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Article

## ‘A women’s war against war: The socialist-feminist pacifism of *Four Lights: An Adventure in Internationalism*’

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### Abstract

The New York City Women’s Peace Party (NYC-WPP) published the first issue of *Four Lights: An Adventure in Internationalism* on 27 January 1917. The inaugural issue opened with the founders’ mission to ‘voice the young, uncompromising woman’s peace movement in America’ and declared the publication’s anti-war and anti-militarist position to be ‘daring and immediate’. In the short span of the nine months between January and October that *Four Lights* issued fortnightly numbers, its editors staked and held onto the staunch anti-war stance and *Four Lights* braided pacifism together with feminism. Their entwined anti-capitalist perspectives on gender, labour, class and race can be understood as anticipating intersectional feminism. Not nearly as well known as *The Woman Citizen*, *The Suffragist* and other publications of the women’s national suffrage and Progressive presses, *Four Lights* offers a fascinating glimpse into the thinking of the most ardent pacifists of the 1910s. This study of *Four Lights* illuminates this history and situates the journal’s critical place in the history of radical American periodicals.

**Keywords:** socialism; feminism; pacifism; internationalism; print culture

Your publication known as the 'Four Lights' is a foolish, dangerous, unthinking and un-American and disreputable paper. It ought not be tolerated in any self-respecting community. Kindly see that my name is taken off your mailing list.

–Charles M. Sheafe, Jr.

I keep 'Four Lights' on file as a rare spiritual voice in these militarist days.<sup>1</sup>

–Anna Strunsky Walling

The New York City Woman's Peace Party (NYC-WPP) published *Four Lights: An Adventure in Internationalism* for ten months in 1917, the year that the U.S entered the Great War in Europe. The passionate and polarised responses to the periodical, such as those quoted above, attest to *Four Lights's* radicalism, given the definition of 'radical' as an extreme political position that demands fundamental revision of existing social, economic and political structures.<sup>2</sup> The editors proudly published both letters, side by side. The first appears as a badge of honour, to demonstrate just how far the journal's anti-war position differed from the acceptable attitudes of the time and confirms their willingness to securely aver this position even in the face of being labelled 'dangerous' and 'un-American'. To place this letter in stark relief, the editors also include the words of well-known anti-war Socialist novelist and journalist Anna Strunsky Walling. Strunsky Walling's endorsement of the periodical as 'a rare spiritual voice' and her acknowledgment of the militarism of the moment authorise *Four Lights* and makes it legible to socialist and feminist readers.

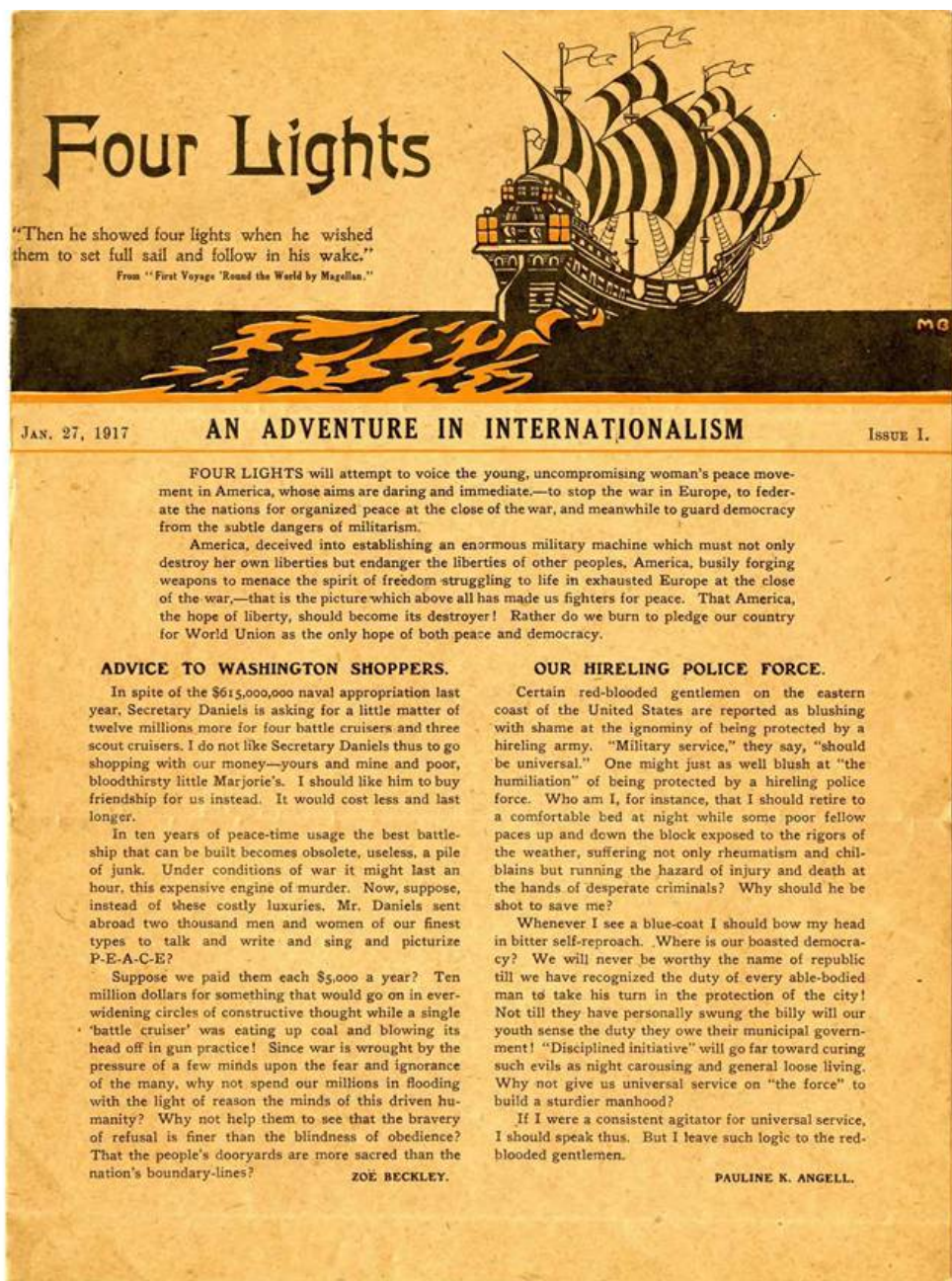
To describe *Four Lights* as feminist is not to say that the publication focused solely on women's rights or women's issues. Rather, *Four Lights* contributed to debates on a range of topics related to the war, always from a distinctly feminist perspective. Feminist periodicals of this era were central to the formation of a 'feminist public sphere', as Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap and Leila Ryan argue.<sup>3</sup> Due to women's exclusion from the political realm, this sphere appeared later than the bourgeois public sphere as theorised by Jürgen Habermas. The full force of this feminist public sphere was deployed after the turn of the twentieth century, yet its complexity has only begun to be studied by historians, who have focused mostly on suffrage publications.<sup>4</sup> As such, the dominant narrative about first wave feminism has maintained a homogenous image of women advocating for the vote, often invoking racist and nativist rhetoric regarding the qualifications for citizenship and indifferent to the struggles of the working class. Though *Four Lights* did not boast as wide a circulation as suffrage journals and did not have their longevity, it was published in a crucial year for feminism, pacifism and socialism. Studying this alternative periodical provides us with an understanding of the heterogeneity of women's voices during this time and reveals the commitments of a small but ardent group of socialist–feminists whose approach to class and race was more nuanced and complex than that found in suffrage periodicals alone.

