School in southeast Denver, did not. White PTA parents chose to dissolve their PTA charter in response to court-ordered busing and the organizational-mandate from the National PTA to support racial integration in the schools.<sup>24</sup> They then reformed as an independent Parent Teacher Organization specific to their individual school and unaffiliated with the national organization. This was a strategy used by many PTAs across the country. As a result, the National PTA’s membership plummeted and it lost influence on the national political scene. These actions reflect Kruse’s assertion that the process of “white flight” is about more than physical movement. Rather, white flight, according to Kruse, represents fundamental transformations in conservative political ideology. I agree with Kruse and further claim that examining white flight in the PTA reveals how white parents fundamentally restructured government and individual civic responsibilities in public schools. Millions of PTA parents across the nation rejected the

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>24</sup> Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*, 7, 11. Urban and political scholars who have linked urbanization to the political resurgence of conservatives in the postwar period include, Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*; McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*; Lassiter, *Silent Majority*; and Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*.

National PTA and its vision of broad community responsibility. Instead, they shunned the national organization and focused only on the school and institutions in which they had a personal stake. This shift from national responsibility to individual interests in the PTA only reinforced more subtle practices of political divisiveness and racial segregation in public schools, North, South, and West.

I also build on existing scholarship on the role of public schools in democracies and women's reform efforts in public education in the late nineteenth and show women continuing this activism into the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> The National PTA emerged as the leading national education organization for women interested in women and children's welfare, public service, and issue-centered advocacy. My history of the National PTA and women's involvement in the development of America's public schools at key moments unsettles the previous assumption that the National PTA has been a "top-down" organization. Instead it highlights local women's role in subsidizing educational resources and programs on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education. This revision also shows how local PTA units came to overshadow the National PTA's influence in local schools and state departments of public instruction.

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<sup>25</sup> For the growth of women's organizations and women's involvement in education in the nineteenth-century see, Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Catharine Beecher: A Study in American Domesticity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973); Rosenberg, Rosalind, *Beyond Separate Spheres: Intellectual Roots of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Helen L. Horowitz, *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in Women's Colleges from Their Nineteenth Century Beginnings to the 1930s* (NY: Aldred A. Knopf, 1984); Solomon, Barbara, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women and Higher Education in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*; Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1990); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Linda Gordon, "Black and White Visions of Welfare: Women's Welfare Activism, 1890-1945," *Journal of American History* 78 (September 1991): 559-90; and Jessica Ellen Sewell, *Women and the Everyday City: Public Space in San Francisco, 1890-1915* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).



Over the course of the twentieth-century women's political activism in the PTA has been ignored because of the tension between the National Congress and its local PTA units as well as persistent stereotypes of the organization and its members. First, misrepresentations and confusion over the organization's national program and objectives has been longstanding. From the outset, the National Congress faced the challenge of crafting a national narrative while drumming up local interest and meeting a spectrum of parental and community concerns. By the mid-twentieth century, local PTAs had expanded annual programs and activities to address specific community matters related to health, education, and welfare so successfully that the local narrative began to supersede the national agenda. Second, misperceptions about the work of the "PTA mother" first emerged in the 1910s and 1920s as local PTA units used tea socials and other gatherings to attract new recruits to school PTA meetings. This perception of a "tea 'n' cake" organization persisted well into the 1950s and permeated postwar America.

To move beyond these perceptions and unearth women's political engagement and activity this study relies largely on institutional records from the National PTA and official documents from state and local PTA units. National and state PTA records although highly bureaucratic reveal women's voices and career trajectories within the organization. Mining presidential and congressional addresses, state and local unit summary reports, and intradepartmental minutes and memos, I document women's experience with policymaking and legislative procedures as well as the strategies and methods used by the PTA to prepare women for political and civic engagement.

While national and state PTA archives are more easily accessible and organized, local PTA documents by and large are maintained if the organization remains active or if the unit's

historian donates records to either a local library or the state PTA. The PTA archives of Ash Grove Elementary School were donated to the Denver Public Library; however, the collection remains largely unprocessed. My examination of Ash Grove's PTA scrapbooks created by the local PTA historian offers insight into how PTA women understood themselves and the value of their work. In my discussion of the Ash Grove PTA and the Arapahoe County PTA, I frequently use the organizations' scrapbooks to highlight women's involvement in key educational programs and community outreach activities. The strengths of the PTA sources are also their weaknesses. National, state, and local PTA manuscript collections provide a unique perspective on how PTA members thought of its organization, its objectives, and its public image. However, it is also a very insular perspective of the organization. Nonetheless, I contend that the first step to understanding women's political activism in the PTA requires investigating its members' self-conception before addressing the cultural and societal perceptions outside of the PTA. As such, *Not Your Mother's PTA* is the first study to address PTA women's perception of themselves as political agents of change. Where possible and appropriate I have included outside opinions of the PTA to emphasize the National PTA's confusion over its message, agenda, and membership responsibilities.

As part of this case study, I have used the Colorado State PTA and a local school PTA located in southeast Denver to trace women's bureaucratic influence from one single school district to the halls of the U.S. Congress. In particular, I focus on county, state, and national PTA leaders as their voices and career paths are more closely recorded and documented because the National PTA reprinted staff directories, presidential addresses, and congressional hearings and proceedings in PTA bulletins and nationally circulated magazines

and pamphlets. Moreover, local unit summary reports and minutes from state presidents' meetings divulge the PTA's fear concerning threats made by ultraconservatives and the deep anxiety over the impact organizations like the JBS would have on American public schools and communities.

The confusion over what the PTA does and identifying a "PTA mother" has emerged more recently in the National PTA's own conversation over how the PTA of today is different than the PTA that operated for the better part of the twentieth century. For example in 1995, at the National PTA's annual convention, the National PTA president Kathryn Whitfill claimed the organization was more diverse in terms of race, gender, class, and region than it was in the 1950s. She counseled her delegates and state leaders to remember that as a result of these changes the PTA was no longer an organization catering to white, suburban families as it had before. "Your PTA is not your mother's PTA," she noted. In 2003 the *New York Times* reported on the increase in father-volunteers in the PTA and similar organizations. Frank Kwan, board member of the National PTA, stressed the importance of creating a more gender inclusive organization and claimed that the PTA he oversaw was "not your mother's PTA" because of increasing male-participation.<sup>26</sup> One former local PTA president commented in 2009 that she sent her husband to PTA events after she started a full-

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<sup>26</sup> For National PTA President Kathryn Whitfill's comments see Charles S. Clark, "Parents and Schools," *CQ Researcher*, January 20, 1995 from <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher>; Kate Stone Lombardi, "Traditional Women's Groups are Neither," *New York Times*, December 7, 2003. For a sampling of organizations that have used the phrase or scholars that have deployed the motto see, Eric Wat, "Not your mother's PTA: beyond the call for desegregation, community organizations of parents and students of color are building campaigns for racial equity within and beyond the schools," in *Colorlines Magazine*, June 22, 2004; Carlina Brown, "Leadership and Advocacy: A Recipe for Success," *Huffington Post*, August 13, 2012, [www.huffingtonpost.com/carlina-brown/pta-teacher-parent-engagement-\\_b\\_1773807.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/carlina-brown/pta-teacher-parent-engagement-_b_1773807.html); and Brunno V. Manno, "NOT Your Mother's PTA: Advocacy Groups Raise Money, Voices, Hope," in *EducationNext*, 12 (winter 2012), [www.educationnext.org/not-your-mothers-pta](http://www.educationnext.org/not-your-mothers-pta).

time job—“It’s not your mother’s PTA, that’s for sure.” Yet, as of 2013 women still make up 75% of the PTA, and white, non-Hispanic people account for almost 70% of the total membership.<sup>27</sup> Local PTA presidents and educators seem to be using the catchphrase “not your mother’s PTA,” to promote parent involvement. While encouraging greater engagement with the schools has been a longstanding objective of the National PTA, the phrase clearly dismisses any and all activism conducted by PTA women earlier in the century as insignificant. For example, career educator Dr. Meryl Ain published “Not Your Mother’s PTA” in 2013 and strongly encouraged parents to become more involved in their child’s PTA. Ain attempted to persuade parents that “today’s PTA is about a lot more than cupcakes,” and noted the many benefits of PTA involvement, including community advocacy, pedagogical expertise, and increased influence on local school boards and committees.<sup>28</sup> Although Ain’s comment was intended to entice parents to become more involved in their child’s PTA, she unintentionally diminished more than a century of women’s political and civic activism in the PTA with those nine words. The idiom “not your mother’s PTA” implies that PTA members, who were predominantly women and many of them mothers, had little to no impact on local and national matters related to women’s and children’s education, health, and welfare.

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<sup>27</sup> In 2013, the National PTA surveyed approximately 300,000 membership cards to determine the self-identified roles, ethnicity, and gender of its membership base. The association identified seven member-categories: parents (76%), teachers (10%), students (8%), grandparent/relative (3%), supporter (2%), guardian (1%), and school administrator (1%). Ethnically the PTA Caucasian/White, Non-Hispanic (69%), African American (11%), Hispanic/Latino (11%), Asian/Pacific Islander (6%), Native American (1%) and Other (3%). Men accounted for 22% of all PTA members. See National Congress of Parents and Teachers, *2013 Annual Report* (Alexandria, VA: National PTA, 2014), 8.

<sup>28</sup> Meryl Ain, “Not Your Mother’s PTA,” *Huffington Post*, September 17, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/meryl-ain-edd/not-your-mothers-pta\\_b\\_3941537.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/meryl-ain-edd/not-your-mothers-pta_b_3941537.html).

The PTA has been an important vehicle for women's political activism and participation from its beginning. Women in the PTA have secured some of the nation's greatest reforms in women's and children's welfare, education, and labor by creating political spaces for themselves and others in public schools and government agencies. However, this activism is often overlooked or misunderstood. This is because often the activism hides in plain sight in the form of book sales and fundraising drives. Additionally, women's political activism in the PTA does not fit traditional definitions of bipartisanship. Instead, PTA women frequently cross political parties to secure rights, funding, and services based on the most pressing needs and concerns of parents, teachers, and school administrators. It is also overlooked because the PTA has not pursued the same strategy—rather, women's activism changes to fit national and local conversations. This activism, however, has been largely misunderstood or overlooked by the public, by scholars, and at times by the PTA itself.

In order to recover that history, Chapter 1 returns to NCM's founding and explores the personal interests of its co-founders, Birney and Hearst. While other scholars who study the PTA focus on Birney as the lead organizer, and indeed, the idea for a Mothers' Congress originated with her, I emphasize Hearst and her philanthropy with kindergarten associations to demonstrate the National PTA's early commitment to women's increasing role in government welfare and educational services for the nation's youngest citizens. In this chapter, I concentrate less on the financial assistance Hearst lent to the NCM. Instead I spotlight Hearst's educational influences and early philanthropic work to illuminate the ways her ideological and programmatic contributions to the association helped women develop the leadership, language, and competencies to begin lobbying for and managing women's and children's welfare reforms.

Chapter 2 documents the development of the Colorado Congress of Mothers (CCM) in 1907 and its commitment to expanding women's suffrage, rights, and political activism before and immediately after the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. As the first suffrage state to organize a state mothers' congress, CCM's development and state organizing capabilities reveals how suffragists within the association used the NCM to advance the call for women's suffrage. I follow state CCM president Florence Dick and her experiences in organizing local and county PTAs to serve as entry points for women's greater opportunities in public life. Following Dick's career in the PTA and her appointments in the Colorado Children's Welfare Bureau and wartime commissions shows the PTA relied on women's close alignment with Colorado's state government to secure new health services and educational standards for rural school populations.

Chapter 3 explores the inner workings of a rural, local PTA, the Ash Grove Parent-Teacher Association of Ash Grove Elementary School, from 1924 to 1957. The school, located in northeastern Arapahoe County, Colorado, from 1898 to 1957, is a snapshot of local PTA activities during the height of the National PTA's membership. By examining local PTAs—such as the Ash Grove PTA and its relationship to the county PTA, the Arapahoe County PTA Council—the importance of the PTA's local organizational structure becomes clearest when the Ash Grove PTA and county PTA provided relief and recovery to local school populations during the Great Depression and World War II. As women's membership rose to new records during wartime, local PTAs provided women greater opportunities to serve the nation. Women's activism and PTA involvement contributed to newly created rural community health clinics, mandatory school immunizations, community-based wartime commissions and agencies, and consolidated and modernized rural schools.

This chapter concludes with the rising tension between Denver and neighboring school districts in northeastern Arapahoe County. In Ash Grove's PTA, women tried to stop the Denver Public School (DPS) system from annexing their school, surrounding school districts, and neighborhoods into DPS's district. Consequentially, this chapter shows local PTA women becoming extremely successful at developing proactive and reactive community PTA programs while increasing their distance from the National PTA to achieve local victories.

Chapter 4 studies the fallout from sixty years of state-supported social welfare provisions through attacks on liberalism, federal support of education, and racial integration. The rise of the ultraconservatism in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the proceeding "PTA takeovers" by members of the John Birch Society signaled the beginning of the National PTA's decline in power. Exploring the PTA's handling of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) and local PTA's response to the school busing order in *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, this chapter reveals how internal and external racial and political frictions severely weakened the National PTA's lobbying-power and local community-partnerships by decreasing its membership from 12 million to just 5 million by the early 1970s. After thousands of local PTAs dissolved in the 1960s and 1970s, the National PTA and state PTAs cut back on publication services and redirected membership funds to reopening its legislative office in Washington, D.C.. The association further recommitted itself to encouraging local women to run for school boards and become politically active in their school communities in an effort to recapture the Progressive-era spirit of women's organizing and activism.

Since the late 1970s, the National PTA has not recovered from its membership loss. It has, however, maintained its commitment to pursuing women's broad political and civic

interests in impacting children’s welfare and education. It’s struggle today is the same as it was in the 1920s and 1930s—defining a single, national narrative and agenda that encapsulates the broad work of 3.8 million members operating more than 24,000 parent-teacher associations located in all fifty states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and across Europe with the U.S. Department of Defense.<sup>29</sup>

In the final pages, I reflect on the lessons learned from the National PTA and women’s political activism in an organization almost a century and a quarter old. I consider how the National PTA and its local units have addressed its complex agenda, which grows daily. And, I offer my advice to future PTA leaders by suggesting they look to their past to understand how to move forward. The National PTA’s engagement with parents and the U.S. government has been one that constantly changed based on the ebbs and flows of national sentiment and attitudes. In order to continue creating opportunities for men and women to advocate on behalf of children’s education and welfare the National PTA and its local PTA units must work in tandem and provide a big tent for parents to debate and become informed on a broad range of issues and interests that are causing immediate impact on America’s children and schools today.

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<sup>29</sup> National Congress of Parents and Teachers. *Annual Report, 2015-2016* (Alexandria, VA: National PTA, 2016), 5-7.



## CHAPTER 1

### *“The Grande Dame of the Capital”: Establishing the National Congress of Mothers, 1897-1907*

The National Congress of Mothers (NCM) between 1897 and 1907 established a bureaucratic framework for white, elite women to pursue political activism and to influence national and state policies concerning women’s and children’s welfare between 1897 and 1907. As the first organization of its kind, both in the United States and in the world, the NCM blended motherhood rhetoric, child and women’s welfare reforms, and women’s rights into a legislative agenda promoting women’s intellectual, political, and civic engagement. As a national association, the NCM relied on existing women’s suffrage networks and coalitions to expand and institutionalize the lines between women’s civic clubs and educational institutions. In the first decade of its existence the NCM built a national coalition of “mothers” to secure education, health, and social welfare reforms for women and children. In so doing the early Mothers’ Congress successfully politicized motherhood to such an extent that the association stripped motherhood of its gendered and biological meanings. Using maternalist language, the NCM argued that all women shared an innate concern for women and children. All women, regardless if they bore children, were “mothers” in the eyes of the National Congress based on their reproductive capacities. The NCM claimed women were best suited to become congressional representatives of their local communities arguing that as “mothers” women had the constitutional right to oversee the regulation of all matters related to children, especially their education.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In discussing the history of the professionalization of parenthood and the National Congress of Mothers and the work of the Parent-Teacher Association in the U.S. 20<sup>th</sup> century, I follow the framework established by Regina G. Kunzel in *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers*

In this chapter, I examine the first ten years of the Congress politicizing motherhood and the shift towards professionalizing parenthood. Second, I reframe its association's founders, Phoebe Hearst and Alice McLellan Birney, as beneficiaries of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's and Susan B. Anthony's women's rights movement. Research into early philanthropic and civic work by Hearst and Birney reveals new bridges that link women's benevolent work during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Progressive Era reforms and the suffrage movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Because women of the General Federation of Women's

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*and the Professionalization of Social Work, 1890-1945* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) in which she examines the gendered meanings of social workers and the gendering of the social work profession. Nancy Cott explored the relationship between Feminism and the decline of the Woman's Movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*. Like similar scholars, Cott noted the quick rise of the NCM and PTA in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but remarked that the association focused almost singularly on educating children as a wartime measure and advocating for children's health measures. While accurate, my research into the national, state, and local units of the NCM and PTA reveals an increasingly wide and diverse legislative platforms covering everything from child labor laws; women's health and wages; education extensions courses for parents; film and literature censorship; drug and alcohol prohibition; access to quality education for children and adults with disabilities; military spending and wartime measures; marriage, divorce, and polygamy debates; school board and state representation; to, curriculum standards, playground facilities, school nutrition, and sex education for parents and children. Other scholars who have written on the PTA but have maintained that the organization was strictly a maternalist organization include, Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement*; Haar, *The Politics of the PTA*; Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*; and, Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*.

<sup>2</sup> The history of the National Congress of Mothers, I argue, chronologically extends and thematically develops the current history of women's association-building and the feminist political tradition in the United States. The interplay between politics and government in the country frequently encouraged the growth of civil society through voluntary associations. Since the nation's founding, the network of voluntary organizations spanning the country is best described as translocal and the NCM mirrored the local-state-national structure of the federal government. Theda Skocpol states the "Moral-reform movements, farmers' and workers' associations, fraternal brotherhoods and sisterhoods, independent women's association, veterans' groups, and many ethnic and African American associations all converged on the quintessentially American form of voluntary membership association." Following the Civil War, the nature of association building become more philanthropic and the federations organized between the 1860s and 1890s were some of America's most effective and impressive developments. While most of the associations founded in the post-Civil War years originated from the northeast and Midwest, the national leadership "cast a wide net" over states and territories in an effort to not only create new local clubs, but to tie already existing local groups to broader state and national efforts. Skocpol further argues that leaders' resolution to link women across the nation was in a broader effort to heal the country following the war. See, Skocpol, "How America Became Civic," 33, 55-56, 60.

Clubs and early suffragists contributed to the work of the NCM during those early years, I apply the term feminist to those national and state leaders who worked jointly with equal suffrage associations, the National League of Women Voters, and those who pursued women's rights in labor, health, and education.

This new, national congress was indeed organized and led foremost by women. Women managed, lobbied, and proposed welfare initiatives that Congress and state governments later adopted. NCM executive members established a new political arena for women *and* men to advocate for parents' rights, state-supported welfare provisions, and education as a fundamental right of citizenry. The National Congress held annual meetings and expanded its platform to bring together multiple constituencies and advocate for a wide-range of issues affecting the welfare of America's children. The NCM situated itself not only as a national "gathering of representative workers" to stand alongside the U.S. Congress but became one of the leading political movements for parents to advocate simultaneously for parents' and women's rights.<sup>3</sup>

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The founding of the National Congress of Mothers in 1897, I contend should be viewed as part of a larger development of national women's associations. The Women's Christian Temperance Union emerged from the initial wave of philanthropic associations in 1873. The General Federation of Women's Clubs organized in 1890 with the intent to establish communication networks between the innumerable women's clubs. Second, I argue that the NCM was the most unique and visionary of the national women's associations, not just for its longevity, its ability to coalesce despite political and economic differences, but also because of its conceptualization of motherhood, and later parenthood, as a vocation rather than a biological act. Furthermore, the ideas of motherhood and parenthood responsibility while incredibly malleable to public perception still informed the structuring of government responsibility and civic responsibility in regards to public education, social constructions of the family, and influenced the development of childhood and adult education.

<sup>3</sup> "Official Call to the First National Congress of Mothers," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, viii. Announcement reproduced with permission by the National Congress of Mothers, copyright 1897 in Annie Laurie Woods, "Mothers to Meet," *Salt Lake (UT) Semi-Weekly Tribune*, January 26, 1897, 14. For Alice Moqué, a suffragist from Washington, D.C., and one of the many speakers to hold the floor in 1897, her participation in the Mothers' Congress represented a chance for women's "real emancipation" and for each woman and delegate to "settle with her own conscience the question of fulfilling the obligations" of motherhood. See, Alice Lee Moqué, "Reproduction and Natural Law," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of*

Over the course of the three days in Washington more than thirty women and men laid out a broad and comprehensive agenda for women's and children's welfare. Invited guests included education specialists, medical experts, kindergarten teachers, school administrators, and clubwomen leaders. Presenters addressed recent developments in kindergarten work, children's nutrition and hygiene, heredity, reproduction, natural law, literature for parents and children, reading courses, music and physical education, playground spaces in urban areas, and the creation of a national training school for women. The organizations represented by those speakers included the National Council on Women, Bureau of American Ethnology, New York City Mission Society, National Association of Colored Women, General Federation of Women's Clubs, American Psychological Association, New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, and the National American Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>4</sup>

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*Mothers*, 128; "Services Held for Mrs. Alice Lee Moque," *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), July 18, 1919, 7. For other attendees, like Helen H. Gardener, a novelist, feminist, and member of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the Mothers' Congress represented women's "true emancipation," in that she believed women could not achieve emancipation until the persistent subjugation of motherhood and mother-intellect ceased. "And it is not until woman comes out from under the cover of conventional usage and says, 'I don't want to do this,' and 'I don't want to believe in that,' of her own volition and thought," could women gain "equal human status," she told the audience. From the national leadership though, they reasoned,

"There have been congresses for the consideration of religious and political questions. There have been world's fairs for the exhibition of great achievements in science and art, and county fairs for the promotion of interest in the raising of cattle. There have been jockey clubs, kennel clubs, and kitten-killing unions. Now, after all these have received due consideration, we have at last reached the human race, and are to have a convention which will discuss methods of developing and educating man's offspring. This step has been taken by those most vitally interested in the question, the mothers of the United States." See, Helen H. Gardener, "The Moral Responsibility of Women in Heredity," *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 131, 145-46.

<sup>4</sup> Harriot Stanton Blatch, daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was scheduled to give a lecture on "How Shall the Nation Secure Educated Mothers?" However, Blatch was unable to attend the congress due to illness. Instead, president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs Ellen M. Henrotin gave the closing address on voluntary organizations as a "world power," see *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 4, 251-254, 256. The typed congressional proceedings listed "Carrie Stanton Blatch" in the "Appendix to the Report of the First National Congress of Mothers," (see p. 255), however, perusing obituaries and "Stanton Blatch" surnames in New York

Although they called for racial unity elite and middle-class white women represented the ideal congressional representative. For example, Mary Lowe Dickinson, president of the National Council of Women, addressed the common concerns shared by the NCM and other women's associations. She noted that all women shared a sense of "common womanhood."<sup>5</sup> However, Dickinson's vision for the Congress consisted of "white-hearted women" with "white thoughts." She drew her inspiration from the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago and the unveiling of the "White City" and the congress of Representative Women held at the Woman's Building during the fair.<sup>6</sup> Ethnologist, Frank Hamilton Cushing, recapped the weakening of "mother right," and the influence of "civilization," and the rise of patriarchy among the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico. Lucy Bainbridge, the superintendent of the New York Mission Society, discussed the consequences of women living and raising children in the "submerged world"—urban areas in America's "great cities"—effected by *darkness, dirt, disease, dress, debt, distress, drink, disaster, and death*.<sup>7</sup> She urged the delegates to go back to their mothers' clubs and commit to house-to-house ministry and "elevate the woman herself." Recognizing single mothers as the "breadwinner" of the family, Bainbridge told the crowd "the woman, the mother, must be helped by other women."<sup>8</sup>

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City during this time period, the transcription of "Harriot" to "Carrie" was in error. Also, a circular written by Annie Laurie Woods for the National Congress of Mothers, attested to the presence of one "Mrs. Stanton Blatch, the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton," see "Mothers Meet at the Capital," *Rocky Mountain (Denver, Colo.) News*, January 24, 1897, 20; and, "Mothers to Meet; Will Hold a National Congress in February; Cabinet Ladies Interested; Programme Includes Speeches by Anthony Comstock and Others," *Salt Lake (UT) Semi-Weekly Tribune*, January 26, 1897, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Lowe Dickinson, "Response to Address of Welcome," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>7</sup> Italicized words are Bainbridge's alliteration of the factors influencing the welfare of children in the "submerged world" of urban cities. Lucy S. Bainbridge, "Mothers of the Submerged World—Day Nurseries," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

But as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper pointed out during her address to the Congress any call for racial unity was disingenuous. Though her speech went unreported in national newspapers and unlisted in the press packet, Harper's speech was included in the official proceedings of the first convention published by the NCM later that year. A black abolitionist and suffragist, Harper publicly challenged Bainbridge's version of an all-white congress. As the newly elected vice-president of the National Association of Colored Women, Harper deliberately and powerfully rebuked Dickinson, Bainbridge, and Cushing's ideal mother. In her speech, "The Afro-American Mother," Harper called for an "enlightened parenthood" that crossed racial and class boundaries.<sup>9</sup> "You of the Caucasian race," she noted of the delegates in the room, "were born to an inheritance of privileges; behind you are ages of civilization, education, and organized Christianity; behind us are ages of ignorance, poverty, and slavery; . . . Has not the colored mother a claim not simply upon your compassion, but also your sense of justice?"<sup>10</sup> She continued,

I do not ask for any special favor for the colored mother. Only let us be tried by the same rules and judged by the same standards as are other people. I am not asking any material favors from a thread to a shoe latchet. . . . I ask that you will do what you can to create a public opinion which will not class the worthy and the worthless together, nor say to the most intelligent and virtuous woman applying for a situation, 'The color of your skin must be a badge of exclusion; no valor nor any virtue can redeem you, nothing can wipe off the ban that clings to you.' Trample, if you will, on our bodies, but do not crush out self-respect from our souls. If you want us to act as women, treat us as women.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the Congress' initial statement promising racial inclusion and Harper's plea, black clubwomen and black teachers found themselves excluded from the National Congress and

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<sup>9</sup> Harper's speech was published in full in the official congressional proceedings. See Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, "The Afro-American Mother," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 69.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

local parent-teacher associations. Black women formed their own PTAs and would establish their own national association, the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT), in 1924. And, the two congresses would not fully integrate until 1970.<sup>12</sup>

Over the next few days, the “temporary possession of the national capital” organized to become a movement of “national importance.” The first board of managers a series of resolutions, known as the “Seven Rules of Harmony” to guide the association. As the foundation for what would become the national legislative program, the original “seven harmonies” required congress members to take an oath committing themselves to studying all state and federal laws pertaining to women and children, promoting patriotism in their communities, protesting against “unjust accusations” of the association, advocating for peace at home and abroad, teaching justice and peace to children, cultivating a spiritual self, and protecting “all birds and beasts and all existencies of the animal and vegetable worlds.”<sup>13</sup> Additionally, the Mothers’ Congress urged members to support the founding of a National Training School for Women, to influence legislation ensuring the inclusion of kindergartens

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<sup>12</sup> Education scholar Christine Woysner has written extensively about the emergence of the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers Association and Frances Harper’s early participation in the National Congress of Mothers in *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970*, see specifically ch. 2; and, “Mothers’ Last Words,” *Washington Post*, January 20, 1897, 3, 9. After reviewing the congressional proceedings in a selection of newspaper it was reported by some that Harper’s address was “liberally applauded.” However, in other newspaper accounts Harper’s address was absent from reports. Similarly, although Harper’s address was reprinted in the official congressional proceedings, her name and presentation were absent from the official conference program, which was also reprinted for the proceedings account. For a selection of newspapers omitting announcement or review of Harper’s address, see “The Congress of Mothers,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1897, p. 1; “A Thousand Mothers: Congress Exceeds in Numbers the Highest Estimate,” *Washington Post*, 17 February 1897, p. 3; “Congress of Mothers,” *The Milwaukee (Wisc.) Sentinel*, 24 January 1897, p. 18; “Mothers’ Congress,” *Atchison (KS) Daily*, February 11, 1897, 3; “Congress of Mothers,” *Rocky Mountain (Denver, CO) News*, February 18, 1897, 3; and, “To-Day’s Telegraph Briefed,” *Atchison (KS) Daily Globe*, February 18, 1897, 1; and “News from Washington,” *Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), February 19, 1897, 1.

<sup>13</sup> “Resolutions as Adopted by the National Congress of Mothers and Delegates,” in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 270.

into public schools, raising the age of marriage to eighteen, censoring advertisements and papers deemed degrading to men and women, and maintaining national headquarters in Washington, D.C.<sup>14</sup> The Mothers' Congress deliberately mirrored the federal Congress and America's political system with a parallel organization for women that encouraged women to participate at all levels of government. That they did so pre-suffrage and paved the way for the NCM to center its women's work and social welfare advocacy at the center of American government.<sup>15</sup>

Birney and Hearts, as co-founders, took different roads to Washington, D.C. and the Mothers' Congress. Their common experiences and similar influences established a strong, feminist foundation for the women's association. Hearst's path traversed well-worn western trails of women's public authority, social and economic issues arising from urbanization and immigration, and struggles between local autonomy and federal control. Birney's trail soon merged with Hearst's. Birney, a widow, felt underprepared and ill-equipped to raise her three children despite her education and training as a school teacher. Those experiences influenced the shape of her new organization. Birney wanted to create an institution that could easily provide resources, literature, and programs to new mothers. The National Congress of Mothers set out to deliver instructional materials to make women better mothers. However, Reverend Mary T. Whitney, president of the National Scientific Family Culture Institute wrote to Hearst and Birney reminding them that the "mother is no more important than the father, but unquestionably we shall have to start with the mothers. . . . God speed this first great national congress of mothers which will certainly bring ere long a great national

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 271-72.

<sup>15</sup> "National Mothers Meet; Unique Kind of Convention Coming Here in February; Training of Children Will Be the Theme—Prominent Washington Women are Patronesses," *Evening Times* (Washington, D.C.), October 3, 1896, 5.



congress of parents.”<sup>16</sup> NCM’s successor, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers Association (National PTA) evolved into a female-led association organizing a national grassroots movement for state-supported education, an expansive welfare state, and a broad understanding of parents’ rights.

At the first congress, Birney described Phoebe Apperson Hearst as “America’s truest philanthropist.”<sup>17</sup> Revered for her benevolence work, historians have characterized Hearst as solely a financial benefactress of the first Mothers’ Congress. Hearst’s contemporaries called her “Lady Bountiful.”<sup>18</sup> However, examining her philanthropic activism which spanned more than thirty years and cut across class, educational, and racial barriers, I demonstrate that Hearst intellectually and financially created a space for feminist activism to thrive in the National Congress of Mothers.<sup>19</sup>

Born on December 3, 1842, in Franklin County, Missouri, Phoebe Elizabeth Apperson grew up in a rural, Presbyterian home. Soon after Phoebe’s birth, her mother, Drucilla decided she wanted more for her daughter than the rural life of frontier Missouri. Phoebe’s father, Ralph Walker, a Presbyterian minister encouraged his wife to secure schooling for his daughter with an emphasis in religious instruction. Despite the limited options available to Phoebe for primary instruction, the young girl found herself on a

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<sup>16</sup> Reverend Mary T. Whitney quoted in “Mothers’ Congress; The Plans for this Great Project are Maturing; Letters from All Sections Received; A Growing Interest Aroused among American Women; Enthusiastic Interest,” *Evening Star* (Washington, D.C.), October 12, 1896, 13.

<sup>17</sup> Alice McLellan Birney, “Address of Welcome,” in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers; First Annual*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> Jesse Lyman, *The Story of Chautauqua* (NY: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, Knickerbocker Press, 1921), 268.

<sup>19</sup> For more on using the term *feminist* to describe women’s political activism prior to 1910 see Gordon, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*; Gordon, “Putting Children First: Women, Maternalism, and Welfare in the Early Twentieth Century,” 63-86; and Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” 120, 136.

somewhat familiar path that would lead her from a local, one-room schoolhouse to earning her teaching certificate and tutoring children in Missouri. After finishing her education and Phoebe began tutoring local children of the Maramec Iron Works employees. This experience was influential in shaping her broad concerns for social, economic, and educational issues effecting children's welfare and well-being. Phoebe's chance to focus on child welfare beyond the classroom was dramatically expanded by her marriage to western mining magnate, George Hearst. The rural escape Drucilla wanted for her daughter nineteen years earlier had arrived.<sup>20</sup>

George, although twenty-two years older than Phoebe, had known her family for years. Neighbors to the Appersons', the family of William G. Hearst possessed considerable political power within Franklin County, Missouri. After amassing a substantial fortune from returns on a small investment in the Comstock Lode of 1859, George returned to Franklin in 1860 to care for his ailing mother, Elizabeth. Historian Alexandra Nickliss describes George as taken with the young Phoebe as her eyes reminded him of his late mother.<sup>21</sup> Married on June 15, 1862, the newlyweds set their eyes westward to California. Although Nickliss believes it unlikely that Phoebe knew the wealth she married into, a prenuptial agreement set aside a separate estate and gave Phoebe sole control over 50 shares of company stock in the Gould & Curry, Gold and Silver Mining Company of Virginia City, Nevada Territory. Comparing the economic power of Phoebe's stock holdings by today's standards, her share and financial "influence" would be valued at \$76,800,000 in 2015.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Alexandra Nickliss, "Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Women in California," (PhD diss., University of California-Irvine, 1994), 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> Nickliss, "Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Women in California," 50.

<sup>22</sup> Hearst's stock assets have been classified here as a measure of economic power and wealth. According to Lawrence Officer, professor of Economics at the University of Illinois at Chicago, wealth can be considered "a financial asset such as bank deposits or a stock portfolio, or can involve a

Soon after moving to California, Phoebe gave birth to her only child, William Randolph Hearst, in 1863. Throughout William's early childhood years, Phoebe remained in California caring for her son, however, when he turned ten she took her first trip abroad. At first glance one could describe this and future trips as opulent, European vacations. However, during her first trip in 1873-74 though Phoebe gained a wider appreciation for women's education.<sup>23</sup>

Hearst came to see schools as instrumental to addressing society's problems. On her return to San Francisco, she directed her new enlightenment and wealth towards tackling the city's high rate of child malnutrition, neglect, and illiteracy which she believed were caused by urbanization and immigration. Based on her teachings in kindergarten work, Phoebe proposed training women as kindergarten teachers to alleviate the city's problems. She used the works of German educational theorist, Friedrich Fröebel, to reform children's welfare in the Bay area. Fröebel's kindergarten method, developed in 1837, posited a holistic learning experience for young children, primarily through child play. Fröebel also insisted that mothers who wanted to better themselves and better equip themselves for motherhood could

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physical asset, such as real estate. Economic power measures the amount of income wealth relative to the total output of the economy. When compared to other incomes or wealth, it shows the relative 'influence' of the owner of the income or wealth has in controlling the composition or total amount of production in the economy. This measures the share of GDP." A straight conversion of Hearst's relative economic value according to the GDP in 2015 see <https://www.measuringworth.com/uscompare/relativevalue.php>.

<sup>23</sup> "Continually Doing Good,' The Philanthropy of Phoebe Apperson Hearst, 1862-1919," in *California Women and Politics: From the Gold Rush to the Great Depression*, eds. Robert W. Cheney, Mary Ann Irwin, and Ann M. Wilson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), ch. 4 respectively, 80-82. Historian Daniel T. Rodgers, in *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age*, shows how individuals, such as Jane Addams and Florence Kelley, I would also add Phoebe Hearst to the list, looked to European models of reform and were part of a larger process of transnational networks confronting "rapid intensification of market relations, the swelling great city populations, and the rising working-class resentments from below." See Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 59, 143.

not rely on natural instincts, but rather had to learn the profession and pedagogy of kindergarten instruction.<sup>24</sup> Wanting to apply kindergarten philosophy to the day nurseries in San Francisco, yet barred from gaining formal training at American universities, Hearst hired Mary Kincaid as her personal tutor. Kincaid, a schoolteacher in San Francisco had read Fröebel's work and would later serve on the San Francisco's Golden Gate Kindergarten Association educational committee, guided Hearst through Europe's universities, libraries, and museums educating her on kindergarten and educational theories.<sup>25</sup> Through her own teaching experiences Hearst realized America's educational system was ill-suited to provide the proper resources and training for mothers. Instead, she proposed introducing Fröebel's kindergarten system to San Francisco public schools.

In 1874, Hearst returned to the city with a new enthusiasm for kindergartens and kindergarten-work.<sup>26</sup> Her collaborations with Kincaid, her tutor, show early efforts to establish kindergartens. By 1877, seventy-five teachers across California petitioned the State Teachers Association to launch the first experimental kindergarten in San Francisco.<sup>27</sup> Hearst bankrolled the operation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Komelia Cepok, "Friedrich Fröebel," <http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/Colleges/Fröebel/Fröebel-History/>. For more on Friedrich Fröebel and his writings concerning kindergartens and women's role as teachers see, Friedrich Fröebel, *Friedrich Fröebel's Pedagogics of the Kindergarten; or, his ideas concerning the play and playthings of the child*, trans. Josephine Jarvis (NY: D. Appleton, 1895, t. p. 1909).

<sup>25</sup> "A Joyful Thanksgiving; Over 150 Kindergarten Children at Their Dinner; The Generosity of Mrs. George Hearst to the Little Ones of the Golden Gate Kindergarten Association—A Pleasing Scene at Saratoga Hall," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), November 28, 1888, 1.

<sup>26</sup> "Californians in Europe," "Women's Missionary Society," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), April 3, 1876, 3.

<sup>27</sup> "State Teachers' Association," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), October 26, 1877, 3; "A Kindergarten in San Francisco," *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), March 23, 1878, 2.

<sup>28</sup> "The Kindergarten; Its Wards—Opinions of Distinguished Philanthropists and Students of Criminals—What is Wanting in the Criminal; The Kindergarten in San Francisco and Elsewhere," *Daily Bulletin Supplement in the Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), December 21, 1878, 5.

Hearst and her kindergarten-colleagues agreed the city needed to implement the program city-wide and should create a full-fledged kindergarten program offering moral instruction for children that would also reach adults in the community. Hearst believed kindergarten instruction if developed properly was rooted in philanthropy and could be professionalized and molded in such a way as to transform and reverse the problems besieging San Francisco. Heart claimed children could learn morally, acceptable behaviors through proper, moral education through kindergartens. Young mothers and teachers could impart these teachings to children through instructed play. Elite and upper-middle-class white women, Hearst's contemporaries like Jane Stanford, married to Leland Stanford, also applied kindergarten education to their own civic code and believed they could stamp out the behaviors of children and teachers of which they disapproved.<sup>29</sup>

Eager to add her name to San Francisco's kindergarten programs, and not just her money, Hearst opened the first Hearst Free Kindergarten in 1883. The kindergarten became part of the larger association, the Golden Gate Kindergarten Association (GGKA), led by Sarah Cooper, who had worked previously with Hearst in the Women's Missionary Society. By 1885, Hearst partnered with Jane Stanford to secure a financial foundation for GGKA and opened another twelve kindergartens and experimental classes which enrolled more than 1500 children under the "care and protection of the [GGKA] association."<sup>30</sup> During this same period, Hearst opened three additional Hearst kindergartens and with 40 to 50 students enrolled in each one. Over the next twenty years, Hearst gifted more than \$80,000 to GGKA

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<sup>29</sup> Nickliss, "Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Woman in California," 99.

