

**The New York Public Library  
Humanities and Social Sciences Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division**

**Women's Action Coalition Records**  
1991-1997  
MssCol 3376

**Briar Sauro  
October 1997**

**Revised by Donald Mennerich  
May 2006**

## Table of Contents

<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Historical note .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Scope and content note .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Arrangement note .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Series descriptions and container list .....</b>	<b>1</b>
I. ADMINISTRATIVE FILES .....	1
II. SUBJECT FILES .....	2
III. COMMITTEES .....	5
IV. ACTION FILES .....	6
V. LETTERS TO WAC – <i>THIS SERIES IS CLOSED UNTIL 2075</i> .....	7
VI. WAC BOSTON .....	8
VII. PHOTOGRAPHS .....	9
VIII. EPHEMERA AND ARTIFACTS .....	10
IX. VIDEO RECORDINGS .....	10
X. SOUND RECORDINGS .....	10

## Summary

- Main entry:** Women's Action Coalition
- Title:** Women's Action Coalition records, 1991-1997
- Size:** 8 linear feet (23 boxes)
- Source:** Gift of the Women's Action Coalition, primarily via Pat DeAngelis, 1994-1997
- Abstract:** The Women's Action Coalition was a direct action organization founded in 1992 in support of women's rights. The records contain subject files, committee files, administrative records, photographs, video and sound recordings, printed material, and artifacts documenting the activities of WAC New York, with some additional records of WAC Boston.
- Access:** Apply in the Special Collections Office for admission to the Manuscripts and Archives Division.
- Boxes 12 and 13 (Letters to WAC) are closed until 2075.
- Preferred citation:** Women's Action Coalition Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.
- Special formats** Photographs, Placards, Sound recordings, Video recordings.

## Historical note

On January 28, 1992, a group of ten to fifteen friends from the New York art world called a meeting, entitled "Women Strategizing in the '90's." There were many reasons these women felt frustrated and angry, but the chief catalyst for the meeting was the recent confirmation of Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court Justice after Anita Hill's testimony that he sexually harassed her. Between seventy-five to one hundred women came to this meeting, and the group decided to become a direct-action organization, similar to the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and the Women's Health Action Coalition (WHAM). They immediately voted on the initials "WAC." After dispute over whether the "A" should stand for "Action" or "Artists," their name officially became Women's Action Coalition.

WAC's first action, at a sexual assault trial involving students from St. John's University, took place six days later. At that time, WAC created its signature "blue dot" logo (see examples in administrative and photo series), modeled after television's way of obscuring rape victims' faces on camera. Members founded the drum corps, which performed at all subsequent actions, and slogans announced, "Let women define rape." WAC was born.

By the second meeting, WAC had 200 participants. By the fourth, and for the rest of the summer of 1992, about 300 women attended every Tuesday. Members created a phone tree and then discarded it as useless, as the number of NYC women involved in some way grew to thousands. The women in WAC were, for the most part, from similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Most were white, many were well-educated, and many were artists and freelance workers, allowing them time to be active in the coalition.

WAC conducted its meetings in a non-hierarchical manner, loosely following "Roberta's Rules of Order" and modeled after those of ACT UP. They were led by facilitators and everything was voted on by everyone. However, WAC's quick growth soon made it impossible to bring all inquiries to the floor. Members created committees for specific actions and issues.

WAC was extremely visible and well organized. Their numerous actions were well-publicized and executed. WAC's mission statement, created by the media committee, contained the memorable phrase, "WAC is watching. We will take action." Art journals described their graphics as timely and thought-provoking, as well as impressive artistically, and their actions often demonstrated a flair for the theatrical. This coverage led to mass interest in the organization. Letters to WAC poured in from women across the country who read about WAC in women's magazines such as *Cosmopolitan* and who were eager to get involved.

WAC's seemingly non-stop actions lasted well into 1993, which was the year of greatest publicity and letters to WAC. Soon, however, WAC's internal difficulties rose to the surface. Issues of race and class diversity and ethnic and sexual identity, though discussed by committees such as the Committee on Diversity and Inclusion and The Lesbian Caucus, caused WAC to lose its direction. Member Tracy Ann Essoglou, in her essay, "Louder than Words: A WAC Chronicle," points to differing levels of political activist experience and WAC's "action, action, action" tendency, which prevented earlier dialogues on matters of diversity. WAC's numbers dwindled to seven or eight, and the group's last meeting was on November 6, 1995.