The *Four Lights* editors assessed the privations of the wartime economy and the impact of violence and destruction on men, women and families. Further, they were attentive to the disparities of these effects on immigrants and people of colour versus native-born white elites. They covered a range of topics related to the war, including the impact of food shortages, critiques of the changes in labour law for wartime industries, war's effects on working-class roles in industrial and domestic labour, exposition of the differing impact of war on the wealthy vs. the working class and impugment of the inefficacy of women's voluntary war relief work. Throughout, the editors not only addressed gender, social class and race as implicitly intertwined, but further viewed all topics through a feminist, pacifist, anti-capitalist lens. From our contemporary vantage point, we might view the *Four Lights* approach to pacifism as a nascent form of intersectional feminism, though this terminology was not in use during the period.

*Four Lights: An Adventure in Internationalism* issued its first number on 27 January 1917 and continued to publish bi-weekly until its shuttering in November under the Espionage Act.<sup>5</sup> The masthead announces the editors' ambition to have the U.S. lead the way in forming a lasting international peace that will circumnavigate the globe, with a quote from the *First Voyage Round the World* by Magellan: 'Then he showed four lights when he wished them to set full sail and follow in his wake' (Figure 1).<sup>6</sup> The inaugural issue's editorial mission statement set the stakes for the editors' socialist–feminist, anti-nationalist pacifist stance:

FOUR LIGHTS will attempt to voice the young, uncompromising woman's peace movement in America, whose aims are daring and immediate – stop the war in Europe, to federate the nations for organized peace at the close of the war, and meanwhile guard democracy from the subtle dangers of militarism.

America, deceived into establishing an enormous military machine which must not only destroy her own liberties but endanger the liberties of other peoples, America, busily forging weapons to menace the spirit of freedom struggling to life in exhausted Europe at the close of the war – that is the picture which above all has made us fighters for peace. That America, the hope of liberty, should become its destroyer! Rather do we burn to pledge our country for World Union as the only hope of both peace and democracy.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1** Cover of the first issue of *Four Lights*, 27 January 1917. Courtesy of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection.

In identifying themselves as the voice of the ‘young, uncompromising woman’s peace movement in America’, the editors signalled their allegiance to the tenets of peace and internationalism established at the Women’s Peace Conference at The Hague in 1915, which advocated peaceful solutions to international conflict and universal suffrage for women.<sup>8</sup> Through such transatlantic affiliations, the magazine’s editors learned of the strategies of British suffragists that favoured militancy and direct action.<sup>9</sup> These women utilised print as a vehicle to ‘set full sail’ in uncharted waters, as they ‘burned’ to promote socialist internationalism as the path to lasting peace.

The *Four Lights* editors expressed their radicalism not only in the periodical’s editorial position; they imbued their production values with it as well. The journal utilised an unusual editorial method, in that each issue was edited by different women – two or three working together. They announced this choice in the first issue as a deliberate counter to the commercial pressures of the mainstream press, which relied on the ‘jewel of consistency’ of voice. By contrast, the editors stated, ‘each fortnightly issue will express the internationalist hopes of a new Board of [two or] three volunteer editors’ and they urged readers who do not like a given issue to ‘be sure to get the next!’, embracing the diversity of opinions that this rotational method would ensure.<sup>10</sup> Brief in length (only four pages – one bi-folded sheet of paper), the publication was free of advertising. The editors volunteered their time and *Four Lights* subsisted through donations, ranging from small amounts up to several hundred dollars, solicited by the staff from supportive readers. Although there was a subscription basis for the magazine, it did not cover the production costs. Additionally, the staff eagerly mailed multiple copies gratis to those who requested it for their own distribution, as well as sending it to libraries, newspapers, universities, members of Congress and all paid members of the NYC-WPP.<sup>11</sup> The issues featured a mix of editorials, poetry, fiction, political cartoons and occasionally photographs, some reprinted from elsewhere and others original to the publication.

*Four Lights* regularly cited pro-war news items that had appeared elsewhere accompanied by sharp, often sardonic critiques through a headline, caption or other commentary that exposed the ludicrous nature of the original piece. For example, on 8 September 1917 the *Evening Telegram* reported on the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy’s claim that it had found ways to ‘turn what might have been an economic loss into an economic asset’ for war veterans, as demonstrated by ‘one man who had neither arms nor legs and who was being taught water painting and had learned to do very fair work by holding the brush in his teeth’. Without any other commentary, the *Four Lights* editors simply title this piece ‘Whose Boy Will It be?’, challenging mothers to assess whether this would be an acceptable outcome for their own sons.

