

Against the “American Century,” Toward a Third World New Left: The Case of Helen Mears*

Few Americans are so unknown yet emblematic of U.S.-Asia relations as the journalist Helen Mears. Lauded by contemporaries as a perceptive observer of Asia, Mears died in 1989 in relative obscurity. That seemed unlikely early in Mears’s career. At the age of twenty-nine, Mears became assistant editor for the liberal monthly, *Survey Graphic*. With graphic artist Rea Irvin and other luminaries, Mears helped found *The New Yorker*. Traveling across the Americas, Africa, and Eurasia—including third-class passage on the Trans-Siberian railway, a daring voyage in its day—Mears wrote for *Fortune*, *Christian Science Monitor*, and other leading periodicals. Invoking these experiences, Mears published two widely read books in the heyday of the “American Century.” British diplomat and Japan authority George Sansom proclaimed her first book, *Year of the Wild Boar*, the most “penetrating” English-language study of Japan yet published. Amid a recent renaissance of Mears’s work in Japan, historians Naoko Shibusawa and Richard Minear respectively called her second book, *Mirror for Americans*, “clear-eyed, rational, and unsentimental” and “the most important book” on Japan from the 1940s.¹

In the 1950s, Mears’s professional fortunes plummeted. Spurned by mainstream outlets, Mears wrote for *The Nation*, *Dissent*, and other left-wing periodicals. Turned out by *The New Yorker*, Mears joined the influential New Left magazine *Liberation* and national War Resisters League as a vocal critic of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. A U.S. Army lecturer and well-assigned college author, Mears found her work banned by overseas U.S. authorities. Despite

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1. George B. Sansom, review of *Year of the Wild Boar*, *Pacific Affairs* 16, no. 1 (1943): 105; Richard H. Minear, “Cross-Cultural Perception and World War II: American Japanists of the 1940s and Their Images of Japan,” *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (1980): 572; Naoko Shibusawa, *America’s Geisha Ally: Reimagining the Japanese Enemy* (Cambridge, MA, 2006), 84; Takashi Mikuriya and Kazuto Oshio, *Wasuwerareta Nichi-Bei Kankei: Heren Miāzu no Toi* (Tokyo, 1996); Helen Mears, *Amerika no kagami, Nihon*, trans. Itō Nobuji (Tokyo, 2005, originally Boston, MA, 1948).

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impressive work on major themes that concern analysts today—competing Western and Asian expansionism, U.S. neo-imperialism, revolutionary Asian nationalism—Mears remains an unknown figure. Frustrated by this neglect, Mears struggled with several large-scale projects, including a study of Indian jurist Radhabinod Pal's dissent in the Allies' post-World War II trials of Japanese war crimes. As public opinion finally turned Mears's way in the Sixties, a mid-Manhattan flood destroyed her research materials. "I'm fighting against a nervous breakdown," Mears mourned. "I was deep in the final crystallization of a book—and I can't concentrate—or even get at my desk."²

Though personally fascinating, Mears's story is ultimately significant for its broader connections with U.S.-Asia relations and the U.S. left as a domestic and global force of Cold War opposition. Though lacking sustained national influence, Mears articulated a far-ranging, trenchant, Asia-centered critique of U.S. policy, helping inaugurate the anti-Vietnam War movement alongside Walter Lippmann, I. F. Stone, and other critics well-known in the historiography. Generating this critique was Mears's anticipation of a recent scholarly trend: what historian Fredrik Logevall has termed the "intermestic"—or simultaneously international and domestic—dimension of U.S. diplomacy.³ Analyzing the Cold War as a local and global outgrowth of U.S.-Asian tensions in ways strikingly unencumbered by Cold War dogma, Mears grew attuned to the interconnected changes occurring in twentieth-century U.S. and Asian societies. Discomfited by communists and socialists, liberals and conservatives, even organized feminists and pacifists, Mears's disaffection with sundry leftist and liberal causes propelled her development as a pioneering New Left intellectual against what Mears viewed as the central fact of the postwar age: the global expansion of U.S. power. In Mears's enlivened eyes, Asia was the crucible of this expansion. As she repeatedly insisted, Asia's postwar emergence from Western imperialism was crucially entwined with the United States' rise as a global power and at the heart of U.S. and global security.

Helen Mears's ideological and sociopolitical experiences illuminate the New Left's transnational dimensions over the "long 1960s" by foregrounding a rare American who bridged the Old and New Left as an unusually perceptive critic of U.S. foreign policy and the U.S. postwar state. Formerly a New Deal supporter, Mears's radically different reading of the United States' World War II policy led her to repudiate the liberal consensus behind an expansive U.S. global posture, without embracing—as did many liberal critics—Cold War conservatism, Third World socialism, or any of postwar liberalism's lesser nemeses.⁴ Like the New

2. Helen Mears to Judy Clement, February 22, 1961, Correspondence, Japan: 1939–49, box 2, Helen Mears Papers, Swarthmore College Peace Collection (hereafter HMP, SCPC).

3. Fredrik Logevall, "A Critique of Containment," *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 4 (2004): 496.

4. Thomas G. Paterson, ed., *Cold War Critics: Alternatives to American Foreign Policy in the Truman Years* (Chicago, IL, 1971); Ronald Radosh, *Prophets on the Right: Profiles of Conservative Critics of American Globalism* (New York, 1975); Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca, NY, 2013).

Leftists she guided as a senior intellectual figure, Mears's sense of alternative possibilities stemmed from revolutionary Asia. But rather than Vietnam, North Korea, or the People's Republic of China (PRC), an unlikely place fostered Mears's internationalism: prewar imperial Japan. Having spent formative years among Japanese liberals and leftists caught in the maelstrom of Japanese imperialism, Mears developed a sense of social mutuality with ordinary and elite Japanese, which fueled her postwar rebellion against an "American Century" that seemed to eerily reconstruct liberal U.S. empire atop imperial Japan's transpacific ashes. Mears's Japanist vision discerned how U.S. exceptionalism, at its postwar height, masked the advancement of U.S. interests and politico-military power. The result was a probing, sustained, though ultimately limited critique of U.S. neocolonialism, one that anticipated and informed U.S. and Third World 1960s-era radicalism.

Historians are increasingly observing the persistence of a U.S. national security state beyond the World War II and Cold War conflicts which engendered it, driving sweeping transformations in U.S. society and culture under ever-expanding definitions of "national security." Few have explored how such processes influenced U.S. foreign policy dissidents mounting a radical critique against its post-1945 formation. Such neglect is unsurprising, given the Old Left's obliteration by repressive Cold War currents and the relative paucity of globally-experienced New Leftists like Mears. It distorts, however, the genuine, strongly rooted internationalism which helped impel Sixties radicalism, thus contributing to the postwar U.S. left's image as a provincial, deeply flawed movement imploding from its internal divisions and follies.⁵

Unlike most New Leftists, largely college-age baby-boomers heeding sociologist C. Wright Mills's call to "become international," Mears was "international" before becoming New Left.⁶ Unlike U.S. diplomatic elites prioritizing postwar Europe as a counterweight to Soviet power, Mears helped turn the New Left's gaze toward a decolonizing, revolutionary Third World. Avoiding bitter Old Left divisions over U.S.-USSR relations, anti-Communism, and socialist revolution, Mears attempted to pivot U.S. policy toward constructive, unorthodox Third World solutions, from a less severe occupation of Japan to U.S. support of the Afro-Asian non-aligned movement and away from neo-imperialistic devices of social and military control. Though her ideas were often unique, Mears's vision of a U.S. diplomacy realistically engaged with Third World nationalism resonated deeply with liberal, Old Left, and New Left

5. On the U.S. state, see Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge, UK, 1998); Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA, 2009); James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York, 2011). On the left, see Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (Urbana, IL, 1993); Howard Brick and Christopher Phelps, *Radicals in America: The U.S. Left Since the Second World War* (New York, 2015).

6. Daniel Geary, "'Becoming International Again': C. Wright Mills and the Emergence of a Global New Left, 1956-1962," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 3 (2008): 710-36.

audiences traversing similar iconoclastic paths from early twentieth-century internationalism. Conditioned by her fundamental belief in the soundness of U.S. liberal democracy, Mears's Third World diplomacy, while short of a radical structural critique of U.S. policy, demonstrated the persistence of neutrality, international law, and other restrained, less militaristic forms of liberal internationalism discredited by World War II, yet still potent among influential pacifist, feminist, and liberal constituencies which shaped the New Left alongside Mears.⁷

Finally, Mears's social identity as a white woman both facilitated and restricted her influence as a political critic. Building on earlier efforts of U.S. and European feminists interrogating Asia and other swaths of Western empire to empower largely white, middle-class women within Western political discourse, Mears's Third World dissent marked the maturation of an antiracist, anticolonial impulse among U.S. women, who, freed from the rubric of "women's issues" that confined early twentieth-century activists, claimed a place in the male-dominated space of mainstream U.S. internationalism. Bridging the generational divide between "first" and "second-wave" feminism, Mears eschewed explicit racial or gendered frameworks but remained constrained by broader sociopolitical inequalities besetting historical actors across the Global North and South, embodying new dilemmas facing U.S. women in the postwar era.⁸

Uneasy over U.S. global dominance, attuned to the sociopolitical upheavals wrought by that dominance, and unusually empathetic with non-white colonial peoples, Mears saw the dangers in ascendant U.S. power in a world far more defiant, complex, and nationalistic than most Americans assumed. Though her attempt to persuade U.S. authorities and public opinion failed spectacularly, Mears's quest revealed how subtly and powerfully U.S. leaders and citizens shifted their identities and relations with a national security state projecting vast power across an embattled globe to this day.