## Scope and content note

The Women's Action Coalition Records trace the rise and fall of a direct-action group often counted among the "Third Wave" of feminism in the early 1990s. Materials are almost entirely concerned with WAC - NY, though there are records of the actions of WAC Boston and scattered files about other branches. The bulk of the material dates from 1992 and 1993. Some papers from 1994 and later are included.

The collection contains files from various committees, especially Outreach, and administrative papers. There are few minutes from meetings and little documentation from the very beginning of the organization. Actions are generally well-represented, starting with WAC's first, the St. John's University action on February 3, 1992. Perhaps the most comprehensive section of the collection is the one concerning the press (Box 6), which contains numerous articles about WAC's action and the organization itself. Photographs, mostly taken by WAC members, and artifacts, such as T-shirts and stickers, also capture the feeling and composition of WAC.

## Arrangement note

The Women's Action Coalition Records are organized in the following series:

- I. Administrative files
- II. Subject files
- III. Committees
- IV. Action files
- V. Letters to WAC
- VI. WAC Boston
- VII. Photographs
- VIII. Ephemera and artifacts
- IX. Video recordings
- X. Sound recordings

**Series descriptions and container list**

**I. Administrative files**

Certificate of incorporation; guidelines for facilitators and treasurers; extensive proposals and correspondence relating to what eventually became the book WAC Stats; contact chapters; guidelines for starting a WAC chapter; legal papers discussing whether to become a 501(c)(3) organization; files about other cities WACs; copies of logo, new member orientation packet and response letters; phone tree; mission statement; press list; "WAC Circle," the bimonthly paper put out by WAC (see also "WACTalk," a supplement in "New Directions for Women" in Box 5, folders 15 and 16).

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>		
1	1	Action Proposal Forms	
	2	Archives	
	3	Backgrounder	
	4	Book Offers	
	5	Book Project	
	6	Book - file of Diane Kurtz	
	7-8	Book project - file of L. Brandon Krall	
	9-10	WAC Stats	
	11	Boston WAC	
	12	Buffalo WAC	
	13	Certificate of Incorporation	
	14	Chicago WAC	
	15	Committees	
	16	Conference (proposal)	
	17	Contact Chapters	
	18	Contact List	
	19	Economic Summit (proposed)	
	20	Education	
	2	1	Facilitator's Guide to the General Meeting
		2	Financial Guidelines
3		Fundraising	
4		General - WAC	
5		General Correspondence	
6		General Information (facilitators and treasurers)	
7		General Statement, sent out with letters	
8		Ignite a WAC - Guidelines	
9		Issues	
10		Legal: WAC 501 (c)	
11		Legal	
12		Liaison Person	
13		Logo Sheet	
14		Los Angeles WAC	
15		Media Kit	
16		Meet the Media - Guide to Press Interviews	
17		Mission Statement	
3	1	New Members Orientation Package	
	2	NYC Response Letter	
	3	Orientation Packets	
	4	Phone Tree	
	5	Phone Tree Guidelines	
	6	Press Contacts and Lists	

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
	7	Press List
	8	Sample Flyer for WAC Chapters
	9	San Francisco WAC
	10	Santa Fe WAC
	11	Start a WAC, Cover Letter
	12	WACnet Satellite Cities
	13	WAC Circle

## II. Subject files

News clippings, brochures, leaflets, and reports on a variety of subjects concerning women, such as breast cancer, rape and sexual harassment cases, abortion, police brutality, women in prison, teenage reproductive issues, portrayal of women in the media and violence against women. Many of these files contain information on events, articles or programs monitored by WAC, but not those that led to direct action. Some incited formal or informal letter-writing by WAC, such as the naming of a pub after Jack the Ripper, a degrading article about a deceased feminist lawyer in the *Harvard Law Review*, and Turner Broadcasting Systems decision to run "pro-life" advertising. There are also files on topics such as boycotts and girlcotts, other organizations (Fury, Women in Black, Gabriela, ACT UP), civil disobedience and projects organized by members of WAC.

Of particular interest are the press files, organized into six areas: Overviews, Art-related, Cosmo, etc., New York area, General, and Not WAC-related. The overviews were organized by WAC, perhaps as part of a press kit, and generally contain press releases as well as the more major articles written about WAC.

The art-related articles are mainly from art journals and concern themselves with WAC's artwork, logos and presentation. Many discuss the action at the Republican National Convention in Houston (1992 - "Women Ignite").