*Four Lights* trumpeted the platforms of the NYC-WPP, which was a branch of the national Woman’s Peace Party (WPP). Founded in 1915, the national party was the umbrella organization over a number of local branches that spanned the United States from Massachusetts to California. The NYC-WPP was singular in producing a serial publication; neither the national party, nor any other branches, published a regular journal. Most branches operated by issuing press releases, hosting speakers’ bureaus, encouraging their members to write to elected officials and other methods of advocacy. The NYC-WPP carried out similar activities, but also added to their repertoire more confrontational approaches, such as a drive that encouraged their members to interrupt movie screenings at popular cinemas by standing up and loudly reading antiwar speeches.<sup>12</sup>

The NYC-WPP had been regarded from the start as the most radical branch of the WPP. Its director was the prominent socialist peace activist Crystal Eastman, who by 1914 was devoting most of her energy to peace activism. In addition to playing the central role in the NYC-WPP, she was also the secretary of the American Union Against Militarism.<sup>13</sup> Crystal’s brother Max Eastman edited the *Masses*, an influential socialist journal of politics and culture; both had an ongoing involvement with the radical press in this era. In addition to Crystal Eastman, the NYC-WPP branch counted among its membership many women from the bohemian artistic and intellectual Greenwich Village-based group Heterodoxy, including Mabel Dodge Luhan, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Jessie Ashley, Katharine Anthony and others. These women hailed from elite backgrounds – as evidenced by their ability to devote so much of their time to unpaid activism – but they aspired to create cross-class alliances through their publications. As Christine Stansell writes, these bohemians were infatuated with the immigrant working-class active in labour politics in New



York City during this period.<sup>14</sup>

Significant overlaps in membership existed between the WPP, suffragists and Progressive reformers. The WPP and the woman's suffrage movements both drew on the Progressive ideology of women as society's housekeepers. At the turn of the century and continuing into the 1910s, American women's movements argued against war from a distinctly female perspective that connected suffrage and citizenship. Because women birth soldiers, it was argued, their maternal instincts and sentiments position them uniquely to guard against violence and loss of life; via the vote, women would be able to keep the country out of wars. Suffragists and Progressive reformers utilised print culture to disseminate these perspectives.

Along with suffrage publications, *Four Lights* was part of a vibrant radical press that had matured in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The diverse yet sometimes overlapping groups seeking social and political change used their presses to disseminate their positions and gain support for their causes. The era gave rise to significant 'print activism', a term that enables us to understand the centrality of media as a form through which activists 'spread their opinions, elicited support, [and] created networks among like-minded individuals', as I have argued elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Enabled by the development of less expensive printing technologies and expanded rail networks for distribution, the rise of small leftist publications gave voice to a particularly radical decade in U.S. history. Mass migrations of immigrants from outside the country as well as native-born whites and African Americans from rural areas to American cities filled the ranks of industrial labour. Russian Jewish, Italian and other European immigrants brought with them a strong history of radical politics and direct action.<sup>16</sup> They worked alongside and inspired their native-born colleagues to oppose the ill effects of industrial labour. Meanwhile, Progressive reformers increasingly turned their attention to the welfare of immigrants and the working class. The push for women's suffrage, which had taken a back seat in the nineteenth century to the cause of abolition, gained steam in this last decade prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment.

The diverse yet sometimes overlapping groups seeking social and political change used their presses to state their positions and gain support for their causes. At the start of the Great War in Europe in 1914, a number of these journals regularly devoted their pages to pacifism, including publications put out by suffragists, advocates of social welfare, socialists and the African American press. But as the decade wore on and U.S. intervention appeared to be on the horizon, many who had earlier professed pacifism shifted to support U.S. involvement. Pacifism in the abstract gave way to the particularities of *this* war. Various groups reconciled their basic belief in pacifism with the immediate need to support Wilson's call to 'make the world safe for democracy' by identifying the exceptionality of the Great War. Further, the suffrage movement as a whole became concerned that continuing to hold on to an anti-war position would negatively affect the cause of suffrage by fulfilling the anti-suffrage argument that women, who do not fight in wars, could not understand the nuances and imperatives of the current political moment. Suffragists saw in women's wartime roles a chance to positively demonstrate their capacity for citizenship, a position from which they argued for their right to the vote. In keeping with this position, the suffrage presses shifted their rhetoric and by early 1917 regularly touted women's contributions to the war effort as demonstrative of their patriotism. The national WPP, many of whom were also active in the suffrage movement, issued statements supporting women's engagement in war relief work and agreeing not to hinder the war effort in any way.

By contrast, *Four Lights* continued to express the NYC-WPP's firm pacifism, drawing negative attention publicly and within the WPP. The leader of the National League for Woman's Service was quoted in the *New York Times* questioning the effects of the work of the NYC-WPP: 'Is this a deliberate plan on the part of women calling themselves Americans to assist the Germans...? Is this pacifism – or is it treason? It certainly is a disgrace to American womanhood.'<sup>17</sup> Within the party, WPP historian Blanche Cook describes *Four Lights* as 'the single most abrasive source of antagonism' between the NYC-WPP and the national office, the latter describing the NYC-WPP as 'extreme' and 'dangerous'.<sup>18</sup> The divide between the NYC-WPP and the national WPP was so extreme that for a time, the national Party even considered changing its name as a means to distance itself from the NYC branch. Some New York City-based members counted themselves as members of the national Party only. And after the NYC-WPP staged a 'War against War' exhibition that ridiculed munitions workers and represented militarists in the

form of a massive papier-mâché dinosaur, a few branch members resigned, resulting in an even more unified radical anti-war stance among those who remained. It was this group that published *Four Lights*.<sup>19</sup>

*Four Lights* was thus at odds with the suffrage and social reform press which, by spring and summer 1917, supported the war effort. Journals including *The Woman Citizen*, *The Suffragist* and *The Survey* all enlisted women's frugality in relation to the food economy and thrift in general; meanwhile, *Four Lights* mocked such efforts. In the 14 July 1917 issue, Elisabeth Irwin published a piece titled 'Hoover, How Can you?' that addresses Herbert Hoover's work as head of the U.S. Food Administration, an agency formed in 1917 to respond to wartime food shortages. The Administration advocated programs including 'Meatless Mondays' and the 'Clean Plate Club'. Irwin derides Hoover's call to housewives to eliminate waste in household food consumption while the food industry continues to destroy productive fields in order to maintain high prices. The women who have acquiesced to Hoover's call and those who don't comprehend the paradox at hand draw Irwin's ire:

Evidently the women of the country are of two minds on the subject of food economy. For lack of more dignified designations they might be called the 'Hoover Helpers' and the 'Hoover Hooters' – the first being those who accept their position beside the garbage cans as they have always accepted what God and man has put upon them to endure; – the second, those who fail to see the crux of the food situation in the gospel of the clean plate, while bushels of peas and rows of lettuce are being plowed under because their price is too low to satisfy the food speculators.

Ultimately, Irwin concludes, 'the present price of food would seem to be ample insurance against wanton waste. To the women whose families have barely enough to eat, let alone waste, Mr. Hoover's admonitions are little short of satire'.