IMPERIAL JAPAN AND THE PREWAR ORIGINS OF MEARS'S COLD WAR DISSENT

Looking over a global landscape roiling with Cold War conflict in 1956, Mears commiserated with a Quaker peace lobbyist. It was difficult getting even the left-wing *Nation* or *Progressive* riled over the United States' enormous \$330

7. Brooke L. Blower, "From Isolationism to Neutrality: A New Framework for Understanding American Political Culture, 1919–1941," *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 345–76; Charles DeBenedetti and Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antiwar Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY, 1990); Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Women's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse, NY, 1993). For Mears's following, see letters to the editor, *The Progressive*, March 1951, November 1954, March 1959.

8. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994); Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ, 1997).

billion military budget or the “peace by strength” strategic policy behind it. “[B]y now we are all so brain-washed that protests against our nonsense are rejected automatically,” Mears lamented. “[A]nyone who does question it is at once called a communist-sympathizer, or a dupe! How did our country get this way so fast—of course I know the answer to that.”⁹ In fact, Mears never laid out a thorough, accessible explanation for the United States’ transmogrification into a seemingly unthinking security state. Where, then, did her professed clarity on a complicated array of issues come from?

To understand Mears’s postwar dissent one must examine her simplistic, yet personally absorbing, idea of the “power dive.” Based on her experiences, Mears saw modern state power, and with it, the entire world order, in a crucial mid-twentieth century phase. Grippled by a technologically stunning yet socially woeful centuries-old industrial revolution, peoples worldwide faced a host of accumulating social and psychological pressures in their domestic societies. Nations were vitally interdependent, but remained antagonistic and suspicious toward one another. Instead of resolving these tensions, leading industrial nations took “power dives,” which Mears broadly defined as nationalistic drives for extraterritorial gain that embroiled international society in growing conflicts. Japan took her brief, catastrophic dive against China and the West in the 1930s; Nazi Germany plunged into Europe, North Africa, and the Soviet Union in the 1940s; and the United States, responding to the Axis Powers and the Soviet Union, took its own ambitious, sustained dive for decades after Pearl Harbor.

The central problem of the modern age, Mears explained in *Mirror for Americans*, was that “of directing and controlling political power.” Despite the revolution in time and space wrought by modern technology and communications, modern states had become unaccountable to popular will. Ordinary citizens relied on governments not only for their welfare, but basic information about the complex world around them. This rendered U.S. and foreign citizens as passive, volatile constituencies for whom “the idea of crisis and war” was “easily believed.” Understandably, Japan’s and Germany’s power dives stemmed from their states’ recent turns toward authoritarianism. What was puzzling was the United States’ similar pursuit, despite its democratic polity, of World War II-era predominance. “Our crisis started building with the First World War and has accelerated, during the Second, to an exhilarating and dangerous power dive,” *Mirror* warned. “Unlike the Japanese, we have swung into it with apparently everything in our favor. With power, however, too much can be as dangerous as too little. With our velocity, only a miracle of intelligent planning, disciplined control, and luck will bring us out of it without a crash.”¹⁰

9. Helen Mears to Warren Griffiths, October 12, 1956, Ma - 1956, box 36, series A, Friends Committee on National Legislation Records (hereafter FCNLR), SCPC.

10. Helen Mears, *Mirror for Americans: Japan* (Boston, MA, 1948), 5-7.

In today's post-Iraq War era, such notions of neo-imperial overreach seem merely cliché.¹¹ Even at the time, Mears's nostrums seemed to parrot those of mainstream U.S. internationalists. What made Mears unique and controversial was her prediction of the United States' global collapse at the very awe-inspiring moment of its postwar ascent.

What caused such a bold prognosis? The answer lay in Mears's anthropological understanding of state power. Heralding the 1960s rise of political anthropology as a field examining political institutions through anthropological inquiry, Mears, steeped in the work of Ruth Benedict and leading anthropologists, informally fused cultural anthropology's concerns with everyday customs with her intense concerns about state institutions and practices.¹² What emerged was an instinctively ethnographic understanding of modern state power. Such an understanding drove Mears's early work, culminating in her commercially successful World War II opus on imperial Japan, *Year of the Wild Boar*. After the war, Mears applied this ethnographic style to her equally alarming portrait of postwar U.S. society. Decidedly heterodox and unpopular with her editors and postwar audiences, Mears's U.S.-focused ethnographic musings stayed shuttered in her private files. Yet, this initial ethnographic sensibility in Asia gave Mears a compelling template for comprehending world affairs and the treacherous "power dives" overtaking Japan and the United States, which Mears strove to analyze and oppose throughout the Cold War.

Born in New York City and raised in the northern Pennsylvania town of Towanda by a local Episcopalian family, Mears discovered her passion for international affairs by happenstance. In 1925, a Goucher College classmate and daughter of a U.S. missionary invited Mears to China. Working as a Beijing medical school secretary, Mears was immediately captivated by Asia. Years later, visiting a British friend in 1930s Japan, Mears's unplanned eight-month immersion in a Tokyo neighborhood resulted in her first book, *Wild Boar*. Though Mears traveled extensively around the world, nothing stirred her like Japan. "Japan changed me . . . drastically," she later reflected. Observing its newly modern society gave Mears a "standard by which to judge" world affairs.¹³

Supported by industrial reformer and *Survey Graphic* founder Paul Kellogg, Mears arrived in Japan a broadly committed New Deal liberal armed with U.S. press credentials and social status as a white Westerner, and quickly gained privileged access to elite Japanese liberal and left-wing circles. Mears plunged into

11. Chalmers Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire* (New York, 2000); Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York, 2005).

12. Minear, "Cross-Cultural," 564–78. On political anthropology, see Marc Abélès, *Anthropologie de l'État* (Paris, 1990); Joan Vincent, *Anthropology and Politics: Visions, Traditions, and Trends* (Tucson, AZ, 1990).

13. "Mears, Helen," *Current Biography* (New York, 1943), 527–28; Richard H. Minear, *Helen Mears, Asia, and American Asianists* (Amherst, MA, 1981), 2; Helen Mears, notes, [1959], Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP.

Japanese daily life, determined to overcome her ignorance of the country despite a formidable language barrier (to attain basic Japanese fluency, Mears relied on Japanese friends, hired translators, “plus woman’s well-known intuition,” she told her *New Yorker* editor). Spanning Murasaki Shikibu’s eleventh-century classic *Tale of the Genji*, contemporary newspapers, textile mills, and automobile factories, Mears’s immersion was unusual for the thousands of Westerners, including two thousand Americans, living largely in isolated Western enclaves. “Helen’s interest in everything has . . . revived mine,” a British friend told Mears’s mother, driving them to scour Japan’s countryside in all “its peculiarities, cotton mills, festivals, fishermen, farmers, the bad manners and the culture.”¹⁴

From these experiences, Mears developed a compelling portrait of Japan, vividly unfurled in her acclaimed *Year of the Wild Boar* and serialized work in several newsmagazines. Brimming with tea rooms and deftly cut sashimi, ob-sashed kimonos and coiffured geisha, bento lunchboxes and other unique aspects of Japanese culture, Mears’s writings gave Americans revealing glimpses of their Pacific rival at a crucial juncture: Japan’s rapid interwar transformation into a modern imperial and industrial power. Critically for Mears, interwar Japan formed the basis of her fast-budding ethnography of state power and international affairs.¹⁵

Cross-cultural racial and gender concerns enriched Mears’s worldview. In a nation where women comprised about thirty-five percent of the industrial workforce, concentrated in Japan’s textile industry, Mears focused her initial investigations on the female Japanese worker, whose Oriental docility and “Madame Butterfly”-like discipline, Mears informed U.S. audiences, comprised Japan’s chief comparative advantage over Western rivals. At first, Mears trafficked in such sensationalistic coverage. After observing, with growing disgust, how such Western chauvinism impaired U.S. missionaries and expatriates’ culturally arrogant interactions with Japan, Mears rejected Americans’ widespread Orientalist attitudes. Life as a middle-class Japanese or Western woman, Mears wrote a friend, was identical. “If you behave well according to the current code . . . you get along fairly well,” she explained of a Japanese friend disowned by her ex-samurai, upper-class family for marrying a communist. “[B]ut if you start to think for yourself . . . you get into trouble immediately.” Such unusual empathy charged Mears’s widening exploration of Japan. Japan’s intricate social fabric, Mears wrote New York social worker Loula Lasker, compelled most Western writers to stick to feudal Japan or “the essence of Bushido.” “Simple things easily explained,” she quipped. “[T]he smallest detail of living leads you thr[ough]

14. Doris Rojan to Elizabeth Mears, October 28, 1935, Correspondence, Japan: 1939–49, box 2, HMP; Helen Mears to G. S. Lobrano, May 26, 1939, folder 4, box 322, *New Yorker* Records, New York Public Library (hereafter NYPL).