<sup>30</sup> "Kindergarten Training, Sixth Annual Report of the Golden Gate Association; List of Classes Established and Maintained by the Society," *Daily Evening Star* (San Francisco, CA), December 30, 1885, 1.

providing resources for schools, teacher salaries, and training programs for young women.<sup>31</sup> Children attending GGKA classes ranged in age from one to five years old and were the children of poor and immigrant working families. The San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* often described the children as the city's "poor little waifs."<sup>32</sup> Similarly, kindergarten instructors believed they took "children from the streets" and rescued them from the "wretched homes of poverty and crime."<sup>33</sup> More so, GGKA rebuked all criticism describing the worthlessness of kindergartens. GGKA claimed San Francisco taxpayers were making "investments" in the city and should consider the work of kindergartens as "laying the foundation for good citizenship in those who might otherwise become criminals."<sup>34</sup> Yet, privately GGKA teachers and public supporters worried that moral- and citizenship-instruction ended when children turned five and could no longer attend kindergartens. One kindergarten teacher expressed her interest in continuing children's training but quickly realized the financial and structural limitations. "We would gladly branch out into a wider field," she said, "but there is a limit to our resources and necessarily a limit to our work; but we do what we can."<sup>35</sup> Despite kindergartens coming into popular favor across the country in the late 1870s and early 1880s, no widespread organization, state or national organization, linked the kindergartens or systematized teachers' training for them. At least not yet.

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<sup>31</sup> Nickliss, "Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Woman in California," 101-103.

<sup>32</sup> "The Kindergarten; Its Wards-Opinions of Distinguished Philanthropists and Students of Criminals—What is Wanting in the Criminal; The Kindergarten in San Francisco and Elsewhere," *Daily Bulletin Supplement* in the *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), December 21, 1878 1878, 5.

<sup>33</sup> Kindergarten Training, Sixth Annual Report of the Golden Gate Association; List of Classes Established and Maintained by the Society," *Daily Evening Star* (San Francisco, CA), December 30, 1885.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

During her time in San Francisco Hearst used her position—initially in an economic sense and then gradually in a more directive approach—encouraging the systemization of kindergartens. In 1886, Hearst partnered with Jane Stanford to organize and fund the “Committee of Two Hundred Ladies,” a campaign directly aimed to elect women to San Francisco school boards. She urged women’s associations to push women to run for school board positions and to setup kindergarten classes.<sup>36</sup> Just as she began this new endeavor, her husband received his appointment to replace the recently deceased U.S. senator from California in 1886. This seemed at first an obstacle to her newly developed activist causes. In time, however, the family’s move to Washington, D.C., increased Phoebe’s ability to centralize kindergarten work on a national level.

After moving to moving to Washington, Hearst initially refused to partake in the political maneuverings of her new social sphere. In 1889 two years into George’s second term, she left the city and traveled once again to Europe with Kincaid in tow. Explaining the trip to her husband as a retreat from D.C., Hearst re-immersed herself in Fröebel’s teaching and kindergarten models. In Europe she sought solace in museums and libraries, and relayed messages to her husband via Kincaid, who often spoke of Hearst’s pleasure at being away from D.C.’s social snares. Acting as an intermediary between husband and wife, Kincaid urged George to let Phoebe stay longer in Europe and conveyed her friend’s reluctance to return. But when George grew ill in 1890, Hearst cut her trip short and returned to the States.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> “The Committee of Two Hundred Ladies,” *Daily Evening Bulletin* (San Francisco, CA), November 2, 1886.

<sup>37</sup> Nickliss, “Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Woman in California.”

Only after her husband's death in 1891 did Hearst embrace her social position and the privileges it came with. Stepping out as the "grande dame of the capital," Hearst enlarged her philanthropic work and reconsidered her involvement in D.C. society, acknowledging women's influence on the political system in the nation's capital.<sup>38</sup> In what may be called her political reformation, Hearst drew on Kincaid's tutelage, Fröebel's philosophies, and her experience in financing kindergarten classes in San Francisco, and redirected her financial interests and social concerns into more directed causes that addressed problems she witnessed in D.C.—primarily issues influencing women's and children's health, education, and labor.

Hearst devoted her financial and philanthropic energies to funding and founding orphan asylums, children and women's hospital care, teacher training schools, and personal tutelage for young women after receiving rights to her husband's estate, estimated at somewhere between \$15 million and \$20 million. The most striking aspect of George's inheritance is how few stipulations the coal-mining tycoon left. Except for one. His son would receive nothing, unless his mother remarried. "I commend my son, William R. Hearst, to my said wife, having full confidence that she will make suitable provisions for him, but in the event of marriage of my said wife after my death, I hereby give and bequeath to my said son all my said property that may remain in the possession of my said wife at that date," George ordered.<sup>39</sup> Hearst remained unmarried the rest of her life to maintain control over her inheritance. While retaining "legal right to one of half" of her late husband's possessions she

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<sup>38</sup> Kenneth Whyte, *The Uncrowned King: The Sensational Rise of William Randolph Hearst* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2009), 8.

<sup>39</sup> Whyte, *The Uncrowned King*, 11.



also remained “unfettered by any bond or by any obligation” and no “court, Judge, or any authority” could decide how she managed *her* estate.<sup>40</sup>

Without financial or legal hindrances, Hearst moved to fully invest in kindergartens and those organizations closely affiliated with the kindergarten movement. After opening a third kindergarten in San Francisco, she opened another three segregated schools in Washington, D.C.—two for white children and one for black children. She also launched a teachers’ kindergarten training school for African American mothers. The establishment of the Columbia Free Kindergarten Association (CKA), as she named her organization, signaled another shift in Hearst’s philanthropic vision. As president of CKA, she and fellow board members established the first legislative arm of a kindergarten association in the nation. With this legislative decision Hearst aimed to “persuade” the congressional representatives to formally incorporate kindergartens into D.C. schools.<sup>41</sup>

Hearst’s first stepped “into” what she perceived as a males-only political sphere when CKA announced its legislative division. Rather than solely “Lady Bountiful of California,” Hearst became America’s philanthropist by aligning her interests politically with the wives of U.S. congressmen through her kindergarten crusade.<sup>42</sup> As “Lady Bountiful” increased her financial commitment to GGKA and CKA, she triggered a national funding spike for kindergartens reverberating from D.C. back to the West.<sup>43</sup> By 1894, just a year after the establishment of CKA, more than ninety percent of D.C.’s public school kindergarten teachers graduated from Hearst’s training schools. According to Jane Stanford, collaborator

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<sup>40</sup> Nickliss, “Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Woman in California,” 144-45.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>42</sup> “Editorial,” in *California’s Magazine* 1, no. 1 (1915): 372.

<sup>43</sup> Nickliss, “Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Woman in California,” 121.

and co-supporter in the Golden Gate Kindergarten Association, the capital's grand dame had become a "household name."<sup>44</sup>

This household name was not foreign to Alice McLellan Birney, either. A southern woman from Georgia, born 19 October 1858, Alice Josephine, grew up in Atlanta, received a private school education and at the age of fifteen attended female seminary at Mount Holyoke.<sup>45</sup> At eighteen, Alice found herself widowed with five-month old daughter, Alonsita. Relying on her training as a teacher, she turned to the educational theories of Friedrich Fröebel and Herbert Spencer, a leading Social Darwinist in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to learn how to raise her young daughter on her own.<sup>46</sup> Unsatisfied with teaching opportunities in Georgia, Alice moved her small family to New York where she studied medicine and later advertising. After meeting an up and coming New York attorney, Alice remarried in 1892 and gave birth to two more daughters, Catherine (b. 1893) and Lillian (b. 1895).<sup>47</sup> After Lillian's birth, Birney expressed concern over her preparedness as a mother, despite already have two children and being well educated herself. In 1895, Birney wrote, "Filled as my mind was with the great mystery of birth, the solemn responsibility of parenthood, and the utter helplessness of the little being by my side, I built in imagination a new world, such as it seemed to me might be a reality if each new born soul might enter into life in a happy uplifting environment."<sup>48</sup>

In August of that year, Birney attended and participated in a series of lectures on parent education held in Chautauqua, New York. William Jennings Bryan, who had spoken

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<sup>44</sup> For Phoebe Hearst's name recognition, see letter from Jane Stanford to Phoebe A. Hearst, 4 January 1893, in Nickliss, "Phoebe Apperson Hearst: The Most Powerful Woman in California," 121.

<sup>45</sup> *Twenty Years' Work for Child Welfare*, 15; *Golden Jubilee History*, 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> *Golden Jubilee History*, 24-26.

<sup>47</sup> *Golden Jubilee History*, 24-25, 27; *Twenty Years' Work for Child Welfare*, 15.

<sup>48</sup> Alice McLellan Birney quoted in *Golden Jubilee History*, 15-16.

at previous Chautauqua sessions, regarded the series as a “potent human factor in molding the mind of the nation.” Remarking on Chautauqua President Theodore Roosevelt believed “there [was] probably no other educational influence in the country quite so fraught with hope for the future of the nation as [Chautauqua].”<sup>49</sup> In the Woman’s Club at Chautauqua, Birney formalized her vision for a “new world” and proposed a national gathering of the nation’s leading mothers. Known for being the largest at Chautauqua, the women’s reading circle welcomed more than 2,000 members and held daily meetings.<sup>50</sup> Frances Newton, leader of the Chicago Kindergarten Association and a fellow Chautauqua participant, introduced Birney to the group as the “little woman who has a beautiful dream she wants us to help her realize.”<sup>51</sup> Birney’s appeal received a “prompt response” from the women in the room, and those individuals “carried her message to their home-towns.”<sup>52</sup> An early historian of the movement wrote, “Out of a meeting a Chautauqua, in 1895, has grown a nation-wide movement in aid of mothers and teachers.”<sup>53</sup>

On the heels of her successful reception at Chautauqua, Birney set out to develop a mothers-association with broad appeal. She expanded her first plan to train “better mothers” to include a national call organizing women for motherhood-training and childwelfare education. However, her focus remained on training mothers to become better at mothering. In order to organize mothers, Birney needed a secondary call to bring in the numbers needed to create a national movement. She confided to Emma Morton, the sister of the U.S.

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<sup>49</sup> Lyman, *The Story of Chautauqua*, ix-x. For more on the Chautauqua movement, see Andrew Chamberlain Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2003).

<sup>50</sup> Lyman, *The Story of Chautauqua*, 256.

<sup>51</sup> Frances Newton quoted in *Golden Jubilee History*, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Lyman, *The Story of Chautauqua*, 267.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 268-69.

Secretary of Agriculture, that mothers were “oppressed with a sense of needless suffering” and that only a “Congress of Mothers” could force the government to recognize its responsibility to mothers and children.<sup>54</sup> Unlike Hearst, the hustle and bustle of D.C. attracted and impressed Birney. She likened the Congress of Mothers to the U.S. Congress, stating, “I knew how [Congress’] doings were telegraphed to all parts of the earth and how eagerly such messages were read . . . and then like a flash came the thought: Why not have a National Congress of Mothers, whose growth would quickly become international?”<sup>55</sup> To do so, especially in D.C., Birney needed financial support and a direct connection to the press. Enter Phoebe Hearst—or, rather Emma Morton who introduced the two women following the Chautauqua moment.

While Birney crafted the Congress’ inaugural message, Hearst recruited other prominent D.C.-women and kindergarten philanthropists from her earlier days in California. With unrestricted access to her late husband’s estate, Hearst covered all expenses of the first Mothers’ Congress. She opened up her D.C. home to serve as National Headquarters. Although Birney offered Hearst the presidency, Hearst declined and agreed to serve as vice president if Birney, herself, would become the first president of the new congress. Hearst’s decision to work behind the scenes “speeded the preparations.” She organized and directed Congress’ first cabinet of advisors.<sup>56</sup> Working her press connections, Hearst effectively circulated the national call for delegates.

More than anyone else Hearst understood that the Congress of Mothers could distinguish itself from other women’s associations by appealing broadly to all of America’s

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<sup>54</sup> *Golden Jubilee History*, 215-16.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-19.

women rather than relying on the support of upper and middle class women. Heartened by the “encouraging response to [the congress’s] universal call” for motherhood and the surprisingly high attendance at the first meeting, Birney, Hearst, and fellow executive members put forth a plan to increase the presence of kindergartens, provide advanced holistic schooling for children, promote the science of child-study and scientific motherhood, and set out to secure greater parent-education and training for women.<sup>57</sup>

NCM’s founding bridges women’s voluntary and benevolent work during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Progressive era reforms and the suffrage movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The women themselves believed that they were embarking on something new. In her first address as NCM President, Birney acknowledged how the “age of movements” had influenced her decision to create the first voluntary organization led entirely by and organized for mothers of the nation. To the rapt audience, she depicted motherhood as a professional track that offered a “bridge upon which struggling humanity [could] safely cross into a new land.” NCM leaders envisioned how a national association of mothers, fathers, professional educators, medical and government authorities, and the “mightiest of [them] all . . . the press,” working together to “raise a new generation of citizens in a new world.”<sup>58</sup> Ellen Henrotin, GFWC president, in her closing address at the first congress issued this statement on the development of the new Congress as a longer legacy of the power of women’s voluntary organizations:

In this great power, first recognized among women not more than thirty or forty years ago, I think we may see that the lead was taken by the missionary and church

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<sup>57</sup> Birney made a special appeal to “laboring mothers” and recognized the need to establish “special clubs to meet their needs, and meeting place for them,” in “The Mother’s Great Work; Objects of the Women’s Congress in Washington; To Discuss the Betterment of the Race Through Better Knowledge of the Duties of the Mother,” *New York Times*, December 20, 1896, 18.

<sup>58</sup> Alice McLellan Birney, “Address of Welcome,” in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 6, 8, and 10.

associations. Then followed the Sanitary Commission; and after that came the great humanitarian associations such as we see to-day, which have done the magnificent work of the Suffrage Associations, the National Council of Women, the General Federation of Women's Clubs; and I believe that the flower and crown of all associations among women came to us in the Columbian Exposition in the Board of Lady Managers, which was all-comprehensive, and in the great Congress of the Columbian celebration; and to the movement is attributable the fact that we are able to-day to hold a Congress of Mothers in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

Like Henrotin, early leaders and participants in the NCM saw themselves building on the work of other women's organizations. NCM women learned from benevolent reformers before them that "the rhetoric of female benevolence concealed authority" and if NCM continued to use maternal and benevolent rhetoric their efforts would go "unchallenged" by male authority.<sup>60</sup> Historian Lori Ginzburg explains that as conservative and upper-class women found their authority unchecked in voluntary associations their work "took them into the political realm, into activities that involved governmental assistance: appropriations, petitioning legislative activities, and the demand for the vote."<sup>61</sup> To oppose female benevolence and mother-work at this time was considered "immoral" and "un-American."<sup>62</sup> Much like female reformers in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the Mothers' Congress cultivated a universal identity for American mothers, based on shared experiences of motherhood and its potential for reform, and encouraged women to act upon those commonalities to challenge patriarchy by critiquing fatherhood and male-dominated government authority.<sup>63</sup>

The women sharing the stage with Birney and Hearst in February 1897 epitomized the vanguard of prominent, D.C. socialites engrossed in mother-work philanthropy. The *New*

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<sup>59</sup> Ellen M. Henrotin, "Organization," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 252.

<sup>60</sup> Lori Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth Century United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 39, 67

<sup>61</sup> Ginzburg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 65-66.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

*York Times* characterized the women as Washington's very own "cabinet of ladies."

Furthermore the NCM contended that, "While the whole country [was] agog with excitement over the coming installation of a new President, the National Congress of Mothers [would] hold its session to consider the raising of possible chief executive of the future on the very ground which will soon throb beneath the feet of thousands at the inauguration of the man of the hour."<sup>64</sup> The NCM quickly amassed an all-female advisory cabinet mirroring the U.S. Presidential Cabinet of Advisors. Members of the NCM's cabinet included the wives, sisters, and daughters of D.C.'s male-political elite—the U.S. Vice-President, the Postmaster General, the secretaries of Agriculture and the Navy, and other presidential appointees. NCM had captured the nation's attention and organized the first ever all-female national congress claiming political authority based entirely on their gender and reproductive capacities.<sup>65</sup>

Addressing her congress for the very first time, President Birney declared motherhood as the "holiest of all [their] missions." Birney claimed that through the science of child study, NCM could give women the knowledge and training that would make them more "fit" for motherhood. She fully believed that while some women "may never marry" all women should prepare to "serve the cause" and help foster a child's highest potential—citizenship.<sup>66</sup>

Birney considered women the natural and logical choice to lead the mothers' causes to eliminate society of its social and economic ills. Furthermore, she did not believe this only applied to women.<sup>67</sup> Rather "the love of childhood" was a "common tie" between women and men, married or single, she stated. This connection, she claimed, led people to develop

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<sup>64</sup> Annie Laurie Woods, "Mothers to Meet," *Salt Lake (UT) Semi-Weekly Tribune*, January 26, 1897, 14.

<sup>65</sup> "Conference of Prominent Women," *New York Times*, December 6, 1897, 1.

<sup>66</sup> Alice McLellan Birney, "Address of Welcome," in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 8-9.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

their own sense of “mother-spirit” and “maternal love.” The act of mothering and the nurturing responsibilities when embraced, she claimed, spread beyond the cradle and the home, and became extensions of the work conducted by educators, legislators, ministers, and fathers, themselves.<sup>68</sup> A very child-centered philosophy for women and men.

Responding to Birney’s opening address to the audience, Mary Lowe Dickinson, President of the National Council of Women (New York City), reiterated the maternal instinct and emphasized the importance of “mother heart” in expanding the growth of philanthropic associations and women’s activism. She envisioned the NCM building a world in which “the outstretched hands of mothers [would] make an orphanage for the whole world’s childhood, and their beating hearts [would] form a bulwark against every tide of evil that, threatening, dare[d] to creep to the threshold of [their] homes.”<sup>69</sup> While Birney expressed an understated need for both women and men to embrace an educated motherhood, Dickinson rested the fate of humanity squarely on the shoulders of women, especially white women. Quoting the well-known phrase, “the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world,” Dickinson advised women in the audience that if they truly wanted to rule the world, to lead the world, they must educate themselves for work beyond the cradle. Specifically, Dickinson believed American women had to become “good students” of motherhood to guide the nation. The American woman had to become the “heart of humanity.”<sup>70</sup>

Despite massive press efforts explaining what this new organization would entail, the National Congress of Mothers attempted to provide a clear and pithy message for its utopian

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Lowe Dickinson, “Response to Address of Welcome,” in *The Works and Words of the National Congress of Mothers*, 12-13.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 13-14.



visions of motherhood and parent-education. Furthermore, in an era of reform movements and increased activity in women's suffrage campaigns, the early association was caught in a trap of its own making. NCM urged members to use maternal authority to advance women's and children's issues but at the same time try to broaden membership to fathers and other male politicians and educational experts. Even more so, the national board of managers, led by Birney, refused to publicly support women's suffrage but would come to rely on those very organizational networks to expand the NCM across the nation.<sup>71</sup> The NCM's executive cabinet and its committee leaders convinced public and educational administrators that parents could become better educated on childhood development and learning practices if they served alongside teachers in the classroom.

To meet these measures Birney and Hearst expanded the reach of the national headquarters beyond the political-wives' corridors of Washington, D.C., and New York City. The National Congress of Mothers looked to suffrage leaders in the West to help establish state congresses and local units. NCM built its organization not just to resemble the U.S. Congress and the presidential cabinet but to mimic government's function and utility. The board of managers turned to local communities with preexisting networks of mothers' circles, parent and teacher clubs, temperance unions, and other local voluntary associations to help expand the Mothers Congress. The network of women's associations and clubs was crucial in training parents and drumming up support for the cause. Once organized, state congresses served as distribution centers for NCM pamphlets, child and parenthood literature, book lists, appointment of executive boards, nomination of national delegates, and

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<sup>71</sup> "The Mother's Great Work; Objects of the Women's Congress in Washington; To Discuss the Betterment of the Race Through Better Knowledge of the Duties of the Mother," *New York Times*, December 20, 1896, 18.

as intermediaries between local associations, schools, state boards of education, and the national office.<sup>72</sup>

National delegates and the board of managers selected more than 300 works to include in suggested reading lists for parents and educators. The most successful of the outreach efforts in building the NCM as an informational clearinghouse on motherhood- and parenthood-instruction were the compilation book lists suggesting works by Friedrich Froebel, Herbert Spencer, Karl Rosenkranz, G. Stanley Hall, Elizabeth Blackwell, and Alice McLellan Birney. The list also included novels, leaflets, pamphlets, and instructions manuals for association organizing, child culture, sex education, cross-listed organizations, public municipalities, sociology, pedagogy, and children's reading lists. Of particular curiosity is Louisa May Alcott's novel *Eight Cousins or, The Aunt Hill*. The book has largely been classified as a children's novel, however, Ruth Dyckfehderau, a literary criticism scholar, has argued that Alcott wrote *Eight Cousins* with an adult audience in mind. Dyckfehderau argues that Alcott challenged the binaries of feminine and masculine parenting roles by portraying the uncle in the novel as a "male mother" and the child's aunts taking on "masculine" roles and thus "displac[ing] the supremacy of biological parents and creat[ing] a space for uncles and aunts as parent figures."<sup>73</sup> While the novel was recommended for girls between the ages of 12 and 15, the NCM's inclusion of the book on their list supports Dyckfehderau's

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<sup>72</sup> Individuals, clubs, and associations could purchase copies ranging from \$0.02 to \$20 each or could purchase traveling libraries for \$5. See, National Congress of Mothers, *Book List Suggested By the National Congress of Mothers* (Washington, D.C.: National Congress of Mothers, Washington Loan and Trust Building, c. 1899), 6-29, in fol. 46, box. 12, series 1, National Congress of Parents and Teachers Records (MSNCPT66), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, (hereafter cited as MSNCPT66 / UIC Archives).

<sup>73</sup> Ruth Dyckfehderau introduces the theory of "denaturalizing maternity" in Ruth Dyckfehderau, "Moral Pap and Male Mothers: The Political Subtexts of Louisa May Alcott's *Eight Cousins or, The Aunt Hill*," *Legacy*, 16, no. 2 (1999): 154-167.

contention that parents themselves were the audience. Going further, within a decade of its founding, NCM challenged the biological supremacy of parents and replaced it with cultural, intellectual, and vocational training. The NCM insisted that anyone—male or female—if trained properly, could take up the role of “mother.”

But the path towards professionalizing motherhood wasn't linear nor without contention. “The experiment is about to reach fruition, and the women who have had their shoulders to the wheel all these months are beginning to feel quite comfortable. There is a tug of war yet to come, however,” the *New York Times* forecasted. The reporter suggested that the “war” would be between the original members of the national board and newly inspired female leaders at the state level. “Now that the congress ha[d] really become popular,” the reporter observed, “there are plenty of women who would like to be recognized as ‘leaders.’” But they warned of the unlikeliness “that those who ha[d] been the mainsprings of the affair [were] going to permit themselves to be pushed aside for new blood, right at the beginning.”<sup>74</sup>

However, during the ensuing decade, the congress found itself extremely successful at organizing nationally and locally. Between 1897 and 1902, the NCM organized seven state mothers' congresses. The NCM recommended the creation of a National Health Bureau, state-wide mothers' demonstrations, traveling book clubs, literary circles, a national advisory council of fathers, and kindergartens in every school in the nation. In 1902, Birney and Hearst resigned their posts to Philadelphia native, Hannah K. Schoff. Despite the *New York Times* reporting of the “unlikeliness” that the two women would give up their positions,

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<sup>74</sup> “The Congress of Mothers: Everything Prepare for Its Assembling in Washington This Morning, Will be a Unique Gathering; Some Women Who Will Attend and Participate in the Discussion—Many Anxious to Become Leaders’,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1897, 1.

Hearst and Birney proved the newspaper and the nation wrong.<sup>75</sup> In a letter written to Schoff on her many contributions to the NCM, Birney wrote, “In letting us have you, Mr. Schoff is contributing more to the Congress than any Astor or Vanderbilt could.”<sup>76</sup> At Schoff’s presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C., in February 1902, Birney told of her pleasure in knowing Schoff would lead the National Congress into the twentieth-century: “It is a source of great comfort to me that you are to control and guide the Congress, and I wish you knew how hopeful I am as to its future.”<sup>77</sup>

As a delegate at the inaugural congress, Hannah Schoff presided as president of the Pennsylvania Congress of Mothers between 1899 and 1902.<sup>78</sup> Taking over as national president, Schoff went to work setting a legislative agenda for the Congress. Schoff’s move represented a clear break with Birney’s more passive practices but the decision to ramp up legislative work mirrored Hearst’s strategies with the “Committee of Two Hundred Ladies.” In Schoff’s words, “The thought of mothers has been utterly lacking in legislative and administrative matters concerning children.” Men, according to Schoff, were failing in their jobs both at home and in government. She argued that America had a responsibility to its future citizens, and individuals also had obligations and responsibilities to the country as parents to educate themselves on childhood welfare and education in order to secure democracy.<sup>79</sup> Between 1899 and 1907, Schoff helped lead the call for equal guardianship

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<sup>75</sup> “The Congress of Mothers; Everything Prepared for Its Assembling in Washington This Morning, Will be a Unique Gathering; Some of the Women Who Will Attend and Participate in the Discussion—Many Anxious to Become ‘Leaders’,” *New York Times*, February 17, 1897, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Alice McLellan Birney to Hannah K. Schoff, letter dated 19 February 1900, quoted in *Twenty Years’ Work*, 21.

<sup>77</sup> Alice McLellan Birney, 1902 congressional address, in *Twenty Years’ Work*, 23-24.

<sup>78</sup> Pennsylvania became the second state to establish a Mothers’ Congress in 1899, it was preceded by New York. *Twenty Years’ Work for Child Welfare*, 20.

<sup>79</sup> Hannah K. Schoff, quoted in Presidential Report of 1905, *Golden Jubilee History, 1897-1947* (Chicago, IL: National Congress of Parent and Teachers Association, 1947), 55.

rights, the creation of a national health bureau, established a national committees for legislation, protective child labor laws, juvenile courts and probation work, as well as, a department for parents and teachers associations at the national headquarters in D.C.<sup>80</sup> Furthermore, as the congressional conventions rolled in year after year Schoff's Congress replaced the rhetoric of "motherhood" and "mother-love" with "parenthood" and "profession." As early as 1899, the Congress adopted its first plans to organize "Schools for Parents" via local parent and teacher associations to train women and men to become better educated in children's health and welfare. By Schoff's presidency, the Congress went further and developed the schools as political entry points for women to discuss parents' concerns regarding child welfare with local, state, and national public officials.<sup>81</sup>

At a time when most women lacked suffrage and isolated from government bureaucratic positions, NCM women discovered they could infiltrate male-dominated public spaces and influence policy by presenting themselves as mothers raising future citizens rather than as women seeking voting rights.<sup>82</sup> NCM's success depended on members embracing a cloak of maternalism to garner vast appeal for women's social, political, and economic

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<sup>80</sup> National Congress of Parents and Teachers, "Legislation History, 1899-1958, Vol. 1," (n.p., n.d.), p. 3, fol. 845, box 127, series 15, PTAR / UIC Archives. According to the 1959 Historian's report of the National Parent Teacher Association, the organization argued that while the initial legislative mission had changed very little since 1897, the early Congress "set a precedent for the future work of the organization that has become one of the nation's most powerful forces in influencing lawmakers." See, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, "History of the Committee on Legislation, 1899-1958," (n.p., n.d.), p. 3, vol. 98, series 5, National Congress of Parents and Teachers Publications (NCPTP), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago, (hereafter NCPTP / UIC Archives).

<sup>81</sup> Within the first ten years, the annual convention for the National Congress of Mothers was held in Washington, D.C. (1897, 1898, 1899, 1902, 1905); Des Moines, Iowa (1900); Columbus, Ohio (1901); Detroit, Michigan (1903); Chicago, Illinois (1904, 1906); and, Los Angeles, California (1907). See, *Twenty Years' Work for Child Welfare*, 18-30.

<sup>82</sup> Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Introduction," in *U.S. History as Women's History: New Feminist Essays*, eds. Linda Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 9.

issues. However, NCM's reliance on women's suffrage networks to establish state and local units resulted increased tensions within its ranks to publicly support women's suffrage as another tool advancing their cause.

In 1900, Birney refused to align the Mothers' Congress with the National Council of Women. Fearful that a division between pro- and anti-suffragists would split the association, the NCM never officially adopted a national resolution supporting women's equal suffrage.<sup>83</sup> However, this did not keep members from voicing their demand for suffrage. Following the fourth National Congress of Mothers meeting in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1900, Ida Husted Harper, in a letter to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, conveyed the growing urgency for suffrage among NCM members. Despite Birney's refusal to add women's suffrage to the national platform, Harper wrote to Stanton noting that the "Congress [was] stampeding for suffrage." Harper also noted that the "male mothers" tried to quiet talks of suffrage but "female mothers" regained control over the conversation. "[The] masses of women undoubtedly are being converted to a belief in woman suffrage," Harper conveyed to Stanton.<sup>84</sup> Two years

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<sup>83</sup> In May 1900, NCM President Alice McLellan Birney "steadfastly opposed . . . any resolution in favor of suffrage" and believed any attempt to officially support suffrage would "divide" and "wreck" the congress. In a letter to Birney, Susan B. Anthony detailed the similarities and indeed the dependent relationship between the work of the Mothers' Congress and suffrage. The congress refused to vote on a resolution adopting women's suffrage. Anthony tried once again to persuade Birney in February 1902 to align the congress with the National Council of Women. Anthony confessed to the NCM delegation, "You must have the control of outside as well as inside of the home to rear your child to perfection. You cannot name a single incident of municipal government that does not affect the home. . . . I should think that of all women in the world mothers would want the vote. You should want a word to say about sanitary matters in the government." But Birney and the NCM Board of Managers still withheld their support for equal suffrage out of fear for fractioning the congress between eastern and western delegates, see "Remarks by SBA to the National Congress of Mothers," February 27, 1902, in *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 425-27. See also "Suffrage Question is Up; On Which Dissension is Likely Before Congress Ends," *Des Moines (IA) Register*, May 24, 1900; and "Mothers' Congress Ends; Equal Suffrage Ignored in the Resolutions," *Des Moines (IA) Register*, May 26, 1900.

<sup>84</sup> Ida Husted Harper to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, June 5, 1900, in *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 348-49.

later a hopeful Susan B. Anthony made her first and only public appearance at NCM.

Stepping before a thunderous crowd of mothers, Anthony said “I do not know exactly what are the lines of the work that you proceed upon, . . . I should think that of all women in the world mothers would want the vote. You should want a word to say about sanitary matters in the government. I have stood for fifty years for the one idea of representation, not as a woman, but as a citizen.”<sup>85</sup>

Over the next twenty years the organization committed itself to a broad interpretation of citizenship obligations and rights first under the banner of motherhood, womanhood, and parenthood. From state organization, to focusing on parent-education, and the first initial steps to professionalize parenthood, the NCM cast a wide net bringing disparate women’s organizations and women’s varied political interests under one institution. The NCM established national networks of informational resources and services training women and men for citizenship.

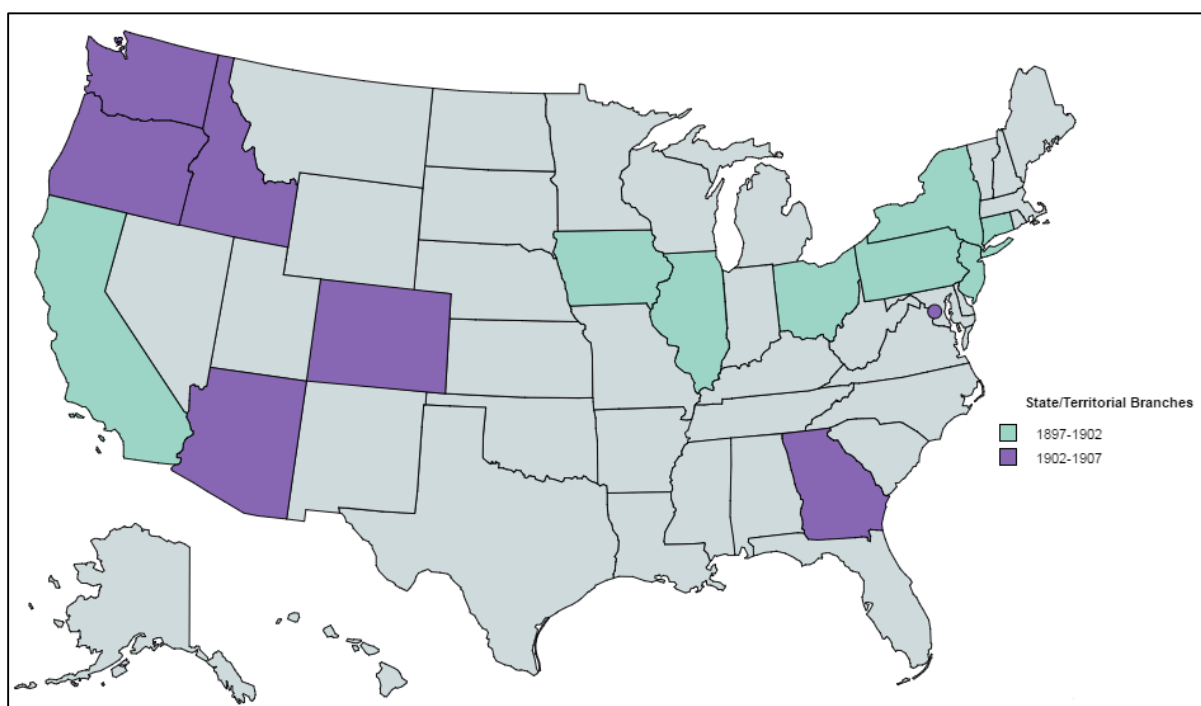
The most effective and successful means of expanding its base and professionalizing parenthood, the NCM concluded, was through the “School for Parents.” The development of mothers’ circles and parent-teacher associations, as part of a national decentralized school for parents, was the most significant factor in expanding and sustaining the national association’s agenda in local communities.<sup>86</sup> During her western tour in 1905, Hannah Schoff spent six weeks speaking and attending state federation club meetings in California, Colorado, Idaho, and Washington. In Denver, Colorado, Schoff met with Sarah Platt Decker, a suffragist and president of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, and with local Denverites Annie

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<sup>85</sup> “Remarks by SBA to the National Congress of Mothers,” February 27, 1902, in *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, 426-27.

<sup>86</sup> Hannah K. Schoff on state organization and utility of parent-teacher associations, see *Golden Jubilee History*, 57, 58.

Louise Hersey, Florence Sprague Dick, and Ella Strong Denison to discuss the possibility of organizing a state mother's congress in Colorado.<sup>87</sup> In 1905, Decker and her associates organized the Denver Mothers' Circle as a precursor to establishing a state mothers' congress. For two years, members of the local Denver Mothers' Circle and members of the Colorado State Federation of Women's Clubs organized reading groups in Denison's home to prepare women for future leadership in the Mother's Congress, which the women would officially establish in 1907.<sup>88</sup>



**Figure 1: Establishment of State Congress of Mothers Branches, 1897–1907**

Source: National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, *Twenty Years' Work for Child Welfare, 1897-1917* (n.p.: National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Association, 1917).

<sup>87</sup> *Golden Jubilee History*, 69.

<sup>88</sup> Sheri Williams, et al., *A Century Dedicated to Children: A Historical Collection of Colorado PTA, 1907-2007* (Wheat Ridge: Colorado PTA, 2007), 8; Mrs. Sherman C. Roe, *A Torchbearer* (n.p.: self-published, 1937), 28.



Although fourteen other state mothers' congresses preceded the Colorado Congress of Mothers in 1907 (five of them established in western states), the Colorado experience is unique for the very reasons Coloradan woman won the vote in 1893—women's cross-associational networking and women's high-interest levels in civic governance. In Colorado mothers' clubs, state women's clubs, temperance unions, and teacher associations joined forces to establish a centralized institution focused on gaining state and federal aid for public education and child welfare. In 1907, Colorado became the first suffrage state to found a state chapter of the National Congress of Mothers. The City and County of Denver heralded this status from the very start of the Colorado Congress of Mothers (CCM).<sup>89</sup> In the next chapter, I examine the processes by which the state of Colorado organized its Mothers' Congress and integrated women's rights issues into CCM's legislative and educational platform and restructured NCM to serve women's greater political and civic interests. If U.S. West historians Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson are correct in their assumption that "No other region of the United States has so shaped the image of our national identity as has the West," I argue that no other western state was more responsible for shaping the identity of the NCM and its successor, the National Parent Teacher Association, than Colorado and its Congress of Mothers.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> "May 3, 1907 Organization of State Congress; Minutes of Board to May 6, 1913," unpublished meeting minutes, p. 1, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Papers, Colorado State PTA Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado, (hereafter CCPTA Archives).

<sup>90</sup> Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, "Editors' Introduction," in *The Women's West*, eds. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 3.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Colorado PTA, 1907-1924: Women's Suffrage and the Expansion of the American Welfare State*

On 10 June 1910, in broad red ink a local Denver newspaper ran the headline: “Mothers of Nation Gather to Discuss Rearing of Children.” Other newspapers also ran full-page spreads announcing the arrival of the NCM. “Slick Up! Mother is Coming!” one warned. “Gates of City Open to Mothers of the Land,” another proclaimed.<sup>1</sup> After the NCM selected Denver as the host-city for its annual national convention the Colorado Congress of Mothers (CCM) board of managers quickly advertised Colorado as the first “suffrage state” to host the Mothers’ Congress. Official CCM historian Mabel Cory Costigan described the gathering as “one of the most important of all women’s conventions.”<sup>2</sup> The *Denver Post* reported the meeting showcased Denver women “wield[ing] the ballot and at the same time look[ing] well to the cares of her household.”<sup>3</sup> Over the course of a few days, CCM embedded women’s suffrage and women’s political activism directly into the foundation of CCM and circuitously into the NCM.

CCM became the first state congress to devote its convention program almost entirely to the question of women’s suffrage. State congress organizers invited well-known female

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<sup>1</sup> Newspaper headlines announcing Denver’s National Congress of Mothers annual convention for June 1910, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>2</sup> Mabel Cory Costigan, “History of Colorado Congress of Mothers, 1909-1911,” n.d., p. 1-4, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>3</sup> “Mothers From Every Nation Throng to Denver When National Congress Meets this Week; Elaborate Program Planned for the 1,500 Resident Society Members; MEETINGS WILL BE SECRET; Woman in All Walks of Life is Down for Discussion by the Delegates,” *Denver (CO) Post*, June 5, 1910, newspaper clipping, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; and, “Denver Women Preparing for National Mothers’ Congress, To Meet Here June 10; Convention Will Be One of the Most Important Ever Held in Denver,” *Denver (CO) Times*, March 1910, newspaper clipping, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

lecturers, writers, academics, and advocates to speak at the convention. Event boosters sought the “best among the representative college women of the Western States.” For instance, suffragist Mary Stewart, the Dean of Women at the University of Montana, Missoula, and Grace Torrey, the acting Dean of Women at UC Berkeley lectured on women’s associations, suffrage, and citizenship.<sup>4</sup> The program blended discussion of women’s political rights with motherhood training, kindergarten instruction, and parenthood education.<sup>5</sup> NCM’s official neutrality on equal suffrage however did not stop the Colorado Congress from broadly declaring equal suffrage and women’s political activism as the key to implementing the national agenda on the state and local level.

Historians writing about the National Congress of Mothers during the Progressive Era have overlooked NCM’s complicated relationship with women’s suffrage. While the women’s association refused to include women’s suffrage on its the national platform the national board members relied heavily on suffragists and suffrage networks to expand its base. Social policy scholar Theda Skocpol in *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* correctly asserts that the association was not initially designed to “[further] women’s rights,” but rather expand the presence and influence of *mothers* on society.<sup>6</sup> Evidence from state mothers’ congresses, particularly, those in the U.S. West, show suffragists expanding women’s political authority by leading and guiding state and local PTAs. Similarly, historian Nancy Cott discusses the longevity of women’s political activism following the passage of the

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<sup>4</sup> “Mothers Congress Special Will Reach Denver June 10, Deans of Women of Western University to Give Thoughtful Symposium at Woman’s Club,” newspaper clipping, n.d., Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>5</sup> “Gate of the City Open to Mothers of the Land,” newspaper headline announcing Denver’s National Congress of Mothers annual convention for June 1910, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>6</sup> Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 334.