Jane Addams had recently invited members of the WPP to join her in volunteering for Hoover's Food Administration.<sup>20</sup> To deride the work of the Administration would thus have been seen as a rebuke against Addams and the national party's acquiescence to participation in war relief work of any kind – it was just these types of volleys that were the source of friction between the national WPP and the New York City branch. Indeed, the NYC-WPP had recently passed a resolution denouncing the actions of WPP members 'in placing at the disposal of the Government the entire membership of the party to render service in case of war' and stating their 'absolute' opposition to any actions in support of the government that would 'increase the efficiency of the war machine'.<sup>21</sup> *Four Lights* enunciated the NYC-WPP opposition to engagement in any labour or services rendered in support of the war effort, through merciless scorn and indignation that Hoover – and by extension, the government and the WPP – could be indifferent to the ways that working-class homemakers already were stretching meagre resources in response to high wartime pricing.

With similar sarcasm to the Irwin piece, the editors of the same issue reply to a short item quoting Dr. Lucius P. Brown, the Director of Food and Drugs of the U.S. Department of Health. The *Four Lights* editors lambast Brown's claims that the 'representative' example of a half day's food waste found in the garbage of a sixty-family apartment building was 'ten loaves of bread and a large assortment of buns, toast and waffles, five pounds of meat, three pounds of soup meat, four lamb chops, two heads of lettuce and loose lettuce leaves, six bundles of asparagus with the tops cut off, three pounds of cake and one pound of cereal'. Lampooning the unlikelihood of such a cache, the editors retitile Brown's quotation, 'We'd Like the Address of this Garbage Bucket, Please.'

Food shortages were a central topic of discussion during the war. In contrast to the ways that *Four Lights* pointed out the ironies of food scarcity in the face of an agricultural economy that continued, during wartime, to profit from price speculation, as well as exposing the speciousness of claims of waste, the social welfare and suffrage presses published recipes and tips on how to make scarce food rations stretch. The *Four Lights* approach was more akin to expected socialist tropes about war's impact on the availability of food domestically, but with particular attention to the ways that working-class mothers bear the brunt of this challenge.

In this way *Four Lights* supported working-class women, who had long been accustomed to thrift and frugality, in wartime and otherwise. It derided patronizing elites who offered lessons in resource

management and also poked fun at the rich for their attempts to ‘do without’. A short piece from the 14 July 1917 issue titled ‘What Sacrifices Women Do Make!’ lists the names of ‘prominent women’ who have announced their intention to ‘cut their midday meals to two courses and their evening meals to three’. Another item on the same page, titled ‘The Patient Rich’, describes the effects on the increased cost of living on the rich as well as the poor. While ‘onions advanced in price 180 per cent and potatoes 113 percent. . . the advance in objects of art appears to have been yet greater’. The piece goes on to report that Henry C. Frick paid \$250,000 for a single Van Dyke painting in February 1917, whereas in January he had paid \$200,000 for four Boucher paintings.

By the summer of 1917, *Four Lights* was one among an extremely limited number of publications that continued to hold fast to their anti-war position and were willing to be openly critical of the war. Significantly, in addition to *Four Lights* these included two other New York City-based publications, the *Masses* and the African American socialist publication the *Messenger*, perhaps reflecting the leftist politics of that urban milieu.<sup>22</sup> By year’s end, all three publications were censored under the Espionage Act of 1917.<sup>23</sup> Incorporating anti-capitalist ideologies, these publications mocked the nationalist impulses that attended war’s rhetoric, critiqued militarism as an evil by-product of capitalism and exposed the ways the wartime economy would disproportionately affect the working class, including immigrants and people of colour.

*Four Lights* regularly expressed concern over the diminishment of hard-won labour rights during wartime – for all workers. By illuminating industry’s efforts to relax labour law once the U.S. had entered the war, the editors demonstrated the ways in which war was motivated by profit and would result in the continued degradation of working-class labour. A short piece in the 19 May 1917 issue quotes John Dewey, who writes of recent bills put forward in New York State that would allow the relaxation of laws protecting workers as well as those enforcing compulsory education for children of farmers during war emergencies. Dewey describes these bills as ‘ill-timed and ill-advised’ and goes on to say ‘the cause of extreme pacifists who hold that all war is the direct product of private greed would be strengthened more by the passage of [this] bill than by anything that the pacifists themselves could ever accomplish’. Dewey is a surprising choice for *Four Lights* to quote. While he had generally advocated pacifism before the war, by spring of 1917 he had come to support U.S. involvement in this war. Still, Dewey did laud the tenets of internationalism, which he described as a ‘higher strategy’ than most pacifist arguments that only decried war on broad principle but did not offer real solutions to avoiding conflicts between nations.<sup>24</sup> In fact, it is reasonable to surmise that the NYC-WPP activists were among those referred to in his quote as ‘extreme pacifists’ and therefore the editors might have been proud to be labelled this way by an intellectual with a high public profile.

Dewey’s quote and its inclusion in *Four Lights* can be compared to several articles published in the social welfare journal *The Survey* on the same topic of eased labour law. In a piece titled ‘Women Munitions Workers and Their Pay’ published in *The Survey* on 10 March 1917, the author cites movements in France to guarantee equal pay for women ‘everywhere they may be called to take the places of men’ and urges its American readers to demand the same. Similarly, a *Survey* article in the 19 May 1917 issue titled ‘Women and War Work’ decries the ‘efforts of state legislatures to break down labour laws and the ignorance of people who confuse patriotism with lengthened hours of factory work which exhaust and hamper efficiency’.<sup>25</sup> Implicit in this quotation is the idea that factory work *could* be an avenue to demonstrate patriotism, so long as adherence to extant labour laws would be guaranteed. *Four Lights* diverged from this approach, as its editors would not see any form of labour, war work or otherwise, as a path to demonstrate patriotism.

*Four Lights* also addressed the ramifications of associating labour with patriotism and nationalism on domestic race relations. While war rhetoric professed the need to make the world safe for democracy, the government was indifferent to domestic racially motivated violence resulting from the wartime economic conditions. In May and July of 1917, race riots erupted in East St. Louis, leading to the deaths of over 40 African Americans and excessive property damage. White labourers, fearful of wage insecurity following the significant migration of blacks to Missouri in search of wartime jobs, set fire to African-American properties, killing scores of people and destroying their homes. In the 25 August 1917

issue reported on the story of Narcis Gurley, an African-American woman who suffered burns while she stayed in her blazing home and excoriated the government for its lack of action taken against the perpetrators. The piece is accompanied by a photo of Gurley, a reprinted photograph from the *Crisis*, the official journal of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Responding to the travesty, the editors decried the hypocrisy of declaring a war 'against a government that was without principle or compassion' owing to the use of submarine warfare, while '[t]hese American Negroes have died under more horrible conditions than any non-combatants who were sunk by German submarines. But to our President their death does not merit consideration'. Meanwhile, the lesson for American soldiers is that they may 'outdo Belgium [sic] atrocities without rebuke' if directed against those of another race.