15. Helen Mears, “Culinary Art of Japan,” *Christian Science Monitor*, May 27, 1939, 12; idem., “Stampu As You Go,” *The New Yorker*, August 10, 1940, 51–52. For interwar Japan’s similar perspectives, see Harry Harootunian, *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (Princeton, NJ, 2011).

such labyrinths that you are lucky indeed if you ever find the tail of the brilliant-eyed idea you were chasing." At one turn, Mears encountered and deconstructed the hand of the Japanese state in Japanese society; at the next, she met another facet of Japanese society impossible to disentangle from the state. "Physical culture is a current fetish, and the authorities see to it that the children get their share," Mears told *New Yorker* readers in 1938. "All over the city you find . . . little boys jumping up and down like pogo sticks and the little girls goose-stepping." Unlike earlier generations of U.S. women reformers or World War II-era liberals concerned with Asia, Mears spurned the fast-rising notion among U.S. internationalists that the "Orient" was immanently different or inferior. "What difference does it make whether or not [Japanese] do original work in oils," Mears rhapsodized after discovering, south of Tokyo, Aburatsubo Bay's marvelously tiny tanks of bright fish worthy of "rank with the world's masterpieces." "[T]hey can paint in fish, that ought to be enough for anybody." Exposing such seemingly exotic, lowly aspects of Japanese culture as historically specific outgrowths of Japan's material circumstances, Mears became an early skeptic of the imperially bounded Orientalist views which wartime and postwar Americans embraced alongside their nation's growing involvement in Asian affairs.¹⁶

Whether addressing Japan's social topography; strict regulation of public and private space; cozy relations between the state and Japan's family-run *zai-batsu* conglomerates; or the sociopolitical meanings of Japanese folk culture, Mears's meticulous, idiosyncratic ethnography made Japan extraordinarily intelligible to English-language audiences. Academic anthropologists and Japanists lauded *Wild Boar* as a leading book on Japan. Promoted by the Roman Catholic Church and national reading groups, it quickly underwent several printings. Westerners who had lived in Japan, including writer William Henry Chamberlin and British diplomat George Sansom, found *Wild Boar* a spitting image of the Japan they knew intimately. Writing "from scratch" about an obscure nation, *The Washington Post* marveled, Mears was a "shrewd octopus" with "[l]ong delicate feelers," pricking bubbly stereotypes like the "inscrutable Oriental" in a Middletown sociology-like manner sucking "the last bit of meaning from a modern bar, a Samurai and a factory." Bearing *Wild Boar*'s colorful anecdotes, local book clubs, newspapers, and civic associations spread Mears's state-society interpretations across the United States.¹⁷

16. Helen Mears, "The Old Fashioned Girl of Modern Japan," *Survey Graphic* (January 1937): 34–38; Helen Mears to "Mary," October 11, 1935; Helen Mears to Loula Lasker, October 26, 1935, Helen Mears – re: Japan-Diary letters, manuscripts, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears, "Crisis in Japan," *The New Yorker*, September 10, 1938, 64. For Mears's context within women's reform and Orientalism, see Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939* (New York, 1990); Mari Yoshihara, *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (New York, 2003); Shibusawa, *Geisha Ally*, 59–92.

17. Helen Mears, *Year of the Wild Boar* (Philadelphia, PA, 1942), 62–76, 218–300; "Book List is Issued by Catholic Group," *New York Times*, October 10, 1942, 13; William Henry Chamberlin, "An Intimate Portrait of Japan," *New York Times*, August 9, 1942, BR13;

Wild Boar owed much of its success to its immediate post-Pearl Harbor publication and its historical setting: the 1930s crisis over Japanese expansion in Manchuria, which set the United States and Japan on a collision course toward World War II. Entertainingly framed as a travelogue, *Wild Boar* set out to demythologize popular understanding of the crisis as Japan's singular, wanton aggression in China. Purveying a deceptively light-hearted exploration of Japan against the global backdrop of Japanese and Western imperialism, Mears sought not only to make Japan's actions morally and strategically legible, but convince Americans they could no longer pursue traditional U.S. isolationism in a world of growing interconnections. Those connections, Mears echoed a growing number of U.S. internationalists, could foster much-needed international cooperation or "new and more frightful Pearl Harbors."¹⁸

The supreme obstacle for Americans, especially after Pearl Harbor, was how to empathize with a Japanese nation experiencing its greatest internal and external strains since its meteoric rise as an Asian power. Mears's Japan, based on several prolonged visits between 1925 and 1946, was one suffering repeated shocks—economic depression, Anglo-American diplomatic rebuffs in Asia, internal turmoil among ruling elites—that unleashed Japanese nationalism at high tide. Rather than recoiling from Japan's emerging fascism as did most Westerners, Mears, enlightened by the embattled Japanese left's perspectives, remarkably embraced Japan all the more. ("Do not forget that in the [West] Fascism is destroying [the] democratic accompaniments of a capitalist society," a Japanese radical impressed Mears. "[Japan's] problems throw a bright light on all of the contradictions that make the world so unstable today.") Repeatedly snubbed by a traditionalist cultural movement stressing Japan's unknowability to foreigners, Mears redoubled her efforts to understand it. Her work's resulting points—that Japanese were not inferior but physically and culturally diverse; that Japan, despite its powerhouse image, was underdeveloped and weak; that Japan's wartime chauvinism was a defensive rationalization of its limited material resources—sprang from Mears's heroic impulses. To understand crisis-racked Japan, *Wild Boar* contended, one had to recognize the "Japan of etiquette, [custom], cults and symbolism" as crucial ideological support for the "real Japan" of "politics, industry and imperialism."¹⁹

Despite its brilliant sympathies, *Wild Boar* failed to ameliorate many readers' wartime hostility to Japan, partly due to unresolved tensions in the book's analysis. Mears went further than most U.S. public intellectuals toward framing Japanese aggression as a logical response to a Western imperialism-throttled

Katherine de M. Hoskins, "Among The Enemy," *Washington Post*, August 2, 1942, L11; Meribeth E. Cameron, "Outstanding Recent Books on the Far East," *Far Eastern Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (1945): 373, n. 8; "Joint Meeting Being Held by Wells College Clubs," *Chicago Tribune*, October 6, 1942, 23.

18. Mears, *Boar*, 8–9.

19. Helen Mears, memo, [1935?], Helen Mears – re: Japan-Diary letters, manuscripts, box 1, HMP; Mears, *Boar*, 2–118, 229–51, 346; Andrew Gordon, *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa Times to the Present* (New York, 2003), 126–203.

international system; yet even she left Japan's reformability in grave doubt. Mears's convincing portrayal of Japan's deeply "folk-habits"-based "totalitarianism" made Japan appear hopelessly undemocratic, even irrational. Her argument that Japan was materially weak yet ideologically strong (bestowing "power and drive" through a national habit of psychic overcompensation) swayed inconclusively over the central issue of whether Japan was a threat to the United States. Despite her impassioned presentation of the United States and other Western powers' longstanding obstruction of Japanese migration, trade, and other international privileges, Mears's brief for Japanese aspirations contradicted her equally cogent portrait of a domestic Japanese crisis manufactured by the state rather than citizens' socioeconomic needs.²⁰

Given the political and material constraints of contemporary research, it is unrealistic to expect Mears to have blunted popular anti-Japanese U.S. outrage, or to have penned an authoritative account of Japan's complicated embrace of imperial authoritarianism beyond the reigning wisdom, which Mears shared, that Japan's government was riven between a pro-war military clique and pro-peace liberal faction in the imperial Cabinet. As a result, however, Mears's nuanced, empathetic work mostly reinforced readers' fears of Japan. "[W]ithout saying as much," the *Chicago Tribune's* editors spoke for many U.S. citizens, Mears's "penetrating" writings proved "the Japs are a race of enlarged termites." Mears's Japan, even the pacifist-leaning left-wing *Politics* adjudged, "makes Western totalitarianism seem like child's play."²¹

Despite these failures, Mears gleaned an intuitive understanding of Japan, as well as state power's broader subtleties. Time and again, Mears was struck by how powerfully yet imperceptibly state-sponsored propaganda, national tourism, and other government initiatives suffused everyday Japanese life. Repeatedly, she was awed by Japanese citizens' casual acceptance of air-raid drills, police surveillance, and national crisis. "Japan has been in a 'state of crisis' for a long while," *Wild Boar* observed. "It has grown so accustomed to uniforms in the streets, to matrons waving flags and bowing as troops come and go, and to geisha raising money to buy a bombing plane that the [Manchuria] incident seems only more of the same thing." From browbeaten Japanese radicals and liberals, Mears learned how the Japanese state relentlessly produced such mass conformity through anti-Communist security measures, public censorship, and tightening social regulations. Rather than imagine U.S. citizens above such state-led hysteria, Mears admitted her own susceptibility to Japan's mesmerizing influences, conveying a more discomfiting lesson: intelligent citizens anywhere were easily indoctrinated in an age of total war.²²

20. Mears, *Boar*, 20, 220–331.

21. Mears, *Boar*, 296–98; "A View of the Enemy," *Chicago Tribune*, October 29, 1942, 12; Ethel Libson, review of *Year of the Wild Boar*, *Politics* (July 1945): 216.

22. Helen Mears, "7–5," [1935], Helen Mears – re: Japan-Diary letters, manuscripts, box 1, HMP; Mears, *Boar*, 34–70, 126–216.