The Cosmo, etc. articles are perhaps the most important because the feature stories published in mainstream women's magazines generated mass interest from women all over the country who then wrote to WAC, eager to start their own branches (see Series 5: Letters to WAC, Boxes 12-13).

The New York area articles follow New York WAC's actions more closely and are perhaps the most realistic outsiders look at what the organization accomplished as well as what went on inside. Feature articles published in the *Village Voice* chronicled the creation and demise of WAC.

The general press contains articles from the rest of the country, often concerning the actions or creation of a WAC branch, such as San Francisco. Articles from Houston follow WAC's "Women Ignite" project. Articles from England and Italy give brief glimpse at what "new American feminists" are doing.

The not WAC-related press file contains articles generally related to women's issues, often issues confronted by WAC, but these articles do not directly mention WAC.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
4	1	Abortion
	2	ACTUP
	3	AIDS - Women and AIDS Working Group
	4	Bake Sale - WAC and WHAM
	5	Bell Communications

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
	6	Bosnia (former Yugoslavia)
	7	Boycott Colorado
	8	Cancer (breast and cervical)
	9	Childhood Sexual Abuse
	10	Chinese Workers (Silver Palace Walkout)
	11	City Health Information
	12	Citywide Coalition to End Police Brutality
	13	Civil Disobedience
	14	Commission on the Status of Women
	15	Counterimages
	16	Cruz, Michael
	17	Domestic Violence
	18	FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting)
	19	Film and Women
	20	FURY (mission statement)
	21	Gabriela Network
	22	Getting It Gazette
	23	GirlsScott
	24	Grants/Foundations
5	1	Harvard Law
	2	Housing/Women
	3	Holland Tunnel
	4	IFCO/Cuba Friendshipment
	5	Jack the Ripper Pub
	6	Job is a Right
	7	Lesbians
	8	Lifetime TV - "Stepping into the Pool"
	9	Mississippi Human Rights Hearings
	10	Mosbacher Op. Ed., 1992 Apr.
	11	Mother's Voices
	12	National Council on Women's Health
	13	National Endowment for Women's Health
	14	Chairman Neary Sexual Harassment Case
	15-16	New Directions for Women (and WAC Talk)
	17	New Yorker article on pro-choice march on D.C., 1992 Apr
	18	NYC School Board Elections
	19	NY Times article, 1992 May 3
	20	Operation Lift the Ban (gays in the military)
	21	Operation Rescue
	22	Police Brutality (Cathy Linn)
	23	Pharmaceutical Companies
	24	Pornography Victims Compensation Act
6	1	Press - overviews
	2	Press - art related
	3	Press - Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Sassy, etc.
	4	Press - New York Area
	5	Press - general
	6	Press - not WAC related
7	1	Pro-choice
	2	Reading list
	3	Resume project
	4	Riker's Island
	5	Roe vs. Wade

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
	6	Rudywatch
	7	Save our Cities, Save our Children
	8	Self Defense
	9	Sex Workers
	10	<i>Speak Up</i> workshops
	11	HR840 - Stalking legislation
	12	Tailhook
	13	Teenage reproductive issues
	14	Turner Broadcasting System
	15	Tyson, Mike
	16	United Nations sexual harassment
	17	Violence
	18	Violence against women
	19	Woman Activist, The
	20	Women's Caucus for Art
	21	Women in Black - Bosnia
	22	Miscellaneous
	23	Seminars, Articles, Clips - misc.

### III. Committees

Some descriptions, correspondence, scattered minutes of meetings of some of WAC's committees. CODAI (Committee on Diversity and Inclusion) is well represented here. Its files contain information about various "consciousness-raising" activities carried out in WAC meetings and sometimes outside of them. Dealing with issues of race and class diversity became important, especially near the final days of WAC.

The largest part of the committee files are from the Outreach Committee. This committee dealt with the hundreds of letters pouring in, attempting to respond and inform women all over the country how to build their own WACs. These files contain outreach letters, orientation packets and contact lists, and the extensive Outreach database, listing women from the U.S. and Europe who wanted to get involved.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
8	1	Anti-censorship Committee
	2	Artwatch
	3	CODAI - Committee on Diversity and Inclusion
	4	Coalition Building - Diversity - CODAI
	5	Multicultural - mostly CODAI
	6	Coordinating Committee - agenda notes
	7	Economic Violence Committee
	8	Editorial Committee
	9	Facilitator Committee
	10	Finance Committee
	11	Lesbian Issues Committee
	12	Mediawatch
	13	Online - WAC
9	1	Outreach Committee
	2	Outreach Committee - contact list
	3	Outreach - contact list
	4	Outreach - general description
	5	Outreach - letters
	6	Outreach - general form letters
	7	Outreach - minutes
	8	Outreach - orientation packet
	9	Outreach - database (blue folder)

#### IV. Action files

Proposals, planning information and ideas, leaflets and news clippings concerning a large part of WAC's actions, which were formal and creative public protests against other groups or the government. The first file contains a helpful action chronology, written by WAC.