One of the editors of this issue was Mary Ovington White, co-founder of the NAACP. Founded in 1909 by White along with W.E.B. Dubois and Moorefield Storey, the association's mission was to be a biracial organization advocating for the rights of African Americans. The three founders believed that anti-racism, anti-imperialism and pacifism were intricately linked. Ovington White was a suffragist and also a journalist. Earlier she had studied and written about the challenges faced by African Americans living in New York City; this work had led her to join the Socialist Party. She was part of a group of socialists who believed that race and class must be understood together and she professed these opinions regularly in a range of New York-based radical journals including *The Messenger*, the *Masses* and *The New York Call*.<sup>26</sup> Ovington White's engagement with all of these publications demonstrates the ways that, through print culture, the vectors of gender, race and class could intersect through these radical journals' overlapping missions. In *Four Lights*, these connections came to the fore in questions about labour.

Discussion of war's negative consequences on labourers and labour conditions during wartime was an ongoing theme throughout the 10-month run of the journal. But even among these, the 14 July 1917 issue in particular is almost entirely devoted to women's relationship to wartime labour. Titled 'The Sister Susie Number' the issue's editors, Mary Alden Hopkins and Elisabeth Irwin, took an even more consistently sarcastic and angry tone than other editors – in fact, the two pieces cited above about food shortages also appear in this issue. Militantly anti-war, the back cover includes an inset box editorializing on the question 'Why Women Don't Fight':

WHAT did American women win the Revolutionary War?

The right of American men to chose [sic] their government.

WHAT did American women win in the War of 1812?

The right of men to trade as they chose [sic].

WHAT did American women win in the Civil War?

The right of Negro men to vote.<sup>27</sup>

WHAT are American women going to win in the Great War?

Child labour, long hours, scant food, high prices, lowered standard of living, loss of constitutional guarantees of freedom, martial law, syphilis, infant mortality, bereavement and desolation.

The last stanza places in high relief the objectives of not only the suffrage movement but the national WPP as well; in contrast to the belief that the war would result in increased rights for women, the ills listed detail a society indifferent to women's lived experiences.

For some readers, this issue went too far in its sarcasm. One reader wrote in expressing concern that 'The Sister Susie Number' was 'flippant and casual' on what were otherwise very serious topics and suggested that the policy of using rotating editors be immediately discontinued so that the publication



could ensure a more consistent voice. The managing editor responded directly to this reader in a reassuring way, confirming that many readers found the rotation of editors to be the ‘charm’ of *Four Lights* and acknowledging the ideological importance of *Four Lights* as a ‘cooperative enterprise’ that provides readers with ‘a varying point of view’.<sup>28</sup>

‘The Sister Susie Number’ addresses the two ways that women’s labour was enlisted in support of the war effort: as replacement labour for the men currently serving in the military and through war relief work. While women had engaged in factory labour since the start of industrialization, the war brought expanded opportunities for women, not only in armaments manufacture but also in an array of industries that had previously been limited to men. *Four Lights* exposed the fallacy that wartime roles for women would bring them standing (and pay) equal to that of men, demonstrating the ways that the disparities in the treatment of women workers before the war would continue in wartime production. A short piece from The Sister Susie Number recounts the story of an employer from Pennsylvania who offered to pay a prize of three dollars to the man who could grow the most potatoes in a ploughed over baseball field. The description is accompanied by the following exchange:

‘Can the women help?’ asked one of the wives anxiously.

‘Certainly,’ answered the speaker. ‘They can kill potato bugs.’

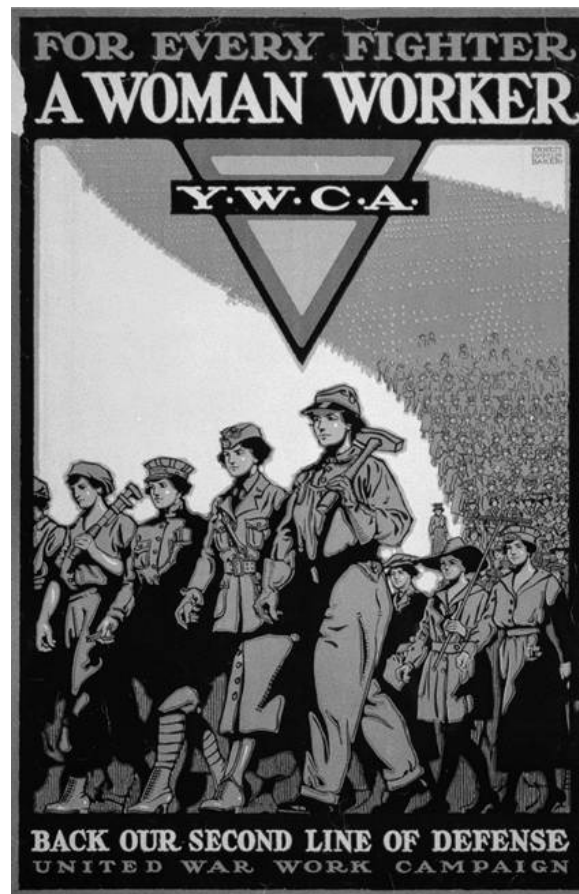
This wife is eager to get on board with war relief work, but in response, the employer assigns the women a secondary role and implies that the meagre prize will not be available to them.

Another short item from this issue derides women and children’s home work. During this time of industrialization, women were often given the raw materials for production, which they took into their homes, then returned the completed goods. Unionists frowned on this labour practice, as it was often underpaid and was difficult to regulate. Social reformers also criticised home work as it often involved children and was thought to take a mother’s attention away from the maintenance of the home. The *Four Lights* piece further demonstrates how, by evoking patriotism, employers are circumventing union-based production and protections. The piece captions a photo by social reform documentarian Lewis W. Hine (Figure 2). The image shows a smiling woman and four children assembling small items at a table, an additional baby in the woman’s arms. The accompanying text describes the woman and children as ‘involuntary scabettes of war’. The group is producing lapel pins featuring the U.S. flag. We are told that they are paid three cents for every 144 pins produced. ‘The earnings of all, including the mother, come to two dollars a week. The baby is a slacker.’ The extra-union status of this activity is indicated by the invocation of ‘scabs’ or strike-breakers, further implying that union workers would command higher wages for the same work.