Japan instilled Mears with three values which served as lodestars in her subsequent career, values which placed her at least aspirationally astride mainstream U.S. internationalism: an abiding faith in Asian and colonial peoples; a multilateral, conciliatory approach to international conflict; and a central commitment to international laws and institutions. As *Wild Boar* catapulted her into national prominence, including high-profile work with major movie studios, U.S. military agencies, and leading universities, Mears grew deeply disturbed by Time-Life publisher Henry Luce and leading Americans' rising calls for a post-war "American Century" of unrivaled U.S. global supremacy. Haunted by her similar experiences in imperial Japan, Mears suddenly perceived her nation, driven by its own exceptionalist pretensions, launching a dramatic "power dive" at home and abroad. As in Japan, the symptoms were varied yet tight-knit. At the top, U.S. officials, military authorities, and civic leaders became inflexibly hostile toward self-declared "enemies of the state." ("[T]he useful job is to show *why* that nice German Col[onel] was there shooting nice ordinary people," Mears pled in 1942.) As in Japan, powerful war interests dominated the U.S. press and Congress, promulgating an "Active Americanism" across civil society smearing any opposition to war as "subversive." Locally, Americans, like Japanese, displayed bewilderment, shallow patriotism, and supremacist airs. Mears noticed Americans behaving precisely like the "aggressive" Japanese. The United States and Great Britain were "unquestionably superior" to other world powers, Mears's hometown business leaders lectured her: "We let the Germans off easy [in World War I]. . . . After *this* war, we'[ll] ta[k]e over the world and keep the[m] in their places." Such vulgar remarks captured newly muscular U.S. policies, Mears feared, vulgarities which U.S. officialdom and media expressed "more diplomatically" with "\$100 words." Sprouting air-raid shelters, secret intelligence agents, and mass propaganda, an imperial Japan-like U.S. security state—dwarfing other Allied or Axis nations—made Mears feel "as futile as a dry leaf in a cyclone," she wrote in an unsent letter to a publisher. Until Americans realized how such power appeared to other peoples, "[w]e'll be the menace if we don't watch out."²³

Prudently, Mears self-censored her anti-"American Century" notions during the war, sharing her frustrations solely with close friends and colleagues. Watching the Old Left strongly support the war effort despite the Allies' profound reactionary shortcomings, Mears found little solace among U.S. liberals. Blind anti-fascism, she excoriated the liberal *PM* newspaper's editors for refusing to condemn Allied abuses against industrial labor and Allied colonial populations, succored Anglo-American elites in the war only to defend "their own [imperial] preserves." "We haven't clean hands enough to promise the world

23. Mears to Lobrano, April 22, November 8, 1939, folder 4, box 322, Mears to Lobrano, September 19, 1941, folder 10, box 362, Mears to Lobrano, March 27, 1942, folder 23, box 379, NYPL; Helen Mears, "A Modest Proposal," [1941], Miscellaneous: 1940-41, box 1, Helen Mears to Mr. Wiener, January 13, 1943, Correspondence: 1943-55, box 2, HMP. On Americans' changing relationship with the U.S. war state, see Sparrow, *Warfare State*.

'freedom,'" Mears scolded. "Democracy. The word is beginning to have a hateful sound." Discouraged by such hypocritical realities, Mears appeared to tire of the subtle anthropological style she had contrived in Japan, and began developing a direct, polemical mode more sharply suited for mainstream political discussion. Among the earliest voices to predict Japan's defeat in 1943, Mears anxiously awaited a postwar world wherein the United States was bound to hold preponderant power. The thorny question, Mears knew, was what the United States would do with that newfound power.²⁴

WRESTLING WITH U.S. POWER

For her remaining life, Mears attempted to challenge Cold War "consensus" policy as the United States became the nationalistic superpower she dreaded. Focused on Asia and the Third World, Mears emphasized the United States' pivotal role in these regions. Navigating an unorthodox course through the shoals of postwar U.S. policy, Mears's evolution as an independent left-wing liberal—culminating in her reluctant national leadership with the pacifist War Resisters League against the Vietnam War—revealed the tremendous toll the "American Century" took on Americans opposed to its premises. At root, Mears felt, the "American Century" crafted by the nation's bipartisan establishment showed how dangerously untrammelled U.S. state power—in the name of national security and anti-Communism—could overwhelm U.S. and global citizens.

A deep admirer and associate of C. Wright Mills, I. F. Stone, *Winston-Salem Journal* editor Wallace Carroll, and other iconoclastic anti-"consensus" liberals, Mears identified as what she defiantly called (inverting *The Organization Man*, corporate journalist William Whyte's well-known paean to 1950s conformity) the "non-organization man": an independent citizen critically disassociating from society's central institutions. "My position," Mears diagnosed herself, is the "rugged individualist, the man from Missouri," once "the normal American but who is a vanishing breed." Repelled by Old Left and Cold War liberal dogmas alike, Mears joined the founding masthead of *Liberation*, a New Left beacon in the 1960s and 1970s. Uniting Mears and *Liberation* readers—a medley of pacifists, democratic socialists, ex-conservatives, and college-educated professionals similarly anxious over postwar politics—was a deep aversion to the United States' callous management of its foreign relations. "[W]e are getting [a] hardening of our foreign policy arteries," Mears wrote liberal journalist Norman Cousins in 1948. Whether from the left or right, anyone challenging official "black and white" thinking faced hostility, indifference, or confusion from editors trapped by "the limits of their categorical doctrines."²⁵

24. Helen Mears to Ralph Ingersoll, April 5, 1941, Miscellaneous: 1940-41, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears, "How Strong is Japan?" *Saturday Evening Post*, February 13, 1943, 102.

25. Helen Mears to Norman Cousins, October 29, 1948, folder 6, box 76, Norman Cousins Papers, Department of Special Collections, University of California, Los Angeles (hereafter

Mears's use of the term "man" signaled a broader retreat from race, gender, and sociocultural concerns in her public analysis of U.S. power. Shaped by her dissident energies, Mears defied the gendered expectations afflicting well-educated, professional white women even in progressive circles. "Phil thinks I shamefully neglect him . . . He has a picture of the sort of woman he wants to adore him," Mears, a young divorcée since 1935, rued her most serious, failed courtship in 1958: "I'm not it." Regularly, Mears dodged social invitations from male left-wing admirers and several female friends, whose soirées found Mears the butt of dilettantish political jokes or heated arguments with ordinary men and women intimidated by her "non-organization" persona. Exacerbating her intellectual and political isolation, Mears's social isolation as a single woman in New York City was often intense. Despite her domestic unhappiness and awareness of gender and race as oppressive instruments of state power, Mears never formulated any sustained feminist approach to U.S. power. Positioned between a nascent New Left and traditional Old Leftists for whom the "personal" never became "political," Mears's Cold War dissent lacked any explicit identity politics. Like most postwar public women, Mears cultivated a gender-neutral, putatively objective tone, one that befitted the hypermasculine space of 1950s-era U.S. foreign policy.²⁶

For Mears, the problem of Americans' conservative social identities paled beside her paramount obsession: U.S. attitudes toward U.S. global power. Historians have emphasized the roles of anti-communism and Cold War geopolitics behind U.S. society's conservative postwar turn.²⁷ Mears felt postwar conservatism resulted from a more basic phenomenon: an undemocratic, expansionist U.S. state. Communism, at home or abroad, was not the issue. At home, it was the arbitrary, monopolistic nature of state policy. Sensitized to modern state power's subtly authoritarian ways, Mears saw the United States' much-celebrated postwar "consensus" as an overblown "American Shinto"-styled "hyper-nationalism" which exaggerated communism—as did imperial Japan—as a national threat. "Am I the *only* living American who remembers our propaganda vs the Axis" for similarly "conditioning [citizens] for war"? Mears wrote her Houghton Mifflin editor after the dismal reception of her revisionist Cold War sequel to *Wild Boar, Mirror for Americans* (1948). Abroad, the United States' overweening power was the cardinal issue. Since World War II, Mears agreed in 1961 with liberal maverick U.S. Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas, Americans paradoxically pursued a democratic world order through a "peace-by-dominant-military-power" approach motivated by anti-communism—"a term

UCLA); Minear, "Helen Mears," 7–8; Roy Finch, "The Liberation Poll," *Liberation* (November 1959): 14–17.

26. Helen Mears, diary entry, December 29, 1958; idem., "Notes for GW," [1959?], Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP.

27. Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD, 1991); Jonathan Bell, *The Liberal State on Trial: The Cold War and American Politics in the Truman Years* (New York, 2004); Craig and Logevall, *Cold War*, 80–82.

which is *always* vaguely defined, and usually wildly distorted." Liberals and Old Left radicals suffered the same malaise. The enemy was totalitarianism, not just in the Soviet Union but worldwide, including the United States, Mears disputed influential *Dissent* editor Irving Howe's anti-Soviet assault on C. Wright Mills's similar anti-"consensus" analysis. Under the strategic doctrine of "massive retaliation," Mears reminded Howe, the Eisenhower administration "brought the world to the brink of nuclear war repeatedly." Human extinction through the slightest U.S. or USSR misstep, analysts agreed, was now a distinct possibility. "This is the issue," Mears rebuked, "American radical intellectuals should be dealing with."²⁸

No fundamental clash existed, Mears insisted, between U.S. and Soviet interests. Mears found the few Communist Party USA members she met personally and intellectually distasteful. But the Cold War itself merely resuscitated age-old national and imperial rivalries between the United States, Britain, Soviet Union, and lesser powers. (Much global discord since the sixteenth century, she mused, was "sensible in terms of the rivalry between the expansion of the Russian and British empires.") While Mears took communism and U.S. democratic ideals seriously, her postwar writings bore the central point that U.S. and Soviet policy, under any careful analysis of local realities, primarily despoiled the Third World with self-serving power politics.²⁹

The prolonged U.S. occupations of Korea, Japan, and various Pacific islands (whose neocolonial U.S. control Mears particularly assailed) was hardly a new Cold War phenomenon. It was rather, Mears argued in *Mirror*, an "old, old story." For decades, Asian and Western imperial regimes had cracked down on revolutionary dissenters, cynically deploying anti-communism, xenophobia, and other jingoistic imagery in defense of the status quo or new expansionist campaigns. "United States official opinion denounced the German-Italian-Japanese 'Anti-Comintern Pact' as a conspiracy to conquer the world," she reminded Americans. "Some Powers may give a similar interpretation to a similar 'Anti-Communist' policy announced by President Truman on March 13, 1947." Fear of the USSR as a national power, not communism, was U.S. policy's real concern; considering the USSR's acute military-industrial disadvantages vis-à-vis the West, such fear seemed greatly overblown. Hardly the weak, unsophisticated pro-communist puppets U.S. authorities usually imagined, Asian nationalists—as Mears related personal interlocations with Iranian, Indian, Japanese, and overseas visitors and friends—seethed at the truly central issue: the colonial world's renewed thralldom in the Cold War. Instead of engaging popular Asian nationalist demands, the United States, the Soviet Union, and

28. Helen Mears to Craig Wylie, June 27, 1953, Correspondence, 1946–1950, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears to William Spofford, January 25, 1953, Correspondence, Japan: 1939–49, box 2, HMP; Helen Mears to J. W. Fulbright, October 14, 1961, Correspondence – H-N, box 55, FCNLR; Helen Mears, "Mills vs. Howe," *Dissent* (Autumn 1959): 478.