Nineteenth Amendment in *Grounding of Modern Feminism*. Cott stresses that the “most important” continuity is women’s involvement in voluntary organizations as a means of political activism. While Cott argues that the end of the Woman’s Movement in 1920 led to a massive membership gain in the National Congress of Mothers and other voluntary associations, she does not address the presence of suffragists pursuing women’s rights in the NCM before 1920.<sup>7</sup>

However, after examining state convention records, many of the leading figures in the Colorado Congress of Mothers and other congresses based in the West were indeed suffragists. Several top executives were long-time members of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association. These women also had grown children, were well educated would have been considered part of the middle-to-upper classes. In a striking display of misidentification, Denver newspapers in 1910, reported “stunning wom[e]n, with young and eager face[s]” and “the sweetest, gentlest, cleverest, understanding mothers” with wild flowers in their hats attended the national Mothers’ Congress in Denver. Yet that same week, NCM President Schoff, herself, revealed the congress failed to draw young women to its meetings often because of the lack of child care. She pointed out, “The young woman with her family is not neglecting home for the club.”<sup>8</sup> This was not a young woman’s association. A local cartoonist provided a more apt description of arriving delegates in “Slick Up! Mother is Coming!” In the picture the delegate is a matronly woman, clothed in a conservative Edwardian-style dress petticoat, adorned with a wide-brimmed hat, and wearing a sash—like those worn by suffragists—draped across her

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<sup>7</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 86-87.

<sup>8</sup> Hannah Schoff quoted in “Gates of City Open to Mothers of the Land,” newspaper clipping, n.d., Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

chest.<sup>9</sup> (See Image 1) Other reporters did spotlight a few of the suffragists in attendance. For instance, one newspaper interviewed seventy-year old Mary Eleanor Brackenridge of the Texas mothers' delegation. Brackenridge, described as a "militant suffragette," reportedly found it easy to balance her support for equal suffrage while expanding the work of the Mothers' Congress.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, forty-seven-year-old Ella Caruthers Porter (Mrs. J. N. Porter), who was president of the Texas Mothers' Congress was also active in the WCTU a suffrage supporter. Talking about the possibility of Texas supporting equal suffrage, Caruthers told a Denver journalist, "[T]o be sure the women of Texas are interested in suffrage and when that interest turns to desire they will achieve the ballot. . . . You know when we once set our minds and hearts on a thing—we women of Texas—it comes our way—always."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For more on suffrage dress see Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-14* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); and, Margaret Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> The newspaper misspelled Mary Eleanor Brackenridge's last name as "Breckinridge." Brackenridge was from San Antonio, Texas, and was active in the League of Women Voters and would later become president of the Texas Woman Suffrage Association, see Ida Husted Harper, ed., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 vols. (NY: J.J. Little and Ives, 1922), 5:328; and, A. Elizabeth Taylor, "Brackenridge, Mary Eleanor," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association. For Brackenridge's comments about woman suffrage see "Mothers of Nation Gather to Discuss Rearing of Children; Some are Suffragettes and Some Scorn the Ballot; There's Nothing Frumpy About These Mothers of the National Congress," newspaper clipping, n.d, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>11</sup> For information on the Texas Congress of Mothers see, Amy A. Hatmaker, "A History of the Texas Congress of Mothers-Parent Teacher Association and School Reform, 1909-1930," (Master's thesis, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, 2016). For more information on Ella Caruthers Porter John William Leonard, ed., *Woman's Who's Who of America: A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of the United States and Canada, 1914-1915* (NY: American Commonwealth, 1914), 654; and, Judith M. McArthur, "Porter, Ella Caruthers," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association. For Porter and Rosewater's comments about woman suffrage and the National Congress of Mothers see "Mothers of Nation Gather to Discuss Rearing of Children; Some are Suffragettes and Some Scorn the Ballot; There's Nothing Frumpy About These Mothers of the National Congress," newspaper clipping, n.d, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.



**Image 1:** *Slick Up! Mother is Coming!* Dated 10 June 1910, newspaper clipping in the *Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911*, Papers of the Colorado Parent-Teacher Association, Colorado Parent-Teacher Association State Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

Reflecting on the convention, Costigan described Denver as a city waking up and “brim[ing] over with enthusiasm” for women’s activism, child welfare, mother-work, and parent-teacher education.<sup>12</sup> She described how the CCM executive board of managers collaborated with local mothers’ clubs to provide free milk and ice to local families during Colorado’s hot summer months. She revealed an organization of women working closely with Denver physicians and nurses to coordinate welfare visits to the homes of the city’s

<sup>12</sup> Mabel Cory Costigan, “History of Colorado Congress of Mothers, 1909-1911,” n.d., p. 1-4, *Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911*, CCPTA Archives.

mothers and youngest wards.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, she proclaimed CCM victorious in securing key state legislation and implementing city-wide programs “bearing directly on the protection of women and children.”<sup>14</sup>

In Costigan’s Denver, white, middle-class clubwomen who led during the successful 1893 Colorado suffrage campaign revived their club-integration methods for the Mothers’ Congress. Riding the wave of suffrage victories in the West—Wyoming (1869), Colorado (1893), Utah and Idaho (1896), and the pending victory in Washington and California—Denver clubwomen saw the Congress of Mothers as an opportunity to increase their local activism and national standing as full citizens and mothers. The national Congress only emphasized motherhood. Denver mothers directed their first efforts towards building a coalition of women to lobby and advocate for infant and children’s health care and education in Denver and across the state.

Before the turn of the century Denver women represented 44% of the city’s population whereas women accounted for less than 30% of the Colorado’s statewide electorate.<sup>15</sup> By 1900, women for the first-time outnumbered male residents in Denver 67,207 to 66,592.<sup>16</sup> CCM leaders benefited from these high numbers in Denver and situated

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<sup>13</sup> Mabel Cory Costigan, “History of Colorado Congress of Mothers, 1909-1911,” n.d., p. 1, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>14</sup> On 23 June 1911, the Executive Board of the Colorado Congress of Mothers reappointed Mabel Cory Costigan as the organization’s historian, see Executive Board Minutes, 23 June 1911, *May 3, 1907, Organization of the State Congress; Minutes of Board to May 6, 1913*, n.d., Colorado CCPTA Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Statistics on Colorado’s population from the U.S. Census records for 1890 report 189,336 males and 138,872 females and in Denver City 43,785 males and 34,416 female inhabitants. See “Table 20: Native and Foreign Born and White and Colored Population, Classified by Sex, by State and Territories” and “Table 23: Native and Foreign Born and White and Colored Population, Classified by Sex, of Places Having 2,500 Inhabitants or More,” U.S. Census (1890): 486-387. For state population data circa 1900, see Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, (5<sup>th</sup> ed., Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2013), 185.

<sup>16</sup> “Table 23: Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, for Places Having 2,500 Inhabitants or More,” U.S. Census (1900): 610. In Colorado reported 295,382 male inhabitants and

the state's activities from there. They also navigated multiple women's club meetings and worked through multiple organizations to advocate for women's issues during the early 1890s and 1900s. This chapter will show how Denver-CCM members mobilized women and organized local parent-teacher associations, increased public funding for education and child welfare programs, expanded parents' resources and services, and enlarged women's presence and activity in civic society. This chapter demonstrates how engaging women's larger political interests CCM was able to sustain an expansive grassroots network from Denver to Washington, D.C.

In 1905, the Denver Circle of Mothers, the foremother of the Colorado Congress of Mothers, was established by Sarah S. Decker Platt and Annie Hersey. Both were active in the Colorado Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Colorado Equal Suffrage Association.<sup>17</sup> Platt was a long-time participant in the child welfare and clubwoman movements, a suffragist, and labor activist. She was the first president of the Woman's Club of Denver and a member of the Colorado Board of Charities and Corrections. The governor appointed her to serve on the Colorado Civil Service Commission. She also served as president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs.<sup>18</sup> One author described Platt as the "fearless and able president" of the GFWC.<sup>19</sup> Another noted her "national fame as [an] orator

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only 244,868 female inhabitants, see "Table 9: Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, by State and Territories," U.S. Census (1900): 482.

<sup>17</sup> Carolyn Stefanco, "Networking on the Frontier: Women's Suffrage Movement, 1876-1893," in *The Women's West*, eds. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1984), 268-269.

<sup>18</sup> "Mrs. Sarah S. Decker Platt," in *Representative Women of Colorado*, compiled by James Alexander Semple (Denver, CO: s.p., 1914), 37.

<sup>19</sup> Jennie Cunningham Croly (Mrs. J.C. Croly), *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*, Council of General Federation of Women's Clubs of America (NY: Henry G. Allen, 1898), p. 272.



and leader.”<sup>20</sup> With the establishment of the Denver Circle of Mothers in 1905, Platt bridged the way for Colorado suffragists to merge with the National Congress of Mothers in 1907.<sup>21</sup>

Established in May 1907, the Colorado Congress of Mothers quickly ascended to become one of the state’s largest, nonpartisan lobbying associations for women and children’s welfare because of membership mobilization, the integration of PTA leaders into government agencies, and overcoming internal disputes regarding its role in state-funded health services, child labor bills, and children’s welfare bureaus. CCM built on the strategies and methods used by suffragists during the 1893 suffrage campaign. Since 1876, the Colorado Constitution had granted women partial suffrage and protected their right to vote in school board elections and hold elected school positions.<sup>22</sup>

Historian Carolyn Stefanco noted that the 1893 campaign succeeded because suffragists capitalized on women’s “joint affiliations and shared interests” rather than focusing solely on women’s suffrage. She examined the effectiveness of clubwomen working across associations between 1876 and 1893. Stefanco concluded that in relation to other Coloradan cities during the period, Denver became the “focal point for suffrage activity” because many of the rank-and-file clubwomen resided there and were affiliated with multiple women’s clubs.<sup>23</sup> I agree with Stefanco when she states that Coloradan women “transformed” the WCTU, labor unions, and other women’s organizations into “potent

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<sup>20</sup> “Mrs. Sarah S. Decker Platt,” in *Representative Women of Colorado*, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Platt welcomed NCM President Hannah Schoff and NCM Secretary Helen T. Birney to Denver in May 1907 to officially open the first meeting of the Colorado Congress of Mothers. Helen was the Alice McLellan Birney’s sister-in-law. See, Minutes of the Executive Board of the Colorado Congress of Mothers, *May 3, 1907; Organization of State Congress: Minutes of Board to May 6, 1913*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>22</sup> Abbott et al., *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 183; and Col. Const. of 1876, art. VII, § 1, cl. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Stefanco, “Networking on the Frontier: The Colorado Women’s Suffrage Movement, 1876-1893,” 265, 273.

vehicles for women's political power."<sup>24</sup> I observe similar patterns in the CCM and this chapter will show how the association used parent-teacher associations to propel women's issues forward and to place women in local, state, and national positions of influence and authority.

As Colorado became the first state in the nation to have a Mothers' Congress while simultaneously granting women universal suffrage, CCM became a vehicle for newly enfranchised women to exert real change in the local communities. This history of the CCM breaks with current narratives of the PTA and shows the association thrusting women to the forefront of state and national politics. CCM pulled its representatives and state managers from the ranks of the Colorado's WCTU and the GFWC. Local leaders and state organizers of mothers' circles and parent-teacher associations expanded the CCM program to include women's concerns over children's welfare, protection of the home, health and hygiene, education, social housekeeping, and civic responsibility. The board of managers partnered with high-level public school administrators, state school superintendents, mayors, governors, and legislators to gain support for statewide education and welfare reforms. Consequentially, the close-working relationship CCM built with public officials at various levels of Colorado government opened new civic leadership roles for CCM's female members. The PTA continues to use these same introductory methods and integration tactics to place its members on local and state boards of education, city councils, in federal and non-government agencies.

When viewed through this lens, the history of state congresses, such as the Colorado Congress of Mothers, shows how the National Congress directly benefited from the club

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 273.

movement era and expanded women's cross-organizational networking. By integrating the national association program into local women's clubs and circles through public lecture series, community service projects, parent and child study sessions, and community socials, CCM gained statewide name recognition. Further, CCM secured public favor on matters related to education and community welfare in Colorado during the Progressive Era because of strong female leadership networks. In less than twenty years, CCM successfully increased its membership by 1725%. Initially only 1500 members registered for the 1910 convention, but by 1924, CCM reported 25,888 members and more than 269 parent-teacher associations across the state.<sup>25</sup>

By examining the development of a state mothers' congress in relation to the increased presence of the NCM in Washington, D.C., I offer two new interpretations of the National Congress during the Progressive Era. First, I maintain that although NCM President Birney refused to tie NCM to equal suffrage, western mothers' congresses using their new right of suffrage created an open space for women to test the boundaries of women's political authority. Second, I assert that the influence of suffragists was critical to the future activism of the National PTA. Early state congresses served as a training ground for women seeking government employment and greater public service opportunities.

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<sup>25</sup> In 1910, the Colorado Congress of Mothers reported 1500 members for the opening of the annual National Congress of Mothers convention held in Denver that year. By 1924, the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers counted 25,888 members and more than 269 PTAs established. See "Mothers From Every Nation Throng to Denver When National Congress Meets this Week; Elaborate Program Planned for the 1,500 Resident Society Members; MEETINGS WILL BE SECRET; Woman in All Walks of Life is Down for Discussion by the Delegates," *Denver (CO) Post*, June 5, 1910, newspaper clipping, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; and, 3 April 1924, Board Minutes, *Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, Board Minutes, May 5, 1922 thru October 2, 1924*, CCPTA Archives.

In recasting the history of the Colorado Congress of Mothers between 1907 and 1924 against the backdrop of the expanding National Congress, I take a wide survey of CCM's organizing methods to show how state associations mobilized women and issues across large geographical areas. Second, I examine CCM's extensive methods of preparing women for government positions. Three examples at the local, state, and national level examine individual CCM and NCM leaders' contributions to introducing sex education programs in the Denver Public Schools, organizing the Home Education Division of the U.S. Bureau of Education, and the establishment of the Colorado Child Welfare Bureau. Lastly, I scrutinize the work of CCM presidents and state organizers within each of these areas to better explore women's layered activism in state and federal government.

This approach, I argue, enriches current scholarship on women's suffrage by providing new areas of exploration into the relationship between maternalist organizations and suffrage associations especially post-suffrage. This chapter also challenges the current theory that the National PTA has been a continuously top-down organization. By examining the activities of state and local PTAs through individual members, I contend that the organization begins shifting towards bottom-up association driven by local concerns and interests. Women involved in local PTAs were motivated to join state mothers' congresses based on their concerns about the broader impact of immigration, urbanization, and industrialization on their children and families. For example, CCM historian Mabel Cory Costigan was a Sunday school teacher, presided over the Denver Woman's Club between 1912-1915, and chaired committees for the Colorado Federation of Women's Clubs. At the national level, she served on the National Child Labor Committee advisory council, became vice-president of the National Consumers' League, and testified before Congress on behalf of

the NCL and the National League of Women Voters regarding meatpacking legislation in 1920 and 1921.<sup>26</sup> State and local PTA members' diverse interests and multiple professional ties, like Costigan's, reveal not only women's broad political activism and women's inclusion in government agencies, but also the PTA's largely under analyzed role in the expansion and staffing of the welfare state.

As quickly as Platt and others organized the first Mothers' Congress in Colorado, CCM's executive board set out to build institutional support by increasing the number of parent-teacher associations and mothers' circles across the state. Initially, CCM planned fundraising drives, film screenings and guest lecturers to attract Denverites to join. The National Congress president insisted state branches "spend more money every year and spend it for the good of the mothers and children of this great nation," however, CCM only had \$67.76 as of February 1909 for programs and activities.<sup>27</sup> One of CCM's first outreach programs with the Denver Public Schools (DPS) was the Girls' Circle. The program was a co-curricular course for girls in junior high and high school. Students were instructed on puberty, physiology, hygiene, and domestic science. Since DPS originally refused to fund the program, CCM and the Denver Circle of Mothers sold Mother's Day buttons, held tea

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<sup>26</sup> "Mrs. Edward P. Costigan," in *Representative Women of Colorado*, 34; Wilbur Fiske Stone, ed., *History of Colorado*, (Chicago, IL: S.J. Clarke, 1919), 4:145-46; "Statement of Mrs. Edward P. Costigan, President Consumers' League of the District of Columbia, one of the Vice Presidents of the National Consumers' League, and also Chairman of the Food Supply and Demand Committee of the League of Women Voters," U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, *Meat Packer Legislation: Hearings before the Committee on Agriculture*, 66th Cong., 2d sess. (1920): 691-697; "Statement of Mrs. Edward P. Costigan, Representing the National League of Women Voters, Washington, D.C.," U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Agriculture, 67th Cong., 1st sess. (1921): 53-54; and, Mrs. Edward P. Costigan, *The Food Problem and Federal Legislation* (New York: National Consumers League, 1921).

<sup>27</sup> Hannah Schoff quoted in "Mothers in Membership Campaign," newspaper clipping, n.d., Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; and, 12 February 1909, Minutes of the Executive Board of the Colorado Congress of Mothers, *May 3, 1907; Organization of State Congress: Minutes of Board to May 6, 1913*, CCPTA Archives.

socials, hosted film screenings, and gave trolley rides to residents. They raised more than \$1200 to support the program and had enough remaining to hire an instructor for \$40 a month.<sup>28</sup> After four months of the Girls' Circle in DPS, more than 300 girls enrolled and CCM membership chairman Caroline B. Downing reported, "experience in this new movement assures us that the Mothers' Congress is thus meeting a need in the community; for the enthusiastic response of the girls is unabated." Mothers and teachers alike, Downing said, wanted to attend the course. High interest in the course resulted in the class's instructor, Anna Noble, developing a 12-part lecture series on "The Responsibilities of Motherhood." Downing closed her letter outlining how membership dues helped support the Girls' Circle and the general education fund. Individuals could purchase state memberships for \$1.00, sustained memberships for \$5.00, and life memberships for \$50.00.<sup>29</sup> Impressed by the parents' response to the program, DPS soon incorporated it into the high schools and hired the instructor full-time.<sup>30</sup> Thus the CCM helped shape public education policy by first introducing sex education courses through PTA cocurricular programs.

The CCM also hosted film screenings to raise revenue and increase membership. In October 1910, the group sold tickets to see "Better Babies," a film linking infant mortality to

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<sup>28</sup> Williams, et al., *A Century Dedicated to Children*, 9; *Legacy of Promise, 1907-1957: A History of the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1907-1957* (n.p.: Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1957), p. 9-10, fol. 706, box. 110, series 1, PTAR / UIC Archives; 6 January 1911 and 6 February 1911, Minutes of the Executive Board of the Colorado Congress of Mothers, *May 3, 1907; Organization of State Congress: Minutes of Board to May 6, 1913*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>29</sup> "Course of Study for Denver Girls," *State News, Child Welfare Magazine* 8, no. 5 (January 1914): 182; and, Caroline B. Downing, Chairman Membership Committee, Shirley Hotel, Denver, letter on membership campaign and Girls' Circle educational fund, c.1911, in Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; and *Legacy of Promise*, p. 9-10, fol. 706, box. 110, series 1, PTAR / UIC Archives. Through sustained memberships a member could belong to the local unit, the Denver District Circle, and the National Congress, see June 1914, Executive Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Branch, 1914 to April 1917*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>30</sup> Ella Lyman Cabot, *Volunteer Help to the Schools* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1914), 90.

urban living conditions. Viewers learned about children's hygiene, nutrition, and development. CCM intended to show the film at the 1911 Chicago Child Welfare Exhibition, but decided to preview the film at home in hopes of raising awareness about the welfare conditions of Denver's children. More than 12,000 Denverites attended CCM's exhibit and film screening.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, CCM promoted its speaker series in local newspapers. CCM invited well-known American feminist and suffragist Charlotte Perkins Gilman to lecture on "New Motherhood" at Denver's prestigious preparatory academy—the Wolcott School.<sup>32</sup> CCM hoped fathers would attend Gilman's lecture, too.<sup>33</sup> In her address, Gilman linked the efforts of the Mothers' Congress to bettering women's education on motherhood and advancing gender equality in the home and child care. Moreover, Gilman impressed upon Denver's mothers and fathers the necessity of educating children from birth and underscored that parents were wholly underprepared to fulfill that responsibility. Gilman suggested CCM

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<sup>31</sup> *Legacy of Promise*, p. 9-10, fol. 706, box. 110, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives. For more information about the Chicago Child Welfare Exhibition, May 11-25, 1911, see Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit, Collection, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library; *The Child in the City: A Series of Papers Presented at the Conferences Held During the Chicago Child Welfare Exhibit*, ed. Sophonisba P. Breckinridge (Chicago, IL: Department of Social Investigation, Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, 1912).

<sup>32</sup> "Historian's Report," Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; "New Motherhood, Subject of Talk by Mrs. Gilman," *Rocky Mountain News*, 20 November 1911, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; "Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Lecture on 'New Motherhood'," *Rocky Mountain News* (Denver, CO), newspaper clipping, n.d., Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; "Home Not Proper Place for Babies, Mrs. Stetson Gilman Tells Women," *Denver (CO) Post*, 9 December 1911, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; and, "Mrs. C.P. Gilman Befuddles Denver Women on Babies," newspaper clipping, n.d., Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives. For Charlotte Perkins Gilman's involvement and opinion of the Woman Suffrage Movement see Judith A. Allen, *The Feminism of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Sexualities, Histories, Progressivism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009); and, Cynthia Davis, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: A Biography* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> "Mrs. Gilman Lecture on 'New Motherhood'," 20 November 1911, newspaper clipping, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives.

create courses on motherhood- and childhood science, organize day nurseries, and develop programs that institutionalized and professionalized child care instruction. Gilman called for scientific motherhood and insisted becoming a “better mother” or a “better parent” professional knowledge—a scientific, instructional training course—was required. In the post-lecture discussions groups mothers and fathers remained confused as to Gilman’s suggestions. Were they to give up the rearing of their children to a stranger? Or, did they just need to learn more and train harder to become better parents?<sup>34</sup>



**III. 1** "Home Not Proper Place for Babies, Mrs. Stetson Gilman Tells Women; Father Only Intermittent Affair, Mother Mere Cook--Infants Should be Put in Groups of Six and Looked After Scientifically," *Denver (CO) Post*, December 9, 1911, in Colorado Congress of Mothers

<sup>34</sup> For more on scientific motherhood, see Rima D. Apple, *Perfect Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006); and Jodi Vandenberg-Daves, *Modern Motherhood: An American History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014).



Scrapbook, 1909-1911, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Papers, Colorado State PTA Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

Despite the high attendance at film screenings, national speakers, and working with DPS, CCM had limited success in expanding its membership at first. Between 1910 and 1913, CCM gained only 300 new members. And, yet by the spring of 1914 the congress ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> in highest national membership and boasted 90 parent-teacher associations.<sup>35</sup> But CCM wanted to expand further. In August 1914, the executive board hired a new state organizer. Rather than appointing someone from the outside, they named a director who was familiar with the NCM, CCM, clubwork, and had a good relationship with school teachers and administrators. The board chose its state treasurer and the newly elected national vice-president of the National Congress of Mothers, Florence Dick, to become its official state organizer. Born in 1864, Dick was a former school teacher, the wife of Denver's superintendent of schools, the former president of the Denver Circle of Mothers, and had represented Colorado at the National Congress several times already. Her earliest civic work included establishing kindergartens, directing Denver's playground movement, and serving as CCM's state chairman for the Committee of Literature, Speakers, and Programs. Based on her broad experience and previous leadership in the organization, CCM executives granted

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<sup>35</sup> "Mothers From Every Nation Throng to Denver When National Congress Meets this Week; Elaborate Program Planned for the 1,500 Resident Society Members; MEETINGS WILL BE SECRET; Woman in All Walks of Life is Down for Discussion by the Delegates," *Denver (CO) Post*, 5 June 1910, newspaper clipping, Colorado Congress of Mothers Scrapbook, 1909-1911, CCPTA Archives; *A Century Dedicated to Children*, 10; 28 August 1914, Executive Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Branch, 1914 to April 1917*, CCPTA Archives.

Dick full oversight over state mobilization tactics and authorized her to “organize circles anywhere she [saw] fit.”<sup>36</sup>

As state organizer, Dick met with clubwomen, school teachers, as well as interested parent-teacher and mothers’ circles to establish new associations and reorganize previous ones under the auspices of the CCM. In a commemorative biography written by Mrs. Sherman Roe, a CCM representative and National PTA executive board member, Dick reportedly rode her bicycle from one school district to the next. During her first year as state organizer, Dick added 52 new parent-teacher associations and registered another 300 members. By 1918, she expanded the number of local PTA units to 184 and increased state membership to 5,957. Her achievements led the state executive board to brag on 2 May 1918: “A Parent-Teacher Association has been organized in every school in [Denver].”<sup>37</sup>

In 1922, the state membership committee listed 15,531 parent-teacher members with more than half of the individuals residing in the city and county of Denver.<sup>38</sup> Although half of the thirty-seven county PTA councils reported less than 200 paid members, Pueblo registered more than 1,000 members and Denver recorded 8,241 members. State membership data did not report ethnicity of members, and not every county had local or district PTAs. (See Table 1 and Fig. 1) Two years later, the Colorado Congress had amassed an

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<sup>36</sup> 28 August 1914, Executive Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Branch, 1914 to April 1917*, CCPTA Archives; and, Mrs. Sherman C. Roe, *A Torch Bearer*, (n.p.: s.p., 1937), 25-27, 31, 37-40, in CCPTA Archives.

<sup>37</sup> *A Century Dedicated to Children*, 10; 28 August 1914, Executive Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Branch, 1914 to April 1917*, CCPTA Archives; 30 April 1915, Executive Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Branch, 1914 to April 1917*, CCPTA Archives; *Legacy of Promise*, p. 14-16, fol. 706, box. 110, series 1, PTAR / UIC Archives; 27 May 1918, Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Congress of Mothers Board Minutes, May 18, 1917 thru May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>38</sup> “Membership Totals for 1921-1922,” in Reports, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee; Conventions; May 5, 1922-Oct. 2, 1924*, CCPTA Archives.

organization of more than 25,000 members and oversaw the activities of 269 local, district, and county PTA councils.<sup>39</sup>

**Table 1:** *Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations Membership by County, 1921-1922*

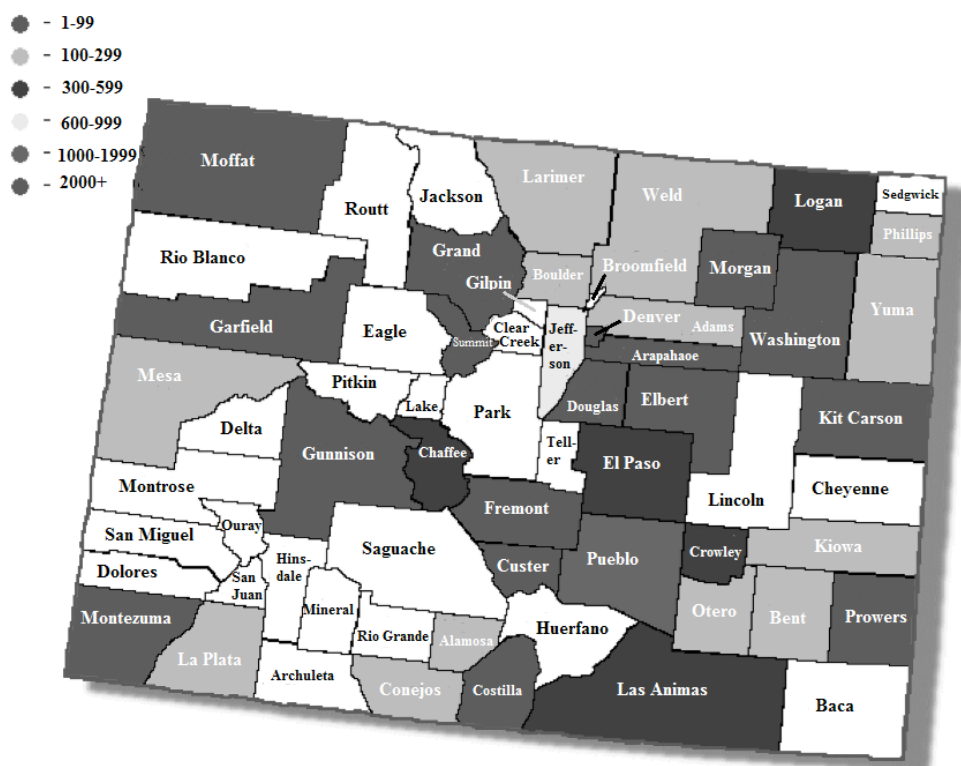
Adams	241
Alamosa	206
Arapahoe	40
Bent	135
Boulder	264
Chaffee	416
Conejos	207
Costilla	16
Crowley	425
Custer	66
Denver	8241
Douglas	11
Elbert	56
El Paso	529
Fremont	14
Garfield	80
Grand Junction	40
Gunnison	18
Jefferson	646
Kit Carson	22
Kiowa	124
La Plata	140
Larimer	286
Las Animas	589
Logan	381
Mesa	251
Moffat	12
Montezuma	80
Morgan	24
Otero	120
Phillips	264
Prowers	80
Pueblo	1007
Summit	24
Washington	46
Weld	252
Yuma	178
Membership Total	<b>15531</b>

Source: “Membership Totals for 1921-1922,” in Reports, Minutes, *The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee; Conventions; May 5, 1922-Oct. 2, 1924*, Papers of the Colorado Parent-Teacher Association, Colorado Parent-Teacher Association State Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

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<sup>39</sup> 3 April 1924, Board Minutes, *Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, Board Minutes, May 5, 1922 thru October 2, 1924*, CCPTA Archives.

**Fig. 1** Map of Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations Membership by County, 1921-1922



Source: "Membership Totals for 1921-1922," in Reports, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee; Conventions; May 5, 1922-Oct. 2, 1924*, Papers of the Colorado Parent-Teacher Association, Colorado Parent-Teacher Association State Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

As part of its membership drive, the CCM executive board worked to increase father and teacher membership. CCM president Rosina Zimmerhackel instituted statewide and district-wide registration drives urging all schools to "declare each father, mother and teacher as a paid member." Local PTAs and district councils received letters from CCM requesting PTAs represent "every home in the district." The CCM state chairperson also advised unit leaders that, "Any parent, tourist, or person interested in school and children [was] eligible" for membership. Although membership reports from this period do not record the gender or profession of individual members, the state executive board's implementation of "State

Week” and “District Week” did result in increased membership across the state. Membership campaign packets also signaled the board’s early efforts to diversify the delegation with mothers, fathers, and teachers as potential agents of child welfare advocacy.<sup>40</sup>

CCM appealed to parents and teachers arguing a membership with the PTA was part of their civic responsibility to the local community, the state, and the nation. During the state convention of 1922, CCM resolved that, “The work of the Congress is civic work in its highest and broadest sense, and every man or woman who is interested in the aims of Congress is cordially invited to become a member and aid in the organized efforts for a higher, nobler, national-life which can only be attained through the individual home.”<sup>41</sup> CCM Pres. Zimmerhackel and her board members turned a keen eye to building its membership base by broadening its program platform. Supporting the National Congress’s legislative agenda, Zimmerhackel’s CCM pursued work advocating for international peace, prohibition, protection of women’s labor, aid for physical education, home extension services, and federal aid for public schools and the appointment of a Secretary of Education to the president’s cabinet.<sup>42</sup> The corresponding activities to expand the presence of CCM in Colorado and across the nation led to senior-level state CCM leaders assuming greater responsibilities with state and federal agencies.

Typically, PTA managers and chairmen collaborated with state and national agencies to leverage the organization’s membership and legislative committees to promote women’s

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<sup>40</sup> *Legacy of Promise*, p. 20, fol. 706, box. 110, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives; and Membership letter from Mrs. Harry Wood, State Membership Committee Chairperson, reproduced in *A Century Dedicated to Children*, 12.

<sup>41</sup> 5 May 1922, 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, *Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, Board Minutes, May 5, 1922 thru October 2, 1924*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>42</sup> 5 May 1922, 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, *Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, Board Minutes, May 5, 1922 thru October 2, 1924*, CCPTA Archives.

and children's welfare issues. Since its founding the National Congress of Mothers saw itself as an information clearinghouse for mother's circles, parent-teacher associations, and clubwomen interested in motherhood practices and child welfare techniques. However, the national association shifted from influence to direct action and lobbying under the leadership of presidents Hannah Schoff (1902–1920) and Katherine Chapin Higgins (1920–1923).<sup>43</sup> Between 1902 and 1923, the organization constructed a broad legislative agenda and worked to secure government *support* for public education, women and children's labor laws, and social welfare provisions.

National legislative chairman, Elizabeth Tilton, argued that the full-support of state congresses and local units allowed NCM to use its policy platform as protection “against the barrage of the enemy”—anyone or any institution against public education and child welfare.<sup>44</sup> Officially called the “6Ps,” the National Congress constructed a national legislative program that attempted to streamline state programs and services to better address, propose, and support reform measures for women and children's welfare. The platform included policy issues concerning labor rights, marriage and divorce laws, juvenile probation, physical education programs, drugs and alcohol, parent-education courses, and federal aid to education.<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that the National Congress could not act unilaterally, rather,

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<sup>43</sup> Early in NCM's history the president-elect was inaugurated in February during the annual congressional conventions. Schoff presided until the end of the 1920 convention and Higgins accepted the position following the conclusion of the meeting.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Tilton, “Preface,” in “6Ps: Six Prominent Welfare Issues,” quoted in *Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies*, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Chicago, IL: NCPT, May 1967), p. 3, fol. 27, box 4, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives. In April 1922, the Colorado Congress of Mothers requested each of its local and district PTA councils officially support Tilton's 6Ps, see Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, *Colorado Congress of Mothers Board Minutes, May 18, 1917 thru May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>45</sup> *Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies*, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Chicago, IL: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, May 1967), fol. 27, box 4, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives.

the national board required state approval on any resolutions impacting policy recommendations or endorsement of federal legislation. Ahead of national conventions state delegates received legislative packets from Tilton.<sup>46</sup> State representatives were then required to review the material with local, county, and state leaders before voting on resolutions at the national convention. To reassure those members who doubted the efficacy of the legislative committee, Tilton reminded local and state members that lobbying for the NCM-PT's platform issues was the "best investment of energy." And, the NCM-PT needed local and state PTA members to educate themselves, make their case to legislators, organize new members, and to send news to the NCM-PT legislative committee. The transition from a *clearinghouse* to a *lobbying firm*, I argue, represents a larger effort by the National Congress to solidify its bureaucratic presence in Washington, D.C.

Capitalizing on its proximity to the center of America's government and close working relationship with Washington bureaucrats, the National Congress saw its ideas incorporated into the U.S. Bureau of Education in 1913 when the U.S. Commissioner of Education Philander Priestly Claxton appointed NCM President Hannah Schoff as the director of the newly created Home Education Division (HED).<sup>47</sup> HED, essentially an outreach instrument of the NCM-PT, was established to embed the work of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations into the federal government. HED also established continuing education programs for children and young adults who withdrew

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<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Tilton, "6Ps: Six Prominent Welfare Issues," in *Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies*, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Chicago, IL: NCPT, May 1967), p. 1-2, fol. 27, box 4, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>47</sup> *Twenty Years Work*, 36-37.

from school or completed secondary instruction.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, HED duplicated NCM-PT's goals and aimed to educate parents through local reading circles and parent-education university extension courses. Under Schoff's direction, HED formalized and strengthened the influential position of the NCM-PT and its state and local branches through the work of the federal bureau and state departments of public instruction.<sup>49</sup> The NCM-PT celebrated the division's creation and Schoff's appointment by Commissioner Claxton as "the first federal recognition of parents as educators." According to NCM-PT, this was the first time the federal government held parents just as "worthy of federal consideration" as "farmers or teachers."<sup>50</sup>

For six years Schoff led the National Congress and directed HED. Writer and educational-activist Helen Christine Bennett described Schoff's position at HED as "a post without salary." However, Bennett believed the appointment gave Schoff the "opportunity she longed for, that of putting a part of the government at the service of parents."<sup>51</sup> After establishing HED offices in Washington, D.C., and in her hometown of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Schoff received over 1600 pledges from women across the nation to help support and advance the division.<sup>52</sup> Similar to the National Congress' original suggested reading list for mothers and children, HED offices distributed the NCM-PT prepared *1,000*

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<sup>48</sup> "Statement of the Commission of Education to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1919," U.S. Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1919), 28-29

<sup>49</sup> "Statement of the Commission of Education to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1919," 28-29.

<sup>50</sup> *Twenty Years Work*, 37; Mrs. Frederic (Hannah) Schoff, "The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 67 (September 1916), 145.

<sup>51</sup> "Writers of the Day," *The Writer*, 30, no. 3 (March 1918), 42; and, Helen Christine Bennett, *American Women in Civic Work* (NY: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1915), 158

<sup>52</sup> Bennett, *American Women in Civic Work*, 158; and, *Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Appropriation Bill, 1917; Hearings: Before Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations*, 64<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1st sess. (1918): 674.



*Good Books for Children* and sent more than 95,000 reading course packets to schools, parents, and local circles. Schoff also established a western and southern tour for HED and NCM-PT officers to promote the division's work and reading courses.<sup>53</sup> The resources created by HED then went back to local communities and local parent-teacher associations. For example, in Denver, Anna Noble, the instructor for CCM's Girls' Circle was hired by the Denver Public School Board to teach a course on sex hygiene at East Denver High School. Noble immediately turned to the HED for instructional materials and used the provided reading lists to build a course for high school students, parent study group, and a university extension course.<sup>54</sup>

During Commissioner P.P. Claxton's hearing before the House Committee on Appropriations on 26 January 1916, Claxton reported that executive leaders from the National Kindergarten Association, the International Child Welfare League, the National Congress of Mothers, and the National Americanization Committee all ran separate divisions within the Bureau of Education, reported to him, and received a salary of \$1 for their services but led their divisions "as though they were full-paid members of the bureau."<sup>55</sup> Despite HED's success, the U.S. Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Appropriation Bill of 1917 ended Schoff's tenure as director of HED. The bill, which went into effect in 1919, made it "illegal for any government official or employee to receive any salary in connection with his services as such official or employee from any source other than the Government of the United States." Regardless of her small salary from the National Congress and receiving only

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<sup>53</sup> Schoff, "The National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations," 147.

<sup>54</sup> 28 August 1914, Executive Board Minutes, *Minutes, Colorado Branch, 1914 to April 1917*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>55</sup> See, *Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Appropriation Bill, 1917; Hearings: Before Subcommittee of House Committee on Appropriations*, 64th Cong., 1st sess. (1918): 692.

a \$1 annually from the U.S. Bureau of Education, the federal government forced Schoff to resign her directorship.<sup>56</sup>

Undeterred, NCM-PT leaders and Commissioner Claxton refused to close the Home Education Division. In his annual report to the U.S. Congress, Claxton unabashedly declared that congressional action had led to the suspension of kindergarten work and adult education programs. He added that without the NCM-PT and the necessary government appropriations the division was “reduced in efficiency.”<sup>57</sup> He warned Congress, “If education in the home fails no other agency can make good the failures.”<sup>58</sup> With Claxton publicly admonishing the federal government, Schoff supported her former colleague HED Secretary Ellen C. Lombard’s promotion to HED Director. Lombard continued to work closely with Schoff and kept national and state PTA leaders on as unofficial consultants. In the face of formal separation from government agencies, the NCM-PT held fast to its position as the foremost experts on parent-education, child welfare issues, and organizing parent and teachers.

