

## Week Three Reading Guide: The Nuclear Freeze campaign and the role of organizers

The reading by Redekop has been replaced by a book review by Randall Forsberg, and the long rough-cut video interview of Forsberg has been replaced by a shorter, more focused one. We start the first day with a brief discussion of Gusterson's second article, building on the previous long discussion of the first one.

**September 23, 2019**

**Gusterson, H. 1999, "Feminist Militarism," *PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 22.2, 17; <https://doi.org/10.1525/pol.1999.22.2.17>**

This article focuses on the feminist themes Gusterson touched on in his earlier one. He begins restating the essentialist position and its opposition by feminists via "social constructedness." Second-wave feminism started with Simone de Beauvoir's idea that gender is constructed ("One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman") and extending to post-structuralist Judith Butler, for whom gender is a performance, potentially fluid, learned and practiced daily based on cultural norms and discourses. Gusterson is intrigued by the idea of feminist militarism as performance.

"If we weren't feminists when we went in [to the military], we were when we came out." What was meant by this? How does the military culture described in the article reflect gender essentialism?

On p. 22, Gusterson argues that the women's movement and the peace movement "remake their mythic narratives... through the tropes of revitalization." What does he mean by this? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Is feminist militarism feminist? Does your answer depend on whether you adopt essentialist or constructivist reasoning?

**Wittner, L. S. 2010, "The Nuclear Freeze and its Impact," [Arms Control Association](#), December 5, 2010**

Dr. Randall Forsberg was a powerful figure who helped to dissipate the nuclear arms race that posed a threat to all humanity during the Cold War. During the late 1970s she was an MIT graduate student in political science, though she completed her PhD only in 1997. That's because during the 1980s she created and led a mass political movement to freeze the nuclear arms race. She had a tremendous influence on me and thousands of other young activists. Her technical knowledge, political savvy, strong communication skills, and organizational genius generated a mass movement that taught me what is possible through organizing. This [obituary](#) summarizes her life and career.

Wittner's article goes into more depth. Examine the [Call to Halt the Nuclear Arms Race](#), a document used by local organizers gathering signatures. Three of the listed endorsers were MIT faculty (but only one is identified as such). What were the elements of the strategic plan Forsberg and colleagues created, for which the Call was the mechanism for change? Why was the Freeze headquarters placed in

St. Louis? (Two years later, the highest-rated television film in history, *The Day After*, showed the effect of a full-scale nuclear war on the midwestern US.) Note the role of coalition-building: the Freeze campaign gathered many other organizations into the effort. Later we will learn more about the Union of Concerned Scientists and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

How effective was the Freeze movement politically? How can one measure that?

Who resisted the Freeze, why did they do so, what power did they have, and how did they try to diminish the effectiveness of the Call?

How did the Freeze influence the thinking and action of the Soviet and US leaders?

What do you think were the most important factors in the success of the Freeze movement?

**Forsberg, R. (2004). “The Impact of Activists on Nuclear Disarmament.” Review of Lawrence S. Wittner, *The Struggle against the Bomb*, volumes 1–3.**

<https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=9328>

Lawrence Wittner wrote a comprehensive 3-volume history of the impact of activists on nuclear disarmament. As perhaps the leading activist during the 1980s, Randall Forsberg provides unique insights in her review of his books. She focuses on the third volume, 1971 to 2003, and particularly on the presidency of Ronald Reagan, 1981–89. Wittner concludes, and Forsberg supports with her own arguments, the conclusion that the main reason for the end of the nuclear arms race was the effectiveness of the protest movement, not the impact of Reagan’s military buildup. The pertinent issues—US militarization, resistance to negotiating with adversarial governments, opposition to treaties negotiated by prior US Democratic presidents, and efforts to tarnish activists—are strikingly similar today (including the recent US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty that Reagan signed in 1987). Thus Forsberg’s perspectives are deeply valuable in our current context.