This series covers such actions as the St. John's action (see historical note), Mother's and Father's Days, Pink Slips for Bush and Quayle, Glen Ridge, (a rape trial involving several young men who sexually assaulted a mentally disabled woman), the 1992 Democratic and Republican national conventions, The March on Washington, and the Pace Gallery and Guggenheim actions, both protesting the lack of women and people of color represented in art shows. It also has information about less direct action-oriented projects such as Art in the Anchorage and the Postcards to Bill Clinton campaign. There is also a file containing many of the Request for Coverage letters concerning these actions.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
10	1	Action chronology
	2	Art in the Anchorage
	3	Calling, art cards
	4	Cardinal O'Conner
	5	Democratic National Convention, 1992
	6	Documenta
	7	Father's Day Action, 1992
	8	Firefighters
	9	Figueroa, Justice (Garay Rape)
	10	Glen Ridge Action
	11	Guggenheim - SOHO
	12	Irish Consulate protest
11	1	March in March, Int. Women's Day, 1994 Mar 6
	2	March on Washington, 1992 Apr 5
	3	Mother's Day Action, 1992 May 8
	4	Mother's Day Action, 1993
	5	Pace Gallery Action, 1993 Oct
	6	Parental Notification
	7	Pink Slips for Bush and Quayle
	8	Postcards to Bill Clinton Campaign
	9	Requests for Coverage
	10	St. John's
	11	St. John's - newsclippings
	12	Women Ignite
	13	Miscellaneous

**V. Letters to WAC – this series is closed until 2075**

Letters from women all over the country to WAC. Most simply request information, although many women took time to add words of encouragement, support and agreement with WAC's ideals. Quite a few women volunteered to start a branch of WAC in their hometowns, though it seems very few of these materialized in the time of WAC New York, if ever.

The letters are from very young teenagers, retired older women, college students, middle-aged mothers, urban women and women from more rural areas, representing enormous diversity.

Most interesting is the number of letters that mention reading about WAC in one of the several women's magazines which ran articles. In the letters from late 1992, many women mention *Harper's Bazaar*. In March-May of 1993, and for quite some time later, a large number of women credit *Cosmopolitan's* article about WAC. Also mentioned in the letters are articles in *New York*, *Elle* and *Sassy* among others (see Subject Files, Box 6: "Press"). Some letters are quite personal, talking about violence and rape or confronting sexism, and some directly ask for help.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
12	1	1992
	2	1993 Jan - Feb
	3	1993 Mar
	4	1993 Apr - May
	5	1993 Jun - Jul
	6	1993 Aug - Dec
13	1	1994 Jan - Mar
	2	1994 Apr - Jul
	3	1994 Aug - Nov
	4	Miscellaneous
	5	<i>Not Databased Yet</i>
	6	Various / Unanswered

## VI. WAC Boston

Descriptions of various actions and projects undertaken by the Boston branch of WAC, as well as the accompanying flyers and ephemera. Boston's WAC was founded in late 1992 and was still active as of early 1997. The files cover various actions and projects.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
14	1	Miscellaneous
	2	New Freedom Trail, 1992 Oct 31
	3	Transaction, 1992
	4	Body Image brochure
	5	Boston Pride, 1993 - 1996
	6	Brighton Police Action, 1993 Feb
	7	Framingham 9, 1993 Jan
	8	Judgewatch, 1992 - 1993
	9	Labor Day, 1993 Sep
	10	Make-Up, 1993
	11	March on Washington, 1993 Apr
	12	Memorial Day Parade, 1993, 1994
	13	Operation Retaliation clinic actions, 1993
	14	Picket of Operation Rescue members,
	15	Remember our Sisters, 1993 Oct
	16	Sheros, 1993 - 1995
	17	Shopping Action, 1993 Dec
	18	Women's Community Cancer Project Demo, 1993 Sep
	19	Workfare, 1993
	20	Body Image at the Mall, 1994
	21	Breast Cancer Newspaper Stuffing, 1994 Nov
	22	Calendar, 1994
	23	Counter-Presence
	24	Make Sexism History, 1994
	25	Taking Space: Women Building Activism, 1994
	26	Teens and Sex, fall, 1994
	27	Abortion Access at Malden Hospital, 1995 Oct
	28	Deck the Gap, 1995 Dec
	29	Fingerprint This, 1995
	30	Promote Masturbation, 1995 Spring
	31	State House Action, 1995 Jan
	32	Valentine's Day, 1995 Feb
	33	Welfare vs. Wealthfare Game Sheets, 1995
	34	Whitburn Wheatpasting, 1995 Spring
	35	Anthology Submission, 1996-97
	36	Economic Insecurity Rat Race, 1995 Apr
	37	Rubbing Up Against the Law
	38	Bosnia March