Despite the National Congress no longer directly managing HED, the association remained closely tied with the U.S. Bureau of Education. During the second annual National Conference on Home Education in 1924 hosted by the U.S. Bureau of Education, conference program chair, Margaretta Willis Reeve, president of the NCM-PT, reiterated the importance of parent-teacher associations as the “point of contact” between the federal and state governments.<sup>59</sup> Reeve argued “Of all the agencies which stimulate the desire for extension of

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<sup>56</sup> See, “Statement of the Commission of Education to the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1919,” 51-52.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> In 1924, the National Congress of Mothers and Parent-Teacher Associations officially changed its name to the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT). The Colorado Congress followed suit and changed its name to the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers (CCPT) at its state convention in October 1924. See, “Thirteenth Annual Convention of the Colorado Parent

education, the parent-teacher association with its auxiliaries—the mothers’ clubs and the preschool circle—is perhaps the most fundamental and far-reaching.” She further explained how reading courses groomed future association leaders.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Walton S. Bittner, the associate director of Indiana University’s extension service praised the enterprise and the work of HED. He called HED’s parent reading courses a “tangible connection” linking the Bureau of Education, state education departments, and state universities to one another. Bittner also praised the division for disproving parents’ fears of “federal interference” by working through local networks—in this case, the parent-teacher associations.<sup>61</sup>

Along with the influence at the federal level, the power of the PTA to encourage women’s political activism and women’s power to shape public policy also surfaced at the state and local levels. Colorado’s state and local PTA leaders worked with the Colorado State Teachers Association, the Colorado Federation of Women’s Clubs, state teacher institutes, the National Education Association, the U.S. Bureau of Education, as well as state departments of instruction and mental health. Such connections not only helped Denver remain a focal point for women’s activism, but also, helped the Colorado Congress claim its place at the center of this engagement. The association that asserted itself as a state-wide organization with local control did so because of its female leadership. They served as consultants on national child welfare and parent-education courses. Many of the top

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Teacher Association,” October 2-3, 1924, *Minutes, Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, May 5, 1922 thru October 2, 1924*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>60</sup> Margaretta Willis Reeve (Mrs. A.H. Reeve), “Practical Methods of Cooperation in Educating for Parenthood,” in “Cooperation in Adult Education; Report of the Second National Conference on Home Education, Called by the U.S. Commissioner of Education at Minneapolis, Minnesota, May 7, 1924,” U.S. Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1925), 21-23.

<sup>61</sup> Walton S. Bittner, “Value of Home Reading Service,” in “Home Education by Means of Reading Courses and the Cooperation of State and National Agencies,” *Home Education Circular, No. 2*, U.S. Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior (Washington, D.C.: GPO, April 1922), 8.

managers at the state level also held positions on state commissions and agencies. Such was the case when Colorado governor Oliver Shoup nominated former president of the Colorado Congress, Florence Dick, to serve as the Assistant Community Organizer for the Fosdick Commission's War Camp Community Service board in 1918.<sup>62</sup> As a member of the commission, Dick led a 68-member, all-women's war advisory council. The *Colorado School Journal* celebrated Dick's nomination as the chance for PTA members to extend their service beyond the school and to gain valuable experience managing war-time activities on the local and state level.<sup>63</sup>

In Colorado, the National Congress relied on Dick to promote and advance its national legislative agenda on matters related to child labor. As vice-president of the National Congress, Dick had been instrumental in establishing the U.S. Children's Bureau and had worked with state congresses to introduce child welfare legislation and the national child labor amendment to state legislatures. Julia Lathrop, chief of the U.S. Children's Welfare Bureau, considered the National Congress as the "medium" by which the bureau worked.<sup>64</sup> The Colorado General Assembly set off a firestorm in the Colorado Congress when it ruled the National Child Labor bill unconstitutional in June 1918. Disappointed but not defeated, Dick challenged the state legislature's decision and launched a full-scale campaign within the state mothers' congress to reverse it.<sup>65</sup> Dick established a special committee on child welfare

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<sup>62</sup> 27 May 1918, Board Minutes, *Colorado Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Associations, Board Minutes, May 18, 1917 thru May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; *Legacy of Promise*, p. 14-16, fol. 706, box. 110, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>63</sup> Mrs. A.G. Fish, "Parent-Teacher Association," *The Colorado School Journal*, 32 no. 10 (June 1917), 23.

<sup>64</sup> Julia Lathrop, Chief of the U.S. Children's Bureau, quoted in "National Congress of Parents and Teachers, History of the Committee on Legislation, 1899-1958," n.d., p. 6, pt. 1, vol. 98, series 5, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>65</sup> Dr. Maude Sanders was the vice chair of the Child Labor Committee and the National Child Welfare Bureau. 25 January 1918, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*;

legislation and investigated child-welfare work being conducted by county PTAs. The Colorado Congress reported 19 county councils had successfully implemented programs educating parents on child labor and welfare, another 15 were actively engaged, and another 16 had just begun.<sup>66</sup> After presenting the evidence of welfare work conducted by parent-teacher associations, Governor Shoup signed “An Act to Create and Established a Child Welfare Bureau” into law on 12 April 1919.<sup>67</sup> The act created the first state-supported children’s welfare bureau in the nation and at its educational helm was Florence Dick and her PTA boards.<sup>68</sup>

Following the passage of the bill, Colorado Congress board member and its legislative chairman, Dr. Maude Sanders, teased the almost all-male state legislature remarking it took only \$121.89 for a “women’s legislative committee to negotiate the passage of [the] bill.”<sup>69</sup> Sanders glee would be short lived though. In June 1920, the Colorado General Assembly cut state funding to the Colorado Child Welfare Bureau. For ten

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*Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives; 13 June 1918, Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives; August 9-10, 1918, Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives.*

<sup>66</sup> November 22, 1918, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives.*

<sup>67</sup> January 23, 1919, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives; April 18, 1919, Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives.*

<sup>68</sup> “National Office Notes,” *Child-Welfare Magazine*, 17, no. 6 (February 1923): 246.

<sup>69</sup> April 18, 1919, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922, CCPTA Archives.* At the time of the passage of the Child Welfare Bureau bill two women served in the House and one served in the Senate, see “History of Women in Colorado’s Legislature,” <https://sites.google.com/site/coloradowomenscaucus/home/history-of-women-in-colorado-s-legislature>.

months, the CCM tried its best to keep the bureau afloat and services running with its own funds.<sup>70</sup>

Four months later in October 1920, the *University of Colorado Bulletin* published a scathing report of CWB and its activities written by Dr. W.H. Slingerland of the Russell Sage Foundation. Slingerland attempted to undercut the work of the CCM, CWB, and Colorado's parent-teacher associations claiming:

[The Child Welfare Bureau] appears to be for the promotion of community organizations of parent and teacher groups throughout the State . . . On this basis, the Bureau is a State organization for propaganda among adults, without a single definite administrative duty to perform in reference to normal children in family homes or abnormal children in society or in institutions. Its purpose would be clearer if it were stated to be an organizing center for parent and teacher associations. It has been said that "to reform a man you should begin with his grandfather"; and so this Bureau apparently is intended to promote child welfare and "cultivate healthy and happy childhood" by organizing into efficient associations the parents and teachers of the State. In other words, it is a Bureau for the organization and education of adults, rather than a direct agency for the benefit of the children of Colorado.<sup>71</sup>

Tensions erupted in CCM's legislative committee over the organization's role in legislative matters just two months after the publication of the *UC Bulletin*. Just as Julia Lathrop viewed the NCM as a vehicle for the work of the U.S. Children's Welfare Bureau, Dick believed Colorado's CWB could be used to advance the ideas and activities of the state's Mothers' Congress.<sup>72</sup> Her legislative chairman, Dr. Sanders, concurred. However, fellow committee

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<sup>70</sup> April 11, 1919, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; and, June 24, 1920, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>71</sup> W.H. Slingerland, "Child Welfare Work in Colorado: A Study of Public and Private Agencies and Institutions and Conditions of Service, in the Care of Dependent, Delinquent, and Defective Children," *University of Colorado Bulletin*, 20, no. 10 (October 1920): 79. For Slingerland's continued work with the Russell Sage Foundation and his research on child welfare agencies see Slingerland in "Boulder County Studies: A Series on Health, Sanitation, Recreation, Relief, Municipal Administration and Business," *University of Colorado Bulletin*, 21, no. 9 (September 1921): 70.

<sup>72</sup> August 14, 1919, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; and,

member Mary F. Lathrop, no relation to Julia Lathrop, advised the board to remove itself from the business of policymaking and legislative affairs.<sup>73</sup> Lathrop also disagreed with Sanders' desire to have the Colorado Congress shoulder the burden of state appropriations for the CWB. In her letter to the executive board, Lathrop, channeling the early vision of the NCM, wrote,

Your legal committee has considered the matter of supporting or endorsing pending bills, and recommend that they do not deem it wise for the Association, as a body, to endorse or support any particular bills. We believe the policy of the Association should be to furnish information to existing legislation and proposed legislation, to state the strong points, and point out the defects. We make this recommendation, because we believe the individual members of the organization are entitled to their opinions; these opinions will necessarily differ; and any attempt to commit the body to endorsements or recommendations will inevitably lead to dissension, and will weaken the work as to other matters entirely within the province of the Association. We believe the Association will be more effective, if its work is purely educational. The legal committee is unanimous in this recommendation.<sup>74</sup>

Although Lathrop's counsel was in stark opposition to the position of the National Congress, which had just merged its legislative and child welfare committees to lobby more efficiently on behalf of the child welfare legislation, Sanders still resigned her post as legislative chairman for the Colorado Congress of Mothers.<sup>75</sup> Three months later, Lathrop quit after discovering the state board ignored her advice. Dick resumed her activities as CWB

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"National Congress of Parents and Teachers, History of the Committee on Legislation, 1899-1958," n.d., p. 6, pt. 1, vol. 98, series 5, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>73</sup> Currently I can find no direct familial relation between Mary F. Lathrop and Julia Lathrop. Mary was born in Philadelphia in 1865, established herself as an investigative journalist with her coverage of Chinese labor in California, and finally moved to Colorado in 1897 where she began studying law at the University of Denver School of Law. She was the first woman admitted to the Colorado and Denver Bar Associations and was a member of the American Bar Association. See *Colorado Women's Hall of Fame* <http://www.cogreatwomen.org/project/mary-florence-lathrop/>

<sup>74</sup> CCM Legal Committee Letter filed December 17, 1920, signed by Mary F. Lathrop and Maude E. Woodward, republished January 13, 1921, Executive Committee Minutes, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>75</sup> "National Congress of Parents and Teachers, History of the Committee on Legislation, 1899-1958," n.d., p. 4, pt. 1, vol. 98, series 5, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

Educational Director and continued working with Gov. Shoup to channel funds from the Sheppard-Towner Bill into the CWB. At the behest of the governor, Dick also submitted a list of PTA members who could serve as CWB board members.<sup>76</sup>

Once CWB's state funding was restored in April 1921, Dick spent the next three years steering the educational division of the CWB while maintaining her position as CCM state organizer. Under her leadership, the educational division of the bureau hosted child welfare demonstrations and clinics at steel workers meetings, assisted state representatives in passing a series of child welfare bills, assured CWB's permanency, and secured salary and travel expenses for the CWB state organizer (Dick).<sup>77</sup> In an interview with the National Congress' *Child Welfare Magazine*, Dick reaffirmed her state's commitment to the dual purpose of child welfare and parent education noting, "The women of Colorado are pledged to assist in the great work for better homes, better health, better parenthood, a better civilization, a better America. Let us lend a hand and do our best to make the Sheppard-

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<sup>76</sup> December 8, 1921, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; February 3, 1921, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; and March 10, 1921, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>77</sup> April 15, 1920, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; March 1, 1923, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; March 26, 1923, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; April 5, 1923, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives; May 22, 1923, *Minutes, The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers; Board of Managers, Executive Committee, Conventions, May 18, 1917-May 3, 1922*, CCPTA Archives. Between 6 March 1923 and 22 May 1923, Sanders lobbied congressmen to increase the state's appropriation for the CCWBB state organizer's travel and salary from \$1200 to \$1800 combined lines.



Towner Act a success, for in it we have a great educational opportunity.”<sup>78</sup> National Congress president Katherine Chapin Higgins, who succeeded Schoff in 1920, credited Dick with Colorado’s success in achieving a child welfare bureau. Higgins praised her national vice-president for “proving that the work of the [CWB and Colorado Congress] supplement[ed] each other.”<sup>79</sup> According to the 1924 *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction* several CCM-PT members continued to hold positions on the CWB Board of Control and Staff.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, CWB organized health conferences across the state. Children received free examinations by local doctors. Following morning health screenings, the staffers planned instructional sessions for parents to learn about infant and child health care. Between August 1923 and May 1924, more than 3,700 Coloradan children received free dental, vision, hearing, respiratory, and nutrition examinations. The Colorado General Assembly appropriated \$4,000 for the health conferences, and the U.S. Children’s Bureau provided \$15,000 for supplies and staff salaries.<sup>81</sup> The National Congress and its state congresses now received federal matching grants through state departments of education to conduct its child health programs, organize immunization and vaccine clinics, and provide infant and maternal care to local mothers. Historian R. Todd Laugen in *The Gospel of Progressivism* finds that because CWB originally “relied more directly on support from

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<sup>78</sup> Florence Dick, “Colorado and the Sheppard-Towner Act,” *Child-Welfare Magazine*, 17, no. 7 (March 1923): 287

<sup>79</sup> Katherine Chapin Higgins, “President’s Message,” *Child-Welfare Magazine*, 17, no. 1 (September 1922): 4.

<sup>80</sup> “Biennial Report of the Colorado Child Welfare Bureau of the Department of Public Instruction in Co-operation with the Children’s Bureau, United States Department of Labor,” 1 December 1922 to 30 November 1924, in *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Official Biennium Ending November 30, 1924*, State Superintendent Mary C.C. Bradford, Department of Public Instruction, Colorado (Denver, Colo.: Bradford-Robinson, 1925), 28.

<sup>81</sup> “Biennial Report of the Colorado Child Welfare Bureau of the Department of Public Instruction in Co-operation with the Children’s Bureau, United States Department of Labor,” 29-34.

women’s clubs and a modest state appropriation” the bureau “politicized motherhood” in order to increase state funding and support.<sup>82</sup> Laugen argues that as CWB became increasingly more reliant on professional and scientific methods it de-radicalized maternalism thus allowing programs like CWB to gain wider-state support.<sup>83</sup> Dick’s vision had come to fruition—parts of the federal and state government now directly serviced the needs of local parents and children.

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The 1893 Colorado suffrage victory laid the groundwork for the Colorado Congress of Mothers to build a state-wide organization of mothers to help shape the welfare state as advocates and eventually program directors, and health and welfare service-providers. The establishment of the U.S. Bureau of Education’s Division of Home Education and Colorado’s Child Welfare Bureau also demonstrated the ability of the Mothers’ Congress to create spaces for women to acquire political experience, drafting education, health, and welfare policy, and practice navigating bureaucratic networks. Additionally, that the Colorado Congress successfully captured the CWB and secured government appointed seats for women reveals the association’s ability to embed its programs, activities, and leaders at all levels of government.

Riding the wave of its recent successes and legislative victories, the National Congress and its state congresses attempted to further expanded its association by actively encouraging fathers and teachers to join the rank-and-file. The national executive board

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<sup>82</sup> R. Todd Laugen, *The Gospel of Progressivism: Moral Reform and Labor War in Colorado, 1900-1930* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011), 144.

<sup>83</sup> Laugen, *The Gospel of Progressivism*, 143.

officially renamed the organization the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT) in 1924, and all state congresses followed suit.

Overseeing the new phase, NCPT President Margaretta Reeve reminded state and local PTA members: “The history, not of a club’s activities but of a national movement, must constitute their background, for without that consciousness of the permanence of their work, its educational significance fades and it becomes merely a community enterprise, often admirable and valuable, it is true, but flourishing in shallow soil and with no far-reaching resources of nourishment and of resistance to storms and droughts.”<sup>84</sup> The following chapter explores NCPT’s increasing reliance on local PTAs to mobilize a national parent movement in neighborhood schools and local communities. The chapter will also continue unraveling the entangled history of the local PTA from the state and national association to better understand the rising tension between federal aid and state-intervention into local affairs and individual interests in public schools and the communities they served.

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<sup>84</sup> Margaretta Willis Reeves quoted in *Milestones Along the Way: Presidents’ Messages, 1897-1940* (Chicago, IL: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1940), box 12, Series 1, MSNCPT66 / UIC Archives.

### CHAPTER 3

#### *Ash Grove PTA, 1924-1957:*

#### *Assessing the National PTA's Effectiveness during the Great Depression and World War II*

In 1895, in the well of the Cherry Creek Valley and southeast of the city of Denver, residents of the unincorporated Sullivan township tore down their old, wooden Coronado school to build a sturdier one-room schoolhouse for the town's children. The townspeople christened the new building, Ash Grove School, in honor of the Ash trees a local farmer had planted alongside it.<sup>1</sup> Part of Arapahoe County, the largest county in the state at the time, the school's town consisted of no more than 225 people and more than likely had only one teacher, a young female, instructing their children.<sup>2</sup>

Over the next sixty years, the city of Denver surrounded and engulfed parts of eastern Arapahoe County. The Ash Grove School became "Annexation No. 73" after the county sold

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<sup>1</sup> Donald K. Goe and Clarice M. Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five, 1869-1981* (Englewood, CO: Cherry Creek School District, 1981), 81; and, "School Exercises," *Littleton (CO) Independent*, June 12, 1903.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, "Population of Colorado by Counties: 1870 to 1900," in *Bulletin: Population of Colorado by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1901), Table 2, p. 2. According to the U.S. Census of 1900, Arapahoe County's population was 97.3% white, and less than 0.02% black, see U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, "White, Negro, and Indian Population by Counties: 1890 to 1900," in *Population, Part 1: Sex, General Nativity, and Color, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1901), Table 19, p. 531. U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Census Office, "Population of Colorado by Minor Civil Divisions: 1890 and 1900," in *Bulletin: Population of Colorado by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1900* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Office, 1901), Table 4, p. 3. The *Census Statistics of Teachers* report published in 1905 reported of the 3625 teachers in Colorado, 77.2% of the teachers were female, higher than the national average of 73.4%. For information regarding percentage of female teachers in Colorado and the United States see, U.S. Department of Commerce and Labor, U.S. Census Office, *Bulletin: Census Statistics of Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1905), 7; U.S. Department of the Commerce and Labor, U.S. Census Office, "Number and Proportion of Teachers: 1900, 1890, 1880, and 1870," in *Bulletin: Census Statistics of Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1905), Table 27, p. 17; U.S. Department of the Commerce and Labor, U.S. Census Office, "Number and Proportion of Teachers in Cities having at least 25,000 Inhabitants and in Smaller Cities or Country Districts: 1900," in *Bulletin: Census Statistics of Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1905), Table 28, p. 18; and, U.S. Department of the Commerce and Labor, U.S. Census Office, "Distribution of Teachers by Sex: 1900 and 1890," in *Bulletin: Census Statistics of Teachers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office 1905), Table 29, p. 19.

the building, land, and property to Denver Public Schools in 1957. For the school's parents and teachers, the failure to stave off Denver's incorporation provided a lesson in the limits of their authority in local affairs. The story also provides historians a keen insight into the operational structure of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers and its relationship with state and local PTAs. Specifically, how voluntary associations must often bend to the will of state powers and local citizens. While they uphold and support each their continuation and viability are subject to the mercy of both.

In this chapter I examine the history of the Ash Grove School, particularly the activities and community outreach efforts of its parent-teacher organization—the Ash Grove Parent-Teacher Association—in conjunction with the Arapahoe County PTA Council and the Colorado State PTA from 1924 to 1957. In analyzing the activities of local PTA units in conjunction with county, state, and national PTA efforts, I differ from previous scholars and argue that to understand the wide and prolonged presence of the National PTA in American society the development of the national association *must* be viewed through the organization, activities, and leadership councils of local and state units. First, in this chapter I demonstrate where and how the National PTA took programming and legislative cues from local units to facilitate nation-wide educational and social-welfare reforms. Second, I survey the boundaries and influences of local PTA units in rural counties and their ability to direct the state's department of education. Specifically, this chapter is a case study exploring how Ash Grove PTA leaders understood the role of the parent-teacher association in developing engaged neighborhood communities and the PTA's participation in state policymaking from 1924 to 1957. Framed by the Great Depression and World War II, this chapter follows local and county PTAs as they subsidized state spending and resources for women and children's

welfare impacted by the economic collapse, national health crises, and wartime buildup for the nation.

This chapter also documents the early origins of postwar-conservatism in Denver's outer suburbs. In suburban PTA parents' efforts to control larger functions of the school, such as taxes, curriculum, and staffing, the PTA's acceptance of state funds for consolidation and school improvement speaks to recent scholarship on the emergence of moderate, suburban conservatives in postwar American. In the case student of Ash Grove PTA and the school's buyout in 1958 from Denver Public Schools, I locate early examples of "white flight" in Denver's outermost suburbs. However, white Denverites vacating the school district for another had not quite yet reached the levels busing would bring about in the later 1960s and early 1970s. Ash Grove PTA's withdraw from Denver in 1958 speaks to current historical narratives explaining the political withdraw of white middle-class families from urban areas during the postwar era. I draw from Kevin Kruse's rich exploration of moderate conservatives and the influence of race, class, and economics in Atlanta during the height of school desegregation. In so much that Kruse finds evidence of pro-segregationists or disaffected parents in Atlanta's PTAs this chapter offers a closer examination of the community-based concerns of local PTA members and offers an explanation as to why the "white flight" of local PTA parents in the 1960s stunned the National PTA.

In this chapter, I use the Ash Grove Elementary School as a case study to analyze the breadth of PTA-work at local and county levels. The school's PTA is characteristic of most PTAs aligned with the National PTA at this time—predominantly white, and its student and teacher demographics equally so. The school's surrounding neighborhoods, likewise. In my examination of Ash Grove's PTA records from the mid-1920s through the late 1950s, I find

that the mere possibility of integration with a multiracial Denver school system in 1957 prompted many of the school's PTA members to flee further into Arapahoe County and away from the City and County of Denver. This chapter reveals that even as the local, county, and state PTAs supported key welfare provisions for the benefit of local communities the support for the PTA as a national institution quickly ended as urban sprawl and racial integration of schools became likely scenarios.<sup>3</sup>

By analyzing the PTA from the bottom-up, I offer a new interpretation of the development of the National PTA as a decentralized, national association relying on its local and county PTAs to be self-supporting and self-motivated to affect nationwide change in schools and society. Ash Grove PTA and Arapahoe County PTA Council's organizing efforts, community programs, and role in school standardization, I contend, contributed to the National PTA's post-1945 legislative platform for parent involvement, national health standards, and federal aid for education. Local and county councils not only contributed financial resources and program ideas, but also continued to supply experienced and locally-trained executive and managerial staff to help shape the National PTA's message and platform issues.

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<sup>3</sup> For urban/suburban histories survey the intersections of race, class, and ethnicity in relation to school desegregation in postwar America see Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Kruse, *White Flight*; Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*; Kevin Kruse and Thomas J. Sugrue, *The New Suburban History* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*; and, Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

Finding the Ash Grove PTA story in the larger arc of the National Parent Teacher Association and its state associations requires a cognitive map to understand how local parent-teacher associations form, operate, and interact with local school administrators and public officials. It also necessitates a wide-lens and a microscopic lens to view the many ways local PTA units work in cooperation with state and national partners. Combined, the two approaches reveal a decentralized, national organization creating political pathways for women in educational administration and local parent-teacher associations becoming key contributing factors in modernization of public schools and the expansion of the American Welfare State.

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Beginning in the 1890s and early 1900s, Arapahoe's population and by extension source for school funding was decimated by land annexations. The eastern part of Arapahoe County experienced a massive population loss following the panic of 1893. The ensuing economic depression forced "financially strapped" towns to seek financial abatement with Denver.<sup>4</sup> Increasing the pressure on neighboring counties, the Colorado State Legislature in 1902 passed the Rush Amendment forming the City and County of Denver from land annexed from Arapahoe County and establishing home rule.<sup>5</sup> In practice, home rule is a form of self-government that grants local citizens the authority to control municipal and public

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<sup>4</sup> As early as February 1893, state representatives began introducing bills "cutting off the eastern portion of Arapahoe County" for incorporation into other counties. See "Colorado's Legislature, Detailed Report of the Proceedings of Both Houses," *Silver Cliff (CO) Rustler*, February 8, 1893; and Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1990), 61.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, "Notes Regarding Changes in Boundaries, Etc," in Colorado Bulletin, *Population by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1910, 1900, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1912), 24.



works within the city and county and to limit state interference in city relations.<sup>6</sup> In *The Law and the Practice of Municipal Home Rule* (1916), a comprehensive study of home rule as public law, its development, and its application in the United States, author Howard Lee McBain describes home rule as any power “vested in cities by constitutional provisions . . . that extend to cities the authority to frame and adopt their own charters.” He added that home rule established a city’s “constitutional rights” like those of individual rights that could be “defended in the courts against invasion by the legislative arm of the government.”<sup>7</sup> In McBain’s analysis of home rule in Colorado, he argued that the movement “grew out of a combination of exhaustion and exasperation” with the state government and governor interfering in Denver’s public works and municipal services.<sup>8</sup> McBain’s contemporary, Clyde Lyndon King declared: “Denver now embraces a homogenous urban district with ample territory within its limits for expansion. Though a county as well as a city, it possesses a city’s power to expand.”<sup>9</sup>

With the passage of the home rule amendment in 1902, the Rush Amendment became Article XX of the Colorado Constitution and granted “exclusive power” to Denver citizens to amend their charter, adopt new measures concerning city expansion, taxation, public works, and school consolidation and standardization.<sup>10</sup> Coloradan historians Stephen J. Leonard and Thomas J. Noel note that during the formation of Denver the legislature’s decision to bound

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth G. Buehe, “A History of Home Rule,” *Colorado Municipal League* (November 2009), [http://www.cml.org/pdf\\_files/09\\_home\\_rule.pdf](http://www.cml.org/pdf_files/09_home_rule.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Howard Lee McBain, *The Law and the Practice of Municipal Home Rule* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1916), v.

<sup>8</sup> McBain, *The Law and the Practice of Municipal Home Rule*, 498.

<sup>9</sup> Clyde Lyndon King, *The History of the Government of Denver with Special Reference to Tis Relations with Public Service Corporations* (Denver, CO.: Fisher Book Co., 1911), 227.

<sup>10</sup> J. E. Snook, *Colorado History and Government with State Constitution* (Denver, CO: Herrick Book, 1904), 45.

urban areas to Denver and rural areas to Arapahoe County created /resulted in a stark “political division” between Denver and its sister counties teetering on an “urban versus suburban rivalry.”<sup>11</sup> I would argue that this rivalry and tension extended throughout the twentieth-century and became highly charged during the debates over rural school consolidation and school standardization. Ultimately, between 1900 and 1910, even as the state’s population increased by 48%, Arapahoe County surrendered more than 93% of its population to surrounding counties—Denver (1902), Adams (1902) Washington (1903), and Yuma (1903).<sup>12</sup> Arapahoe County schools falling within the new boundaries of the City and County of Denver came under the supervision of the Board of Education of School District No.1, the sole school district in Denver.<sup>13</sup>

Despite loss of population and subsequent limited sources for school revenue, eighty-nine percent of the 1,550 children (ages 6-14) remaining in the Arapahoe County attended county schools and the community circled to respond.<sup>14</sup> For students enrolled at Ash Grove, the Sullivan community built a new two-room, brick schoolhouse consisting of two classrooms, one for the “senior” students and the other for “junior” students. In the “senior”

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<sup>11</sup> Leonard and Noel, *Denver: Mining Camp to Metropolis*, 277.

<sup>12</sup> The state legislature annexed land from Arapahoe County in 1902 and 1903 to form the City and County of Denver, Adams County, and parts of Washington and Yuma counties. The annexations reduced Arapahoe’s population from 153,017 to 10,283, a 93.3% reduction. Contrastingly, between 1900 and 1910, the state’s overall population increased by 48%, from 539,700 to 799,024 inhabitants. By comparison, the population of the United States increased by only 21% during the same period. See, U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Notes Regarding Changes in Boundaries, Etc,” in Colorado Bulletin, *Population by Counties and Minor Civil Divisions, 1910, 1900, 1890* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1912), 24; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Table: Population of Colorado, 1860 to 1920,” in *State Compendium: Statistics of Population, Occupations, Agriculture, Irrigation, Drainage, Manufacturers and Mines, and Quarries for the State, Counties, and Cities* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1924), 7.

<sup>13</sup> See proposed Article XX, in “Proposed Constitutional Amendments,” *Greeley (CO) Tribune*, October 2, 1902.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, “Composition and Characteristics of the Population for the States and for the Counties,” in *Population: Colorado: Composition and Characteristics of the Population, 1910*, Bulletin (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1912), Table 1, p. 9.

department,” the students had access to maps, anatomy and music charts, more than two hundred books, a piano, as well as a prized dictionary and encyclopedia set. Across the hall, the teacher instructed the children with “memorial” charts. One couple touring the school, remarked on the school’s progress and stated that if Ash Grove was a “specimen” of other rural schools, the children of Colorado were “indeed fortunate.”<sup>15</sup>

Echoing similar ideologies interlaced into the platform of the National Congress of Mothers, Arapahoe County Schools established parenthood as vocation and teaching as an extension of the female sphere. In 1907, Arapahoe County school administrators took to describing their schoolteachers and parents as “co-workers.” Arapahoe County school superintendent Louis J. Rote promised parents their children would experience a “mother’s love” while at school.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the county, individual parent-teacher organizations voted for school uniforms to benefit the war effort, hosted parent-only receptions, held film screenings to help fundraise for phonographs, and invited state PTA organizers and lecturers from Denver to speak about parent-teacher associations and childhood behaviors.<sup>17</sup> By April 1922, the Arapahoe County Parent-Teacher Association formally organized all parent-teacher

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<sup>15</sup> “The Ash Grove School,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, April 22, 1904.

<sup>16</sup> According to historian Katherine Weiler in *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850 to 1950*, women made up 97.9% of the teaching labor in the United States by 1905. See Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850 to 1950* (Stanford, Cali.: Stanford University Press, 1998), 8. Louis J. Rote was Arapahoe County School Superintendent in 1907, see *Report of the State Superintendent of State Public Instruction for the State of Colorado For the Years 1907-1908*, Katherine L. Craig (Denver, CO: Smith-Brooks, 1908), 54; and, “Arapahoe County Schools,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, December 20, 1907.

<sup>17</sup> “Parents Adopt Uniform for School Girls; The Parent-Teachers Meetings Held at the Assembly Room Last Saturday Evening was Largely Attended,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, August 23, 1918; “Parent-Teachers’ Meeting,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, April 13, 1917; “Parent Teachers’ Meeting Next Wednesday,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, October 22, 1920; “Parent-Teachers Assn.,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, February 25, 1921; and “Record of Important Events Condensed for Busy People,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, December 16, 1921.

organizations across the county and held its first meeting in the Littleton High School auditorium.<sup>18</sup>

On 12 February 1924, just two years after its founding, the Arapahoe County PTA helped organize the Ash Grove Parent Teacher Association under the watchful eye of former state PTA president and current CWB parent-teacher organizer, Florence Dick.<sup>19</sup> Like other schools in Arapahoe, Ash Grove was a third-class school district and one of 28 single-school, school districts in the state.<sup>20</sup> Colorado's Department of Public Instruction rated schools as first-, second-, third-, fourth-class districts based on consolidation, standardization, and number of available classrooms.<sup>21</sup> Parents, who were almost always members of their child's school PTA, also served as members of the school board collecting school taxes, hiring teachers, drafting school budgets, controlling school rent and maintenance, and selecting textbooks. Thomas J. Mahan, education professor at Colorado State Teachers College in 1927, described parents of third-class school districts as "dominat[ing] the whole system of

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<sup>18</sup> "Arapahoe County P.T.A. Will Meet Here April 14," *Littleton (CO) Independent*, April 7, 1922.

<sup>19</sup> "Historian's Report, 1953-1954," in Yearbook 1953-1954, box 5, Ash Grove Parent Teacher Association Records, Western History and Genealogy Special Collections, Denver Public Library, Colorado. At the time of organization, Florence Dick remained on staff for Colorado's Child Welfare Bureau as the parent-teacher organizer, see *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Official Biennium Ending November 30, 1924*, filed by State Superintendent Mary C.C. Bradford, Department of Public Instruction, Colorado (Denver, CO: Bradford-Robinson, 1925), 28.

<sup>20</sup> For number and ranking of school districts in Arapahoe County in 1924, see "Number of Districts in County," in *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Official Biennium Ending November 30, 1924*, 109.

<sup>21</sup> Counties with first class school districts were given this ranking based on consolidation of schools, standardization measures, and a centralized junior high school. Schools with second class district distinction were unconsolidated with four to six classrooms and an inclusive junior high program; third class with two to three classrooms; and fourth class schools were one-room schoolhouses, see "Standardization Statistics—1924," in *Twenty-Fourth Biennial Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for the Official Biennium Ending November 30, 1924*, 73.

education.”<sup>22</sup> Ash Grove’s parent-teacher organization, by 1933, included 85 parent-members, 103 students, and 4 teachers.<sup>23</sup> Ash Grove parents were closely involved with the county PTA and frequently hosted events for the Arapahoe County PTA and routinely attended county council meetings to remain informed about child welfare and labor bills and programs, as well as school consolidation and standardization movements. By attending county PTA meetings, local PTAs, like Ash Grove’s, became an educational resource and community welfare advocate for community residents. Parents and teachers stayed abreast of events and activities supporting children’s welfare, public instruction, health clinics, recreational programs, traffic safety, and state legislation.

Generally, rural schools prior to 1950 experienced widespread inequality and inefficiency in school funding, programs, and access to high school education.<sup>24</sup> Rural school districts in Colorado, like Ash Grove’s school district, relied heavily on parent-teacher organizations and town residents to provide funding for extracurricular programs, collect county taxes, coordinate school transportation, provide hot meals, serve on the school board, and organize health clinics and screenings.<sup>25</sup> Local parent-teacher associations, in rural

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<sup>22</sup> For a biography of Thomas J. Mahan, see *History of Colorado, Biographical*, 5 vols. (Denver, CO: Linderman, 1927), 5: 229. For Mahan’s description of third-class school districts, see Thomas J. Mahan, “Education in Colorado,” in *History of Colorado*, ed. James H. Baker, 5 vols. (Denver, CO: Linderman, 1927), 3:1164.

<sup>23</sup> “Untitled,” Ash Grove PTA Yearbook, 1932-1933, vol. 3, box 5, Ash Grove Parent Teacher Association Records, Western History and Genealogy Special Collections, Denver Public Library, Colorado, (hereafter AG PTA / DPL Archives).

<sup>24</sup> David R. Reynolds has written extensively on rural community resistance to school consolidation in the Progressive Era in *There Goes the Neighborhood: Rural School Consolidation at the Grass Roots in Early Twentieth Century Iowa* (Iowa City: University Press of Iowa, 1999). See also Wayne E. Fuller, *The Old Country School* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1982); and William J. Reese, *Power and Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era* (Boston, MA.: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986).

<sup>25</sup> Donald K. Goe, former deputy superintendent of the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD), and Clarice M. Crowle, a CCSD patron, have written on the specific inequalities faced by the schools in Arapahoe County, and more specifically at the school district level in *The History of the Cherry*

districts especially, were instrumental in providing parents and teachers the resources, knowledge, and skill-training to help parents have a say in the management and structure of their children's school. Through the PTA, parents, primarily mothers, integrated themselves into the school's day-to-day operations and became bureaucratic leaders in the school community.

Ash Grove's PTA invested in the community and prided itself on public ownership of the school. It capitalized on the school's already well-established relationship to the town to provide health and educational services for children. As the town's only school, the students and teachers of Ash Grove featured prominently in the local newspaper. Residents wrote into the *Littleton Independent* recalling the Ash Grove students' "heroic" act that saved their beloved teacher, Miss Eddy, from a "restless broncho."<sup>26</sup> The community kept track of former Ash Grove students and reported updates and life happenings in the *Littleton* and in the *Aspen Democrat*. News stories highlighted the successes of Ash Grove graduates at teaching institutes and even their motorcycle accidents, such was the case for Doris Wyman who broke her wrist and fractured her leg after crashing in Denver.<sup>27</sup>

The school served as a center for local democracy. Through the school and the PTA, local citizens had the opportunity to become more civically engaged. Local organizations and associations frequently used the school building and grounds as meeting spaces. In previous years, the school had been used by the Arapahoe County PTA, the local Farm Bureau

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*Creek School District Number Five, 1869-1981*, see Goe and Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*.

<sup>26</sup> "The Teacher was Lucky; Bronchos Do Not Usually Act This Way," *Aspen (CO) Democrat*, October 1, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> "School Gossip," *Littleton (CO) Independent*, June 16, 1916.

chapter, and political organizations for community gatherings and events.<sup>28</sup> For instance in 1917, the Arapahoe County Farm Bureau made Ash Grove School its general meeting place. At the initial meeting, one Farm Bureau representative remarked that those in attendance at Ash Grove “appeared like a big family reunion and all seemed to have something to say.”<sup>29</sup> Another Farm Bureau member declared Ash Grove “one of the very best communities” in all of Arapahoe County, and praised the community for its progress in education and agriculture.<sup>30</sup> Ash Grove was also the first town to promote the Boys and Girls Club in the county.<sup>31</sup>

Even without an official parent-teacher organization, the school frequently participated in county festivals and hosted the events on behalf of the Arapahoe County PTA Council. The *Littleton Independent*, described one festival in May 1923 as a “stupendous success,” with more than 1500 county residents in attendance. The festival featured Maypole dances, gymnastics, student-work exhibitions, a community dinner, field day events, a track meet, as well as, a side show attractions which included fortune tellers and performance animals—even “King Tut” made an appearance.<sup>32</sup> The newspaper reported on the day’s festivities and congratulated the Arapahoe County PTA for organizing the fair for providing the perfect venue for county and local PTAs to sway county commissioners to support children’s welfare and health programs.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “Ash Grove District,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, June 23, 1916; “Farm Dates in Arapahoe County,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, August 27, 1920; “Arapahoe County Fair,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, September 17, 1920.

<sup>29</sup> “Another Shot Fired,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, June 8, 1917.

<sup>30</sup> “Arapahoe County Fair,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, September 17, 1920.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Per the *Littleton Independent*, the total enrollment for Ash Grove School District, No. 35 for the 1919-1920 school year was 84. By comparison, the school district of Englewood had more than 1300 students enrolled. See “School Census,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, April 30, 1920; and, “Arapahoe County May Fete, Field Day, and Track Meet is a Stupendous Success,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, 4 May 4, 1923.

<sup>33</sup> “Arapahoe County May Fete, Field Day, and Track Meet is a Stupendous Success,” *Littleton (CO) Independent*, May 4, 1923.

For events like the festival in May 1923 which served as backdrop for the call for a county nurse, PTA leaders used local newspapers such as the *Littleton Independent*, *Aurora Democrat*, *Englewood Monitor*, *Denver Post*, and the *Rocky Mountain News*. The Ash Grove PTA announced its monthly meetings, reported its activities, and publicized its upcoming community lectures and school events in the *Englewood Monitor*. For instance, in one newspaper article, the school's PTA tried to increase its membership by encouraging fathers to attend the monthly council meetings making a special note that they would be held on Fridays evenings at 8:00pm.<sup>34</sup> Further, the Ash Grove PTA printed stories explaining why parents should join the local and county PTAs and issued challenges to the community to better "understand the school system and its needs."<sup>35</sup> Parents attending local PTA meetings, especially the lectures held by local and state officials, the state and National PTA believed were better informed and equipped to engage on matters related to children's health.

The real challenge for the PTA came down to parents who were willing to engage on the local level but less inclined to do so nationally. In an article published in October 1929, the author concluded: "There is probably no phase of Parent-Teacher work that is so little understood as the program and yet it is this program by which the organization is judged."<sup>36</sup> This was and remains a consistent problem for the PTA. Mrs. Theodore Reese, president of Ash Grove PTA and county program chair, tried to dispel the myth of the local PTAs as

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<sup>34</sup> "Ash Grove PTA," *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, September 20, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>35</sup> "County Parent and Teacher; Why a Parent Teacher Association," *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, 4 October 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>36</sup> "The Parent-Teacher Program," *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, October 4, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>36</sup> "Mrs. Carl H. (Grace) Beckman, "Publicity Report," *Colorado-Parent-Teacher Magazine*, June 1946, in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.