Relief organizations such as the Red Cross, the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) and others enlisted women to take part in war relief work, regularly positing that women, who could not serve as soldiers, should nevertheless demonstrate their patriotism through war work. Print culture was employed for this call to arms, in periodicals as well as posters and other propaganda. A YWCA poster, for example, depicts an endless supply of women in various kinds of work garb (Figure 3). The title reads, ‘For every fighter a woman worker – Back our second line of defense.’ Though still invoking the secondary status of women’s contributions in relation to that of men, the poster nevertheless glorifies women’s war work.



**Figure 2** Lewis W. Hine. Published in *Four Lights: An Adventure in Internationalism*, 14 July 2017. Courtesy of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection.



**Figure 3** Ernest Hamlin Baker, 'For Every Fighter a Woman Worker', 1918. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

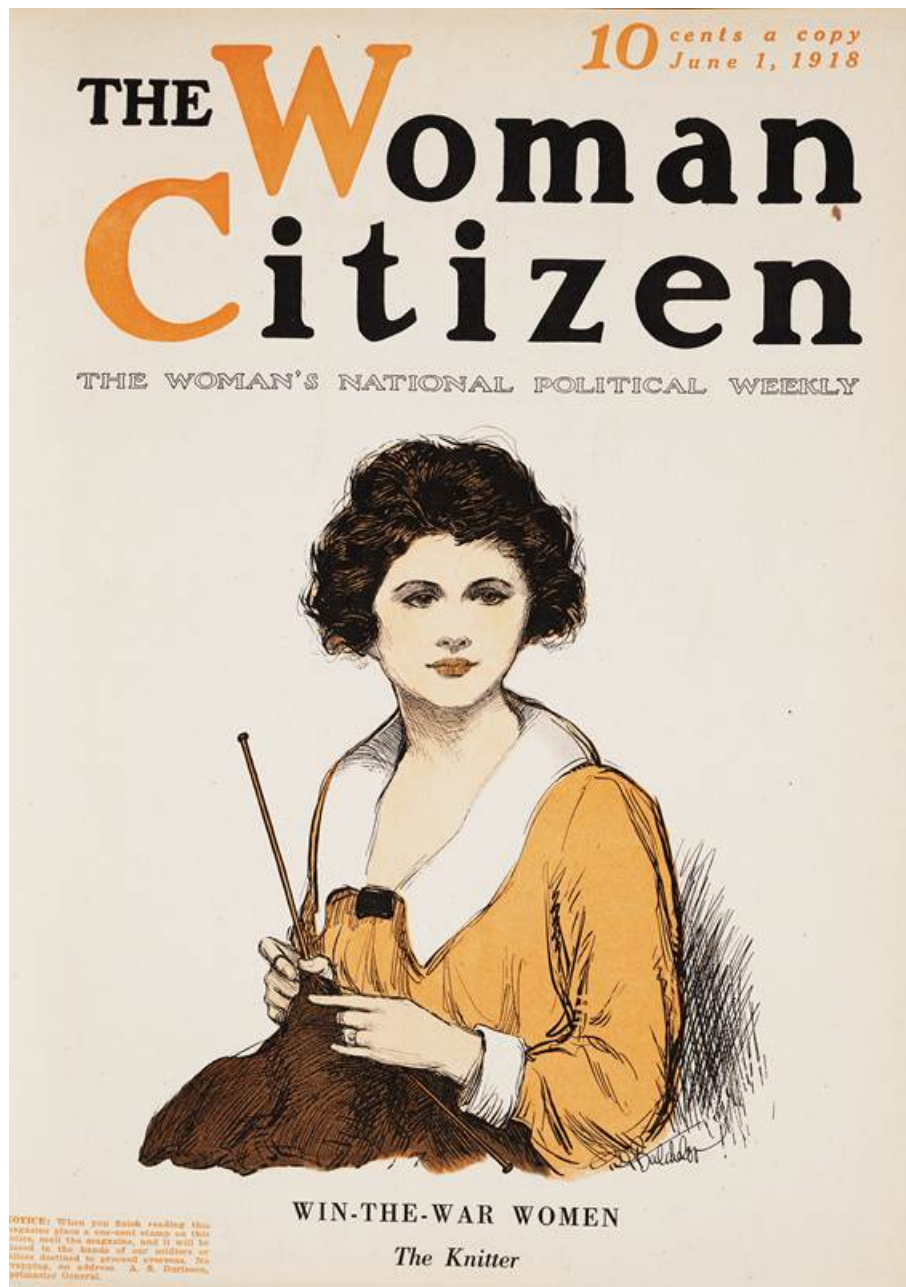
The suffrage press, too, represented women's war work with a proud and patriotic tone. Here, however, women's wartime roles are offered as transactional – the rhetoric in this movement insisted that in exchange for their devotion to their country, women should be granted the vote. The 8 September 1917 issue of *The Woman Citizen* includes a full-page advertisement from the National Woman Suffrage Publishing Company of a poster on offer titled 'As a War Measure'. The poster lists the myriad male roles that women are being asked to fill. In exchange for this 'service', women are asking one thing only from their country – enfranchisement. No mention is made of the conditions under which these women will labour in fulfilling men's roles. In every issue, beginning in the summer of 1917 and continuing through the war, items in *The Woman Citizen* recount with alacrity the excellent jobs women are doing in previously male-only industries.

The subtitle of the 14 July issue, 'The Sister Susie Number', references a popular song of the era, 'Sister Susie's Sewing Shirts for Soldiers'. Humorously alliterative, the song mocks Susie's efforts as being in vain, as the shirts she sews are too short and the soldiers to whom she sends her garments dislike wearing them: 'Some soldiers send epistles, say they'd sooner sleep in thistles than the saucy, soft, short shirts for soldiers sister Susie Sews.'<sup>29</sup> The mocking tone is gentle, but does open the question of the actual utility of women's relief efforts. *Four Lights*'s take on the topic is far less forgiving. The cover story, 'The 'Sister Susie' Peril', written by Katharine Anthony (partner of the issue's editor Elisabeth Irwin<sup>30</sup>) ridicules women in Britain who are knitting for the war effort, describing them as bourgeois women whose attempts at war assistance are not only superfluous, but also even potentially harmful to the labour market, due to the unpaid nature of such work. She belittles the 'peculiarly infantile form of patriotism' of these Sister Susies, who are urging others to knit socks for soldiers. As Anthony explains:

In spite of the common report that the sailors use the knitted garments for cleaning guns and swabbing decks; in spite of the statement of a British officer who openly advised the guardsmen for the good of their feet to refuse to wear home-knit socks; in spite of the fact that the government has ordered three and a half million pairs of socks; – the knitting goes merrily on.