29. Mears diary, [January 1953], Correspondence, 1953–61; Helen Mears, note, [1949], Projects Currents – Letters to Editors, box 1, HMP.

Western Europe steadily re-colonized native populaces under various Cold War pretexts. “American-Russian leadership has triumphantly emerged, leading backward,” Mears summarized the critical Asian reaction to Allies’ broken World War II promises for anticolonial liberation. In light of FDR’s and Stalin’s recently disclosed Yalta Conference negotiations regarding postwar China, China—the primary reason the United States went to war with Japan—inaugurated this perverse drama. Fractured into communist and Nationalist factions dependent on Soviet and U.S. aid, *Mirror* charged, postwar China was only sovereign “on paper.” Even Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek, Mears observed in the leader’s diplomatic maneuvers, “passionately resent[ed]” his U.S. patrons. Despite mountains of evidence suggesting Asians saw through the United States’ purportedly disinterested intentions, Americans clung to the belief that Asians were “on our side.”³⁰

Though tediously empiricist (drawing *ad nauseum* from the *New York Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and official and semi-official sources), thematically repetitive, and meek in tone, Mears’s writings employed the same anti-imperialist lens that 1970s-era New and Third World Leftists adopted in their radical interpretations of U.S. diplomacy. Though Mears never completed another major monograph after *Wild Boar* and *Mirror*, her journalistic work broached various insights which scholars have since established: the informality of U.S. empire (including indirect devices like state monopolies and UN trusteeships); the centrality of territorial and non-territorial U.S. expansion; World War II as a turning point in U.S.-Asia relations; and the ironic postwar revival of Japan’s “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere” as a U.S.-oriented regional economy.³¹

Unsurprisingly, Mears’s revisionist work drew deeply critical reactions. Academic and popular reviewers castigated its alleged pro-Japan bias, lack of realism, and flawed methodology. “Miss Mears gives evidence that she has read a great deal of current history,” the *New York Times* chastised. “She still hasn’t read enough. And some of her conclusions border on the ridiculous.” A few

30. Helen Mears, “Chinese Primer,” *The New Republic*, May 28, 1945, 757–60; idem., “Okinawan ‘Showcase’ Needs Restyling,” *Dissent* (Spring 1958): 195–97. Siding with postwar Democrats’ conservative Republican opposition, Mears criticized FDR’s “odorous” Yalta diplomacy granting Soviet rights in Manchuria as a “spectacular” example of U.S. immorality, given U.S.-British opposition to Axis Japan for precisely such concessions. Yalta, Mears argued, proved Japan’s claims that U.S. policy was based not on “concern for Chinese rights” but U.S. “determination that Japan shall not share equally with the Western Powers.” See Mears, *Mirror*, 24–36, 160–324.

31. Helen Mears, “Security in the Pacific,” *The New Republic*, July 9, 1945, 52–54; idem., “A Letter the ‘Times’ Would Not Print,” *Politics* (March–April 1947): 78–79; Mears, *Mirror*, 13–68, 102–9, 264–81. For Mears-like historiography, see Ronald Steel, *Pax Americana* (New York, 1967); Michael Schaller, *The American Occupation of Japan: The Origins of the Cold War in Asia* (New York, 1985); Walter LaFeber, *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York, 1997); Bruce Cumings, *Dominion from Sea to Sea: Pacific Ascendancy and American Power* (New Haven, CT, 2010); John W. Dower, *Cultures of War: Pearl Harbor/Hiroshima/9-11/Iraq* (New York, 2010).

mainstream voices which took *Mirror* seriously reacted in shock. *Mirror*'s "penetrating" indictment of U.S. policy, *Newsweek* acknowledged, posed "disturbing" possibilities. What made *Mirror* incredible (causing Occupied Japan commander Douglas MacArthur to ban its foreign publication to avoid "encourag[ing] our country's potential enemies") was precisely its challenge to the triumphalist assumptions undergirding U.S. policy. Millions of World War II veterans, a national newsmagazine protested, would simply "find it difficult to accept her opinions." Only the U.S. postwar state's most critical voices endorsed *Mirror*. The myth-shattering work of a journalist with no formal training, Yale anthropologist John Embree challenged Mears's academic detractors, *Mirror* was "a contribution to the sociology of nations" which "tells more about why the [United States and Japan] went to war than all the anthropologists put together." While *Mirror* deserved wide circulation, conservative writer William Henry Chamberlin realistically conceded, "it may be too soon to knock down successfully all the idols of wartime propaganda."³²

Yet, according to Mears, what were the alternatives to prevailing U.S. policy? Like much of the U.S. liberal left, Mears spent far more energy criticizing U.S. policy than she did articulating viable alternatives. In part, this reflected Mears's difficult personal circumstances. Despite successful stints as a university lecturer, Mears found academia overly dry and politically disengaged. Unable to secure a staff position at *The New Republic* and other major liberal magazines, Mears remained a professionally and financially insecure freelancer. "My sense of inadequacy is profound," she privately admitted. "Not as an analyst but as a salesman." At least the domestic repression surrounding U.S. Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist crusade, which devastated the Old Left, mostly spared Mears. Mears's marginal connections to the U.S. state helped Mears, whose views echoed McCarthy's high-profile targets in the State Department's Asia division, evade scrutiny from the era's anti-communist Congressional committees and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Still, the Cold War's narrowing ideological bounds greatly constrained Mears's professional and personal life. By the early 1950s, Mears wrote nearly exclusively for *The Nation*, *Liberation*, and small-circulation left-wing magazines. Reflecting the left's wider fragmentation, Mears—ignoring pleas for her regular participation from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and other pacifist and radical groups—worked largely alone, sustained by occasional contacts with friends, family, and a far-flung, frail network of political allies.³³

32. Foster Hailey, "Apologia for Japan," *New York Times*, September 19, 1948, BR32; Jasper R. Lewis, review of *Mirror*, *The Forum* (November 1948): 284; Richard W. Leopold, review of *Mirror*, *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 35, no. 4 (1949): 708–9; "Japan, Ape of the West," *Newsweek*, September 20, 1948, 105; Minear, "Helen Mears," 6–7; John Embree, letter to editor, *American Anthropologist* 52 (1950): 431, n. 2; William Henry Chamberlin, review of *Mirror*, *Human Events*, March 23, 1949.

33. Mears to Wylie, June 27, 1953, Correspondence, 1946–1950, box 1, HMP; Connie Beach-Sims to author, FBI FOIA Request 1208051-000, August 25, 2015; Helen Mears to Michael Straight, June 5, 1949, Projects Currents – Letters to Editors, box 1, Mears diary,

Scattered in dozens of articles and unpublished fragments, Mears's alternative left-liberal program was dim, yet broadly discernible. Mears's muted, fragmentary vision suggests how closely, yet dissimilarly, Cold War and New Left liberals approached U.S. power. Theoretically, their visions shared considerable ground: a UN-centered world society dispelling *realpolitik* "chaos," Mears argued in *Wild Boar*, for an anti-imperialist order "in which all people were equal, regardless of race, color, or previous condition of dependence." Practically, Mears decried Cold War liberals' scuttling of such ideals. Liberals' global militarism and crusading, distrustful arrogance toward Communists and non-Western allies like Occupied Japan "bewilder[ed]" her, Mears told *The Nation's* editor Freda Kirchwey—thrusting Mears, the former marveled, in the strange company of Republican conservatives and libertarians, the most consistent early critics of U.S. liberal empire. "Did you note [the *New York Post's*] Ted Thackrey—one of our Liberal Editors—recently suggested that the way to peace was to send [radio personality] Mary Margaret McBride to Moscow to teach Stalin about Democracy?" Mears implored a friend in 1950. "I've been expecting that ever since I read that we had sent four experts to Tokyo to teach the Jap to eat corn." Against such dominant liberal interventionist currents, Mears issued a stream of proposals emanating from her core belief that U.S. power to produce global social change was limited—from her World War II-era call for the United States to retain Japan's emperor and quickly revive its war-torn economy to her Cold War campaign for U.S. recognition of the PRC—but which were anathema to Cold War liberals.³⁴

One by one, each pillar of Mears's tentative internationalism crumbled. The first, the need for "disinterested" UN leadership, shattered on the anvil of post-war geopolitics. Besides occasional appeals for UN civil service reform and UN recognition of the PRC, Mears devised few substantive UN measures. Second, Mears's early mantra urging Americans to heed the "Asiatic point of view" became stale and indistinguishable from similar voices in the 1950s and 1960s (besides underestimating Japan's Yoshida Shigeru, South Korea's Syngman Rhee, and other conservative Asian statesmen navigating their nations along complicated paths of U.S. dependency). Mears wavered, and personally crumbled upon, another crucial pillar: U.S. public opinion. Following like-minded U.S.