“money-making schemes.” She urged parents to attend their local county meetings so they could “interpret the plans of the State Board to the locals” rather than just hear by-proxy. She earnestly believed active participation in the county PTAs caused parents to “feel closer” to the national association.<sup>37</sup>

For example, in September 1929 the Arapahoe County PTA, very concerned about the “inadequate” health services in school districts, increased pressure on the County Health Commission to hire a full-time county nurse. The Arapahoe County PTA utilized its monthly meetings to educate local unit PTA presidents and members about their children’s improper health care and the benefits a county nurse could bring to their individual schools and communities. Furthermore, the county PTA encouraged local PTA leaders to pressure county health commissioners by drumming up support in outside clubs and organizations, such as lodges and churches. During these meetings, local leaders, mostly women, circulated petitions across the county calling for a county health nurse.<sup>38</sup> In addition to fundraising and informational sessions, the PTA’s executive leadership reached out to the “influential men” of Arapahoe to sway the County Health commissioners in their favor. Mrs. Van Gilder, president of the Arapahoe County PTA and president of the Ash Grove PTA, met with the county commissioners and representatives from the state health and education departments, as well as health experts from the Tuberculosis Association and the state sanitarium to discuss the hiring of a county nurse. Van Gilder, with the backing of Ash Grove parents and teachers, and the support of the county’s PTA organizations devised a plan to split the

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<sup>37</sup> “The Parent-Teacher Program,” *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, October 4, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>38</sup> “Parent-Teachers Ass’n: Health County P.-T.A. Promote Appeal for Health Nurse,” *The Englewood Monitor*, September 13, 1929; and, “Ash Grove P.-T.A.,” *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, September 20, 1929 in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-May 1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

nurse's salary- and supply-cost between the Arapahoe County PTA and Arapahoe County Commission of Health.<sup>39</sup> With funds from a "Christmas Seal" sale, the county PTA initially promised \$300 in donations and ended up raising more than \$750 for the nurse's salary.<sup>40</sup> The Arapahoe County Health Commission hired Virginia Adkins to serve as its first county nurse in 1929.<sup>41</sup> The county and local PTAs had achieved their first victory.

School children were not the only ones who benefited from the county PTA's victory. County PTA council members educated parents about immunizations, vaccines, nutrition, sanitation, and childhood development through health clinics, special topic lectures during monthly PTA meetings, circulated literature, and encouraged interaction with the county nurse. During the first few months in her new position, Adkins required Arapahoe parents' attendance at their child's health screenings and included home inspections in her duties. Adkins urged school PTAs to provide educational programming on milk, water, sanitation, physical education, and first aid. Additionally, she encouraged PTA leaders to visit other schools in the county with her. She recommended PTA-sponsored community health demonstrations for towns and schools without PTAs.<sup>42</sup> After visiting with the Ash Grove PTA in January 1930, Adkins described the parents as initially "anxious" when she first examined their children. However, soon after, she noticed a change in her wards and their

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<sup>39</sup> "Want Public Health Nurse for Arapahoe Schools for this Year, County Health Council Met with County Commissioner to Present Plans," *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, September 20, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-May 1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>40</sup> "Raising Money by Sale of Seals," *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, November 29, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-May 1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>41</sup> Virginia Adkins, "County Health Nurse Suggests List of Health Essentials," *Englewood Monitor*, December 6, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-May 1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>42</sup> Virginia Adkins, "County Health Nurse Suggests List of Health Essentials," *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, December 6, 1929, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-May 1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

parents. Rather than fearing her prognosis, parents eagerly awaited her visits. “Interest seems contagious,” she noted, and as an added benefit to having a county nurse screen their children, she observed parents increased interest in their own health.<sup>43</sup>

Adkins also worked closely with the Colorado PTA health committee and local PTA units to coordinate the National PTA’s Summer Roundup program for schools.<sup>44</sup> Initiated by the National PTA in 1925, the Summer Roundup provided health screenings for preschoolers, kindergartners, and first graders before the start of the school year. For instance, in 1930, the National PTA evaluated more than 50% of the 102,490 children nationwide who entered kindergarten and first grade that fall. According to county and local unit annual summary statements for the years 1930-1931, the National PTA reported PTAs worked with health officials to administer 18,872 small-pox vaccines, gave out 9,903 shots for diphtheria, and immunized 1,221 children for typhoid fever. Through the program, nurses and physicians discovered 105,732 “defects” in children, with the most common ailments being dental problems, enlarged tonsils, ear infections, and malnutrition. Additionally, as part of the Summer Roundup, the National PTA set “campaign requirements” for state and local PTAs to promote the program, provided health literature for distribution to parents, and assisted with registration resources for state PTAs.<sup>45</sup>

During an Arapahoe County PTA council meeting in November 1932, the county nurse educated local PTA units about the state’s health crises ranging from dental health to

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<sup>43</sup> “County Nurse Makes Good Impression throughout County,” *Englewood (CO) Monitor*, January 31, 1930, in Ash Grove PTA, Arapahoe County, Colorado, September 1929-May 1930, vol. 1, box 5, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>44</sup> Felda L. Arnold, “They Are Seven,” *National Parent-Teacher*, December 1946, p. 35, in “Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947,” CCPTA Archives.

<sup>45</sup> “The Annual Summary of Congress Information for 1930-1931,” Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p.13, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

tuberculosis. Based on PTA council reports printed in the *Aurora Democrat*, the county nurse served as a liaison between the state health office, and county and local PTAs. She kept parent-teacher associations up-to-date about recent state appropriations for county hospitals for children and adults' health care. The Arapahoe County PTA Council became the primary circuit for local PTA presidents to receive information about state and national PTA activities directed towards children's hygiene and nutrition. Moreover, local unit leaders used the county meetings to maintain their ties with other PTA units in their county and across their state. After attending a county meeting, local leaders would return to their schools and communities with new ideas on how to better children's welfare, better their community, and better the impact of their PTA. For example, PTA leaders discussed the best ways to heat school buildings, the importance of traffic signs, the benefits of hot lunches, how to organize and fund school libraries, and establishment immunization programs for kindergarteners. They also helped other parents stay informed of state and national PTA activities by promoting the local half-hour radio broadcasts on KOA, an NBC affiliate radio station.<sup>46</sup>

In national activities like the Summer Roundup program which promoted children's welfare and community health, the National PTA could only measure the effectiveness of its programs through the local actions of county and school PTAs.<sup>47</sup> State, county, and local PTA volunteers were the linchpin to implementing and promoting the National PTA agenda. District and county presidents, responding to a National PTA's request for feedback, reported

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<sup>46</sup> "Arapahoe Council Report," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, November 18, 1932; "P.T.A. School of Instruction," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, October 6, 1933; "P.T.A. News," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, October 27, 1933; Blanche Paulson, "Arapahoe County Council," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, January 26, 1934.

<sup>47</sup> "Arapahoe Council Report," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, November 18, 1932; "P.T.A. School of Instruction," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, October 6, 1933; "P.T.A. News," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, October 27, 1933; Blanche Paulson, "Arapahoe County Council," *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, January 26, 1934.

they needed leaders and “anyone who will work.”<sup>48</sup> The PTA desperately needed volunteers to coordinate local and nation-wide campaigns. Per local unit summaries, school PTA volunteers completed the clear majority of the National PTA’s groundwork. For example, state presidents across the nation advanced the National PTA platform through active collaborations with a variety of state and local organizations.<sup>49</sup> Such as:

AAUW	Prison Society
American Child Health	Progressive Education Association
American Forestry Association	Public Athletic League
American Legion	Red Cross
Auto Club	School for Deaf and Blind
Better Homes Association	Social Hygiene Society
Board of Control	Social Welfare Agency
Book Mobile	State Charities
Boy Scouts	State Council for Social Work
Cause and Cure of War Association	State Council of Women
Child Health Institute	State Dental Society
Child Welfare Bureau	State Department of Education
Children’s Aid	State Department of Health
Community Chest	State Education Association

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<sup>48</sup> “The Annual Summary of Congress Information for 1930-1931,” Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 8, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, National Congress of Parents and Teachers Publications (NCPTP), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.; and, “The Annual Summary of Congress Information, 1932, Section 2: State Branch Information Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 5, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>49</sup> “The Annual Summary of Congress Information, 1932, Section 2: State Branch Information,” Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 7, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

Council of Farm Women	State Federation of Women's Clubs
Endorsers Photoplay	State Home Economics Association
Federal Citizens Association	State Humane Society
Federation of Music Clubs	State Library Association
George Washington Bicentennial Commission	State Medical Society
Girl Reserves	State Mental Hygiene Society
Girl Scouts	State Safety Commission
Governor's Council on Unemployed Relief	State Society for Crippled Children
Illiterate Commission	State Teacher's Association
Motion Picture Council	State Universities and Teachers Colleges
Music Teachers Association	State White House Conference
National Child Labor Commission	Summer Outing Fund
National Dairy Council	Thrift Committee
National Education Association	Women's Christian Temperance Union
Needlework Guild	Women's Joint Legislative Committee
Negro PTA	Women's Law Enforcement Committee
Patriotic Association	Young Citizen's League

In Colorado, lay leaders accounted for 90% of the state PTA “workforce” in 1931. Many of them participated in local and county unit study groups on parent-education and PTA programming. Of the 211 study groups and courses offered across the state, the CCPT enrolled more than 2,500 members to study PTA leadership.<sup>50</sup> For instance, CCPT and its

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<sup>50</sup> By comparison, in 1931, the National PTA reported an average of 65% of members enrolled in the 6311 study groups were “lay leaders.” See, “The Annual Summary of Congress Information, 1932, Section 1: Local Parent-Teacher Association Information,” Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 5, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

county PTAs organized “parent-teacher” summer courses at Denver University and the Colorado State Teachers College for parents to learn about PTA work as early as the 1930s.<sup>51</sup> During the institutes parents and teachers were provided opportunities for learning about the organization’s history and program through study groups. In Arapahoe County, former state PTA president and state organizer Florence Dick ran the parent-teacher courses. Her “students” included parents and teachers who were either PTA leaders or interested persons from the county’s elementary, high school, collegiate, and rural schools. Dick used materials from the state and national office to help instruct the local PTA members on the history, purpose, objectives, and activities of the association. In addition to the pamphlets, handouts, and study guides, Dick directed local leaders to organize parent-teacher discussion groups around articles they had read in the *National Parent-Teacher* and the *Colorado Parent-Teacher*. The Ash Grove PTA frequently enrolled its members in Dick’s courses and often hosted countywide study group sessions at the Ash Grove School.<sup>52</sup>

Women became more involved in their local, county, and state PTAs through state conventions. In Colorado, state conventions and district conferences offered women the opportunity to run for state PTA positions and seek greater involvement with the national association which led to other public offices at local, state, and national levels. The Colorado PTA board included a president and seven vice-presidents.<sup>53</sup> The first and second vice-

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<sup>51</sup> “The Annual Summary of Congress Information for 1930-1931,” Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p.10, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>52</sup> “Arapahoe Council Report,” *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, November 18, 1932; “P.T.A. School of Instruction,” *Aurora (CO) Democrat*, October 6, 1933.

<sup>53</sup> By the 1950s, the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers consisted of ten vice-presidents on the board of managers. The executive board also included a secretary, historian, treasurer, financial secretary, magazine editor, the President of the County PTAs, standing committees, and numerous council presidents. The CCPTA at the time had thirty-five standing committees and twenty-two council representatives on the board. Eight of the vice-presidents oversaw

presidents provided general administrative aid and support to the president. The remaining five presidents chaired the departments of Rural Service, Public Welfare, Education, Organization and Programs, and Health. Department chairs were nominated and elected by the state board. Within each department, the chair was responsible for coordinating multiple program and service divisions. For instance, the seventh vice-president presided over the Department of Health and coordinated the Summer-Roundup program, mental and social hygiene educational programs, and organized the circulation of narcotic literature. Local presidents received detailed reports and informational packets from the department chairs each fall which they then used to structure their monthly events, programs, and activities.<sup>54</sup>

For example, individual PTA units and county PTA leaders planned, directed, and managed the National PTA's Summer Roundup health programs for local elementary schools. According to reports from Colorado's Department of Public Instruction and the Child Welfare Bureau (CWB), which worked in concert with parent-teacher associations, PTAs organized nursing clinics and hosted summer roundup events in Arapahoe County during the 1930s. CWB Field Secretary and former Colorado State PTA president Elizabeth Shuttleworth, remarked, "the fact that 2,574 parents or guardians were present at [Summer Roundup] clinics, proves that parents are realizing the importance of health education."<sup>55</sup>

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eight districts, which included organized and unorganized county PTAs. Ash Grove PTA belonged to District 1 with 52 local units registered. By comparison Denver, which belonged to District 2, represented 77 of the 135 local units in its district. See "Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Handbook, 1952-1955," *Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers* (Denver, CO: Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1952), p. 4-8, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Felda L. Arnold, "They Are Seven," *National Parent-Teacher*, December 1946, p. 35, in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth Shuttleworth, "Report of the Field Secretary to the Colorado Bureau of Home and School Service, July 1, 1934-June 30, 1936," in *Biennial Report, Colorado Child Welfare Bureau*, Department of Education, July 1, 1934-June 30, 1936, in *Thirteenth-Annual Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Colorado; For the Years July 1, 1934-June 30, 1936*, Inez Johnson Lewis, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Denver, CO: Bradford-Robinson, 1937), 23-24.



County nurses and local physicians examined children entering kindergarten and first grade for small pox, typhoid fever, and diphtheria. Children also received immunization and vaccine shots.<sup>56</sup> As noted in the annual unit summaries by the National PTA research division, local and state PTAs collaborated with state teachers' associations and state health departments to facilitate the national program to address local community health concerns. By 1945, Mrs. James B. Noel, president of the Colorado PTA, partnered with the Colorado Education Association to promote local PTAs as one solution to community health education. The state's PTA executive board and Health Committee surveyed Colorado's health services and resources. Local PTA presidents received state and county health reports from the committee every fall. The state PTA also created a special committee to propose health legislation to the Colorado General Assembly. They assisted in introducing bills on pasteurization, sanitation, and public health education.<sup>57</sup>

At the same time the Summer Roundup campaigns took off in Colorado and across the nation, school districts and local PTAs began to feel the fallout from the Great Depression. Colorado State Superintendent of Public Instruction and former Colorado PTA Vice-President, Inez Johnson Lewis, lamented to the Colorado Gov. William Adams that the financial and agricultural strains felt by Coloradans directly impacted the state's poorest school districts. In 1932, Lewis wrote: "These two years have been difficult years for our citizens and the financial troubles of our people have been inevitably reflected in reduced income for the support of schools as well as other functions of the government." She went on

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<sup>56</sup> "The Annual Summary of Congress Information for 1930-1931," Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p.10, Series 1: Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, vol. 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>57</sup> "Congress of P.-T.A.," *Denver (CO) Post*, August 11, 1945; "State P.-T.A.," *Denver (CO) Post*, September 1, 1946; "State P.-T.A.," *Denver (CO) Post*, August 18, 1946, all in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

to address the overabundance of single-school districts conceding that, “It is sometimes contended that the maintenance of schools is the exclusive responsibility of local school districts. This is not in accordance with the spirit of either the Constitution of the United States or of the Constitution of the State of Colorado.”<sup>58</sup> As a former PTA president and state vice-president, Johnson fully believed the state and federal government’s obligation to schools and students was “one of the most important duties with which the Legislature [was] charged.”<sup>59</sup> Just two years later, Lewis again reported on the state of Colorado’s public schools calling attention to the “blasting effects of the economic depression”—shortened school terms, insufficient funds, varied educational standards, “antiquated taxing system,” and teachers whose salaries had been cut or who had not been paid at all.<sup>60</sup> Colorado, however, would see a modicum of relief from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), which employed teachers to provide adult educational programs for more than 23,000 Coloradans.<sup>61</sup> New Deal historian Jason Scott Smith, in *Building New Deal Liberalism*, points out that nationally under the Works Project Administration “6,000 new schools were built, 2,170 additions built on to older schools, and 31,000 schools

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<sup>58</sup> Inez Johnson was a member of the Colorado Council of Rural Education, a member of the Colorado Child Welfare Bureau, and the third vice-president of the Colorado Parent-Teachers Association, see “Colorado Educational Directory; School Directory, 1922-1923,” Katherine L. Craig, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (Denver, CO: Eames Brothers, c. 1923). Inez Johnson Lewis, Letter to Governor William H. Adams, 20 December 1932, in *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Colorado For the Years July 1, 1930 to June 30, 1932; July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1934*, Colorado Department of Public Instruction (Denver, CO: Bradford-Robinson, 1934), 4-5.

<sup>59</sup> Inez Johnson Lewis, Letter to Governor William H. Adams, 20 December 1932, in *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Colorado For the Years July 1, 1930 to June 30, 1932; July 1, 1932 to June 30, 1934*, Colorado Department of Public Instruction (Denver, CO: Bradford-Robinson, 1934), 5.

<sup>60</sup> Inez Johnson Lewis, Letter to Governor Edwin C. Johnson, c. 1934, in *Report of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Colorado For the Years 1933-1934* (Denver, CO: Bradford-Robinson, 1934), 135-136.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

modernized.”<sup>62</sup> By 1936, the WPA was the largest, single employer in Colorado and helped build 63 new schools.<sup>63</sup> In 1938, as a WPA project, Ash Grove received \$50,000 to build a larger school next to its older one. The new school added a library, additional classrooms, and hired four teachers.<sup>64</sup>

Consequentially in the decade preceding World War II, the national network of local, female PTA leaders, both trained and lay, coordinating national health and educational programs across state and local institutions equipped women to take on a more active role in state and federal wartime efforts. By nurturing volunteerism at the local level, the state PTAs and the National PTA capitalized on women’s prior experiences running health clinics, facilitating parent-study groups, and organizing cross-organizational committee initiatives. The skills women developed during the 1930s easily transferred to organizing community defense councils, establishing a wide spectrum of wartime activities. The National PTA relied on state and county PTAs to advertise membership as part of one’s civic responsibility. Whether a parent, a teacher, or a student enrollment in the PTA equated to responsible citizenship. The state and national associations made special appeals to mothers who wanted to feel a part of something bigger than their local PTA unit.

By the time the United States entered World War II, local and state PTAs changed their health programs from individually and family-centered to focused on national welfare and community health. Individual unit activity reports in the National PTA annual summary reports before WWII show local branches organizing lectures and activities focusing on

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<sup>62</sup> Jason Scott Smith, *Building New Deal Liberalism: The Political Economy of Public Works, 1933-1956* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 114.

<sup>63</sup> Abbott et al., *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 284.

<sup>64</sup> Goe and Crowle, *History of Cherry Creek School District*, 81-86; and, Tom Simmons and Laurie Simmons, *Historical and Architectural Survey of Selected Denver Public Schools, 2005* (Denver, CO: Front Range Research Assoc., 2006).

childwelfare on an individual basis. Typical PTA health programs prior to WWII included “Radio’s Effect on Children” and “Safeguarding Community Health.”<sup>65</sup> According to the National PTA unit summaries, the Colorado PTA registered the most local units for the “Know Your Community” national health program in 1940.<sup>66</sup> The transition from student-centered health programs to defining children’s health and nutrition as a factor in national defense became prominent in the 1941-1942 National PTA program agenda. In the health section of the annual local unit summary reports, the National PTA reported an increase in local programs linking national health and defense. Parent-education group topics included: “Health in Defense,” “Nutrition in Defense,” and “Welfare Aid and Civil Defense.”<sup>67</sup>

During the war, the National PTA and its state and local associates mobilized for “total victory.” Two months after the United States declared war on Japan and officially entered WWII, National PTA president Virginia Kletzer, in her monthly address to PTA units, wrote: “Victory must be a part of everything we do. And it be total victory—victory for the war, victory for the peace, victory for the civilization we have achieved, victory of the ideals of freedom and justice and brotherhood. This victory is the legacy we must bequeath our children.”<sup>68</sup> Another contributor to the *National Parent-Teacher* praised the PTA for its wartime contributions and for “defend[ing] the home front.”<sup>69</sup> National PTA officer, Letitia

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<sup>65</sup> “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1939-1940,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1942, p. 4, in series 1, vol. 2. Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>66</sup> “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1939-1940,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1942, p. 4, in series 1, vol. 2. Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>67</sup> “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1941-1942,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Chicago, Illinois, 1939, p. 7, in series 1, vol. 2. Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>68</sup> Virginia Kletzer, “President’s Message: Victory in Every Heart,” *National Parent-Teacher*, 36, no. 6 (February 1942), p. 3, in CCPTA Archives.

<sup>69</sup> Mark A. McCloskey, “What Shall We Do Next?” *National Parent-Teacher*, vol. 36, no. 6 (February 1942), p. 9-11, CCPTA Archives.

J. Lytle, in her coverage of the PTA's wartime activities, pointed out that very little of the PTA's program had to change during the war, stating rather "The program has simply been stepped up, teacher and parents realizing more keenly their mutual responsibility. . . . [PTA workers] are united in their endeavors to serve childhood on every front."<sup>70</sup>

On a state and local level, PTA wartime activities included "block-mother" programs and wartime emergency councils. In Colorado, state PTA president, Mrs. O.C. Ufford worked with her local PTA presidents to establish more than 500 war services zones with a "block-mother" in charge of each zone. Block-mothers, typically PTA members, were responsible for circulating information between the city and state's defense councils and local neighborhoods.<sup>71</sup> Preparing the community for potential air-raids, block-mothers in Colorado organized a housing-network of "open homes" for families and children to seek safety. The program provided free child-care for working-parents, and in case children became lost during the raids, PTA "War Councils" advocated for child registration and identification cards.<sup>72</sup> In addition to the block-mothers program, the National PTA distributed monthly war-time pamphlets, FAQs, and discussion topics through the *National Parent Teacher Magazine* which state and local unit leaders received. The national organization promised wartime progress claiming the materials would "contribute to the planning, perfecting, and carrying out of parent-teacher war activities."<sup>73</sup> Parent-study group leaders

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<sup>70</sup> Letitia J. Lytle, "The West Blazes New Trails," *National Parent-Teacher*, vol. 36, no. 8 (April 1942), p. 33-34, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>71</sup> Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers *Legacy of Promise: A History of the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1907 to 1957* (n.p.: Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, c. 1957), p. 36, in fol. 706, box 110, series 10, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, "Colorado is on Alert," in *National Parent-Teacher*, 9, no. 12 (August 1942), vol. 89, series 5, NCPTP Archives.

<sup>72</sup> "Wartime Service Packet for Parent-Teacher Associations," pamphlet, vol. 89, series 5, NCPTP Archives.

<sup>73</sup> "Around the Editor's Table," *National Parent-Teacher*, 36, no. 7 (March 1942): 38, CCPTA Archives.

used the material to inform parents, primarily mothers, about food rationing, financial literacy, community service, propaganda, youth and democracies, clothing substitutions, and job creation for the family unit.<sup>74</sup> Other war-efforts included restricting travel during the war. The National PTA cancelled the annual meeting and urged states to follow suite. An unknown PTA president living in rural Colorado, as noted by the National PTA, walked more than six miles to attend her county PTA meetings during the 1941-1942 school year. Similarly, after cancelling district conferences to save on tires and gasoline for the war effort, Colorado President Ufford traveled the state alone directing and coordinating the PTA's program, services, and activities.<sup>75</sup>

Immediately following WWII, the National PTA noted an uptick in attendance from the local to national, with state conference attendance doubling.<sup>76</sup> During the first postwar convention, held in Denver in May 1946, NCPT President Minnetta Hastings acknowledged that the war "brought to [the PTA's] attention . . . the need for better national health."<sup>77</sup> The National PTA urged state and local PTAs to expand their energies and push an international agenda for the PTA. As a member of the educational delegation to the United Nations, Hastings was primed to position PTA for greater influence with the United Nations,

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<sup>74</sup> For wartime pamphlets and programs produced by the National PTA and used in local parent-study groups see "America Pitches In: P.T.A. Wartime Program," pamphlet, vol. 89, series 5, NCPTP / UIC Archives; "Babies in Wartime," pamphlet, vol. 89, series 5, NCPTP / UIC Archives; "Wartime Service Packet for Parent-Teacher Associations," pamphlet, vol. 89, series 5, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>75</sup> Quote from: "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1941-1942," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 4, series 1, vol. 2. Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, NCPTP / UIC Archives; *Legacy of Promise*, p. 36, fol. 706, box 110, series 10, PTAR / UIC Archives; "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1942-1943," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, series 1, vol. 2. Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>76</sup> "A Summary of Local Unit Information, 1945-1946," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 4, series 1, vol. 2. Annual Summaries of Local Unit Information, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>77</sup> Frances Carpenter, "P.-T.A. Head Urges U.S. Aid Starving," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 20, 1946, in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

UNESCO, and UNICEF.<sup>78</sup> In response, the Arapahoe County PTA Council hosted guest lecturers to discuss food shortage in the U.S. and abroad during their monthly council meetings.<sup>79</sup> At the biennial state convention in Pueblo, Colorado, in April 1946, former state PTA president and national vice-president, Mrs. O.C. Ufford, stated that members in attendance would “get in the groove of real P.-T.A. services” at the conference.<sup>80</sup> More than 500 state delegates registered for the state convention. They represented more than 300 local units across the state. More importantly, local and county representatives attended workshops on “legislation, bills, health, membership, and other phases of the Parent Teacher program” which they then took back to their home districts.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> “Newly Elected PTA President Tells Her Aims,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1943; “National P.T.A. President Will Address Council; Mrs. Hastings Also to be Teachers’ Club Guest on Friday,” *Daily Sun* (San Bernardino, CA), March 15, 1944; and “Obituaries...Mrs. Hastings, Civic Leader, Auto Accident Victim, Dies,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 25, 1962. Minnetta Hastings, a native of Wisconsin, and the mother of two sons, began her PTA career as president of a local PTA unit in Madison, Wisconsin. She ascended the PTA ranks serving as county and state president, and then transitioned to the national organization to serve on the Board of Managers and became a regional vice-president. In 1927, she received her Master’s degree from the University of Wisconsin. One of her sons graduated from UW the same year. See, “Obituaries...Mrs. Hastings, Civic Leader, Auto Accident Victim, Dies,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, May 25, 1962.

<sup>79</sup> “Colorado Congress,” *Denver (CO) Post*, June 2, 1946 in “Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947,” CCPTA Archives.

<sup>80</sup> Mrs. O. C. Offord was Colorado state president from 1942-1944 when she was elected to the National PTA as Vice-President of Region 8 in 1944. During the war, Offord discontinued the district conferences to save on tires and gasoline. Instead, she traveled the state visiting local and district units. During her state presidency, Offord established the “War Council” and “Block Mothers” program. See *Legacy of Promise*, p. 36, fol. 706, box 110, series 10, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>81</sup> “P.-T.A. Parley of Colorado Is Under Way,” n.d., Associated Press, “Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947,” CCPTA Archives.



**Image 1:** *Official Greetings from National PTA Vice-Presidents, 1946 Annual Convention;* See, "Denverites Offers City's Greetings to Opening of P.-T.A. Convention," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 21, 1946 in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Papers, Colorado State PTA Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

As state president, women often found themselves assisting in the development of the national program. For example, Mrs. James B. Noel as president of CCPT chaired the national convention planning committee for the 1946 annual convention in Denver. Noel gained a spot on the national committee in 1945 and helped orchestrate the program, transportation, and services for the first-postwar meeting that brought more than 1500 voting delegates to Denver. On the agenda, state presidents, state executive members, and county leaders discussed social and cultural relations, community planning initiatives, and held separate legislative workshops, organizational management, and discussed problems in



schools from preschool through high school. Although they did not have voting privileges, local PTA members who were non-delegates could attend state and national conventions.<sup>82</sup>

The National PTA insisted that local PTA members, through coordinated effort, could solve the nation's problems. They could solve national crises in education, housing, and health as PTA leaders working within city and county planning committees.<sup>83</sup> During the 1946 national convention in Denver, PTA members heard from leading experts in atomic research and international relations. They were encouraged to join their town's planning councils to help shape postwar America. They were told they were more than capable of holding council positions alongside city council representatives, administrators from city planning offices, and representatives from local civic groups. During state conventions, members who became official delegates learned to draft state and national resolutions, design programming agendas, chaired state legislative committees, reviewed and assessed state public welfare services, learned the importance of media relations, and developed the skills and knowledge to garner support for federal educational aid. In so doing, one former state president of Colorado, Mrs. Cyril Lyster, began referring to her state and local PTA members not as "parents" but as "workers" serving the national platform.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "Colorado Congress," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 5, 1946, "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

<sup>83</sup> "Arrange National PTA Parley," *Rocky Mountain (CO) News*, May 1, 1946; Frances Wayne, "P-T.A. Leaders Plan National Convention to be Held Here During May," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 5, 1946; Peggy Orme, "Denver will be host to big P-T.A. Parley This Month," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 12, 1946; "P.-T.A. Board Urges Planning Councils for Municipalities," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 19, 1946.

<sup>84</sup> "Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Handbook, 1952-1955," *Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers* (Denver, CO: Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1952), p. 3, CCPTA Archives.



**Image 2:** *Grace Beckman, State Publicity Chairman, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, see "P.-T.A. Board Meeting Set," *Denver (CO) Post*, April 28, 1946, in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Papers, Colorado State PTA Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

Building on the workers-narrative, state publicity chairman, Grace Beckman, attempted to educate the public on the PTA program via newspapers and magazines. In an article published in the state PTA magazine, the *Colorado Parent-Teacher*, Beckman reminded PTA members that the public would not know the strength of the PTA unless the PTA took control over the narrative. "It will be up to us," she wrote, "to sell PTA to the public in general through our stories of the work we plan to do and to share the result of our labor with each other."<sup>85</sup> In addition, she circulated articles from *National Parent-Teacher* among the local and county councils. One way to "sell PTA" to Colorado was through its

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<sup>85</sup> "Mrs. Carl H. (Grace) Beckman, "Publicity Report," *The Colorado-Parent-Teacher Magazine*, June 1946 in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

newspapers. Beckman requested the county and local units provide notices about upcoming events and activities for her to publish in her weekly Sunday column in the *Denver Post*.<sup>86</sup>

Colorado's PTAs also used the radio to increase public favor for PTA-supported programs and services. The Arapahoe County PTA developed half-hour broadcasts for KOA on parent education, health programs, and child welfare. The county encouraged its study group participants to tune in for the half-hour National PTA program that aired on Friday afternoons. While membership campaigns frequently centered on signing parents up at their local school, the CCPT tried to increase program funds by boosting its state membership numbers following the war. PTA advertisements in local newspaper singled-out fathers as a particular source for new recruits. For instance, in June 1946, the CCPT reported to the *Denver Post* that the association netted 5,139 men to join the PTA, bringing total male membership to 16,719. Male membership represented over 25% percent of the total state membership.<sup>87</sup> The following month, the *Denver Post* Sunday edition included an announcement from the state PTA about a joint-conference between former state presidents and the Colorado Education Association on the connection between a healthy community and a healthy PTA membership.<sup>88</sup>

No one issue concerned the PTA more than federal aid to public education and the debate over local control. Newspaper articles, national PTA resolutions, local school histories, and annexation maps reveal a complex and at times contentious relationship

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<sup>86</sup> "Mrs. Carl H. (Grace) Beckman, "Publicity Report," *The Colorado-Parent-Teacher Magazine*, June 1946 in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

<sup>87</sup> "Parents-Teachers," *Denver (CO) Post*, June 23, 1946, in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

<sup>88</sup> "Congress of P.-T.A.," *Denver (CO) Post*, August 11, 1946, in "Publicity Record Book, Colorado Congress of P.T.A., 1946-1947," CCPTA Archives.

between local PTAs, state legislatures, and the federal government. For the Ash Grove PTA and its school the matter of federal funding and standardization of rural public schools was the forefront issue of the 1940s and 1950s. Recall that between 1895 and 1949, the Ash Grove School, specifically its parents, operated independently from neighboring school districts in Arapahoe County. As one of twenty-eight single-school districts in Arapahoe County, the teachers and parents of Ash Grove had collective oversight of the school. Parents set the school tax rate, collected taxes, arranged transportation for children, and in totality, were the board of education for Ash Grove. The county superintendent had little if no authority over the school and its parents. Local control reigned.

Ash Grove, like many other rural schools at the time, had a long history of operating in isolation from the county school superintendent and the state department of public instruction. Its primary connection to the state legislature was via the Child Welfare Bureau and its affiliation with the state parent-teacher association organizer. When children needed a hot meal during lunch time, Ash Grove PTA president Van Gilder provided students with warm stew to eat.<sup>89</sup> When teachers wanted a library for the school, PTA parents donated their own books.<sup>90</sup> When parents expressed concern over children's safety and the increase in traffic incidents near the school, the PTA installed a traffic light.<sup>91</sup>

For much of its early history the Ash Grove PTA and its school administrators operated on the periphery of the state and county superintendents. However, by the late 1940s, Ash Grove and other rural parent-teacher associations in Arapahoe County faced mounting pressure to standardize education, consolidate school districts, and provide a high

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<sup>89</sup> *History of Cherry Creek School District*, 81-86.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

school education program. Colorado schools and parents had faced tough times before. During the Great Depression, the State School Superintendent Inez Johnson Lewis, had stated that, “Due to the careful planning of the boards of education in charge of our schools, to the attitude of our people toward public schools, and in many cases, to the personal sacrifice of both our citizens and our public school teachers, the wholesale discontinuance of schools has not yet occurred in Colorado.”<sup>92</sup> In the aftermath of the economic collapse and with the appearance of federal relief in the form of school construction and adult educational programs, Coloradans began making “strong pleas” for state funding for their children’s schools.<sup>93</sup> As it was during the Depression, rural schools lacked the sufficient funds to provide adequate education, to transport students from elementary to junior high, and to increase teacher wages. Even more problematic were the schools and communities in northeastern Arapahoe County being compressed by Denver’s ever-expanding city boundaries. The Ash Grove PTA and school districts in eastern Arapahoe County were faced with a decision: fight for local control and potentially lose out on state-funded school resources; or give up local control in favor of a county board of education and keep Denver at bay.<sup>94</sup> They chose the latter.

By mid-century, the National PTA saw its influence shift away from Washington and move towards local PTAs. Additionally, local PTAs began to experience the first restrictions placed on PTA authority. In the example of the Ash Grove PTA, parents’ decision to sacrifice local control to county superintendents allowed the county school board to gain fiscal and program supervision in coordinating high school education programs and

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<sup>92</sup> “History of the Colorado Department of Education,” Colorado Department of Education (Denver: Colorado Department of Education, 1968): 13.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Goe and Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*, 81-86.

modernizing school facilities. In turn, parents lost oversight of their local school. With the dissolution of many single-school districts boards of education and the emergence of one school board representing multiple schools, PTA parents also saw the number of PTA-representatives decline. However, parents still considered the consolidation of rural schools and the loss of school board positions a viable alternative to incorporation with Denver's solitary school district. DPS's board of education represented an even larger number of elementary, junior, and high schools and left few seats at the table for parents.

On 13 April 1949, the Colorado State Legislature passed House Bill No. 900, *The School District Reorganization Act of 1949*.<sup>95</sup> The bill provided for the "general improvement of public schools" across the state and called for an alteration of school district boundaries to increase district size, both in tax revenue and student enrollment. The bill also required schools, like Ash Grove, to work with neighboring schools to develop a plan for a "proposed district."<sup>96</sup> The 1949 Act guaranteed reorganization plans would address the state's present school "emergency." Pursuant plans, according to the General Assembly, would establish a "uniformed system of free public schools," a standard school tax rate, provide high school education, and contribute to the "equalization of the benefits and burdens of education." Yet each plan would be "liberally construed."<sup>97</sup>

By May of that year, the Colorado General Assembly declared a state of emergency in public education and forced school districts to vote on consolidation.<sup>98</sup> With experience in

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<sup>95</sup> *An Act Relating to Schools and School Districts and to Provide for a Method of Reorganization of School Districts*, Co. Acts ch. 224, H.B. 900 (1949): 636-651.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 637.

<sup>97</sup> Goe and Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*, 4-5; and, *An Act Relating to Schools and School Districts and to Provide for a Method of Reorganization of School Districts*, Co. Acts ch. 224, H.B. 900 (1949): 637.

<sup>98</sup> House Bill no. 639, *An Act in Relation to Education*, Co. Acts ch. 219, H.B. 639 (1949): 625.

state policy-making, networking, and coordinating with state agencies, Arapahoe PTA parents quickly took the lead in holding public forums on the new bill and organizing subsequent meetings discussing reorganization plans. At Ash Grove, on 19 June 1950, two forums were held that day to “fully explain” the school reorganization bill to the community at-large and the merits of voting for and against the measure in the August referendum were debated.<sup>99</sup> Four days later polls opened at the eight schools under consideration for consolidation. The vote easily passed and for the first time in its history, Ash Grove teachers and the PTA became part of a consolidated school district—the Cherry Creek School District, no. 5. With the formation of the new school district the former districts were abolished—Castlewood School (no. 5), Sullivan School (no. 12), Cherry Creek (no. 19) Ash Grove (no. 35), Cherry Hills (no. 36), Mountain View (no. 54), and Maple Grove (no. 69).<sup>100</sup> As testament to the strength of its PTA, and perhaps its close relationship with county commissioners, Ash Grove School became one of two polling places for eastern Arapahoe County residents to vote on the new school board.<sup>101</sup> Following board elections, Ash Grove became the home office for the new school board during the school district’s first year.<sup>102</sup> Under the auspices of the new district school board, Ash Grove continued to expand its enrollment and teaching staff. The school hired six new teachers, added four additional

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<sup>99</sup> Goe and Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*, Appendix A, 11.

<sup>100</sup> “School Reorganization Notice,” in *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*, Appendix A.

<sup>101</sup> Goe and Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*, Appendix B, 12.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 81-86.

classrooms, a boy's bathroom, teachers' lounge, kitchen, and new heating system.<sup>103</sup> The PTA continued to receive high-membership banners from the county and state PTA.<sup>104</sup>

Arapahoe County's reorganization plan to "stave off Denver annexation" ultimately failed, though. Between the years 1951 and 1959, the Cherry Creek School District seceded more than 2,130 acres to the city and county of Denver (see Map 1). Historians of the Cherry Creek School District argue that through a combination of annexation pressures and consolidation mandates the school board and community decided to sell Ash Grove to the Denver Public School system. "It was inevitable," Goe and Crowle state, "that change would come to this quiet farm community bordering Cherry Creek."<sup>105</sup> By 1956, Denver had encircled Ash Grove. The jewel of Arapahoe County School system marked by its successful PTA now became Denver-Annexation no. 73. On 1 October 1957, the Cherry Creek Board of Education sold Ash Grove for \$200,000. The equivalent of \$1,728,391.46 in 2017.<sup>106</sup> The following year in September the transfer of Ash Grove to Denver was complete.

While the Ash Grove PTA lost its school to Denver, the Arapahoe County Superintendent, the school's PTA members, schoolteachers, and administrators took the funds from the sale and built a new school, Holly Hills Elementary, just beyond the reach of Denver and DPS. Coming together to meet national and community demands for relief and aid during the Great Depression and World War II, local PTAs felt increasing internal conflict with the National PTA and state departments of education over school modernization and rural school consolidation. The strain on local PTAs to support national-interests while

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 83.