Anthony continues, expressing hope that the 'productive capacity of this sentimental army of knitters' will not be high, lest it result in loss of work for 'the thousands of women massed in the garment factories and knitting mills'. By contrast, elsewhere in the suffrage and social reform presses, the efforts of women's knitting and sewing for the war are praised and encouraged. *The Woman Citizen*, for example, published 'An Open Letter to Women in War Time' on 13 April 1918 attesting to women's knitting as a source of somatic patriotism: 'We eat, sleep and drink the purposes of this war', write the editors, 'our hands are sentient with it as we knit and knit'. Later that year, the journal featured a knitter on one cover in its series of 'Win-the-War-Women' (Figure 4). 'The Knitter' is a beautiful, wholesome young woman who resembles the idealised 'girl on the magazine cover' of its day.

While the song lightly makes fun of Sister Susie and the suffrage press lauds her efforts, *Four Lights* exposes such work as at best unproductive and inefficient; at worst disruptive of women's industrial labour. Further, while suffragists and Progressives have turned their attention to women's war relief work, more serious concerns go unnoticed. A number of *Four Lights* items discussed above, including 'The Patient Rich', 'What Sacrifices Women Do Make' and 'We'd Like the Address of this Garbage Bucket, Please' all appear on the same page of the July 14 issue, grouped under a headline that reads 'Events that Pass While Susie Sews'.



**Figure 4** C. D. Batchelor, 'Win-the-War Women: The Knitter', *The Woman Citizen*, 1 June 1918.

The theme of women knitting for the war appears once more in *Four Lights*, in what would turn out to be its last issue of the year. The entire last page of the 20 October 1917 is devoted to a script for a scene titled 'Knitting Women'. The scene is 'A Fifth Avenue Tea-Shop' where two friends meet for afternoon tea. The women are designated as Mrs. Stuyvesant and Mrs. Rittenhouse – names that would have clearly signalled to readers their status as elites from prominent East Coast American families. The third character is the woman who serves them, identified as 'the maid'. In contrast to the patrons, the server is not given a name, perhaps to suggest that she is an 'everywoman' or typical working-class figure. The two patrons discuss the war and their efforts at knitting socks. Mrs. Stuyvesant recounts a 'fussy woman' at the Red Cross who criticised the (poor) quality of her work: 'She tried to make me rip out half my sock – said it would hurt their feet – and I give you my word I'd never worked so hard on anything in my life!' When the server brings them their order, Mrs. Rittenhouse asks her if she's knitting for the war, stating 'My husband cares so much about this great war for democracy we are in, my good girl, that he wants every woman, however low and humble her station, to knit!' When Mrs. Rittenhouse learns that the



server has not knit any socks, she exclaims: ‘Good Heavens! ... are you a German?’ The server responds proudly that she is ‘German and French and Russian and Arab and Turk and Serbian and American and Czech’. Appalled, Mrs. Rittenhouse interrupts, saying she will speak to the manager; however, it’s too late, the manager, having overheard the exchange, has already fired the server. The server explains as she walks out that the women will be in good hands, ‘I’m fired. But Effie [will assist you] – you’ll like Effie, she’s doing her bit. She knits all the time’.

More than simply humorous, this short piece assembles many of *Four Lights*’s critiques. In addition to mocking women’s war relief work, the wealthy tea-shop patrons are represented not only as patronizing of the working-class server but also as politically ignorant, in contrast to the more nuanced thinking of the server. Mrs. Rittenhouse’s husband has ‘just gone into yarns’ and so the Rittenhouses stand to profit financially from all the knitting – a critique that refers to the socialist refrain that industrialists profit from war industries. The wealthy women do not understand the aims of the war and are too simple to comprehend that the server intends her stated countries of origin to indicate her adherence to internationalism. Finally, the fact that her statements, as well as her refusal to knit, result in her losing her job indicates not only the rush to label pacifists anti-American but also the precariousness of working-class labour in war time. The humorous ‘Knitting Women’ skit was, perhaps, a fitting final note for *Four Lights* in 1917. Though light-hearted in some ways, the piece exemplifies the ways in which the journal’s editors critiqued war, understanding that American women’s differences of opinion about pacifism, intervention in World War I and wartime industry would be filtered through a woman’s socio-economic standing.

Throughout the year, the journal employed humour and sarcasm and held fast to its anti-war stance. While other groups, some of whom had earlier professed pacifism, pivoted within their print culture to support for the U.S. war effort, the NYC-WPP unwaveringly expressed in the pages of *Four Lights* a ‘pacifism based on a plurality of oppressions in American society [that] could not be easily absorbed – or dismissed – by interventionists’ arguments’, as Erica Kuhlman writes.<sup>31</sup> Though not easily absorbed, the voice was indeed quelled by the Espionage Act, which had passed in June 1917, forbidding the distribution via the U.S. mail of materials deemed to hinder the war effort. Both of the *Four Lights* issues from June were censored by the Post Office. The *Four Lights* editors attempted to circumvent the law for a few months by only mailing the publication in a sealed envelope, but by October this strategy failed as well.<sup>32</sup> Beset by financial troubles and now legal troubles as well, the NYC-WPP ceased publication of *Four Lights*, save for one special issue in 1919 devoted to the International Congress of Women in Zurich.<sup>33</sup>

During its run in 1917, the *Four Lights* editors were willing to engage in public sphere discourse from their own radical feminist standpoint, often to the chagrin of the national WPP. But because the NYC-WPP had launched a periodical, they were able, unlike the national party members, to engage in debates about the war within the public sphere beyond party membership. The journal experimented with a new type of editorial vision – true to its word, among the issues published in 1917, thirty-one different women were listed on mastheads as editors and only four edited more than one issue. Enlisting this diverse group meant that there was no overarching editorial voice and, as we have seen, one particularly ardent issue offended readers even within the New York City branch. But through this method, the journal expanded its circle of voices and ensured that no one voice would dominate.