June 23, 1961, Correspondence, Japan: 1939–49, Helen Mears to "Sue," April 11, 1953, Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP; Rupp, *Worlds*, 26–48.

34. Mears, *Boar*, 328–29; Helen Mears to Freda Kirchwey, June 7, 1949, folder 3152, carton 15, *Nation* Records, Houghton Library, Harvard University; Helen Mears to "Lu," [1950], Correspondence, 1946–1950, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears, "The Japanese Emperor," *The Yale Review* (December 1943): 238–57; idem., "The Case for Admitting Red China to the U.N.," *The Progressive* (October 1954): 8–11. For Mears's right-wing connections, see "Japs Slow in Recovery of Economy: Blame First U.S. Policies," *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 1948, C7; Helen Mears, "The Russians are Making the Most of Our 'Imperialist Rule' in Japan," *Saturday Evening Post*, April 29, 1950, 12.

pacifists' decades-old cries, Mears frequently invoked an informed public as the best antidote to U.S. militarism and neo-imperialism. ("[M]ost Americans don't want war," Mears consoled a Japanese friend frightened at Japan's vulnerability "between two giants getting ready to hurl H-bombs" in 1955. "[T]he common sense of most Americans will be strong en[ough] to help change our policies.") Confronting an indifferent public, Mears's faith in ordinary Americans eroded. "[P]erhaps the major responsibility lies with us as readers," Mears weakly addressed popular fears of thermonuclear war in 1959. "For if we paid more attention to the sort of 'evidence' our publicists give us when they announce the aggressive plans of some 'enemy,' and . . . strongly protest all attempts to mislead us toward war, they would not be able to get away with it." Still, like many New Left intellectuals, Mears retained a residual faith in the U.S. public. Convinced by C. Wright Mills's sociological analysis of an interlocking "power elite" in leading universities, businesses, governments, and media exerting disproportionate authority over U.S. society, Mears believed what an entire antiwar Sixties generation came to believe: mainline elites and institutions, not ordinary citizens, comprised the chief obstacle to a democratic, humane politics.³⁵

These analytical failures might be damning, except for the fact that Mears held dim expectations for any rational order to emerge from World War II. Like popular New Left feminist icon U.S. congresswoman Jeannette Rankin, historians Charles and Mary Beard, and a significant minority of 1940s-era leftists and liberals, Mears was a sharp critic of FDR's Japan diplomacy. Closely acquainted with Charles and Mary Beard (both of whom also developed strong personal and intellectual ties with interwar Japan), Mears similarly considered U.S. wartime policy as contrary to the national interest. Agreeing with Charles Beard's publicly controversial analysis, Mears criticized U.S. internationalist elites' anti-Japanese diplomacy as rooted in unrealistic, U.S.-tilted views of Chinese modernization, Western imperial interests, and an overzealous search for overseas U.S. markets. ("It's an illusion that we need markets," Mears noted in 1941, particularly after Japan's recent economic nationalism disproved breezy internationalist assumptions that developing markets would automatically "want the things we produce.") In toto, Mears unleashed what many antiwar liberals could not: a geopolitically nuanced argument, from colonial and revolutionary Asia's perspective, against the United States' morally powerful, seemingly unambiguous stand against imperial Japan. Viewed as a challenge to Western imperialism, Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere possessed great

35. Helen Mears, "Japan's 'Divine' Mission," *Nation's Business* (December 1942); idem., "Peace by Deterrent," *The Progressive* (September 1960): 37; idem. to Akira Usami, February 23, 1955, Correspondence, Japan: 1939-49, box 2, HMP. On Asian conservatism, see John W. Dower, *Empire and Aftermath: Yoshida Shigeru and the Japanese Experience, 1878-1954* (Cambridge, MA, 1979); Young Ick Lew, *The Making of the First Korean President: Syngman Rhee's Quest for Independence, 1875-1948* (Honolulu, HI, 2013).

appeal as a regional model to pro-Japanese Asian nationalists, including India's Subhas Chandra Bose and China's Wang Jingwei. Few Americans accepted such characterizations of official U.S. policy, Mears conceded. But neither could any rational Asian observer view the postwar reimposition of European and U.S. politico-military rule as anything but "old-fashioned imperialism with trimmings."³⁶

In Western imperialism's place, a perdurable U.S. or communist empire seemed unlikely. Betraying her skepticism of globalism and deep-seated respect for Third World agency, Mears anticipated something hardly more reassuring: prolonged global uncertainty, even chaos. Some U.S. internationalists dreamed of a UN-led utopia, others plotted U.S. global domination; but since "the Anglo Saxon prefers to muddle," Mears gloomily predicted in early 1941, U.S. postwar leadership would likely pursue "half measures that will ensure increasing chaos until all the colonial peoples are sufficiently industrialized and . . . nationalized to join in a free-for-all." When anti-Soviet containment strategy emerged as U.S. postwar policy, Mears's public judgment was swift and prescient. In a world of high-tech weaponry and rising social expectations, she projected in 1948, the United States and other advanced industrial nation-states would swirl in an accelerating security spiral powered by "a continuous drive for the dubious 'security' of more and more possessions." Arming "innumerable 'backward' peoples" around the communist periphery, the United States was fomenting a potential threat far more powerful than imperial Japan. The result of such a state of affairs, Mears concluded, "can safely be prophesied by a bright twelve-year-old."³⁷

Mears's most compelling alternative to U.S. hegemony, Third World neutrality and non-alignment, demonstrated the vibrant role that neutrality-related notions played in U.S. internationalist thought, particularly before World War II, as Brooke Blower has argued. Demonstrating prewar neutrality's postwar reinventions in some corners of public life, Mears advocated Japan's UN-guaranteed neutrality—joining Walter Lippmann, George F. Kennan, Charles de Gaulle, and other salient Western voices seeking Japan, Germany, and other embattled Cold War nations' neutralization—as an effective step toward defusing U.S.-communist tensions and weaning Japan's war-depressed society from neocolonial dependence on the United States. After the Korean War's sharp escalation of global military tensions in the 1950s, Mears admitted it was a "tough program." But U.S. officials' contrary approach—"to keep on slugging" by provocatively encircling the PRC and

36. Mears diary, August 31, 1946, Correspondence, 1946–1950, box 1, Helen Mears, notes, [1946], Writings – Fiction, box 2, HMP; Mears, *Mirror*, 236–92; idem., "Modest Proposal"; Amy Swerdlow, *Women Strike for Peace: Traditional Motherhood and Radical Politics in the 1960s* (Chicago, IL, 1993), 135–42; Sadao Asada, *Culture Shock and Japanese-American Relations: Historical Essays* (Columbia, MO, 2007), 42–44; Helen Mears, "Time-Bombs Along the China Coast," *The Progressive* (January 1954): 23.

37. Mears, "Modest Proposal"; idem., *Mirror*, 276–324.

USSR with "a string of time-bombs" from Korea to Southeast Asia—seemed far more difficult and self-defeating.³⁸

Beyond neutrality, Mears pushed for official U.S. recognition of the Third World Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), a Third World-led movement for Third World development and independence from Western-communist power politics, which emerged after the 1955 Afro-Asian Conference in Bandung, Indonesia. Mears heralded NAM as the only sane alternative for an underdeveloped Third World consumed by externally imposed Cold War conflicts. Asians, Africans, and Arabs sought their own destinies, Mears relayed the views of her Third World friends and fellow citizens, in a "polarized" world devastating their small nations as pawns of U.S. and USSR "national power." As U.S. politico-military influences spread from Asia to the Middle East and Africa, Mears urged Americans to discard prevailing perceptions of NAM as an immature, threatening anti-Western rebellion, and instead embrace its broader social aspirations after decades of colonial rule. Far from a churlish bloc of emerging nations, Mears insisted to her readers, NAM was a creative, constructive fount of internationalist ideas such as India's proposals for mediating U.S.-PRC conflict or Afro-Asian regionalism as a counterweight to NATO's militaristic influence in Europe.³⁹

Though NAM's vision of a self-governing Third World succumbed to renewed Cold War superpower rivalries, intra-NAM divisions, and colonial underdevelopment, an undeterred Mears spearheaded the New Left's Third World turn, injecting NAM ideas and energies into New Left intellectual circles in the 1960s and 1970s. U.S. radicals embarrassingly lagged behind millions of Third World citizens—for whom the Cold War was not figuratively, Mears admonished *Progressive* readers, but literally "explosive"—in confronting U.S. power worldwide due to "our persistent failure to examine our own controversial policies realistically." Increasingly, Mears turned her eye to the U.S. state at home, where winds of change stirred less perceptibly, but with potentially massive consequences.⁴⁰

TOWARD A THIRD WORLD LEFT

Historians give varying explanations for the New Left's failure to transform Vietnam-era U.S. diplomacy. Some emphasize the role of Richard Nixon and charismatic world leaders' co-optation of oppositional politics or rising domestic conservatism; others stress the left's sectarian weaknesses. Mears's New Left

38. Helen Mears, "Japan: Challenge to Our Prestige," *Harper's Magazine* (July 1950): 73–78; idem., "Chain Explosion in the Orient," *The Progressive* (October 1950): 24; Blower, "Isolationism"; Craig and Logevall, *Cold War*, 82–85.