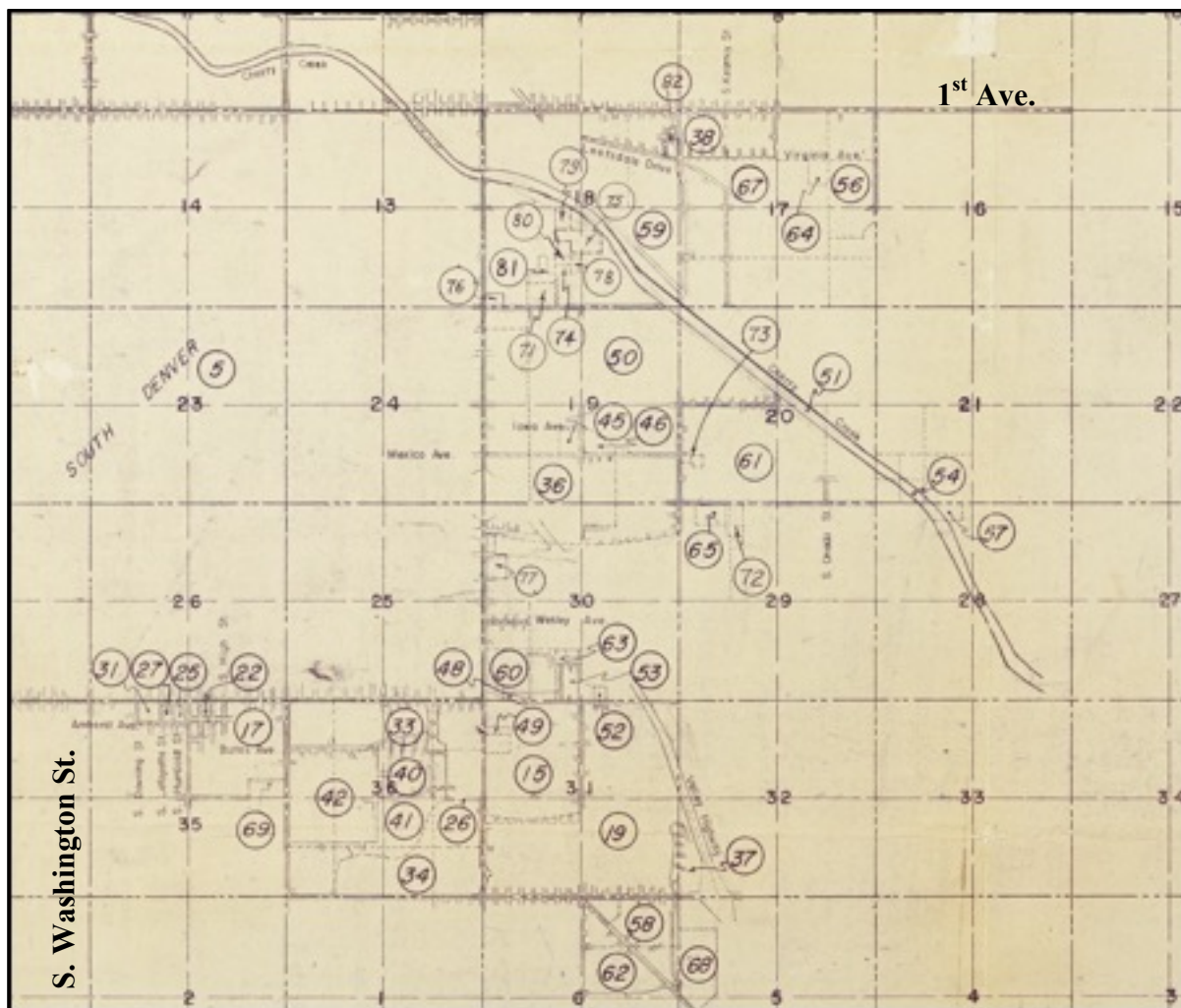
<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>106</sup> Consumer Price Index Inflation Calculator, *Bureau of Labor Statistics*, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm), accessed on 14 March 2017.



shelving self-interests erupted in the postwar years. And in the coming years, Ash Grove's new batch of PTA members and the National PTA would face its greatest opponent to balancing local control and state support—*itself*.<sup>107</sup>



**Map 1: Cross-section of the annexations near south Denver, c. 1959.** Between 11 December 1941 and 19 March 1949, a month before the Reorganization Act, the City and County of Denver annexed approximately 7.65 sq. mi. from Adams and Arapahoe County. Following the passage of the Reorganization Act that created the Cherry Creek School District, the city annexed another 7.27 sq. mi. expanding the western, eastern, and southern boundaries of “South Denver.” Ash Grove (no. 73, 0.0092 sq. mi.) was officially annexed on 14 April 1958. Each number listed on the map corresponds to an annexation site. Ash Grove Elementary is Annexation No. 73. For the full annexation map and list of annexed areas, see *Map of the Annexations to the City and County of Denver, 1959*, Denver Public Library, Western History Collection, CG4314.D4 1959.

<sup>107</sup> Goe and Crowle, *The History of the Cherry Creek School District Number Five*, 86-87, 92.

## CHAPTER 4

### *“PTA Substitutes Teeth for Tea ‘n’ Cake Image”: The Right, Race, and Pursuit of Equal Educational Opportunity in Postwar America*

More than five million parents and teachers left the National PTA between 1963 and 1975. Additionally, more than 5,700 local PTA units folded or separated from local schools, state PTAs, and the National Congress.<sup>1</sup> In less than fifteen years the National PTA went from representing 6.44% to 3.25% of the U.S. population.<sup>2</sup> Fundamentally, the National PTA claimed its association endured where other associations collapsed because of its relationship with its local units. In the eyes of the PTA’s top-leadership, the local and national branches were one in the same. The organization, they claimed, “[did] not exist except as the sum total of all its members in the local units.” Each local PTA, the National PTA argued, worked in tandem with state congresses and carried out the national education and legislative program.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> At its peak the National PTA reported 12,131,318 members in March 1963 and by August 1975 national membership had dropped to an estimated 7,000,000 members. For PTA membership in 1963, see respectively “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1962-1963,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vols. 2, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives; and, Sue Roll, “PTA Substitutes Teeth for Tea ‘n’ Cake Image,” *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1975. Also, the National PTA reported 47,055 local PTA units as of March 1963. Seven years later, the number of local units was reduced to 41,328 and would further drop to 33,000 by July 1975. For statistical data concerning local unit information submitted to the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, see Summary of Local Unit Information for years 1962-1970, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vols. 2 and 3, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives; and “PTA Contracts Ad Agency,” *Gallup (NM) Independent*, July 17, 1975.

<sup>2</sup> Between 1964 and 1975 the population of the United States grew from 188,483,000 to 215,465,000. For population of the United States between 1964 and 1975, see “Table 1: Population, by Age & Race, Live Births: 1790 to 1991,” in *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*, ed. Thomas D. Snyder, National Center for Education Statistics (January 1993): 12.

<sup>3</sup> In 1963, the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers (CCPT) published a brief overview of the organizational hierarchy to educate its members. The PTA started with the establishment of local units and local members would maintain joint membership with the state and National Congress. The PTA’s national bylaws provided local units to organize into city, county, and area councils which reported to the affiliated state congress. The CCPT as a state congress was responsible for hosting a state-wide convention and publishing a bulletin of events, announcements, and articles of interest to PTAs. CCPT also maintained a state office located in Denver. NCPT maintained its national headquarters and business office in Chicago, Illinois, while also maintaining a national legislation program with a committee focused on legislative affairs in Washington, D.C. The national office also published the *PTA Magazine*, the official organ of the association, and distributed various books, pamphlets, study guides known generally as “PTA publications.” For local, state, and national

The National PTA promoted PTA membership as an extension of civic engagement telling parents the PTA was an organization in which they could gain influence in their child's school while also advocating for children's education reforms in their city, county, state, and federal governments. Local units, however, expressed growing concern with the National PTA often arguing the association was disconnected from local issues and ill-equipped to address neighborhood concerns.<sup>4</sup>

Between the 1950s and 1960s, women's entry into the workforce and emergence of two-income households impacted women's participation in the PTA. At the beginning of the 1950s, 21.6% of wives worked outside the home. By 1960 this number had increased to 30.5%.<sup>5</sup> Historian Alice Kessler-Harris in her groundbreaking work *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* noted the largest demographic of women affected by changes in the labor force were women over the age of 45. This was the bulk of the PTA's state and national. Women in leadership positions within the PTA did not have young children. Rather these were women who had adult children and grandchildren. The increase in women's wage labor, I argue, dramatically limited women's time for the PTA. A dearth of leadership at the top undoubtedly decreased the opportunities for local-level training conducted by state and national leaders.

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association terms see *Colorado Parent-Teacher*, April 1963, p. 19, in scrapbook, History of the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, c. 1961-1968, CCPTA Archives. For NCPT comments about membership benefits of the National PTA, see "YOU and the Legislation Program of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers," pamphlet, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Chicago, Ill.: NCPT, c. 1962), in fol. 532, box 91, series 7, in PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>4</sup>"YOU and the Legislation Program of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers," pamphlet, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Chicago, Ill.: NCPT, c. 1962), in fol. 532, box 91, series 7, in PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>5</sup> Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1982), 302. See also Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001); Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois at Chicago Press, 2007).

Besides women's increased presence in the work force, an expanding federal government and the rise of ultraconservative organizations also tested the National PTA's ability to influence educational policies locally and nationally. The growing presence of the U.S. Department of Education in local and state school affairs, especially regarding federal aid and racial integration, threatened the National PTA's long-standing commitment to local control. Further, public attacks by extremist groups, such as the John Birch Society, which characterized the National PTA and its affiliates as "Communist" and "Anti-American" decimated the association's public image in the early 1960s. By 1975, external and internal challenges resulted in massive membership loss crippling the national parent-teacher movement. For the first time in its history the National Congress of Parents and Teachers had become ineffective and powerless.<sup>6</sup>

Since the 1910s and 1920s, the National Congress had successfully increased local PTAs' rank and file by persuading women they could pursue political interests and voluntary activism by working for children's welfare and education within the association. This method of persuasion took off during the Great Depression and rose steeply during World War II with national membership rising from 1,511,203 to 3,054,950.<sup>7</sup> But it also presented a quandary to the National Congress and its state associations: How does a national voluntary

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<sup>6</sup> A note on the use of National PTA, NCPT, and PTA. The official name of the organization is the National Congress of Parents and Teachers Association. The more common name and widely used name is the National PTA. The "PTA" however refers to any parent-teacher association affiliated with the NCPT and can be used interchangeably between local, county, state, and national units. Through this chapter I will refer to the national organization as NCPT, National PTA, or the National Congress. When directly referencing the business affairs of the NCPT I will use "National Office." When discussing local, county, or state PTA congresses I will include the name of the school, city, county, or state.

<sup>7</sup> "The Annual Summary of Congress Information for 1930-31," Research and Information Division, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 1, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives; and "A Summary of Local Unit Information, 1943-1944," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 2, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

organization maintain unity in the face of local disagreement? When and where does the concerns of individual PTA parents supersede National PTA policies and authority? PTA leaders at all levels grappled with these dilemmas and struggled to balance the personal politics of its members with the public politics of the National Congress.

This chapter explores how the National PTA's dual hope for federal support of public education and increased civic participation in local schools came to a crashing end in the 1960s. Despite wide-sweeping social and structural reforms in education—school desegregation, increased federal aid, state-funded preschools for disadvantaged children, increased teacher training, and funding for special needs students—the National PTA faced increased mistrust and discontent. The combination of pressures from the Far Right and internal disputes over school integration and federal funding of public education kept the National PTA on the defensive for much of the decade. By 1975, the association had lost sway nationally and lost ground locally. The PTA has never recovered from this loss.

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This chapter begins with an exploration of the National Congress' role in the federal expansion of funding for public education and school desegregation from the late 1950s to the early 1970s. National and local PTA response to these measures was influenced by the rise of the Far Right and escalating ideological attacks on liberalism by extremist groups such as the John Birch Society (JBS). The rise of the John Birch Society and its attempts to take over PTAs in the early 1960s captures the first moment when the National PTA began to lose its local foothold with parents and local PTA units. The passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which allocated more than \$1 billion federal dollars into programs addressing educational inequality for low-income and minority

families, marks a second key moment in the fall of the National PTA.<sup>8</sup> The National PTA's role in the passage of ESEA and its commitment to providing support to black and Hispanic children and low-income families signaled a tipping point for many white, suburban PTA members, which I explore in the battle for school integration in the Denver Public School system in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The case of mandatory busing in Denver revealed the Achilles heel of the National PTA. Local concerns would always supersede national agendas and platforms. This chapter scrutinizes how local PTAs in Denver responded to court-enforced busing through the lens of *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973)—the first case addressing school segregation outside the South. *Keyes v. School District No. 1* shows the extent to which many local PTAs in Denver and even county PTA leaders condemned the practices of the National PTA, reinforced neighborhood school policies, perpetuated racially segregated school districts, and ignited their own form of “white-flight” in the PTA by breaking off into independent parent-teacher associations. Both the ESEA and *Keyes* reveal structural and programmatic fissures within the National PTA and the increasing internal disputes voiced by local association leaders and members. For instance, the National PTA's comments and testimonies leading up to the passage of ESEA expose a deeply-rooted conflict between local and federal control over education in America. Collectively, the attack on liberalism in the early 1960s by JBS, school integration, and membership decline is symptomatic of the deteriorating relationship between the National PTA and its local units during the 1960s and 1970s. Additionally, I examine these factors in conjunction with the increased presence of the federal government to address racial and class inequality in public

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<sup>8</sup> Paul S. Boyer, *Promises to Keep: The United States Since World War II*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 202.

education. ESEA and *Keyes* as examples of federal interference in local school systems and the role of the National PTA in both, I argue, reveals the inherent weaknesses and limitations of national, grassroots movements.<sup>9</sup>

Before evaluating the role of the National PTA in the passage of the ESEA, it is worth recalling the association's longstanding belief in the federal government having a responsibility to fund and support public schools. Since 1905, the National Congress has supported federal funding of public education, identifying it as one of the organization's "oldest policies."<sup>10</sup> At the time, the National Congress of Mothers (NCM), the foremother to the National Congress of Parents and Teachers (NCPT), maintained the federal government was uniquely positioned to provide federal support for children's education. The NCM Board of Managers wholeheartedly believed: "The child is in the care of the nation."<sup>11</sup> By the 1920s, the NCPT's national chairman for the education committee argued that the association's program should direct mothers' energies toward activities that would bring forward "backward districts" in which poor women and children lived, primarily immigrants living in cities. The national board and state congresses believed local PTAs and mothers' clubs could uplift immigrant families by providing preschools, day nurseries, parent-

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<sup>9</sup> For urban and political histories discussing American education reform and federal policies, see Howard P. Chudacoff and Judith E. Smith, *The Evolution of American Urban Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 141, 191-93, 285-97; and, Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: The Rise of a President and the Fracturing of America* (NY: Scribner, 2008), 7, 133, and 136. For education policy studies concerning the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, see Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Education for Children of the Poor: A Study of the Origins and Implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978); Sandra J. Stein, *The Culture of Education Policy* (NY: Teachers College, Columbia University, 2004); and David K. Cohen and Susan L. Moffitt, *The Ordeal of Equality: Did Federal Regulation Fix the Schools?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> "Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, n.d., p. 8, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>11</sup> "Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies," May 1967, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 29, box 4, series I, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

education classes, teacher training, and community programs. Because of increased federal spending in the Works Project Administration and Public Works Administration during the Great Depression, the NCPT reframed its demands of federal support and pressured the federal government to equalize education opportunities for all children, especially those living in rural school districts. Additionally, in recognition that the child belonged to the home and not the government, the National Congress impressed upon the federal government the need for local control over the distribution of education funds. It was during this period that the NCPT first linked federal support of education to “maximum local control” by local community members—parents and school administrators.<sup>12</sup>

Towards the end of World War II and during the Cold War, the National PTA divided its efforts between international and domestic issues impacting educational quality and children’s access to education. For instance, in 1941 the PTA and its state congresses backed the Emergency Aid for Community Facilities Impacted by Defense Areas, and in 1958, stood behind the National Defense Education Act.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, through state and local PTAs, parents and teachers learned to interpret and communicate civil defense programs to school officials and community residents. In 1951, the chairman of the National PTA’s civil defense committee in discussing the role of the PTA in wartime civil defense programs stated,

We recognize that we of the parent-teacher organization have a threefold responsibility: We pledge ourselves to keep abreast of defense plans as they are developed and to interpret to the general public the principles of the program and the responsibilities of individuals to take their places on the national, state, and local civil defense teams. We also pledge ourselves, in spite of the burdens created by the

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<sup>12</sup> “Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies,” May 1967, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 29, box 4, series I, NCPTP / UIC Archives; and, “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, n.d., p. 3, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>13</sup> “Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies,” May 1967, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 29, box 4, series I, NCPTP / UIC Archives.



present crisis, to rededicate our efforts to the continuing task of developing homes, schools, and communities in which children can grow as healthy personalities. We shall be ever alert to the situations created by maximum military and industrial defense programs, and we will prepare ourselves to meet emergencies as they arise in our homes, schools, and communities.<sup>14</sup>

During a National PTA Founders' Day Observance in February 1958, Randolph

Apperson Hearst, grandson of NCM co-founder Phoebe Apperson Hearst, delivered an alarming picture of American education and the PTA's role in safeguarding the republic and democratic citizenship during the Cold War:

Today the P.T.A. faces the greatest challenge of its history. . . . Since October 4, 1957—the day the Russians dramatically launched the first earth satellite and proved thereby to the world the extent of their scientific achievements—the educational systems of the free world and of totalitarianism—whether we like it or not—are at war. . . . The conflict cannot be settled by guns or diplomacy. It must be fought in our homes, and in the classrooms of our grammar schools, our high schools, our colleges and our universities. . . . There is no doubt, however, that we are facing an educational crisis. To meet it we look to the P.T.A. to accept a responsibility it alone is in a position to exercise.<sup>15</sup>

For Hearst, the best means of protecting the United States against the Russian threat was via individual school boards and community “desires” that could be “influence[d] strongly” by the PTA.<sup>16</sup> What Hearst did not yet realize is that the greatest threat would come from within the PTA, itself.

In December 1958, Robert Welch founded the John Birch Society (JBS), a Far Right, conspiracy-driven organization that mobilized “grassroots fears of liberalism” and presented

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<sup>14</sup> Mrs. A. J. Nicely, chairman of the National PTA Committee on Civil Defense, submitted the association statement to the National PTA Executive Board at the January 1951 Executive Meeting. See “The Place of the P.T.A. in Civil Defense,” January 1951 Executive Minutes, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 16, box 2, series 1, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>15</sup> Randolph Apperson Hearst, “Response,” Founders Day Observance, Phoebe Apperson Hearst Memorial, Golden State Park, San Francisco, California, February 17, 1958, in fol. 130, box 22, sub B. National Biographies, series 3, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>16</sup> Randolph Apperson Hearst, “Response,” Founders Day Observance, Phoebe Apperson Hearst Memorial, Golden State Park, San Francisco, California, 17 February 1958, in fol. 130, box 22, sub B. National Biographies, series 3, PTAR / UIC Archives.

itself as a grassroots defense against Communism. As the “organized voice for the Right Wing” during the 1960s, the Society stood in stark contrast to the National PTA.<sup>17</sup> JBS opposed the expansion of the welfare state, the Civil Rights Movement, and credited the expanding federal powers with the moral decay of the American family and society.<sup>18</sup> Historians Lisa McGirr and Michelle Nickerson have both written about the formation of the John Birch Society (JBS) and women’s participation in the rise of right-wing conservatism. McGirr explains that JBS successfully indoctrinated white, suburban neighborhoods to its “brand of virulent anticommunism” with relative ease because new recruits felt empowered to “fight communism” in their neighborhoods. Similarly, Nickerson emphasizes the Society’s propensity for using communist tactics in its “anticommunist crusade.”<sup>19</sup> JBS members established bookstores, study clubs, publishing houses to spread its program and attract members on the community level. Nickerson also points out that JBS was uniquely adept at infiltrating local organizations, and Society members especially focused on taking over the PTA.<sup>20</sup> In 1958, as part of the Society’s *Blue Book*, founder Robert Welch instructed his members to draft up a list of anti-Communist speakers to circulate to PTA groups. Welch believed speakers bureaus, like the one established by the PTA, was ripe for Communist subversion.<sup>21</sup> Two years later he advised JBS members to “join your local PTA at the

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<sup>17</sup> McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 10.

<sup>18</sup> McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 10-11; and, Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster, *Report on the John Birch Society, 1966* (NY: Vintage Books, 1966), 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, xxiii, 138.

<sup>20</sup> McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 10, 56, 77; and, Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, 138.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Welch, *The Blue Book of the John Birch Society* (Belmont, MA: Western Islands, 1961) 89, 92.

beginning of the school year, get your conservative friends to do likewise, and go to work to take it over.”<sup>22</sup>

Believing America had entered a time of political, moral, and economic decay, JBS launched a nation-wide campaign trumping up liberals as enemies of the state. The PTA was one of the prime targets. With more than 60,000 members by the early 1960s, JBS increased its attacks on the National PTA and its PTA units.<sup>23</sup> In May 1962, the weekly, nationally-syndicated Far Right bulletin the *American Capsule News* published an essay titled “Let’s Abolish the PTAs” in which editor Morris Bealle alleged the National PTA was in cahoots with the Communists. Bealle accused PTAs of “brainwashing school children” and claimed PTA leaders were accepting bribes from the “Rockefeller-Soviet Axis.”<sup>24</sup> Additionally, *Capsule News* charged the PTA with misleading the U.S. Congress into appropriating \$15,000,000 in federal funds for 3,128 school counselors who they believed to be “sex degenerates.”<sup>25</sup> State PTA leaders in Wyoming received the newsletter and read warnings about how the PTA had become a “completely destroyed” association of “pink-tinged parasites” working with the Kremlin and Rockefellers.<sup>26</sup> Alarmed by the rhetoric and the

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin R. Epstein and Arnold Forster, *Report on the John Birch Society, 1966* (NY: Vintage Books, 1966), 48.

<sup>23</sup> McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> “Let’s Abolish the PTAs,” *American Capsule News*, no. 322 (5 May 1962), p. 1, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>25</sup> “Let’s Abolish the PTAs,” *American Capsule News*, no. 322 (5 May 1962), p. 1-2, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>26</sup> In a series of correspondences between PTA national officer Mary Ferre, Senator Paul Douglas from Illinois, U.S. Postmaster General J. Edward Day, and Chief Postal Inspector H.B. Montague, Ferre recounts the lengths to which she tried to block the publication and distribution of the *American Capsule News*. Initially she had received a written notice from a Wyoming PTA President demanding the NCPT respond to *American Capsule*’s accusations. In her letter to the state congress, she stated that although the Congress “could take no action” she hoped people were “sensible enough” to dismiss the claims as “unfounded and untrue.” See Letter from Miss Mary Ferre to Mr. Everett D. Lantz, President of the Wyoming Congress, 2 November 1962, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives. For the *American Capsule News*, see “Let’s Abolish the PTAs,” *American Capsule News*, no. 322 (5 May 1962), p. 2, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC

quick rise of JBS, and publications like *American Capsule News*, state PTA presidents urged the National Congress to recognize the dire impact pressure groups and extremists were having on local membership numbers and progressive policy issues.<sup>27</sup> In Colorado, the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers (CCPT) reported in the *Colorado Parent Teacher* that “more and more locals are turning in their charters, saying that they would prefer to work as a private unit within their own school.”<sup>28</sup> The CCPT warned its local presidents that parents who abandoned their PTA units and established new organizations could still cause problems. “They may be poorly grounded in facts,” the CCPT wrote, “but they *can* produce unrest.”<sup>29</sup> Just as the NCPT countered continuous misperceptions and outright falsehoods about the National PTA and its goals, state congresses like the CCPT had to fight local misrepresentations, too. Parents, they noted, when asked about their involvement with the PTA often gave “embarrassed smile[s]” and would quickly change the topic. The CCPT noted its organization was considered by some as “nothing but a ‘tea party’.”<sup>30</sup> The comment was like pouring salt into an open wound. CCPT leadership snapped back exclaiming the work of PTA officers, chairmen, and even the “hundreds of housewives” were being undermined by misperceptions, disconnections, and fabrications from the Far

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Archives. For correspondences between Mary Ferre, Senator Paul Douglas, Postmaster General J. Edward Day, and Chief Postal Inspector H.B. Montague, see Letter from Mary A. Ferre to Honorable Paul H. Douglas, 4 May 1962, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives; Letter from Paul H. Douglas to Miss Mary A. Ferre, 21 May 1962, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives; Letter from Postmaster General J. Edward Day to Honorable Paul H. Douglas, 29 May 1962, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives; Letter from Chief Postal Inspector H.B. Montague to Honorable Paul H. Douglas, 1 June 1962, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives; Letter from Honorable Paul H. Douglas to Miss Mary A. Ferre, 18 June 1962, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>27</sup> “Appendix, Per Capita Membership Fee: State Congress Portion,” Minutes, State Presidents’ Conference, 25 September 1962, in fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>28</sup> “Off Base a Little?” Editor’s Mail Bag, *Colorado Parent Teacher* (April 1963): 11, in *History 1961-1964, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

Right, from fellow members, and from the broader public.<sup>31</sup> (See also Figure 1 at end of chapter for programs and services managed by the CCPT State Board of Managers)

The fears of local and state PTAs losing control over their membership ranks was not limited to internal communications. In July 1964, U.S. Senator Vance Hartke of Indiana took the Senate floor to warn against the Far Right's broad sweeping threats to public education. "The growth of such rightwing dictatorial efforts to force the schools in their direction is not an isolated phenomenon," the senator declared. Sen. Hartke reported that the National Education Association (NEA) experienced its own "extreme-right meddlers," and that the National PTA was coordinating with the NEA to address the extremist threat to schools.<sup>32</sup> Incoming National PTA president Jennelle Moorhead spoke at the 1964 NEA Convention and pronounced that the National Congress was ultimately battling "ghosts" and "shadows" created by extremists who had infiltrated local PTAs.<sup>33</sup>

Under President Moorhead's administration the National PTA and its PTA units faced its toughest adversary to date—the Far Right. As president of the NCPT from 1964-1967, Moorhead rose through the PTA ranks from her local PTA in Marion County, Oregon, served as state president, regional vice-president, and then became national first vice-president. Parallel to her PTA career, Moorhead served as president of the Oregon Federation of Women's Clubs (1943-46), was a member of the GFWC Board of Directors (1943-46),

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> G.K. Hodenfield, "PTA Chief Sounds Warning: Right Wing Extremists Called School Threat," in *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, July 3, 1964, submitted into the U.S. Congressional Record on July 20, 1964 by Senator Vance Hartke of Indiana. See Senator Vance Hartke, "Right Wing Extremism: A Threat to Schools," Extensions of Remarks, July 20, 1964, Cong. Reg. 1110 (1964): A3745.

<sup>33</sup> G.K. Hodenfield, "PTA Chief Sounds Warning: Right Wing Extremists Called School Threat," in *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 3 July 1964, submitted into the U.S. Congressional Record on 20 July 1964 by Senator Vance Hartke of Indiana. See Senator Vance Hartke, "Right Wing Extremism: A Threat to Schools," Extensions of Remarks, July 1964, Cong. Reg. 1110 (1964): A3745.

Coordinator of International Studies at Oregon State, and held positions with the U.S. Commission for UNESCO (1957-69), Peace Corps, Alliance for Progress U.S. Intelligence Agency, U.S. AID, International Union of Family Organizations, National Citizens Committee for Public Television, and Foods for Peace. A mother to two sons, Moorhead was an experienced world traveler who often sponsored parent- and teacher-study seminars throughout Latin America during the Cold War.<sup>34</sup>

Moorhead and the National PTA attempted to shore up the PTA against outside attacks by warning local and state members of the imminent threats to the association. Moorhead reminded her members about the advantages and successes of the PTA. Relying on familiar outreach methods, the National PTA Office distributed press packets, study guides, and organized special lectures at state and national conferences. The executive leadership also worked with the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) and the NEA to increase its message. At a 1965 section meeting of the AASA, Moorhead characterized the PTA as an asset to senior-level school administrators, explaining that where local PTAs were concerned with staffing, funding, overcrowded classrooms, and ensuring quality educational services for all children, extremists groups would rather ignore a school's core issues and make every attempt to isolate and "cut local PTAs off from state and national

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<sup>34</sup> U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles appointed Moorhead to UNESCO in 1957. For more than ten years, Moorhead worked on policy committees advising the State Department on US relations to UNESCO. During her time with the State Department, she organized parent-teacher training groups in Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Bolivia. For further biographical information on Jennelle Moorhead, see "Mrs. Jennelle Moorhead," July 1970, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 132, box 23, sub B. National Biographies, series 3, PTAR / UIC Archives; "Mrs. Jennelle Moorhead, Division of Continuing Education," n.d., National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 132, box 23, sub B. National Biographies, series 3, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, "Biographical Data, Mrs. Jennelle Moorhead," n.d., National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 132, box 23, sub B. National Biographies, series 3, PTAR / UIC Archives.

organizations.”<sup>35</sup> One in thirty school districts, she reported, were already threatened by outside extremist groups. For a PTA to effectively protect schools they had to partner with school administrators and school boards, she explained. “You can be sure when a PTA is under attack,” she told AASA members, “the real target is the school.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Moorhead, JBS “tactics of intimidation, coercion, and misrepresentation” of the PTA was routine at this point. “These extremists are not really after the PTA but are attempting to gain control of it to get at their real objective—the educational system,” she warned.<sup>37</sup> Moorhead’s claims were supported by the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith which identified schools and PTAs as “prime target[s]” of the Far Right.<sup>38</sup> John H. Rousselot, Western Regional Director of the John Birch Society, tried to downplay claims made by the PTA, the NEA, and the Anti-Defamation League that Birchers were trying to take over the PTA. Rousselot, who was a former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, contended JBS was an educational organization that merely wanted to educate fellow citizens about “conservative thinking” and introduce “ideological competition” into the PTA.<sup>39</sup> Rousselot’s account, however, failed to explain recent reports of Birchers leaving pre-recorded messages describing the PTA as “Communist-infiltrated.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Jennelle Moorhead, “The PTA and School Policy: Cooperation or Interference?” 16 February 1965, Section Meeting, American Association of School Administrators Conference, p. 8, in fol. 63, box 11, series 2, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>36</sup> Jennelle Moorhead, “The PTA and School Policy: Cooperation or Interference?” 16 February 1965, Section Meeting, American Association of School Administrators Conference, p. 1, 7-8, in fol. 63, box 11, series 2, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>37</sup> Senator Hale McGee, “The John Birch Society—Program and Activities,” March 9, 1966, Cong. Rec. 112 (1966): 5436.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Senator Hale McGee, “The John Birch Society—Program and Activities,” 5436; and, Myrna Oliver, “John Rousselot, 75; Congressman for 14 Years, John Birch Society Official,” *Los Angeles Times*, Obituaries, May 12, 2003.

<sup>40</sup> Senator Hale McGee, “The John Birch Society—Program and Activities,” 5436. See also, Epstein and Forster, *The Report on the John Birch Society*, 48.

As JBS increased its attacks on the PTA, the National Congress tried to counter the slander at the community level by distributing anti-extremist pamphlets and literature. Publication materials outlined the tactics and methods of the Far-Right to local PTA members. The National PTA also encouraged its member to recognize that the goals of the Far Right were to reverse the progress of the Civil Rights Movement by blocking federal and state funding of public education, by opposing measures supporting equal educational opportunity, and by contesting mental, health, and sex education in schools. The line of attack against JBS's opposition to federal funding would prove particularly troubling for the National PTA as it struggled to support President John F. Kennedy's education bill (1963) and President Lyndon B. Johnson's Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965).

As noted in previous chapters, the National Congress had made it a point of pride to prepare parents to exercise authority in local schools and state departments of education. Parents received preparation through PTA publications, such as pamphlets, study guides, handbooks, and legislative agendas coming from the National Office. Each year, the association discussed the matter in the *National Parent Teacher*, the official PTA magazine which had more than 47,000 local PTA presidents subscribing. All state congresses hosting conventions, and PTA district and county councils also received a free copy of the magazine.<sup>41</sup> Included in one of the educational packets on federal support, the National PTA reissued the essay "Concerning Federal Aid to Education" which was originally published in the *National Congress Bulletin* in February 1947. The essay bluntly informed parents of the national association's position on federal aid for education stating: "Control of education

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<sup>41</sup> "YOU and the Legislation Program of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers," pamphlet, National Congress of Parents and Teachers (Chicago, Ill.: NCPT, c. 1962), in fol. 532, box 91, series 7, in PTAR / UIC Archives.



must be kept in the states and communities. Local school boards must select their teachers, choose their textbooks, and offer an educational program suited to the needs of their children. One hundred and sixty years of federal aid to education has not taken this power away from local school authorities.”<sup>42</sup> The PTA’s message: though money and resources would come from the federal government, the authority to control the use of funds would come from parents.

Since 1905 the National Congress had advocated for federal aid for education; the assumption, however, was that the government would support only public schools. In 1945, the National Congress clarified its position stating: “We believe that any such funds to help states provide adequate educational opportunities for all children and youth appropriated by the federal government should go to public tax-supported schools only.”<sup>43</sup> By 1962, when President Kennedy introduced his education omnibus bill, the NCPT refused to support HR 8900 and SB 1241, because the proposed bills provided federal funds to private and religious schools.<sup>44</sup>

Despite the National PTA’s desire for federal funding, the associated remained adamant that the federal government should only provide tax-payer dollars to public schools. The National PTA launched a nation-wide campaign through its state and local unit leaders to put pressure their congressional leaders to vote against Kennedy’s education bills. The

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<sup>42</sup>“Concerning Financial Aid to Education,” *National Congress Bulletin*, February 1947, p. 3, in “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 50, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>43</sup> “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p.9, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>44</sup> “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 10, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

association made funding “the free public school system” a top priority in its 1962-1963 legislative program. They sent parents congressional notes in the monthly *National Parent Teacher*, as well as articles and essays written by former National PTA presidents making the case against federal funding of non-public schools. The national press committee printed packets, study group discussion questions, and policy briefs to state congresses for local PTA distribution. The average PTA member learned how best to engage their Congressmen by reading PTA-published materials such as *You and the Legislative Program*; *Your PTA—Quality in Quantity*; *Action Program: New Adventures in PTA Leadership and Responsibility*; *The PTA in the Local Community*; *The Part of the PTA in Political Life and Civic Life*.<sup>45</sup> The Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers voted to support the National Congress’ legislative program.<sup>46</sup> In its own state, the CCPT legislative committee worked with the Colorado General Assembly to pass HB 10 and HB 35, a state-supported funding package for vocational training for the mentally disabled and a budget increase to the state’s Public School Foundation Act.<sup>47</sup>

On 22 February 1963, Betty Bull, national chairman of the PTA Committee on Legislation, testified before the House Committee on Education and Labor on President Kennedy’s “National Education Improvement Act” and the proposal to provide federal funds

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<sup>45</sup> For a list of references and publication materials made available to parents and state congresses regarding federal support of public education and the PTA’s role in overseeing federal education funds, see “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 33-46, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Mrs. George Swallow, “Legislative Round-Up,” *History for 1961-1964, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>47</sup> See “Summary: 1961 Action of Colorado General Assembly on Items Covered by Legislation Platform, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers,” March 1, 1962, *History for 1961-1964, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, CCPTA Archives.

to private and religious schools.<sup>48</sup> In her remarks regarding the omnibus bill, she stated that although the PTA represented the “greatest cross-section of the American public” and “crosse[d] all barriers of race, creed, and color,” the PTA in good conscience could not support bills that did not align with the PTA legislative platform.<sup>49</sup> The bill before the House failed to meet national requirements, Bull told the committee. Pres. Kennedy could only expect the PTA’s support if the administration reversed its policy on providing federal dollars for private and religious schools, introduced a “free public school system” supported by the government, guaranteed “maximum local control” over school resources and funds, continued to support higher education, and would “channel” all federal dollars and resources for public education through the U.S. Office of Education and then through local authorities.<sup>50</sup>

Following Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963, President Lyndon B. Johnson resuscitated the comprehensive educational bill and reintroduced it as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The legislation became a central component of his “War on Poverty” program. Historian Annelise Orleck argues that although Johnson’s Great

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<sup>48</sup> Betty Bull, a former Maryland State PTA President, served as NCPT Legislative Chairman for six years, see “State PTA Conference Opens Here,” *News* (Frederick, MD), June 24, 1965. For Bull’s testimony before the U.S. House of Representatives see Mrs. Fred L. Bull, Testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor, February 22, 1963, U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Education and Labor, National Education Improvement Act: H.R. 3000 and Similar Bills to Strengthen and Improve Educational Opportunities in the Nation, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (1963): 899-905. The proposed “National Education Improvement Act of 1963” died in the U.S. House of Representatives. For a history of Kennedy’s proposed plan and related congressional materials see Irving Bernstein, *Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy’s New Frontier* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991); and, U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, Subcommittee on Education, National Education Improvement Act of 1963: A Compilation of Materials Relevant to the National Education Improvement Act of 1963, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (1963).

<sup>49</sup> Mrs. Fred L. Bull, Testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor, 22 February 1963, U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Education and Labor, National Education Improvement Act: H.R. 3000 and Similar Bills to Strengthen and Improve Educational Opportunities in the Nation, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (1963): 899.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 900-903.

Society package did not “eradicate need in America,” the program did however succeed in “lift[ing] millions of the poorest Americans out of squalor, hunger, illiteracy, and disease.”<sup>51</sup> Orleck notes, “By 1974, the number of Americans living in poverty had been cut in half. Child poverty rates had dropped from 27 percent to 14 percent. Programs created during Johnson’s years in office brought food aid to tens of millions of hungry Americans, medical care to communities that had previously had none, and new housing to crumbling neighborhoods.”<sup>52</sup>

When the ESEA was first proposed in 1964, the NCPT determined the bill “deserve[d] serious consideration” by association members but was adamant that it did not “meet the NCPT policy requirements.”<sup>53</sup> Further, the NCPT’s Committee on Legislation guaranteed: “If amendments are proposed to include private schools, the NCPT will protest such amendments.”<sup>54</sup> The following year, the PTA withdrew its support and declared that the ESEA failed to uphold key tenets of the NCPT, namely the sole-funding of publicly owned, tax supported public schools.<sup>55</sup> Noticeably, the NCPT remained absent from the 1965 congressional hearings and witness lists. Following ESEA’s passage, the NCPT issued a letter to the Senate Judiciary Committee commending President Johnson and the Congress

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<sup>51</sup> Annelise Orleck, “The War on Poverty from the Grass Roots Up,” in *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980*, eds. Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>52</sup> Orleck, “The War on Poverty from the Grass Roots Up,” 6.

<sup>53</sup> “Program Committee on Legislation,” Minutes, May 21, 1964, p. 10, fol. 342, box 65, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 10, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>54</sup> “Program Committee on Legislation,” Minutes, 21 May 1964, fol. 342, box 65, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 10, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>55</sup> “Committee on the Legislation Program,” Minutes, May 13, 1965, fol. 342, box 65, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

for attempting to “equalize and improve education opportunity,” but warned them that the distribution of public funds to non-public schools would severely undermine democracy, itself:

The National Congress of Parents and Teachers several years ago adopted by action of its state branches a policy in support of federal aid to education, within certain limitations. Chief of these limitations is our long-established policy that appropriations of public funds for education should be supported only for publicly controlled, tax-supported schools. The efforts of the President [Johnson] and the Congress to equalize and improve educational opportunity in our country cannot help but command our sympathy and admiration. We also fully approve the maintenance of private schools by private resources. Nevertheless we continue to suggest most urgently that public subsidy of non-public schools will over a period of time seriously weaken the public schools, which we deeply and firmly believe are the mainstay of our democratic society.<sup>56</sup>

The federal government’s failure to gain the PTA’s backing stemmed from two key issues: the federal funding of non-public schools and the debate concerning local control over the distribution of federal funds.<sup>57</sup> The prime directive of the PTA, however, was and continues to be: gaining federal funding for public education at all levels and ensuring local control. When it came time to supporting ESEA in 1965 the NCPT broke with its fellow “Big Six” educational lobbying groups and withheld its support.<sup>58</sup> The NCPT believed ESEA

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<sup>56</sup> NCPT Letter to Senate Committee on Judiciary, in “Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 10, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives; see also, Mrs. Fred L. Bull, Testimony before the Committee on Education and Labor, 22 February 1963, U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Education and Labor, National Education Improvement Act: H.R. 3000 and Similar Bills to Strengthen and Improve Educational Opportunities in the Nation, 88th Cong., 1st sess. (1963): 903.

<sup>57</sup> “Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies,” May 1967, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, fol. 27, box 4, series I, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, “Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965,” Public Law 89-10, 11 April 1965, 79 Stat.