The numerous women who contributed to *Four Lights* as editors seized the opportunity to engage in print activism. The twenty issues that appeared between January and October of 1917 provide a view not found elsewhere of a group whose positions on various topics and themes, including labour law, food shortages and women’s war relief efforts stood apart even from other activist and reform publications. Ultimately, *Four Lights* braided together feminism and pacifism in ways that anticipate the women’s peace movements of the latter part of the twentieth century, as well as the intersectional feminist critique, still salient 100 years after the publication of *Four Lights*, of earlier waves of feminism that have not adequately addressed class alongside gender, race and nationality. More than anything else, this attentiveness to overlapping vectors of difference was the truly radical aspect of the publication.

## Author biographies

Rachel Schreiber, MFA, PhD, is a visual artist and historian and Associate Professor at the San Francisco Art Institute. Her two books include *Modern Print Activism in the United States* and *Gender and Activism in a Little Magazine: The Modern Figures of the Masses*, both published by Routledge. She has published additional articles and exhibited her photography-based art works internationally. Her research focuses on gender and activism in visual and print culture.

## Declarations and conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Four Lights*, June 16, 1917. Archival note: all references to the periodical here are drawn from the archive at the Swarthmore College Peace Collection, which holds the entire run of *Four Lights* as well as the records of the Woman's Peace Party. Citations of *Four Lights* refer to the date of publication only, as the pages of the publication are not numbered. The author wishes to thank the Peace Collection for support of this research.

<sup>2</sup> See Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 251–2.

<sup>3</sup> Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 26.

<sup>4</sup> For another example of a study that looks past the most visible suffrage literature to assess the diversity of voices in that movement, see Mary Chapman and Angela Mills, eds., *Treacherous Texts: An Anthology of U.S. Suffrage Literature, 1846–1946* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> *Four Lights* resumed publication for one issue only in 1919, and then ran again from 1941 to 1970.

<sup>6</sup> The quote is from Antonio Pigafetta's account of Magellan's voyage around the world. See Antonio Pigafetta and Paula Spurlin Paige, *The Voyage of Magellan: The Journal of Antonio Pigafetta* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969).

<sup>7</sup> *Four Lights*, January 27, 1917. The editors of this issue are Anne Herendeen, Edna Kenton, and Zoë Beckley. Here and throughout, articles absent specific bylines are attributed to the editors of that issue.

<sup>8</sup> For more on the Woman's Peace Conference and internationalism, see Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*, Paper edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Historian John M. Craig has argued that the more radical nature of this group owes to their generational difference from the members of the national party – the women of the NYC-WPP were younger and tended to be college-educated socialists. This distinguished their activism from that of the older generation within the national party, most of whom belonged to the older and more conservative generation of social reformers. John M. Craig, "The Woman's Peace Party and Questions of Gender Separatism," *Peace & Change* 19, no. 4 (1994): 389–90; See also Charles Roland Marchand, *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1898–1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

<sup>10</sup> *Four Lights*, January 27, 1917.

<sup>11</sup> See Woman's Peace Part records, Box 5, Folder 13 for correspondence soliciting donations and other notes regarding distribution. The records do not include full financial records or statements, but the correspondence reveals some of these operations.

<sup>12</sup> Woman's Peace Party records, Box 5, Folder number 10.

<sup>13</sup> Craig, *The Woman's Peace Party and Questions of Gender Separatism*, 381.

<sup>14</sup> See Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan, 2000).

<sup>15</sup> See my book, *Modern Print Activism in the United States*, for a more full discussion of the ways in which print culture became its own site for activism in the U.S. over the course of the twentieth century. Quotation is from *Modern Print Activism in the United States*, ed. Rachel Schreiber (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), 1.



- <sup>16</sup> For more on the political scene of New York City in this era, see Stansell, *American Moderns*.
- <sup>17</sup> “Head of Women’s League Says Propaganda Aids Germany’s Agents,” *New York Times*, August 14, 1917.
- <sup>18</sup> Blanche W. Cook, “The Woman’s Peace Party,” *Peace & Change* 1, no. 1 (Fall 1972): 39. Courtesy of the Swarthmore College Peace Collection.
- <sup>19</sup> The War against War exhibition was staged in 1916, and designed by artist Walter Fuller, husband of Crystal Eastman. See Craig, *The Woman’s Peace Party and Questions of Gender Separatism*, 386.
- <sup>20</sup> Cook, *The Woman’s Peace Party*, 39.
- <sup>21</sup> Woman’s Peace Party records, Box 5, Folder number 9.
- <sup>22</sup> William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914–1920* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2001), 112.
- <sup>23</sup> For a full account of the ways in which the *Messenger* stood apart from other African American publications in its anti-war position, see Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914–1920*.
- <sup>24</sup> John Dewey, “The Future of Pacifism,” *The New Republic*, July 28, 1917, 358.
- <sup>25</sup> Mary Chamberlain, the author of this article, also wrote for *Four Lights* and edited one of its issues, signifying the overlaps in membership of the handful of peace groups. The differences between her writing for these two journals confirms that the distinctions between the publications owes more to the editorial board’s position than to the beliefs of any one writer.
- <sup>26</sup> Mary White Ovington, *Black and White Sat down Together: The Reminiscences of an NAACP Founder* (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995).
- <sup>27</sup> The penultimate stanza can be read as a pointed barb aimed at the suffrage movement, which was initially linked with the abolition movement but agreed to focus on eliminating slavery rather than pursuing woman suffrage as the latter was assessed to be an extremely radical cause for which it would be difficult to gain widespread support. Given this concession before 1863, many women were particularly embittered by the passage of the 15th amendment that granted African American men the right to vote 50 years before women achieved the same right.
- <sup>28</sup> Woman’s Peace Party records, Box 5 folder 13, unsigned letter to Miss McDowell dated August 30, 1917.
- <sup>29</sup> Darewski, Herman (composer). Weston, R. P. (lyrics). *Sister Susie’s Sewing Shirts for Soldiers*, 1914.
- <sup>30</sup> The relationship between Anthony and Irwin is noted in Alden Waitt, “Katharine Anthony: Feminist Biographer with the ‘Warmth of an Advocate’,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* Volume 10, no. 1 (1988): 73.
- <sup>31</sup> Erika A. Kuhlman, *Petticoats and White Feathers: Gender Conformity, Race, the Progressive Peace Movement, and the Debate over War, 1895–1919* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1997), 101.
- <sup>32</sup> Letter from Margaret Lane, Executive Secretary, to *Four Lights* board members, dated July 14, 1917. Woman’s Peace Party records, Box 5 folder 13.
- <sup>33</sup> Kuhlman, *Petticoats and White Feathers*, 118. *Four Lights* was revived by the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom in 1940.

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