## VII. Photographs

Mostly black and white photos by members of WAC (perhaps members of the photo committee) at actions, as well as photos by professional photographers and some color snapshots of meetings and marches. Photos by Mary Beth Edelson, Terise Slotkin and Harriet Zucker, and a few others.

<u>Box</u>	<u>Fol</u>	
15	1	Slides, contact sheets and negatives by Star Black, 1992, Pride 1994
	2	St. John's Photos by Mary Beth Edelson, 1992 Feb 10
	3	March on Washington by Mary Beth Edelson, 1992 Apr 5
	4	Copies of Photos by Ellen Moses
	5	Photos by Lynda Rodolitz, 1992
	6	Terise Slotkin "WAC Slide Show" see also Series X. for audio accompaniment to slide show
	7	Washington D.C. photos by Terise Slotkin, 1992 Apr 5
	8	Figueroa photo file by Terise Slotkin, 1992 Apr 16
	9	Moynihan action by Terise Slotkin, 1992 Apr 22
	10	Photos and slides by Harriet Zucker
	11	Photos from Chico, CA WAC
	12	Photocopies of photos - miscellaneous
	13	WAC Snapshots
16		<i>The Queer Book</i> - Meredith Allen (in binder) <i>WAC 1992-1994</i> - Meredith Allen (in binder) Photos - Carol Gehring (in binder)
17		<i>Women's Action Coalition</i> - Stephanie K. Damoff (in binder) <i>How To Plan an Action</i> - Mary Beth Edelson Artwork - Mary Beth Edelson Photos - Lisa Kahane
18		<i>Women's Action Coalition</i> - Katherine O'Brien Photos - Ellen Moses Contact Sheets - Harriet Zucker

### VIII. Ephemera and artifacts

Signs, stickers, cards, T-shirts, and other items produced in connection with WAC's "actions," letter-writing campaigns, and other activities; and periodicals and other printed matter by or concerning WAC. Among the more unusual items in this series are five phallic squirt guns, used to decorate banners at WAC's 1993 demonstration at the Pace Gallery.

Box  
19

*Legal Observer* and *Clinic Defender* signs  
*Support Lesbian Visibility* stickers (small and large)  
*Women in Film* pins and *Women Ignite - Houston '92* pins  
WAC return address stamp (and stamp pads)  
Guggenheim protest "art cards"  
*Postcards to Bill Clinton* campaign - postcards  
*Stop Sexist Advertising* stickers  
*Lesbian Rights are Civil Rights* transparency

20

T-Shirts (3 black with WAC symbol, one white with WAC symbol, 2 "Dykes Take the Mall - March on Washington '93," one white with black and blue WAC symbol, one white "All of the Above")

21

Five dildo squirt guns used at Pace Gallery Action. Which were filled with paint which was squirted on to banners.

22

Two banners (decorated with dildo squirt guns) from Pace Gallery Action, 1993  
Oct 23

23

Printed matter by, sent to, or about WAC  
  
But Is It Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism - edited by Nina Felshin  
Listen Up! Voices from the Next Feminist Generation - edited by Barbara Findlen  
The Power of Feminist Art - edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard  
WAC Stats: The Facts About Women  
Woe to the Women - The Bible Tells Me So - Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Referral Guide to Health and Social Services for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Communities of New York City

### IX. Video recordings

Unit ID  
04112

Critical Mass

04114

The Year in WAC, 1992

04117

Rudy Watch, episodes 5, 7-9

04113

Rudy Watch, episodes 10-13

04115

CBS news clip from the St. John's University rape trial, 1992

04116

Laura Cottingham Speaks, 1995 Jun 1  
Laura Cottingham speaks of her experiences in WAC.

### X. Sound recordings

Unit ID  
D00315

Slide show accompaniment, Houston 1992