39. Helen Mears to Max Ascoli, September 22, 1949, Projects Currents – Letters to Editors, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears, letter to editor, *New York Times*, November 28, 1952, 24; Helen Mears, "Those Doubting Asians," *The Progressive* (April 1960): 23–26.

40. Helen Mears, letter to editor, *The Progressive* (January 1960): 46; Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York, 2007), 95–223.

experiences suggest another cause: a resilient U.S. security state. Through its paradoxically voluntarist grip on U.S. society, the U.S. government, Mears perceived, proved far more enduring than its Vietnam-era blunders or the global protests which erupted in their wake.⁴¹

The postwar United States presented a particularly puzzling dilemma: it was a coercive, “consensus”-bound state abroad yet relatively pluralistic, democratic society at home. Where many analysts offered state- or elite-based structural explanations presuming a theoretical divergence of the U.S. state and society, Mears pursued a simultaneously top-down and bottom-up ethnography of U.S. politics, interrogating how local and elite citizens and institutions mutually constituted one another through everyday social practices. It was precisely from ordinary U.S. society, Mears observed, that the U.S. state and U.S. foreign policy drew their harrowing power.⁴²

Confined to drafts and marginalia, Mears’s ethnographic diagnosis of postwar U.S. society was never fully published. As the sequel to her prewar ethnography of imperial Japan, it nonetheless suffused her everyday vision. The United States’ fundamental contradiction, Mears wrote in *Dissent* in 1954, was its “moral schizophrenia.” Americans routinely condemned their immoral enemies overseas, yet ignored daily newspaper reports of the global devastation wreaked by their military. Such callous, terroristic behavior sprang naturally from totalitarian societies, not the United States’ “organically” democratic social structure. Mears’s public answer to this puzzle, shaped by conventional foreign policy frameworks that eschewed deep social analysis for high politics, was neither original nor compelling. The United States behaved this way, Mears blared as the Cold War veered from crisis to crisis, because it was an uncritical “bi-partisan policy” establishment; a “disenfranchised” electorate; a “permanent war economy” making war “the health of the state”; or, put bluntly, “The Military Mind at Work.”⁴³

Beneath such left-wing truisms coursed Mears’s innovative ethnographic grasp of the postwar United States. Since World War II, Mears perceived extraordinary shifts in Americans’ everyday relations with a U.S. state rapidly encroaching on the nation’s domestic and global affairs. This insight was hardly

41. Jeremi Suri, *Power and Protest: Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 211–65; Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (New York, 1984), 275–439. On the U.S. security state’s resilience, see Julian E. Zelizer, *Arsenal of Democracy: The Politics of National Security—From World War II to the War on Terrorism* (New York, 2010).

42. Cold War scholars have begun utilizing similar approaches; see Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York, 2010); Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (New York, 2011); Andrew Friedman, *Covert Capital: Landscapes of Denial and the Making of U.S. Empire in the Suburbs of Northern Virginia* (Berkeley, CA, 2013).

43. Helen Mears, “A Note on Atrocities,” *Dissent* (Winter 1954): 103–6; idem., “America Must Choose,” *The Progressive* (January 1951): 7; idem., “Did Anyone Say ‘War Prosperity?’” *Dissent* (Winter 1955): 89; idem., “Foreign Policy: An Issue in Search of a Party,” *The Progressive* (October 1958): 9; idem., “Militarism is Impractical,” *Liberation* (March 1959): 14.

unique; what was unique was Mears's ethnographic sensitivity to the United States' social and cultural evolution as a global superpower. Mears was uniquely positioned for such an analysis as she witnessed U.S. power unfold in Japan, a place few knew so intimately. Visiting Occupied Japan as the lone woman on an official U.S. labor advisory committee, Mears was astonished by the social and technological "medley of miracles and vexations" involved in modern U.S. administration of an entire nation across the Pacific. "Three hundred thousand pieces could be done by anyone of talent," she marveled. Publicly, Mears's ethnographic work appeared most prominently in a brief, brilliant series of *New Yorker* stories. Stunned by Occupied Japan's stark contrast with prewar Japan, Mears described the occupation as an awkwardly imposed superstructure atop a defeated, confused, amazingly dignified Japanese people. Redeploying her state-society lens from *Wild Boar*, Mears captured a kaleidoscopic range of U.S.-Japanese responses. Likening Americans to a "Dai Itian" alien race (named after the Occupation's Dai Ichi building headquarters), Mears poignantly recorded postwar Japan's jarring social order. From starving Japanese girls wandering U.S. hotels to Americans' awed reactions to Japanese high culture, from Tokyo's bombed-out desolation to the country club-like atmosphere of U.S. expatriate society, Mears's *New Yorker* stories gave readers eye-opening glimpses of Occupation life. Mears's deepening alienation from the United States' presence in Japan caused an irreparable rift with her longtime *New Yorker* editors. The American "attitude . . . toward the people [it] rule[s]," Mears pointedly concluded her last installment about a U.S. official unable to eat breakfast while observing a Japanese family living in the rubble near his hotel, "is one of interest, and sometimes even of concern."⁴⁴

Occupied Japan's most glaring contrast was not between communism and democracy, U.S. modernity and Japanese immaturity, or other common postwar tropes. It was the "problem," Mears told a friend, "of what in hell we are up to in Japan": the vast gulf between the "slick machine-like organization and the ideological muddle" of U.S. power. How could Americans reform any nation, Mears asked, when they hardly knew or cared about other nations' cultures, societies, and particular historical experiences?⁴⁵

Mears alarmingly watched such U.S.-Japan patterns spread worldwide. Several features marked her resulting analysis. First, U.S. power everywhere, as in Japan, was remarkably "innocent, so almost unaware of itself" that Americans, casually inhabiting their nation's globally expanding presence, were genuinely surprised when foreigners accused them of imperialistic self-interest. Americans, Mears diagnosed, had "an almost psychopathic split personality." Abroad, they imposed an ill-defined "American Way" upon others ("We'll

44. Helen Mears to Katharine White, February 1, 1946, folder 2, box 437, NYPL; Helen Mears, "Tokyo Revisited," *The New Yorker*, October 19, 1946, 90-96; idem., "Life with the Dai Itians," *The New Yorker*, February 14, 1948, 48-53.

45. Helen Mears to "Dot," [1946], Writings - Fiction, box 2, HMP.

democratize the hell out of them,” a popular Occupation wisecrack went). At home, they assimilated global influences like traditional Asian architecture and UN high society with imperious reactions ranging from paternalistic bemusement to racialized hostility.⁴⁶

Relatedly came Mears’s second claim: a pliable, yet potentially powerful, U.S. public. Rejecting U.S. establishment wisdom, which dismissed public opinion as uninformed and irrelevant, Mears—incessantly polling friends and strangers—unearthed a more difficult paradox: ideologically broad, yet socially shallow, consensus. Like World War II Japanese, postwar Americans’ public support for their government belied private uncertainties and thin political commitments. “With Cuba following Laos—you must be in a tizzy,” a friend quipped to Mears after President John F. Kennedy’s disastrous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion. “The way ostriches avoid anxiety—is my pattern.” Some day, Mears warned the *New York Times*, “a groundswell of outraged public opinion” would transform U.S. policy.⁴⁷

One last feature of U.S. society inhibited such a development: the immense socioeconomic opportunities afforded by U.S. hegemony. Over a decade before President Dwight Eisenhower’s famed 1961 farewell address warning Americans of a “military-industrial complex,” Mears anxiously identified that same alliance of interests. From burgeoning public and private employment opportunities to a globalizing U.S. education system, from aspiring middle-class parents to fast-expanding networks of global professionals, Americans seized on foreign affairs as their main chance. Geopolitical or moral precision in U.S. statecraft seemed incidental; personal advancement at the behest of U.S. power overrode such scruples every time. Such was the American “dilemma,” a retired U.S. Army general agreed with Mears in the *Progressive*. “Full employment through fear of the classical ‘enemy at the gates,’ or unemployment with peace. . . . [T]herefore, the Cold War must go on.” Shamefully, Mears held a small lot of U.S. military-linked General Electric stocks and seriously dated a corporate aviation executive, tormented by the global suffering she condoned through such connections. “A civilization that makes war and conformity profitable will always win the allegiance” of its citizens while non-conformists like Mears became the “crackpots.” “I could join in this established society and make a decent salary and living conditions,” she grieved. “[I] *long to belong* but *can’t* except on my own terms.”⁴⁸

46. Mears, *Mirror*, 4–41; Mears diary, [1959], April 30, 1960, Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP.

47. Eleanor Levy to Helen Mears, April 18, 1961, Correspondence with Lester Levy, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears, letter to editor, *New York Times*, September 7, 1952, SM5.

48. Helen Mears, “You in Tokyo,” *The New Yorker*, November 23, 1946, 80–89; Hugh Hester, letter to editor, *The Progressive* (January 1960): 46; Mears to Clement, April 1, 1955, Correspondence, 1953–61, box 1, Helen Mears, “On Selling Out to the Devil for a Sprig of Holly,” [1953], *idem.*, notes, [1959], Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP.