<sup>58</sup> Elsie Carper, “NEA Supports Johnson Program Including Parochial School Aid,” *Washington Post*, January 26, 1965. The “Big Six” included the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the National Education Association, Council of Chief State School Officials, the National School Board Association, the American Association of School Administrators, and the National Association of State Boards of Education. For background on the close-working relationship of the “Big Six” educational lobbying groups see, “Proceedings, Seventy-Fifth Annual Convention of the

violated its long-standing national principles supporting free education and claimed ESEA would irreparably damage public schools and by extension, democracy itself. Even as President Johnson's education bill promised the largest federal aid package to public schools ever, the PTA refused to lend its support because the government promised federal aid to private and religious schools. Regardless of the funds local public schools would receive for children from low-income families; grants for textbooks, resources, and libraries; increased educational services; and federal support for research and teacher training, the PTA refused to fall in line. The PTA stood alone in its opposition.

As tensions mounted, the National PTA tried to dampen the churning ideological disputes emerging in local PTAs and rally its energies to eject JBS-infiltrators from PTAs. The National PTA characterized JBS, the Far Right, and other extremist groups as a "well-heeled, well-oiled, if unwelcome, movement." Through circulated literature and articles, National PTA Pres. Moorhead warned her members that, "In the Far Right's coloring book, the instructions are to color the schools and the PTA red."<sup>59</sup> In the *National PTA's Guide to Extremism, Extremists, Extremist Groups* (c. 1966), the National Congress made clear to parents that extremists were neither liberals nor conservatives, not Democrats or Republicans, but rather were simply individuals and organizations who would "use democratic procedures only to deny rights to others."<sup>60</sup> The PTA counseled parents to detect the warning signs of extremism in their schools, communities, and school boards. Parents were instructed to be alert to any call for textbook and library censorship; attacks on history

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National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Discussion in the Round, PTA Power in Legislation," May 26, 1971, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in fol. 289, box 56, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>59</sup> Jennelle Moorhead, "DANGER from the Far Right," pamphlet, c. 1966, National Parent Teacher Association, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>60</sup> *National PTA's Guide to Extremism, Extremists, Extremist Groups*, booklet, National Parent-Teacher Association, c. 1966, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

curriculum, sex education, and science programs; discrimination of social groups; and fellow members reinterpreting current events with fabrications and untruths.<sup>61</sup> In regards to textbooks and curriculum, the PTA alerted its members that extremists would make every effort to takeover textbook selection and would pressure textbook committees to select textbooks that included “only good things about American history.” If extremist groups gained control over textbook publications, the PTA stated, children would not learn about slavery, the Civil Rights Movement, Watergate, the Anti-Vietnam protests, and the histories of Hiroshima and atomic testing would be absent from school instruction. Parents received highly-charged rhetoric from the National Congress describing the full dismantling of public education and the rise of privatized education if the Far Right succeeded in taking over the PTA. The National Congress had effectively ordered PTA parents and leaders to become America’s last defense against those who sought to destroy democracy and democratic ideals.<sup>62</sup>

In addition, the PTA worked with the American Jewish Committee to prepare fact sheets and counter-attack materials for parents and teachers. In one such pamphlet, *Countering Extremism: A Primer for Americans*, the NCPT provided a contact sheet of organizations and councils that could help PTAs against extremist attacks. The list included such organizations as the American Association of University Professors, the American Civil Liberties Union, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations, the Democratic National Committee, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored

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<sup>61</sup> *National PTA’s Guide to Extremism, Extremists, Extremist Groups*, booklet, National Parent-Teacher Association, c. 1966, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>62</sup> *National PTA’s Guide to Extremism, Extremists, Extremist Groups*, booklet, National Parent-Teacher Association, c. 1966, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

People, National Catholic Welfare Conference, National Council of Christians and Jews, as well as the NEA and the United Nations.<sup>63</sup>

The National Office recommended state and local units form extremist watch committees, hold public forums about the benefits of public education, revise current textbook policies and committee regulations to bar extremist infiltration. *Extremist Groups: A Clear and Present Danger to Freedom and Democracy* outlined ways PTA members could “combat undemocratic pressures” on PTAs. Parents were urged to run for school board positions, be staunch opponents of censorship, and most importantly, “be prepared and willing to oppose all efforts by extremists to take over their PTA organization.” In the case of “attacks,” PTA members were told to “hold public hearings” and advised to “conduct a joint, vigorous education campaign to make the community aware of the importance of freedom of speech and freed to read, to teach, and to learn.” National leaders sent handouts to local units describing the various tactics extremists used to gain control of the PTA. Members were instructed on how to identify extremist front groups and their speakers. Pamphlets also outlined tactics used by JBS such as: infiltration, blacklisting, “divide and conquer,” blacklisting, fear-mongering, coercion, and smear campaigns. Vigilance and a well-educated community of parents and teachers, the PTA promised, could defend and protect the rights of all students and parents.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ralph Ross, “Countering Extremism: A Primer for Americans,” pamphlet, c. 1966 American Jewish Committee, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>64</sup> *Extremist Groups: A Clear and Present Danger to Freedom and Democracy*, pamphlet, n.d., in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, National Parent Teacher Association Records (PTAR), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago; *Tactics of Extremist Groups*, n.d., in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, *National PTA’s Guide to Extremism, Extremists, Extremist Groups*, booklet, National Parent-Teacher Association, c. 1966, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.



While shielding the PTA from external assaults, Moorhead and the National Congress also had to deal with the membership-hemorrhage resulting from those attacks. “[T]he PTA’s loss of members and local units through the machinations of the Radical Right is probably an organizational gain, [but] the loss of a single PTA member or a single parent-teacher association to the extremists is nevertheless a disaster,” Moorhead stated.<sup>65</sup> PTAs and local parents were now tasked with “fight[ing] untruths, half-truths, and distortions” coming from JBS, *American Capsule News*, and the “Radical Right.”<sup>66</sup> Although her organization and members were living in a “climate of fear and mistrust,” Moorhead remained hopeful that the PTA could survive the vilification and membership loss and would emerge stronger and more determined to protect the democratic freedoms embodied in the public schools:<sup>67</sup>

In short, good has come out of evil. . . . IT HAS focused national attention on the importance of democratic procedures. IT HAS stimulated organizations to scrutinize their activities for lapses from democratic practice. IT HAS alerted them to watch out for infiltration and takeover by totalitarian groups. IT HAS reawakened and renewed our appreciation of our heritage of freedom—freedom of opinion, speech, and dissent, freedom to teach and to learn, freedom to read. IT HAS sent adult citizens back to restudy the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, to increase our understanding of the need to give American youth increased understanding of the Bill of Rights and a firm, educational foundation for the exercise of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy. IT HAS made school boards and library boards aware of the wisdom of having written policies on selecting books and determining curriculum in order to withstand the assaults of Rightists on freedom to read, to teach, and to learn. IT HAS caused citizens to scrutinize more closely the qualifications of candidates for school boards to see whether or not they have ulterior motives for seeking board membership. IT HAS aroused Americans’ sense of fair play and their righteous indignation against such reprehensible Rights tactics as slander, innuendo, character assassination, threats, intimidation, and coercion. IT HAS led more and more citizens to demand sources and facts and documentation of charges and accusations made against individuals, schools, and organizations. In short, Far Right tactics have served to strengthen the resolution and ability of PTAs and other democratic organizations to defend freedom and democracy and prevent a takeover of education by those who would use our schools not to *educate* but to *indoctrinate* in their own political,

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<sup>65</sup> Jennelle Moorhead, “DANGER from the Far Right,” pamphlet, c. 1966, National Parent-Teacher Association, in fol. 570, box 95, series 7, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

economic, and social dogmas. . . . [T]he Far Right . . . is the enemy of education and democracy. It is dangerous and damaging to the American school—that strongest stronghold of freedom and democracy.<sup>68</sup>

As the Far Right commandeered local PTAs and chipped away at the National Congress' associations during the 1960s, the fault ultimately fell on an ill-connected national bureaucracy too reliant on forms, surveys, and pamphlets and not focused enough on mentoring local school and community leaders. Almost a year after Moorhead's speech to the AASA about aligning the PTA with school administrators to repel attacks from outside extremist groups, her hope for close cooperation began to wane. Posing a new question to the AASA conference attendees, she bluntly asked, "Who's blocking educational change?" Moorhead conceded, "Sometimes I have nightmares that it is the PTA that blocks educational change." Considering her initial question, Moorhead then countered her previous statement and retorted, "Who isn't?" "A case can be made against almost any group," she admitted, "parents, the public, the school board, the school administration, the university, [and] the private foundation." For the first time, she openly acknowledged the PTA had to take responsibility for its actions and inactions. While she laid the blame at the feet of her own organization, she also reprimanded her partners at the NEA, the AASA, the U.S. Office of Education, and officials at all levels of government for failing to adapt to society's changes and for succumbing to their fears about educational innovation and advancement.<sup>69</sup> In a few words, Moorhead acknowledged the often misunderstood and at times silent power of the PTA. The association could work for or against public education, but it could not work without parents.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Jennelle Moorhead, "Who's Blocking Educational Change?" February 15, 1966, Annual Conference of the American Association of School Administrators, p. 6-7, in fol. 64, box 11, series 2, PTAR / UIC Archives.

In May 1967 during the final days of her presidency, Moorhead divulged an “uncomfortable truth” to her members. She admitted the PTA continued to be broadly misunderstood and misrepresented because it failed to fully explain the scope and significance of its program to members. “[We] have only ourselves to blame,” she exclaimed, “Is it any wonder that they in turn fail to feel close to the state congress and the National Congress?” In response to internal and external criticisms, Moorhead questioned if NCPT should “simply throw away the conventional PTA pattern.” She urged PTA representatives to refrain from always going to the manual, and instead turn towards their members for advice and new program ideas. Ironically, her advice was also the path extremists took in overtaking the PTAs.<sup>70</sup>

Despite attacks from the Far Right, Moorhead remained hopeful that PTA members could sort out the “fiction” from the “truth.” She thought local PTAs still had transformative powers and only needed the support of the NCPT to sell the PTA program to the public. In her final speech as National PTA president on 22 May 1967 at the annual PTA convention, Moorhead reminded PTA delegates of their “back-breaking effort” for children. Successes included: partnering with the U.S. Public Health Service on the *Smoking and Health Project*; working with the National Bureau of Mental Health for children’s emotional services; coordinating state and regional conferences on the effects of child abuse and neglect; establishing Project Head Start for disadvantaged preschoolers; securing state-funded library and counseling services for Indian school and overseas students, and obtaining federal assistance for Native reservations, children of migratory agricultural workers, and foster

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<sup>70</sup> See Jennelle Moorhead, “The Truth About the PTA,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Annual Convention, May 22, 1967, p. 1-7, in fol. 63, box 11, series 2, PTAR / UIC Archives.

children.<sup>71</sup> No amount of rhetoric or resuscitation of past victories, however, could stop the membership from plummeting.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, the National PTA's support of the ESEA continued to be an open wound for many in the association. In 1971, reflecting on the PTA's role in the ESEA, National PTA President Elizabeth Mallory confessed her association and members "viewed [the ESEA] with blurred vision and some disdain."<sup>73</sup> The disdain, I argue, festered throughout the fights with JBS and continued to grow during the battle over the ESEA. To the everyday local PTA member, the National Congress seemed disconnected and indecisive. For the last decade, state presidents had warned the National Congress of increasing internal disputes concerning local and federal education matters. State presidents relayed members' failure to act on issues because they felt "hampered" by the PTA action plan. Parents, they professed, don't want to get caught up in the PTA's bylaws and regulations, they "want to be able to act."<sup>74</sup> The constitution of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers stated members and units would "not interfere with the administration of schools."<sup>75</sup> State PTA presidents recommended to the national board a series of suggestions to improve local/national relations

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<sup>71</sup> "Legislative Program: Historical Background Papers; #1-1963; Background Information and Discussion Pointers—Policies of the NCPT Legislation Program," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, p. 10, fol. 782, box 119, series 11, PTAR / UIC Archives; "Support for Federal Aid," in "Background of the National PTA Legislation Policies," May 1967, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, in fol. 29, box 4, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives; and, Stein, *The Culture of Education Policy*, 48.

<sup>72</sup> See Jennelle Moorhead, "The Truth About the PTA," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Annual Convention, 22 May 1967, p. 1-7, in fol. 63, box 11, series 2, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>73</sup> Mrs. John M. Mallory quoted in "Discussion in the Round: PTA Power in Legislation," in *Proceedings, Seventy-Fifth Annual Convention of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers*, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, 26 May 1971, p. 17, in fol. 289, box 56, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>74</sup> "Minutes," State Presidents' Conference, May 17, 1963, in fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>75</sup> The national bylaws were amended in 1972 to foster greater interaction between parents and school administrators in the "decision-making process" of school policies. See Lawrence Feinberg, "PTA Seeks to Reverse Decline with Activism," *Washington Post*, December 5, 1977.

and increase parent participation: simplified reporting forms, reinstatement of district conferences, legislative workshops, adult instruction courses, parent-teacher study groups, summer extension courses, and orientations for new school board members.<sup>76</sup> Colorado's state PTA hosted focus-group dinners with local PTA boosters to discuss the membership's concerns. Meeting as the "Flying Squad" CCPT board members, the state school superintendent, and Colorado school board members stated local PTAs had become the "victim of over organization."<sup>77</sup> In response to failing relations between the national association and local units, the "Flying Squad" suggested that the national branch review state bylaws for unit termination, increase the presence of state organizers at local meetings, reintroduce an "intensive leadership education" program, and address local members' "negative attitudes toward state organization[s]."<sup>78</sup> The National PTA only began implementing the recommendations in 1972.<sup>79</sup> By then it was too late. The PTA had been at war with itself for more than a decade.

Between 1963 and 1970, the PTA's membership declined by 20.2%. In less than a decade, more than 2.45 million parents and teachers disbanded from the national association. (See Table 1 and 2) The largest membership loss occurred during the 1965-1966 school year with more than 680,000 individuals withdrawing. Colorado's membership dropped by 37%

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<sup>76</sup> "Minutes," State Presidents' Conference, May 17, 1963, in fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>77</sup> "Report of 'Flying Squad' Meeting at Longmont," Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, September 22, 1965, in *History for 1961-1964, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>78</sup> "Group Discussions-State Presidents' Conference," Minutes, State Presidents' Conference, 23 September 1963, Appendix, in fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>79</sup> Judy Klemesrud, "Changing P.T.A.: No Longer Concerned Only With School," *New York Times*, April 22, 1972; Sue Roll, "PTA Substitutes Teeth for Tea 'n' Cake Image," *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1975; and Lawrence Feinberg, "PTA Seeks to Reverse Decline with Activism," *Washington Post*, December 5, 1977.

between 1962 and 1967.<sup>80</sup> As of 31 March 1970, the National PTA had lost more than 5700 local units in a seven-year time span.<sup>81</sup> Even as the number of local PTAs decreased, the number submitting activity and program reports to the national office declined as well. By 1970, only 38% of local PTAs filed with the Congress. (See Table 3) In the 1930s, the NCPT made clear its success nationally relied on the effectiveness of local PTAs to activate and critique the national program. Without reporting and without members, the National PTA was ever more isolated from its local chapters.<sup>82</sup>

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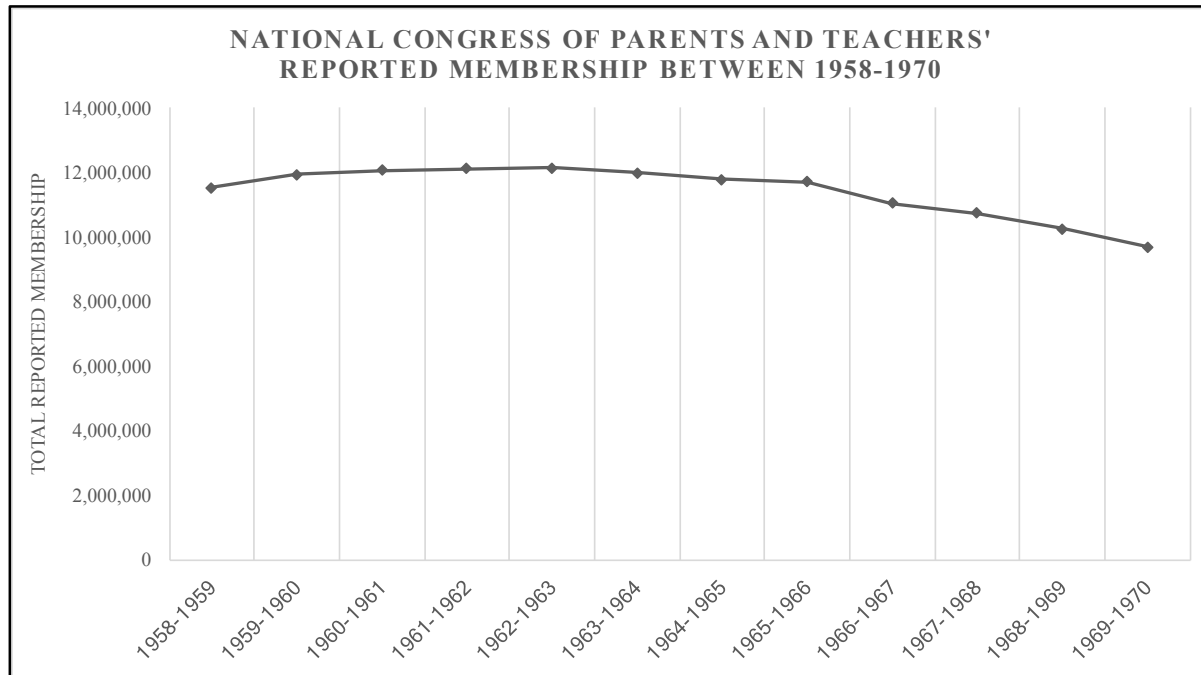
<sup>80</sup> In 1962, CCPT reported state membership at 185,063; by 1967, membership totals dropped to 117,332. See "State PTA Members Convene," newspaper clipping, c. 1967, in *Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, History for 1961-1968*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>81</sup> In 1963, the National PTA reported 47,055 local units. By 1970, the number of local units had declined to 41,328. For summary of local PTA units for the National Congress of Parents and Teachers between 1958 and 1970, see *Summary of Local Unit Information*, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vols. 2-3, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>82</sup> "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1958-1959", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1959-1960," "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1960-1961", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1961-1962", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1962-1963", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1963-1964," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 2, series 1, NCPTP, UIC Manuscript Collection; and, "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1964-1965", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1965-1966", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1966-1967", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1967-1968", "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1968-1969," and "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1969-1970," all in National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 3, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<b>Years</b>	<b>Total Membership</b>	<b>Gain/Loss</b>
1958-1959	11,516,905	n/a
1959-1960	11,926,552	3.43%
1960-1961	12,074,289	1.22%
1961-1962	12,107,507	0.27%
1962-1963	12,131,318	0.20%
1963-1964	11,992,726	-1.16%
1964-1965	11,791,431	-1.71%
1965-1966	11,710,117	-0.69%
<b>1966-1967</b>	<b>11,029,396</b>	<b>-6.17%</b>
1967-1968	10,738,541	-2.71%
1968-1969	10,249,740	-4.77%
<b>1969-1970</b>	<b>9,681,209</b>	<b>-5.87%</b>

**Table 1: National PTA Membership Gains and Losses Between 1958 and 1970.** See “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1958-1959”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1959-1960,” “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1960-1961”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1961-1962”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1962-1963”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1963-1964,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 2, series 1, NCPTP, UIC Manuscript Collection; and, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1964-1965”, “ Summary of Local Unit Information, 1965-1966”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1966-1967”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1967-1968”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1968-1969,” and “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1969-1970,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 3, series 1, NCPTP, UIC Manuscript Collection



**Table 2: National Congress of Parents and Teachers, Reported Membership Between 1958 and 1970.** See “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1958-1959”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1959-1960,” “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1960-1961”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1961-1962”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1962-1963”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1963-1964,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 2, series 1, National Congress of Parents and Teachers Publications (NCPTP), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago; and, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1964-1965”, “ Summary of Local Unit Information, 1965-1966”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1966-1967”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1967-1968”, “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1968-1969,” and “Summary of Local Unit Information, 1969-1970,” National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 3, series 1, National Congress of Parents and Teachers Publications (NCPTP), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago.



Local Unit Summary Report Year	States Reporting %	Local Units Reporting %
1959	100	60
1960	96	62
1961	92	63
1962	92	61
1963	94	61
1964	92	60
1965	85	53
1966	89	47
1967	85	46
1968	92	46
1969	83	37
1970	83	38

**Table 3: Percentage of State and Local PTAs Reporting to National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 1959-1970.** For summary of state and local PTA units filing annual summary reports with the National Congress of Parents and Teachers between 1959 and 1970, see Summary of Local Unit Information, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vols. 2-3, series 1, National Congress of Parents and Teachers Publications (NCPTP), Richard J. Daley Special Collections Library and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago. Unit information is divided into school years.

It is not altogether clear if Pres. Moorhead fully realized that the PTA was in the eye of the storm and sinking rapidly. Underfinanced, understaffed, publicly vilified, isolated from regional and national partners, and frustrated with the National PTA's lack of economic and political action, local PTA leaders and parents withdrew from the organization enmasse. One newspaper reported the association lost 500,000 members each year.<sup>83</sup> For some PTA members, the choice to disband came down to feelings of disconnect with state and national leadership, the desire to act without the bureaucratic hindrances of NCPT policy and regulations, and consternation over PTA membership dues. For many white, middle-class suburban PTA members, however, their frustration with the National PTA stemmed from its support of school integration and abandonment of neighborhood school policies. The growing chasm between local units and the national PTA was never more apparent than in

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<sup>83</sup> Sue Roll, "PTA Substitutes Teeth for Tea 'n' Cake Image," *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1975.

the ensuing local battles over school desegregation and the diminished capacity of parents to control neighborhood schools.

In the history of the National PTA one of its most significant and defining moments in post-WWII America is the rejection of the PTA's worth by white, suburban parents. As the National PTA struggled to hold national membership together during the 1960s the association began discussions to merge with the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers. Many angry, white suburban parents across the nation withdrew their affiliation in response to the National PTA merging with the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers.

In response to school integration nationwide, some PTA members sought to weaken the National PTA integration policy through resolutions and unit dissolution. In most cases, angry and dissatisfied white PTA parents rallied together to dissolve their local PTA charter and start their own parent-teacher organizations separate from the National PTA and state branches. In some situations, the National PTA and state leaders tried to revoke local charters when PTA parents refused to follow national standards and guidelines regarding extremism and racial integration. In 1964, the Colorado PTA and its state leaders were stunned when the Arapahoe County PTA president resigned her post after calling the Colorado PTA "undemocratic." The former president then campaigned during the annual state convention to block the state PTA's proposals to censor extremist publications and annul local PTA charters.<sup>84</sup> Typically, PTA leaders resigned as a result of illness, age, advancement in the association, or perhaps because of a job conflict or necessary relocation. The county president's resignation is but one example of the growing frustration with the National PTA

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<sup>84</sup> Walt Lindenmann, "Local Control P-TA Bloc Wins," *Denver (CO) Post*, c. 1964, in *Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, History for 1961-1968*, CCPTA Archives.

and state branches. Instead of resigning, other state and county leaders attempted to block the National PTA's support of racial integration at the National Convention. At the 1964 conference, a majority of state delegates watered down the NCPT's amendment on school integration three times before settling on a policy that urged local PTAs to only follow "just and peaceful solutions" for achieving racial balance in the schools.<sup>85</sup> If local PTAs failed to comply there were no repercussions for the chapter. This was a policy with the teeth removed.

Between 1969 and 1974, *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, tested Denver's local PTAs commitment to racial integration. *Keyes* only exasperated already existing racial and political tensions over local school control, neighborhood school policies, racial integration, and federal power. Furthermore, the court case deepened the strain between the Denver County PTA and the city's local PTAs. Undoubtedly, local PTA leaders were not prepared to handle the collision of internal, associational level-conflicts, and the impending aftermath of the *Keyes* case. While *Keyes* tested the PTA's foundation in Denver, the case also redefined the issue of school integration for an increasingly multiracial society.

In analyses of *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973) legal scholars and historians assert *Keyes* as a landmark case in the legal battle for school integration because of its status as the first school segregation case outside the South, the first case to rely on circumstantial evidence to implement court-ordered busing, and for its failure to address racial disparity and educational inequity in multiracial communities.<sup>86</sup> *Keyes* also

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<sup>85</sup> "P-TA Urges Peaceful Integration," *Denver (CO) Post*, May 28, 1964, in *Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, History for 1961-1968*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>86</sup> Tom I. Romero, II, "Foreword: How I Rode the Bus to Become a Professor at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law; Reflections on *Keyes*'s Legacy for the Metropolitan, Post-Racial, and Multiracial Twenty-First Century," *Denver University Law Review* 90, no. 5 (2013): 1023-1058; Michael A. Olivias, "From a 'Legal Organization of Militants' into a 'Law Firm for the

exasperated tensions between desegregation and bilingual education. In January 1968, the Bilingual Education Act, an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provided federal grants to create bilingual education programs for students with limited English-speaking skills. Legal scholar Rachel F. Moran notes the *Keyes* decision “made clear that bilingual education was not a substitute for desegregation.” Legal professor Michael Olivas, a former director of the Director on the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), similarly remarked that *Keyes* unnecessarily set desegregation and bilingual education against one another. Even though Mexican American outnumber African Americans in Denver, the plaintiffs and defendants pursued the case along black-white arguments.<sup>87</sup>

Dr. Wilfred Keyes, an African American father of two school-age children of the predominantly black neighborhood of northeast Denver, became the lead plaintiff in the case to desegregate Denver Public Schools. Seven other parents of Hispanic and black children joined Keyes in the lawsuit. The Colorado U.S. District Court heard the initial case in June 1969. The previous year, two blue-ribbon panels, appointed by the Denver Board of Education, reviewed educational equality in Denver schools. School board member Rachel B. Noel, a PTA member and former member of the CCPT Board of Managers, proposed a comprehensive school integration plan to achieve racial balance in the Denver Public School

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Latino Community’: MALDEF and the Purposive Case of *Keyes, Rodriguez, and Plyler*,” *Denver University Law Review* 90, no. 5 (2013): 1151-1208; Rachel F. Moran, “Untoward Consequences: The Ironic Legacy of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*,” *Denver University Law Review* 90, no. 5 (2013): 1209-1229; Catherine L. Horn and Michal Kurlaender, “The End of *Keyes*: Resegregation Trends and Achievement in Denver Public Schools,” *The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2006).

<sup>87</sup> Moran, “Untoward Consequences: The Ironic Legacy of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*,” 1209; Olivas, “From a ‘Legal Organization of Militants’ into a ‘Law Firm for the Latino Community’,” 1154.

system (DPS).<sup>88</sup> Known as the “Noel Resolution,” the plan also proposed three resolutions to specifically address racial integration of predominantly black schools in Park Hill (northeast Denver), voluntary student reassignment, and voluntary busing plans.<sup>89</sup> Denver’s school board implemented resolutions 1520, 1524, and 1531 and proceeded with the reassignment of more than 3,000 black students from Park Hill to southwest Denver. The community’s response was “electric.”<sup>90</sup>

While Denver’s residents largely accepted Noel’s voluntary enrollment plan, DPS’s busing proposal met “significant backlash.”<sup>91</sup> By May 1969 during the school board election, the seven-member school board which previously favored racial integration measures flipped. The “anti-busing team” of James C. Perrill and Frank K. Southworth shifted the board to a 4-3 majority opposed to busing. The *Denver AP* reported voter turnout was nearly double than the last school board election and by a margin of 2-1 the “anti-busing team” won a “walkaway election.” DPS school superintendent, Dr. Robert Gilberts, assured schools and parents court action would come to pass if Perrill and Southworth rescinded the busing plans. Days after the school board election, Perrill and Southworth did just that. On 19 June 1969,

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<sup>88</sup> Based on records from the Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, Rachel Noel was chairman of the CCPT Health Committee from 1962-1964. The committee was part of CCPT’s Department of Program Services and the CCPT Board of Managers. See Directory, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, Board of Managers, 1962-1963 and 1963-1964, in *Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, History for 1961-1968*, CCPTA Archives.

<sup>89</sup> For more information about the blue-ribbon committees, the Noel Resolution, and resolutions 1520, 1524, and 1531 see James J. Fishman and Lawrence Strauss, “Endless Journey: Integration and the Provision of Equal Educational Opportunity in Denver’s Public Schools: A Study of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*,” *Howard Law Journal* 32 (1989): 639-40. *Keyes* (413 U.S. 189) cited DPS’s racial composition as “66% Anglo, 14% Negro, and 20% Hispano,” see Olivas, “From a ‘Legal Organization of Militants’,” 1155.

<sup>90</sup> For more information about the blue-ribbon committees, the Noel Resolution, and resolutions 1520, 1524, and 1531 see James J. Fishman and Lawrence Strauss, “Endless Journey: Integration and the Provision of Equal Educational Opportunity in Denver’s Public Schools: A Study of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*,” *Howard Law Journal* 32 (1989): 639-40.

<sup>91</sup> Moran, “Untoward Consequences: The Ironic Legacy of *Keyes v. School District No. 1*,” 1213.

the parents of eight minority school children sued the Denver's school board and administrators for "unconstitutionally perpetuating a policy of segregation," violating the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment and Equal Protection Clause, and for rescinding school board resolutions 1520, 1524, and 1531 implementing school integration.<sup>92</sup> U.S. District Judge William Doyle, presiding over the case, found the school board's rescission of the integration plan unconstitutional and placed a preliminary injunction on the school board keeping it from destroying documents related to the blue-ribbon committees, the resolutions, and integration plans. He ordered the school board to continue with compulsory busing and pupil reassignment.<sup>93</sup> According to the *Denver AP* school board member Rachel Noel's busing plan would have integrated more than 30,000 students.<sup>94</sup> The pupil enrollment of Ash Grove Elementary would have been impacted by the Noel Resolution. For much of its history, Ash Grove educated white, middle-class suburban children. As of 1969, the ethnic distribution of students at Ash Grove Elementary was 97.1% White, 1.6% Black, and 1.3% Asian American. City-wide, White students accounted for 60.2% of all enrolled students in DPS.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Burl Osborne, "Anti-Busing Team Wins in Denver," *Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, May 21, 1969; "Denverites Vote Against Racial Busing Proposal," *Colorado Springs (CO) Gazette*, May 21, 1969; and, David Fitzpatrick, "Denver School Busing Seen Necessary for Integration," *Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, May 24, 1969; Romero, "Foreword: How I Rode the Bus to Become a Professor at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law," 1026.

<sup>93</sup> "Denver School Integration Appeal Mullied," *Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, July 30, 1969.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> "Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Elementary Schools, September 26, 1969," *Denver Public Schools Report of Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Classroom Teachers, and Other Certificated and Classified Personnel, September 26, 1969*, Office of Planning, Research, and Budget, Denver Public Schools, filed 27 October 1969, p. 1-3, in fol. 7, box 1, series 1, Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library. After the implementation of the "Noel Resolution" and the school board's integration plans in 1969, Ash Grove's enrollment of black students increased to 3.4% by October 1970. According to a report filed by the Denver Public Schools administration submitted on October 2, 1970 the complete ethnic distribution of Ash Grove Elementary was the following: 93.4% "Anglo and Other," 3.4% "Negro," 1.7% "Oriental," 1.5% "Spanish Surname." The school reported 825 out of 883 enrolled for that school year were white. See "Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Elementary Schools, October 2, 1970," *Denver Public Schools Report of Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Classroom*

Ash Grove was one of forty-one of out ninety-two elementary schools in DPS with Anglo students making up more than 75% of the school's student population.<sup>96</sup> As for parents, although the school's PTA did not keep records of the ethnicity of their members, based on student enrollment data showing 735 of the 757 students at Ash Grove were white, it is reasonable to conclude that white, middle-class suburban parents also made up the majority of the school's PTA membership and would have felt strong resentment towards DPS's compulsory busing measure.<sup>97</sup> Judge Doyle further determined the actions of Perrill and Southworth and fellow anti-busing advocates on the school board's repeal of 1520, 1524, and 1531 "had the effect of perpetuating school segregation" rather than integration. The school board's actions and inactions, Judge Doyle concluded, "had not only a chilling effect upon [plaintiffs'] rights; it had a freezing effect."<sup>98</sup> DPS was far from a unified school system.

In the months leading up to the trial judgement, tensions and violence erupted in Denver. On 5 February 1970 twenty-three DPS school buses were destroyed in a series of bombings. James Perrill, one-half of the DPS "anti-busing team" had his house firebombed. Wilfred Keyes also had his home bombed during the appeal process. Reporting on the

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*Teachers, and Other Certificated and Classified Personnel, September 26, 1969*, Office of Planning, Research, and Budget, Denver Public Schools, filed October 27, 1969, p. 1-3, in fol. 7, box 1, series 1, Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>96</sup> "Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Elementary Schools, September 26, 1969," *Denver Public Schools Report of Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Classroom Teachers, and Other Certificated and Classified Personnel, September 26, 1969*, Office of Planning, Research, and Budget, Denver Public Schools, filed October 27, 1969, p. 2, in fol. 7, box 1, series 1, Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>97</sup> "Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Elementary Schools, September 26, 1969," *Report of Estimated Ethnic Distribution of Pupils, Classroom Teachers, and Other Certificated and Classified Personnel, September 26, 1969*, Office of Planning, Research, and Budget, Denver Public Schools, filed October 27, 1969, p. 2, in fol. 7, box 1, series 1, Rachel Noel Papers, ARL117, Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library, The Denver Public Library.

<sup>98</sup> For the preliminary injunction handed down by U.S. District Judge William E. Doyle see *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 303 F. Supp. 279, 287 (D. Colo. 1969). For the trial case see *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 313 F. Supp. 61, 83 (D. Colo. 1970).

destruction to the Keyes' home, the *Denver AP* reported "the explosion blew a hole" straight through Keyes' front porch and "blew the door off its hinges."<sup>99</sup> Following these incidents and threats made to other school board members and city officials, the Denver police force formed an anti-bombing taskforce to end the attacks. The state legislature went so far as to restrict the sale and purchase of explosive materials.<sup>100</sup> And, Judge Doyle still had to decide if the school board was responsible for perpetuating racially segregated school districts in the absence of *de jure* segregation. The attorney for DPS questioned the validity of the case stating it could never fall to the school board alone to "provide remedies for all sociological and economic ills."<sup>101</sup>

In 1970, Judge Doyle found DPS in violation of the Fourteenth Amendment and ordered DPS to implement Noel's resolutions 1520, 1524, and 1531 along with compulsory busing. Despite the lack of over policies corroborating system-wide *de jure* segregation, Doyle still found the school board failing to provide equal educational opportunities to Denver's black and Hispanic children. Explaining the responsibilities of school boards affected by racial housing practices and commenting on the responsibilities of parents as members of the Denver community to provide equal educational opportunities for all children, Doyle wrote:

Today, a school board is not constitutionally required to integrate schools which have become segregated because of the effect of racial housing patterns on the neighborhood school system. However, if the school board chooses not to take positive steps to alleviate *de facto* segregation, it must at a minimum insure that schools offer an equal educational opportunity. The evidence in this case at bar

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<sup>99</sup> "Man's Home Bombed in Denver School Suit," *Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, February 25, 1970; "Colorado Weighs Blas Controls; 24 Fires and Explosions in 45 Days May Spur Curbs," *New York Times*, March 9, 1970, 10.

<sup>100</sup> "Denver Police Anti-Bombing Squad Formed," *Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, February 26, 1970.

<sup>101</sup> "Judge Considers Decision in Denver School Integration," *Colorado Springs (CO) Gazette*, August 20, 1970.



establishes, and we do find and conclude, that an equal educational opportunity is not being provided at the subject segregated schools within the District. The evidence establishes this beyond any doubt. Many factors contribute to the inferior status of these schools, but the predominant one appears to be the enforced isolation imposed in the name of neighborhood schools and housing patterns. It strikes one as incongruous that the community of Denver would tolerate schools which are inferior in quality.<sup>102</sup>

And yet, white parents who sent their children to Denver's predominantly white schools felt little reason to correct inequalities outside of their neighborhood school. As the Keyes case moved up through the district and appellate courts and finally landed before the U.S. Supreme Court, schools like Ash Grove Elementary were scheduled for mandatory busing beginning in 1970. While Ash Grove parents could not avoid integration plans, its PTA could cut itself off from pro-busing factions, namely the Denver County PTA, the Colorado PTA, and the National PTA.

At the same time as Ash Grove's white parents contemplated the implications of busing on their school and their children, the National PTA continued its process of desegregation with the official merger with the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers in June 1970.<sup>103</sup> Since *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka, Kansas* 347 U.S. 483 (1954) the NCPT had worked towards racial integration of its state and local units but left the

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<sup>102</sup> *Keyes v. School District No. One*, 313 F. Supp. 61, 83 (D. Colo. 1970).

<sup>103</sup> History of education scholar Christine Woynshner examines the origins and activities of the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT) in the U.S. South in *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement, 1897-1970*. Woynshner's work is the first full-length monograph studying the role of black PTAs and the "Colored Congress" in the history of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. Founded in on 7 May 1926 by Selena Sloan Butler, an African American clubwoman, in Atlanta, Georgia, the NCCPT operated as a "parallel organization . . . for black members . . . with separate national, state, and local units." Woynshner also notes that although the unification between the NCPT and the NCCPT in June 1970 politically desegregated PTAs, integration led to the collapse of black PTA leadership and diminished authority in the decision-making progress regarding the education of black children. Additionally, after desegregation of the two national PTAs in 1970, 28% of the National PTA's membership losses for 1970-1971 came from southern PTA units. See Woynshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement*, 14, 56, 153-154, 157, and especially chapters 2 and 5.

timing and process up to the discretion of state and local leaders. The National PTA also began the shift from opposing busing based on the dissolution of neighborhood schools to supporting busing as a viable method for school integration.<sup>104</sup> In May 1972 during the NCPT's annual convention, national delegates, elected by their local, county, and state PTAs, narrowly approved a resolution supporting busing. The resolution passed 302 to 296.<sup>105</sup> Additionally at the same convention, national delegates voted down an antibusing amendment, 342 to 331, which had proposed local and state PTAs "make every possible effort to insure that no school children shall be transported across municipal or school district boundaries in order to achieve racial segregation or racial integration."<sup>106</sup> The small margin of victory in both resolution votes indicated how deeply school integration and compulsory busing divided the membership.

That September, the parents of the Ash Grove dissolved its PTA. The termination of the PTA in 1972 is interesting for two reasons. First, the point at which Ash Grove parents cancelled their charter with the National Congress of Parents and Teachers aligns with national trends of PTA-separations following the National PTA's approval of pro-busing resolutions. Second, the reasons Ash Grove parents gave for disbanding echoed familiar arguments made by PTAs across the country, especially those situated in high-minority-enrollment-school districts. In a newsletter sent home with students, the school announced

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<sup>104</sup> For more information about merger between the National Congress of Colored Parents and Teachers (NCCPT) and the NCPT see Woyshner, *The National PTA, Race, and Civic Engagement*. For a history of the National PTA and its evolution on school desegregation policies in the South, see Sarah E. Heath, "Lubricating the Machine of Social Change": The National PTA and Desegregation Debates, 1950-1970," *Peace and Change*, 39 (January 2014): 49-72.

<sup>105</sup> For the resolution voting record regarding the National PTA's support of school busing please see Gene I. Maeroff, "P.T.A. Convention Approves Busing Resolution by 6 Votes," *New York Times*, May 24, 1972.