How does Forsberg argue that activists, and not Reagan’s military buildup, ended the arms race? What role did Soviet economic concerns play?

Forsberg refers to “an important but turbulent story” about the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR, originally founded in 1961 by Bernard Lown and revived in 1978 by Helen Caldicott) and the International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (co-founded by Lown, this organization won the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize). Caldicott was a charismatic speaker and activist whose popular acclaim and leadership style irked the more conservative PSR board members, and she resigned as PSR president in 1983. This fall (2019), PSR will present her their [Lifetime Achievement Award](#).

What is the “arms control community” and why does Forsberg conclude they played a crucial role in ending the arms race? Which MIT faculty members does she cite as being part of this community? On what point does Forsberg end her review?

## **September 25, 2019**

Today's discussion is based largely on television interviews of two activist leaders of the campaign for nuclear disarmament. We conclude with Beckwith's chapter and its relevance to current events at MIT.

### **CNN Crossfire 1984, Helen Caldicott, two video segments:**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uANKCuv7xQY> and  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TWCW0ZXQwIA>

These two video segments (just under 10 minutes each) feature Helen Caldicott. They are taken from a 1980s television debate program featuring liberal and conservative antagonists, co-hosted by liberal Tom Braden and conservative Pat Buchanan. In this episode, most of the discussion is between Buchanan and Caldicott.

What are the main points made by Caldicott? What are the roles of Buchanan and Braden? What rhetorical methods does Caldicott employ?

### **WGBH OpenVault 1988, "War and Peace in the Nuclear Age; Missile Experimental; An Interview with Randall Forsberg", [video](#), 54 min.**

In the beginning of this interview, Randall Forsberg describes the start of the Freeze campaign, the growth of the movement, its impact on US politics, and more. She outlines her strategy for creating a mass movement and shows how effectively it happened. She also adds details not mentioned in earlier readings for this week. For example, Reagan's highly controversial Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI, known popularly as "Star Wars"), may have been a reaction to the peace movement. She also discusses the impact of the freeze movement on the 1982 Congressional and local elections, when Democrats gained 27 seats in the House of Representatives and 7 governorships. (A national recession also played a significant role in this election.) During the later portions of the interview, watch especially:

18:59 – 28:30 the nuclear freeze and Congress

28:30 – 29:34 the role of the presidency

23:48 – 25:54 and 30:14 – 31:42 Reagan's response to the freeze movement

Comment on Forsberg's assertion at (30:51).

31:46 – 33:57 role of the freeze in the 1984 election

Compare Forsberg's analysis of the role of the freeze in the 1984 election to the current political discussions around gun control and climate change.

36:38 – 40:22 the freeze movement after 1984 and her resummation 41:18 – 43:56

How did the freeze movement change the peace movement? Do you agree with Forsberg's comments concerning the news media? Do we have a much more informed movement that will not be deflected by

lip service from politicians? What are the similarities to and differences from the current situation compared with 1984?

52:09 – 54:18 Did the freeze movement win by losing? One thing Forsberg doesn't discuss is the long time period needed for successful cultural change. Researchers estimate it takes about 7 years in organizations.

**Beckwith, J. 2002, *Making Genes, Making Waves: A Social Activist in Science* (Harvard University Press), Chapter 4.**

In this chapter, Beckwith argues strongly the imperative for students to consider the social impact of science. In what ways does MIT do this and how does it fall short? Was this important to you when you entered MIT? If its importance has changed for you while at MIT, why?

How did Beckwith avoid reproducing harmful hierarchies given the power he had as a spokesperson following the 1969 press conference? Was he right to take money from an industrial "villain"? What privileges did he have that enabled him to speak out, what were his responsibilities, and why? What parallels exist with the 2019 Media Lab scandal concerning money from Jeffrey Epstein? Compare Ethan Zuckerman's [blog entry](#) and Arwa Mboya's [letter in The Tech](#) with Beckman's chapter.

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