Looming above Mears's personal anguish was an increasingly unresponsive, dictatorial U.S. state. The Vietnam War brought Mears's anti-state rebellion to its climax. A relatively lone voice against Vietnam policy in the 1950s, Mears steadily documented U.S. policymakers' basic misreading of Vietnamese revolutionary nationalism and escalating military commitments in yet another postcolonial Asian civil war. For Mears, Vietnam recapitulated every U.S. mistake since the Pacific War, including the United States' cavalier attitude toward international law, support of Third World counterrevolution, and what Mears pungently called the "big risks" of "little wars." "The time to rethink this policy is now—before mounting American casualties and the importunities of the fanatic 'no substitute for victory' elements in our country," Mears reminded Americans of their similar, oft-forgotten war in Korea. Unable to fully empathize with pacifist "do-gooders" due to her support of military force within the context of anticolonial liberation and collective security, Mears resisted A. J. Muste and pacifist leaders' pleas to help organize a U.S. peace movement in disarray since World War II. Witnessing Eisenhower's, Kennedy's, and their successors' disastrous course in Vietnam, Mears finally joined the War Resisters League's national board and began organizing demonstrations, protest votes, and acts of civil disobedience with civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph, chemist Linus Pauling, and other activists in a rising antiwar movement in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁹

For most New Leftists, the Sixties marked the beginning of a globally energized anti-establishment politics. For Mears, the decade marked the maturation of lifelong struggles against the U.S. state. For thirty years, Mears developed major themes—the civil and colonial dimensions of Third World conflict; the USSR's and PRC's realistic motives; the "credibility gap" between U.S. rhetoric and actions; and the U.S. military strategy's provocative nature—which the New Left refined and redeployed in its struggles with U.S. policy. Equally critical of the Kennedy-Johnson liberal establishment and conservative New Right for their fundamentally peremptory approach to U.S. diplomacy, Mears backed antiwar Democratic Party candidate George McGovern in the 1972 U.S. presidential election. In a tragically broken U.S. system, Mears lauded South Dakota's McGovern, Arkansas's J. William Fulbright, and other antiwar congressmen challenging the Cold War establishment as the nation's "true voice" in its "darkest hours" in Vietnam. How Americans dealt with McGovern, a "deep-digging, issue-oriented honest human being who gives life to our political

49. Helen Mears, "Our Newest War: The Mess in Indo-China," *The Nation*, April 25, 1953, 344–45; idem., "The Big Risks of Little Wars," *The Progressive* (October 1962): 23–27; Mears diary, [1959?], Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP; Memo, September 26, 1967, 13, WRL – Executive Committee Minutes (1965–1969), box 1, subseries II, series B, War Resisters League Records, SCPC; Committee for Protest Action in the 1960 Elections, "Cast a Total Vote for Peace and Civil Rights," [New York, 1960]; "Please Stop it, My Fellow Men!," advertisement, *New York Times*, October 31, 1971, E6; Lawrence S. Wittner, *Rebels Against War: The American Peace Movement, 1933–1983* (Philadelphia, PA, 1984), 34–201.

system," Mears told the *New York Times* eight months before Nixon defeated McGovern in one of U.S. history's largest landslides, would foretell "the future of our country."⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

The price of her insight, Mears knew, was marginality. "Being a prophet gets one *nowhere*," she lamented in 1961. Based on a diminished documentary record, Mears spent her final years consolidating her views against a U.S. state proliferating beyond overseas threats and U.S. citizens' actual needs. "[T]he Atlantic is our 'pond' as the Pacific is our 'lake,' and if the Russians are challenging our absolute control by building . . . offensive weapons," Mears mocked a *Nation* journalist defending U.S. anti-submarine bases in the Azores Islands, we must "acquire every possible facility to overkill them."⁵¹

Historians have largely interpreted U.S. dissenters as heroic bearers of idealistic alternatives or naïfs unschooled in the realities of power. Certainly, Mears's flaws were serious. Lacking modest influence until the 1960s, her public recommendations were often vague, formulaic, or self-defeating. Mears acutely identified a problem most Americans casually assumed: U.S. global power. But her solutions—strengthened international law; independent public opinion; U.S. policymaking respectful of foreign perspectives and interests—overemphasized legal, ideological, and personal factors in U.S. diplomacy. Sharing Americans' basic libertarian tendencies, Mears's moralistic sensibility neglected structural factors, particularly constitutional constraints against popular decision-making and exploitative First-Third World economic linkages ("[T]he only thing wrong with capitalism is the capitalist ideology," Mears lamented, "which oddly en[ough] works against the interests of the capitalist system"). The result was a Mearsian analysis of the U.S. liberal-capitalist state bereft of institutional and economic aspects crucial to a broader understanding of post-1945 affairs.⁵²

But Mears's shortcomings also reflected the monumental challenges facing U.S. dissenters. Despite Mears's astute critique of U.S.-led global order and her attempt to bridge various ideological chasms dividing Americans, World War II-based liberal exceptionalism remains the dominant mode for Americans' contemporary understandings of the United States' commanding role in world affairs. Mears's intellectual work subsisted in the diminutive political and socio-economic space afforded radical dissent, including U.S. media institutions decidedly reliant on the Cold War state. Furthermore, U.S. postwar society's patriarchal norms, within and beyond the left, magnified Mears's difficulties.

50. Helen Mears to Edward Snyder, March 1, 12, 1962, Ma-Me - 1962, box 60, FCNLR; Helen Mears, letter to editor, *The Nation*, August 11, 1962, October 3, 1966; idem., "Bi-partisan Brinkmanship," *Liberation* (October 1964): 29; idem., letter to editor, *New York Times*, March 12, 1972, E10.

51. Mears to "Sue," June 11, 1961, Correspondence, 1953-61, box 1, HMP; Helen Mears, letter to editor, *The Nation*, December 6, 1975, 578.

52. Mears to Clement, February 4, 1961, Correspondence, 1953-61, box 1, HMP.

"From male and females' sad relations—we garner enmity for nations," Mears philosophized on her failure to attain an egalitarian relationship like that of her personal intellectual idols, Charles and Mary Beard. "I think longingly of such partnerships," she regretted at the end of her career. Like that of many women caught in U.S. feminism's early postwar retreat, Mears's political, intellectual, and social oppression were inextricably linked. Straddling traditional and feminist sensibilities, Mears's personal journey across U.S. high politics demonstrated the remunerations as well as challenges still confronting women serving in the loftiest corridors of U.S. and global power.⁵³

Measuring Mears against New Left or conventional U.S. state-based metrics of diplomacy elides her significant achievements. Though Mears insufficiently scrutinized identity politics and U.S. capitalism, issues which New and Third World Leftists more boldly confronted in the Vietnam era, Mears cultivated an idiosyncratic, forceful, supple critique of postwar state power. Rejecting "American Century"-styled exceptionalism, middle-class domesticity, and other powerful hierarchies of inequality afflicting U.S. and global society, Mears, alongside C. Wright Mills, A. J. Muste, and other older New Left critics, adumbrated alternative possibilities between orthodox Cold War liberalism and Soviet-styled socialism—including Third World non-alignment, UN-centered internationalism, and transnational civil society—which New and Third World Leftists neglected in their flawed attempts to build alternative orders *de novo*. More than once, Mears's New Left progeny foundered on the craggy perils of centralized authority, inauthentic democracy, and ideological conformity about which she warned.

Complicating existing scholarship on the U.S. left, Helen Mears's Cold War dissent illuminates the globally informed dimensions of U.S. radicalism. Transcending political parties, universities, labor unions, and other traditional sites of radical activity, Mears, like various liberal and New Left actors under growing study, honed her domestic and international politics as the United States emerged as a world power. As it was for U.S. internationalist elites who, imbricated in these same global processes, rallied U.S. opinion behind global interventionism, World War II was a watershed for Mears and other opposing voices in the U.S. Congress and civil society leading a growing movement against the U.S. state through the Vietnam era. Rooted in her liberal experiences in Asia, Mears's unique intellectual contributions drew from her anticolonial anthropological gaze, which posed U.S. power and culture, rather than Communist or Third World societies, as the chief problem of postwar

53. Mears diary, [1961], Correspondence: 1952–59, box 2, HMP; Priscilla Roberts and He Peiqun, eds., *Bonds Across Borders: Women, China, and International Relations in the Modern World* (Newcastle, UK, 2007); Swerdlow, *Women*, 2–69. Mears's decision to destroy most of her personal papers—despite archival interest in her large collections—makes her full biography elusive (Helen Mears to Carey McWilliams, [1976], folder 10, box 28, Carey McWilliams Papers, UCLA; Richard Minear e-mail to author, August 7, 2015).

thought.⁵⁴ Though Mears and her New and Third World Left successors failed to attract a popular U.S. constituency, Mears's insights into the United States' Third World dilemmas and ethnographic paradoxes as a nationalistic super-power contest the tidy categorizations of "engagement" and "coercion," "interventionism" and "isolationism," and "liberalism" and "conservatism" that dominate present-day public discourse. One might dismiss Mears's creative, contradictory answers. But the questions she raised regarding a widening disconnect between the United States and the world, U.S. global rhetoric and local realities, and a powerful U.S. security state and its citizenry, haunt us still.

54. Randall B. Woods, ed., *Vietnam and the American Political Tradition: The Politics of Dissent* (Cambridge, UK, 2003); Daniel Geary, *Radical Ambition: C. Wright Mills, the Left, and American Social Thought* (Berkeley, CA, 2009), 60–61. Contrarily, on the neocolonial state-centered bent of postwar U.S. anthropology, see Peter Mandler, "Deconstructing 'Cold War Anthropology,'" in *Uncertain Empire: American History and the Idea of the Cold War*, ed. Joel Isaac and Duncan Bell (New York, 2012), 245–66. For recent work on the global U.S. left, see Jacqueline L. Castledine, *Cold War Progressives: Women's Interracial Organizing for Peace and Freedom* (Urbana, IL, 2012); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (Cambridge, UK, 2013); Sean L. Malloy, *Out of Oakland: Black Panther Party Internationalism During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY, 2017).

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