<sup>106</sup> New York, Associated Press, "PTA Approves Busing," *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1972.

the dissolution of the PTA and the formation of a new parent-teacher organization.<sup>107</sup> Citing membership fees and the desire to focus on the students and neighborhood of Ash Grove, the PTA ended its 48-year operation. Even during Ash Grove's transition from Arapahoe County Public Schools to Denver Public Schools in 1957-1958, the school maintained a chartered-PTA. Per the executive committee chairman of the "Family-Teacher Organization," Margaret McDowell, families broke with the Denver County PTA because they wanted to create a "vital, useful organization" to "keep [the] school united."<sup>108</sup> McDowell announced that the new organization would be fee-free for parents. But the new organization implied that Ash Grove parents would still need to financially support school committees, activities, programs, and materials like serving on the school's Budget Advisory Committee and funding the school newsletter. The only disruption to the funding-flow was the stream of dues to the county, state, and national PTAs.<sup>109</sup> McDowell's promise of "no dues" was quickly rescinded the next year. After becoming president of the new Educator-Student-Parent (E.S.P.) organization at Ash Grove she recommended that involved parents become voting members of E.S.P. and give a 50¢ family contribution to the group for school events.<sup>110</sup> In theory and in practice, E.S.P. was still a parent-teacher association. Just a stripped down and unaffiliated version cut-off from national resources and leadership support.

The rising number of PTAs disbanding and creating independent parent-teacher organizations (PTOs) only compounded the already growing list of problems the National PTA faced. State PTA presidents voiced their frustrations to the National Congress urging

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<sup>107</sup> "NOW IS THE TIME FOR ALL GOOD IDEAS TO COME FOR OUR NEW FAMILY-TEACHER ORGANIZATIONS AT ASH GROVE!!" *Ash Grove Accents*, vol. 15, no. 1 (20 September 1972), p. 1, in AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> *Ash Grove Accents*, vol. 15, no. 1 (20 September 1972), in AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>110</sup> *Ash Grove Accents*, vol. 16, no. 1 (19 September 1973), in AG PTA / DPL Archives.

the board to pump funding and resources into local and state PTAs. State presidents defined PTOs as any group that “withdraws from the PTA state and national organizations as an effort to either ‘keep the money’ themselves or to avoid policies.”<sup>111</sup> Even before the PTA felt its largest membership losses in the mid-1960s and early-1970s, state presidents recommended strategies to minimize the impact and to curb the rise of PTOs. PTA presidents from across the country advised the National PTA to improve communication between state and local PTA boards, relax interpretations of PTA policies, increase cooperation with area-colleges, foster closer and more supportive relationships with school principals, and finally, boost the community presence and leadership of local PTAs.<sup>112</sup> The suggestions were ignored by the National PTA and left to the states and county PTAs to address. And, as the National PTA backed busing and increased membership dues to replace diminished program funds, the mistrust between state and local PTAs, such as the case in Colorado, continued to grow. Ash Grove’s PTA not only wanted to “keep the money” but parents also wanted to control the impact of racial integration on its school and district. The Supreme Court’s ruling on DPS’s appeal of *Keyes* in 1973 would ensure that Ash Grove’s E.S.P. would also fail in its efforts to stop school desegregation.

On 12 October 1972, opening arguments for *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver* began in the Supreme Court. While the Denver school board and Denverites eagerly awaited the Court’s ruling, *New York Times* author, Christopher Jencks, reporting on the case speculated that the Court’s ruling could indicate if the highest court was prepared to “launch

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<sup>111</sup> “Appendix, Per Capita Membership Fee: State Congress Portion,” Minutes, State Presidents’ Conference, September 25, 1962, in fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives; and, “Report of Discussion Group of Presidents,” n.d., Appendix, fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>112</sup> “Report of Discussion Group of Presidents,” n.d., Appendix, fol. 318, box 62, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

a major attack” on northern schools. He also indicated that one need only to examine Denver’s “history of gerrymandering” attendance zones to realize that the school boards’ neighborhood policies had never been “color-blind.”<sup>113</sup>



**Image 3:** *Busing--The Supreme Court Goes North.* See Christopher Jencks, “Busing—The Supreme Court Goes North,” *New York Times Magazine*, 19 November 1972.

On decision, Justice William Brennan, writing the *Opinion of the Court*, found the Denver Board of Education complicit in “practic[ing] deliberate racial segregation in schools” and charged the school board to “show that its policies and practices with respect to schoolsite location, school size, school renovations and additions, students-attendance zones, student assignment and transfer options, mobile classroom units, transportations of students, assignment of faculty and staff, etc., considered together and premised on the Board’s so-called ‘neighborhood school’ concept . . . were not taken in effectuation of a policy to create or maintain segregation in the core city schools.” If found practicing racial segregation in public education, the Court charged the District Court with forcing DPS to “desegregate the entire system ‘root and branch’.”<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Christopher Jencks, “Busing—The Supreme Court Goes North,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 19, 1972, 41, 121.

<sup>114</sup> *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

Historian Danielle Olden cites several practices implemented by the Denver School board to keep “racially recognizable schools” in place. The school board’s decisions regarding where to build new schools, assessing cost of maintenance repairs and building additions, determining attendance boundaries, testing scores, classroom placement, and voluntary busing, according to Olden, “ensure[d] as little racial mixing as possible between Anglo and other students.” Practices such as these helped shape the public’s perception of neighborhood school policies as race-neutral, when in fact, the policies, which *Keyes* would determine, represented *de facto* segregation.<sup>115</sup> The failure in *Keyes* was the fact that the “plaintiffs’ decision to construct Mexican Americans as minorities along with blacks reaffirmed the black-white paradigm because it erased the distinct racialization of Mexican Americans that informed their educational experiences in Denver.” Furthermore, *Keyes* failed to account for the multiracial population in the U.S. West. DPS argued that it was not responsible for the city’s racial imbalance nor should it be forced to defend against arguments of systemic segregation.<sup>116</sup>

Olden’s final assessment of *Keyes* is that it ultimately failed to deliver equal education because the plaintiffs and courts conflated Black and Hispanic experiences. The creation of “minority” as a legal term obfuscated multiracial communities and labeled them along an “Anglo/minority binary.” Additionally, *Keyes* and the proceeding cases in the U.S. District Court maintained racial balance was the only method of achieving educational equality.<sup>117</sup> The possibility of introducing bilingual education into Denver’s schools to help

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<sup>115</sup> Danielle R. Olden, “Becoming Minority: Mexican Americans, Race, and the Legal Struggle for Educational Equity in Denver, Colorado,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 48 (Spring 2017): 44-45.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-46.

achieve equal educational opportunities for Hispanic children was not a viable option according to the courts. As Olden concludes, “The traditional black-white binary could not account for the kind of segregation that existed in Denver’s public schools.”<sup>118</sup>

Although the Court upheld *Keyes* in a 7-1 decision, the *Opinion of the Court* was complemented with a separate concurring opinion from Justice Douglas and a partial concurring opinion and dissent written by Justice Powell. In Douglas’ opinion, he pushed the Court to further consider the similarities between *de jure* and *de facto* segregative actions.<sup>119</sup> “I think it is time to state that there is no constitutional difference between *de jure* and *de facto* segregation, for each is the product of state actions or policies . . . calling [these actions] *de facto* is a misnomer, as they are only more subtle types of state action that create or maintain a wholly or partially segregated school system,” he argued.<sup>120</sup> Justice Powell in partial concurrence with the Court agreed with Douglas that the time had come to abandon the “*de facto/de jure* distinction” and that school boards should only be held responsible for minimizing segregative conditions. “It is this policy which must be applied consistently on a national basis,” he continued “without regard to a doctrinal distinction which has outlived its time.”<sup>121</sup> However, forced busing was not the solution. According to Powell, it would be the “single most disruptive element in education.”<sup>122</sup> Powell expanded on this statement warning of the yet unforeseen consequences on private rights, minority communities, and public education:

No one can estimate the extent to which dismantling neighborhood education will hasten an exodus to private schools, leaving public school systems the preserve of the

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>119</sup> Justice Byron White did not participate in the decision. See *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colo.*, 413 U.S. 189, 214 (U.S. 1973).

<sup>120</sup> *Keyes v. School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado*, 413 U.S. 189 (1973).

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

disadvantaged of both races. . . . Instead of recognizing the reality of similar, multiple segregative causes in school districts throughout the country, the Court persists in a distinction whose duality operates unfairly on local communities in one section of the country and on minority children in the others.<sup>123</sup>

The District Court, on directive from the Supreme Court, granted the Board the opportunity to prove they were not practicing system-wide racial segregation and not operating a dual system. “This is one more (and hopefully the final) episode in the Denver School desegregation case,” Judge Doyle wished. After reviewing submitted desegregation plans from DPS and the plaintiffs, Doyle concluded neither sufficiently addressed Denver’s problems. DPS relied extensively on busing to resolve racial imbalance, and the plaintiffs’ plan was “unduly complex and unadaptable.”<sup>124</sup> Rather than have the two parties revise plans, Doyle appointed Dr. John A. Finger Jr., an outside consultant, to draft school desegregation plans. The final proposal outlined half-day busing for select elementary, junior high, and high schools, and recommended rezoning student assignment boundaries. DPS selected more than 4,800 minority students for school reassignment.<sup>125</sup>

On the first day of the second round of court-ordered busing some local and national commentators reported Denver experienced little resistance to busing measures.<sup>126</sup> However, the bombings and explosions had already gone off during the ruling. Perhaps the city’s

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> For Denver Public Schools desegregation plan see “A Plan for Expanding Educational Opportunity in the Denver Public Schools,” Submitted by School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado, January 22, 1974 in box 3, AG PTA / DPL Archives. Ash Grove Elementary was one of twenty-two schools classified by DPS as “predominately majority schools . . . with an Anglo enrollment of more than 75 percent,” see “A Plan for Expanding Educational Opportunity in the Denver Public Schools,” Submitted by School District No. 1, Denver, Colorado, January 22, 1974, p. 2, in box 3, AG PTA / DPL Archives.

<sup>125</sup> *Keyes v. School District No. 1*, 380 F. Supp. 673, 688 (D. Colo. 1974); and, “Consultant Presents New Plan for Denver School Integration,” *Greeley (CO) Daily Tribune*, March 28, 1974.

<sup>126</sup> Reporters described residents as complying with the measure “without incident” and showing “only token resistance” to the ruling, see “‘White Flight’ Threatens Denver School Integration,” *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, December 10, 1974; and, “Thousands Are Bused in Denver as School Desegregation Begins,” *New York Times*, August 31, 1974, 32.



tempered response was a sign of their own exhaustion similar to Doyle's desire to put this case behind him. Instead of increased violence though, the city experienced a mass exodus of white homeowners and white schoolchildren.

Following the Supreme Court ruling and the reestablishment of city-wide integration plans, Denver School Superintendent Louis Kishkunas reported severe declines in student enrollment. Since *Keyes* first hearing in 1969, the city's school enrollment had dropped by 17,000. Supt. Kishkunas cited a combination of "white flight" and dropping birth rates for DPS' declining enrollment numbers. However, he confessed was "swimming upstream" with little hope of "stem[ming] the tide of white flight."<sup>127</sup> With the new school year underway, DPS reported "school enrollment was below expectations" after implementing busing plans. The *New York Times* reported Denver's Catholic schools for the first time in five years increased their student enrollment.<sup>128</sup> By December 1974, Supt. Kishkunas confirmed the enrollment exodus. More than 7,200 students had left DPS since the start of the school year that past August.<sup>129</sup>

Attempts to stop school busing culminated in the passage of two amendments to the Colorado state constitution in 1974. The first initiative amended Articles XIV and XX to prohibit counties like Denver from "striking off of any territory from a County without first submitting the question to a vote of the qualified electors of the County and without an affirmative vote of the majority of those electors." In perspective, while the amendment stopped Denver's 40-year method of expansion, it also kept the city from further integrating

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<sup>127</sup> "'White Flight' Threatens Denver School Integration," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, December 10, 1974.

<sup>128</sup> "Thousands are Bused in Denver as School Desegregation Begins," *New York Times*, August 31, 1974, 32.

<sup>129</sup> "'White Flight' Threatens Denver School Integration," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, December 10, 1974.

public schools by incorporation into Denver School District No. 1. The second amendment was a direct assault on busing to achieve racial integration. The initiative passed 485,536 to 220,842 in favor of prohibiting pupil assignment and transportation. Combined the amendments became known as the Poundstone Amendment. In one election, Coloradans officially clamped Denver's ability to integrate surrounding public schools through suburban annexation land grabs and squashed school integration methods. Unequivocally, the two initiatives on the ballot that year was a clear sign of the "suburban vote against busing."<sup>130</sup> Justice Powell's predictions had unfortunately come true. Suburban, white Denverites had not only fled the core city, but Coloradans had restricted the powers of the City and County of Denver. Poundstone killed any hopes of achieving racial balance through busing and pupil reassignment, and undoubtedly, secured the continuation of "neighborhood school" policies and *de facto* segregation in the Rocky Mountain state.

The National PTA's response to JBS and the ESEA and Denverites response to *Keyes* and the school busing plans were the consequence of several closely associated factors bearing down on PTA efficacy—expanding federal government, rise of Far Right and extremist pressures, over-organization, and ideological and operational competition. The failure of the National PTA was its staunch belief in the efficacy of its local units to

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<sup>130</sup> "White Flight' Threatens Denver School Integration," *Fort Collins Coloradoan*, December 10, 1974; "An act to amend Articles XIV and XX of the Constitution of the State of Colorado, concerning the annexation of property by a County or City and County, and prohibiting the striking off of any territory from a County without first submitting the question to a vote of the qualified electors of the County and without an affirmative vote of the majority of those electors," 1974 Initiative, Ballot History, Colorado State Legislature, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf>; and, "An amendment to section 8 article IX of the Constitution of the State of Colorado, to prohibit the assignment or the transportation of pupils to public educational institutions in order to achieve racial balance of pupils at such institution," 1974 Initiative, Ballot History, Colorado State Legislature, <http://www.leg.state.co.us/lcs/ballothistory.nsf>; and, Colo. Const. Art. IX, Section 8.

implement the national program with minimal resistance. Although suggestions flowed up through county and state delegates to the National Office, the proposals from local members died out. As the National PTA continued to hemorrhage members and units across the country, local units continued to suffer from a lack of leadership, direction, and faced increasing pressures sever ties. By 1975, National PTA membership was nearly cut in half. At seven million members nation-wide, the *Chicago Tribune*, reported the PTA had lost on average 500,000 members a year since 1965.<sup>131</sup> National PTA President Carol Kimmel, quoted in the same article, tried to reassure doubters the association hadn't lost ground despite decreased membership. "The PTA hasn't lost stature nationally," Kimmel stated, "neither have the state groups." Kimmel emphasized loss ground at the local level was the real problem, however.<sup>132</sup>

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"The lifeblood of the PTA is membership. Without membership there would be no P.T.A. We could not function at all, much less effectively," Coreen Weiner, National Chairman of the Membership Committee, told PTA national delegates in 1960.<sup>133</sup> Since the founding of National Congress of Mothers in 1895, the National PTA relied almost unilaterally on building a grassroots organization of parents, initially mothers and later expanding membership to include fathers, teachers, and school administrators to implement

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<sup>131</sup> According to the *Chicago Tribune*, the National PTA reported its total membership for 1965 at 12,000,000. This number is slightly more than the number reported in the "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1964-1965," which reported 11,791,431. See, Sue Roll, "PTA Substitutes Teeth for Tea 'n' Cake Image," *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1975; and, "Summary of Local Unit Information, 1964-1965," National Congress of Parents and Teachers, vol. 3, series 1, NCPTP / UIC Archives.

<sup>132</sup> Sue Roll, "PTA Substitutes Teeth for Tea 'n' Cake Image," *Chicago Tribune*, August 19, 1975.

<sup>133</sup> "Where Children Come First, P.T.A. Membership Follows," National Congress of Parents, 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 25, 1960, p. 4, in fol. 266, box 52, series 4, PTAR / UIC Archives.

state- and locally-based child welfare and educational services. For eighty years, the centralized authority of the National PTA resided in the power of local parents and teachers to activate and shape an educational program and legislative action plan for local school districts and state departments of education.<sup>134</sup> By 1975 the National PTA lacked an expansive, grassroots base of parents and teachers. As a result, the association, despite reassurances, could no longer claim to represent the majority will of public school parents. Numbers and public opinion were against them. In less than fifteen years, the National Congress had cut national representation in half. The NCPT sacrificed local control to secure federal aid and entitlements for public schools and low-income families. They rejected long-standing neighborhood school practices to advance equal educational opportunities for African American and Hispanic children. The National Congress of Parents and Teachers had little hope of achieving pre-1963 membership levels. And yet in 1977, the National PTA and its state presidents conducted an autopsy report to try and do just that.

National PTA President Grace Baisinger, interviewed by the *Washington Post* in 1977, described the PTA's return to its activist roots and "advocacy-oriented" agendas. Since the end of World War II, PTA leaders had fallen behind in leading the call for educational, social, labor, and health reforms for their communities and states. Instead of launching community health clinics, creating sex education classes for public schools, advocating for teacher salaries and benefits, or hosting civic leadership training seminars for women, local PTAs had become a "nice organization where you could go to a bake sale."<sup>135</sup> The National PTA had unintentionally displaced voluntarism from statecraft. The PTA of the 1960s was

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<sup>134</sup> Jennelle Moorhead, "The Truth About the PTA," 71st Annual Convention, National Congress of Parents and Teachers, May 22, 1967, in fol. 63, box 11, series 2, PTAR / UIC Archives.

<sup>135</sup> Lawrence Feinberg, "PTA Seeks to Reverse Decline with Activism," *Washington Post*, December 5, 1977.

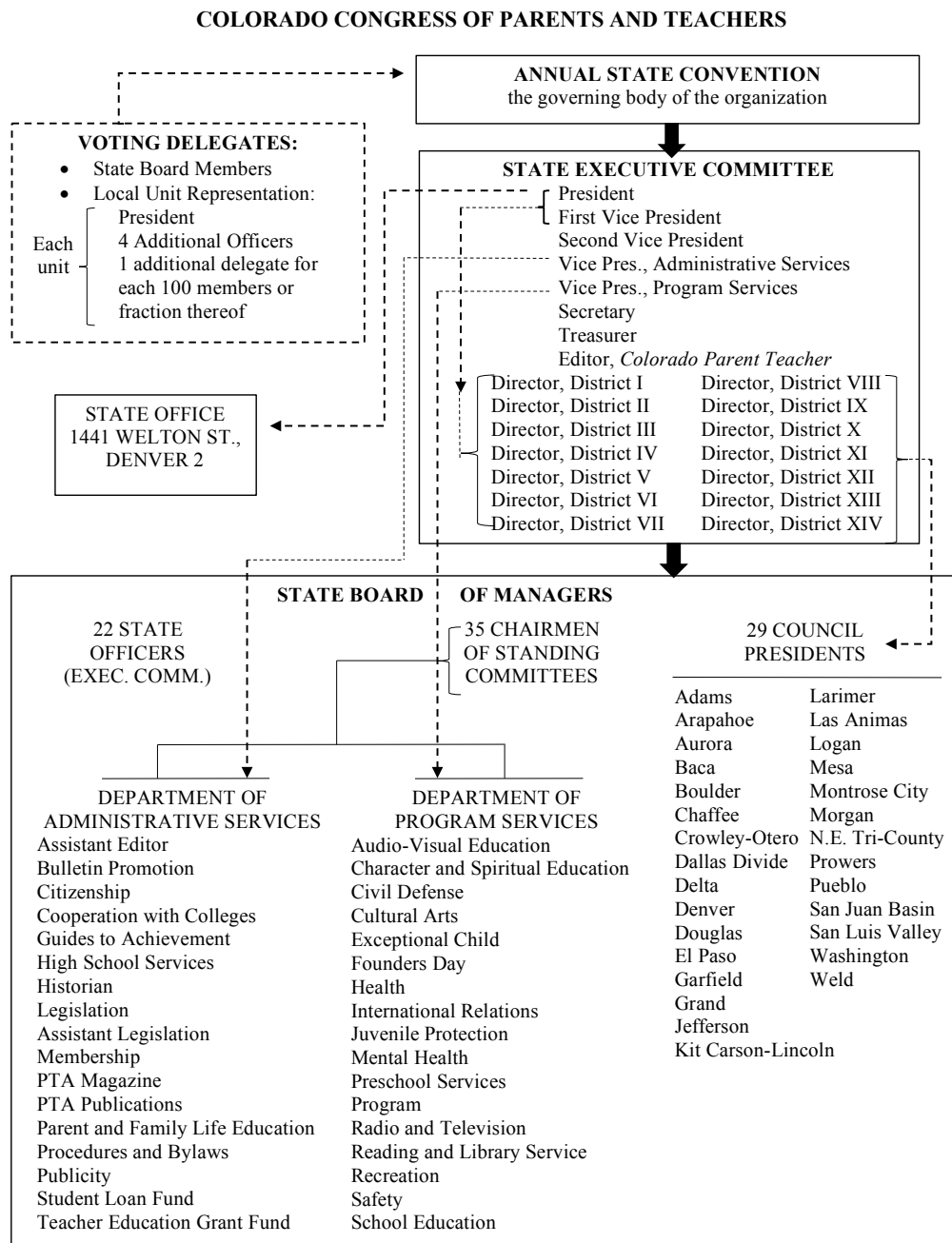
perceived as antithetical to civic engagement. Parents who grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, Baisinger noted, did not see a place for themselves in the PTA. “These parents,” Baisinger said “want meaningful participation.” For Baisinger, the only way the PTA could become meaningful once again was by “returning to the outlook of those who started it in 1897. . . [as] an unabashedly political organization.”<sup>136</sup> The National Congress began publicly promoting its Progressive Era achievements and experience leading federal and state government departments on child welfare and parent education. It celebrated progress in welfare, labor, and education as part of its advocacy. In 1972, the National Congress made its first steps toward civic engagement when national delegates reversed a seventy-year old policy which discouraged members from opposing school administrators and kept parents on the sideline. The amendment revived parents’ activism by encouraging them to once again seek equal partnership with school administrators and to collaborate in the “decision-making process establishing school policy.”<sup>137</sup> Additionally, after shutting down the *National Parent Teacher*, the main point of information for local and state PTAs, and cutting national staff in 1974 to save money, the National Congress reopened its legislative “satellite office” in Washington, D.C. in 1977.<sup>138</sup> Moreover, as the membership became more urban and racially diverse, the National Office began actively recruiting “single parents, senior citizens, and business leaders” to advocate for public education beyond the schools. It seemed that the National PTA, at last, heard the single most pressing demand from their base: the incessant desire for civic engagement at all levels and arenas of government and society.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Lynn Simross, “PTA Graduates to Contemporary Image,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1977.



**Figure 2: Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Organizational Chart.** Reproduction of organizational chart from the Colorado Parent Teacher magazine. See "Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers," chart, *Colorado Parent Teacher* (April 1963), p. 14, in *History for 1961-1964, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Papers, Colorado State PTA Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado. By 1964, the State Board of Managers added one council president and sixteen outside consultants to the state congress. See "Director, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers, Board of Managers, 1963-1964," in *History for 1961-1964, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers*, Colorado Congress of Parents and Teachers Association, Papers, Colorado State PTA Office, Wheat Ridge, Colorado.

## CONCLUSION

What happened in your mother's PTA that led the nation, scholars, and even the PTA to discount its legacy of women's political activism? Did the association grow too large too quickly? Was it "big government" intervening in local matters? Was it a result of women entering the workforce? Was it the image of the 1950s housewife? Or, can it be contributed to the extreme rhetoric of the 1960s that unseated millions of women from the PTA?

*Not Your Mother's PTA: Women's Political Activism in Twentieth-Century America* provides the first in-depth study of women's political activism in the National PTA and its local PTA units. It closely examines how women integrated themselves and their ideas on women's and children's welfare reform into government from the 1890s through the 1970s. This project explores the resources, strategies, and methods used by PTA women working for women and children's interests at the local and national level, primarily in public schools and government agencies. Initially established as a maternalist organization, female members deployed maternalist language and their identity as mothers to insert themselves into government bureaucracy in matters related to childrearing. Following the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment granting national suffrage to most women, female leadership within the National Congress believed that with access to the vote they no longer needed to argue for their inclusion in government based on sex difference. Rather, female members dropped "mother" from its official title and renamed the organization the National Congress of Parents and Teachers. This transition, while partially a rebranding tactic, challenged women to redefine parents as a constituency accorded particular rights and privileges in America's public schools. By the mid-twentieth century, the National PTA's success in mobilizing local parents, especially women, for community-centered activities and engagements on behalf of

publicly supported education contributed to the growing image of the iconic 1950s housewife.<sup>1</sup> *Not Your Mother's PTA* challenges the subtext of the PTA mother/housewife and shows how women used the language and identity of motherhood and later parenthood to expand women's role in government, increase women's political activism, and its ability to sustain a Progressive-era, female-led maternalist organization in the face of transformative social, economic, and racial changes in the twentieth century.

Women have continuously led the PTA at all levels of the association since 1897, but not every woman in the PTA has been a mother. However, because women have been the face of the organization since its founding, the public and many scholars have continued to perceive the organization as a mothers' institution based solely on women's reproductive capacity. However, historical evidence shows that as the PTA evolved over the twentieth century, PTA women stopped using motherhood as a reason for oversight in America's schools and started arguing as parents after the passage of the suffrage amendment in 1920. Although women remained central to the PTA's operation on the national and local level, after the 1920s many women in the PTA rejected sex difference and argued as parents, a gender-neutral term, to maintain their presence in public school systems and government agencies. In the PTA, the term "parent" evolved into a broad category for women *and* men to advocate on behalf of children's welfare. The term also included aunts, uncles, grandmothers, grandparents, and legal guardians, generally any adult interested in advancing the mission, goals, and objectives of the National PTA in local communities and school districts.

*Not Your Mother's PTA* uses the perspective of history to reexamine today's organization within the context of women's changing political access and activism over the

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the caricature of the 1950s housewife and its impact on conservative women's politics see Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*.



course of the twentieth century. This dissertation is the first step in reconnecting today's PTA with its gendered and political past and placing the PTA in the longer history of women's organizations and movements in the United States. From the 1890s through the 1920s, PTA women supported and subsidized the expansion of the American welfare state by promoting women's common bond of motherhood to bring women's clubs and organizations under the umbrella of maternalism. Between the 1910s and 1920s, women assisted and directed government bureaus, such as the Children's Welfare Bureau, the U.S. Bureau of Education Home Education Division, and state-level departments of public instruction and health tasked with managing women's and children's education, welfare, and health services.

After most women achieved national suffrage in 1920, the National Congress of Mothers experienced an increase in female members and women's activism just as other Progressive Era voluntary organizations, such as the GFWC and NWP, reported declining membership.<sup>2</sup> The NCM successfully navigated the transition from maternalism to feminism without losing members, continued to expand Progressive-era reforms, and increased women's public service roles by shifting its language from motherhood to parenthood.<sup>3</sup> The social and economic decline created by the Great Depression had provided women the opportunity to dramatically expand their activities, increase their local civic engagement, and obtain the necessary skills and experience to become key stakeholders in their communities. From the 1930s to the 1950s, women's increased activity as parents in local PTAs created tension between the local and national leaders as the National Congress struggled to develop

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<sup>2</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 86-7.

<sup>3</sup> Nickerson also notes maternalism "lost cultural power" between the 1920s and 1940s. The NCM, I argue, recognized these changes and publicly rebranded their organization as the "National Congress of Parents and Teachers" in 1924 to continue women's "mother-work" into the twentieth century. See Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*, xv.

a viable narrative that would encompass the work of thousands of units, hundreds of councils, and state chapters and branches. During this period women increased their involvement in local PTAs by delivering health care services to rural families, lobbying for increased state-sponsored education standards, and managing wartime community defense programs.

Just as the organization was succeeding on the local level, however, problems arose at the national level. The expansive and often hyper-reactive local level programs by mid-century unintentionally watered down the National PTA's message and weakened the national association's impact in local and state school systems. PTAs had become so successful at the local level that individual members and local PTA leaders often operated autonomously from the National PTA. National leaders scrambled to find a way to maintain relevancy and significance to local PTA units and communities.

The shift in power from the national headquarters to local, communal organizations hastened the National PTA's massive membership loss between the 1960s and early 1970s. Other factors contributing to the PTA's instability in the post-Cold War era included women's greater opportunities in the work force, new attacks from the Far Right, and increasing tensions over the role of the PTA in federal aid and school integration. More broadly, local concerns regarding federal aid to education and racial integration of schools ultimately cut the National PTA out of many public schools and communities. Consequently, the National PTA and its rank-and-file members saw their political authority across state and national government significantly reduced for the first time in the association's history.

For more than 120 years, women in the PTA have partnered with government agencies to increase federal and state funding for education, organize rural health clinics,

introduce sex education courses, govern school boards, and extend the presence and influence of women across local, state, federal, and international agencies. The National PTA has created political spaces and national networks for women interested in community engagement and public service. And yet, the National PTA has spent the last two decades recalling a past of that describes women's political ignorance. Scholars have declined to pursue inquiries into women's activism in the PTA for several reasons, often themselves, buying into the belief that nothing was occurring in the PTA during the middle-part of the century. In the moment women's participation in voluntary and maternalist organizations declined after 1920, female participation and women's activism dramatically increased and continued to climb until 1963 when opposition politics, racism, suburbanization, and two-income households brought it crashing down. The PTA, a longstanding American institution, is now found in less than a quarter of public schools, its membership represents less than 1.18% of the national population, and it continues to have a PR problem when it comes to describing female participation and women's activism.<sup>4</sup>

Reframing the history of the PTA as part of a longer history of women's political work offers not only new perspectives on women's activism in local communities, but also brings into sharp focus women's role in creating, expanding, and subsidizing government

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<sup>4</sup> In June 2016, the National PTA estimated its membership at 3.8 million and reported 24,334 PTAs. The National Center for Education Statistics reported 98,300 public schools in 2016. Comparing the number of PTA units in 2016 and the number of public schools that same year, PTAs were present in 24% of schools. For National PTA membership and unit summary for 2016 see National Congress of Parents and Teachers, *Annual Report, 2015-2016* (Alexandria, VA: National PTA, 2016), 6. For public school statistics see "Fast Facts," U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/>. The U.S. Census Bureau estimated the national population at 323,127,513 by July 2016. For U.S. population estimates see, "Table 1. Annual Estimates of the Resident Population for the United States, Regions, States, and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2016," *Population Estimates, Population Change, and Components of Change*, National Population Totals Tables: 2010-2016, December 2016, Population Division, U.S. Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/data.html>.

services and programs in the United States. One of the most important lessons we can learn from history of the PTA is its ability to mobilize citizens, especially women, into community action. Despite its downfall in the early 1970s, the National PTA had more than 70 years of success in organizing women across city, county, and state lines to achieve some of the nation's greatest social and educational reforms for women and children. PTA women steadfastly worked across organizational and political party lines during periods of economic decline, social disruption, cultural backlash, and conservative ascendancy.

To understand the history of women's politics and engagement in America, from the Progressive Era through the rise of modern conservatism in the 1960s is to recognize the factors pulling some women away from civic engagement. Since the 1960s, women have turned away from the PTA for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to full-time employment, familial obligations, finances, political beliefs, school policies, and even their own sense of boredom with the PTA. In turn some women started or joined independent parent-teacher organizations.

Nevertheless, those women still active in the PTA remain politically and civically engaged with their local school populations and national association. Women pursue a broad range of political, social justice, and environmental issues impacting children's health, education, and welfare. I believe a political revival in the PTA is occurring and that it can be found in local conversations between parents who are concerned about such issues as academic censorship, climate change, sexual assault and school reporting, gun violence, and the rights of LGBT students.

For instance, in Jefferson County, Colorado, local PTA members took on the local school board between 2014 and 2016 in an effort to protect school curriculum from

mentorship. On 18 September 2014, the new conservative-majority school board, backed by the Koch brothers, proposed a review of the AP History curriculum to ensure that students learned the “benefits of the free enterprise system, respect for authority and respect for individual rights.” The board issued a statement recommending that all history curriculum should be free of narratives “condon[ing] social strife, or disregard of the law.” Almost immediately, the PTA joined by concerned teachers and students of Jefferson County Public Schools spoke out. The American Historical Association even weighed in on the local school board decision and condemned its proposals.

Michelle Patterson, president of the Jefferson County PTA board (JeffCo PTA), “waded right into the muck” of the curriculum controversy. After declaring the school board’s move an effort to “whitewash” American history, Patterson and her PTA board members were harassed and threatened by community members and out-of-state trolls. Undeterred, the PTA packed school board meetings, wrote op-eds, called into local radio and news stations, held community hearings, coordinated public protests including student and teacher walkouts. After initially failing to stop the board from revising the curriculum, JeffCo PTA president saw students and her fellow parents regroup and “planning their next steps” against the school board. “I saw the tears in their eyes. Then I saw their resolve,” she wrote.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Lane, “What the AP U.S. History Fight in Colorado is Really About,” *PostPartisan* Blog, *Washington Post*, November 6, 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/11/06/what-the-ap-u-s-history-fight-in-colorado-is-really-about/?utm\\_term=.47697ab0f459](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2014/11/06/what-the-ap-u-s-history-fight-in-colorado-is-really-about/?utm_term=.47697ab0f459); James Grossman, Letter to Ken Witt, President of the Jefferson County Board of Education, October 1, 2014; and, Michelle Patterson, “Heading the PTA, and Challenging the School Board in Colorado,” *Motherlode* blog, *New York Times*, October 8, 2014, <https://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/10/08/heading-the-pta-and-challenging-the-school-board-in-colorado/>. James Grossman’s letter to the JeffCo school board was sent on October 1, 2014 and later published in *AHA Today* and circulated on the association’s social media platforms. For a copy of the “letter of concern” see James Grossman, “Letter to the Board of Education for Jefferson County Colorado Public Schools,” American Historical Association, *AHA Today*, October 2, 2014, <http://blog.historians.org/2014/10/letter-board-education-jefferson-county-colorado-public-schools/>. Initially *Motherlode* started as a parenting blog and a “play on words,” however, in March 2016 the

Outside of Jefferson County, ultraconservative pundits could not refrain from weighing in on the school curriculum controversy. Among the more fringe, conservative media outlets, *The New American*, a subsidiary of the John Birch Society's American Opinion Publishing company, turned its focus on Jefferson County and its PTA. *The New American*, the quintessential conservative bully pulpit warned its readers of "teacher indoctrination" at all levels of education and described how history teachers "brainwashed" students with "environmental, anti-war, anti-capitalist, and anti-parent propaganda." Essayist Walter E. Williams, a professor of economics at George Mason University, took a page straight from the John Birch Society's 1960s playbook. He urged parents to "show up enmasse" at PTA meetings, urged students to "secretly record and expose academic misconduct by teachers," and told parents to examine textbooks, lesson plans, and teachers for any sign of "anti-American" propaganda.<sup>6</sup> American political historian Rick Perlstein, also commenting on the curriculum controversy, described the Republican Party's "impassioned outpouring" as part of the larger "cult of optimism in education." Perlstein argued: "In part, the controversy evinces the right-wing antipathy to federal dictates that undercut local control, especially local control of education."<sup>7</sup>

The controversy over the AP History curriculum and JeffCo PTA's involvement in blocking censorship, demonstrates the PTA's century-long commitment to federal education

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*New York Times* changed the blog's name to *Well Family* launching a more inclusive and diverse recognizing "every possible variation" of the modern family. See K.J. Dell'Antonia, "Well Family: A New Name and New Home for Motherlode," *Well Family* Blog, *New York Times*, March 3, 2016, <https://parenting.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/03/03/well-family-a-new-name-and-new-home-for-motherlode/>.

<sup>6</sup> Walter E. Williams, "Teacher Indoctrination," *The New American*, October 8, 2014, <https://www.thenewamerican.com/reviews/opinion/item/19267-teacher-indoctrination>.

<sup>7</sup> Rick Perlstein, "The Powerlessness of Positive Thinking," *In These Times*, November 3, 2014, [http://inthesetimes.com/article/17309/the\\_powerlessness\\_of\\_positive\\_thinking](http://inthesetimes.com/article/17309/the_powerlessness_of_positive_thinking).

initiatives and parents' civic engagement. In early October 2015, the Jefferson County school board voted 3-2 to remove the JeffCo PTA council members from the school board. As the conservative-majority school board ended its 60-year partnership between the JeffCo PTA, Patterson, now the former JeffCo PTA president, took to social media calling out the school board and its president for damaging and whitewashing history. "Recall these clowns," Patterson tweeted. The JeffCo PTA, loyal to its former president, retweeted Patterson's demand and began efforts to recall the conservative school board members. The PTA organized voter drives and town hall meetings in an effort to reseal PTA members on the school board. By 2 November 2015, the PTA succeeded in its mission. Jefferson county residents voted out the three conservative members by 28-points.<sup>8</sup>

During the same year, the California PTA passed the first state PTA resolution declaring climate change a threat to children and making it a priority-action issue not only for California's PTAs but for the entire California public school system. State PTA leaders reached out to the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) to draft the California's climate change policy and to help create educational materials for local PTAs. After

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<sup>8</sup> For the JeffCo PTA's response to the removal of the PTA members from the District Accountability Committee see Angela Geier, president of the Jefferson County Council PTA, "Your Voice: School Board Majority Removes JeffCo PTA from District Accountability Committee," online community blog, *YourHub, Denver (CO) Post*, October 6, 2015, <http://yourhub.denverpost.com/blog/2015/10/your-voice-school-board-majority-removes-jeffco-pta-from-district-accountability-committee/113290/#comment-1244572>. The JeffCo PTA encouraged high voter turnout through voter-drive campaigns, distribution of ballot and polling place information, as well as holding candidate forums. For the former JeffCo PTA President's response to the school board's 3 September vote see Michele Patterson, Twitter Posts, 3 September 2016, 8:56pm, <http://twitter.com/mmpcatt>. For JeffCo PTA efforts towards recalling the board members see JeffCo Council PTA, Twitter Posts, September 19, 2015, 7:40am; September 29, 2015, 1:16am; September 30, 2015, 2:05pm; October 14, 2015, 12:12am; October 31, 2015, 11:32am; November 2, 2015, 6:34am; and November 2, 2015, 8:55pm, <https://twitter.com/JeffcoPTA>. Yesenia Robles and John Aquilar, "JeffCo Voters Choose Recall; Incumbents Losing in DougCo School Race," online edition, *Denver (CO) Post*, November 3, 2015, <http://www.denverpost.com/2015/11/03/jeffco-voters-choose-recall-incumbents-losing-in-dougco-school-race/>.

reviewing proposal issued by the California PTA the NCSE policy director remarked, “People tend to blow off the PTA . . . But if the PTA supports something, it is hard for politicians and community leaders to go against it. It would mean going against the wishes of the majority of the parents in their state or district.”<sup>9</sup> In 2016, the California PTA successfully lobbied the National PTA to adopt its environmental policy and begin the process of introducing it to other state and local PTAs for adoption.<sup>10</sup> Environmentally-conscious PTA members are diving into deep, controversial waters and taking on climate-deniers in the schools and on a national stage and they are relying on their broad geographic base to persuade local, state, and national public officials to support the PTA’s recommendations.

Today’s PTA is the PTA it has always been. Between 1897 and 1924, PTA women found motherhood a useful mobilizing category for American women. Since then, PTA women have exercised political action on matters of concern related to their family, their neighborhood, and their nation. The PTA is also a globally-connected network of parents, teachers, students, aunts, uncles, school administrators, legislators, and allies. Over its lifetime, its female members have achieved great advances in children’s health, welfare, and education services. It has also survived extraordinary losses at its base after pursuing more liberal and progressive agendas for children’s benefit. If the current political climate is any indication, we are crossing a bridge into an era of American history where we desperately need engaged citizens. Women’s relentless activism in the PTA may just offer us the

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<sup>9</sup> Katherine Bagley, “Climate Change Lands on Agenda of the PTA,” *Inside Climate News*, May 19, 2015, <https://insideclimatenews.org/news/19052015/climate-change-lands-agenda-pta>.

<sup>10</sup> Bagley, “Climate Change Lands on Agenda of the PTA,”; and, National PTA Position Statement, “Environmental Health, Remediation, Sustainability and Climate Change,” National PTA Position Statement, Adopted November 2003, Amended November 2016, <http://www.pta.org/>.



framework to building national coalitions that reignite grassroots activism and strengthen alliances to expand and protect the democratic freedoms and rights of all our children.

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