Waiting and Burning Out:  
War Memory, Psychological Resilience, and Interwar Disillusionment

Abstract
This article examines interwar peace activism by focusing on the personal emotional process that provokes disillusionment. This study documents how peace aspirations collapsed for two activists during the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference and again at the start of the Second World War. The former destroyed their faith that peace could be obtained through international mediation while the latter prompted a rejection of all interwar peace organizations. This article argues that while war memory often prompted involvement in interwar peace movements, trauma decreased psychological resilience—effectively leaving individuals prone to disillusionment when faced with the political machinery of conflict negotiation.

Keywords
World War, Memory, Disillusionment, Gender, Peace Activism, Disarmament

Trauma decreases resilience and increases the desire to avoid conflict. This article studies this process by following the narrative of two interwar peace activists as they shared their memory of the First World War, their hopes for peace and their eventual rejection of interwar peace organizations at the start of the Second World War. What a society remembers and what it forgets is a telling indicator and for the interwar generation memories of the First World War loomed large.1 It was a trauma that ran deep. For many, this trauma led to an intense commitment to establishing and maintaining a lasting peace. Private memory, especially in the interwar period, is much more difficult to uncover compared to the popular, public memory of events. This case study provides a rare glimpse into the private memory of the First World War—especially that of women. While women’s private war experience is more evident in the popular memory of the Second World War, women’s roles have been less visible in the memory of the First World War.2 This article analyzes an extended interchange between an American woman, Dorothy Whitney Straight, and British man, Leonard Elmhirst, about their memories of

the First World War, their hopes for the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference held from 1921-1922, and their subsequent interwar peace activism.

Psychology is particularly helpful for historians studying war memory and trauma. While the study of trauma has become increasingly common in historical study of memory, few scholars have addressed the role of trauma in activist narratives. This article incorporates another important factor in studying responses to trauma: resilience. In psychology, resilience is defined as an individual’s ability to adapt to adversity and trauma. In the context of this article, resilience is used to analyze how memory of conflict and subsequent trauma can prompt high hopes for change, but also leave individuals prone to disillusionment. This article uses the concept of psychological resilience to analyze the intersection between the private memories of two individuals—which prompted them to take part in peace activism—and the public force of political machinery in conflict negotiations that eventually caused them to repudiate interwar peace organizations. In the following narrative, psychological concepts—including vicarious trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and organizational crisis—are employed to analyze the role of resilience in the peace activism of two individuals. Clinical psychologists use the term vicarious trauma to describe the deleterious effects on therapists working with trauma victims. However, historians have deployed vicarious trauma to describe the process by which personal memory of an event can be influenced by secondary accounts or witnessing in such a way that these external accounts are encoded as private memory.

---

3 See David B. Pillemer, “Can the Psychology of Memory Enrich Historical Analyses of Trauma?” History & Memory, Vol 16, No 2 (Fall/Winter 2004).
7 Peter Zarrow found a similar process at work in China: “Late Qing radicals were not literally ‘rendered helpless by
A crisis at the structural or governmental level—such as in the perceived failure of the Washington Conference and the start of the Second World War explored below—is likely to prompt a reassessment of personal assumptions and defined roles within an organization or movement. Detachment and emotional reevaluation are common responses to organizational crisis. In fact, as psychologists Christine M. Pearson and Judith A. Clair argued: “Ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution of the organizational crisis will lead to disillusionment or loss of psychic and shared meaning, as well as to the shattering of commonly held beliefs, values and individuals’ basic assumptions.” Lowered resilience leaves individuals even more prone to disillusionment when faced with organizational crisis. This article argues that these two individuals, though their direct experience of war was limited, nonetheless suffered from vicarious or secondary trauma. In the case study below, actual experience intertwined with secondary witnessing to form their personal memory of the First World War. This combination directly informed how they communicated their war experience. While this personal memory, informed by vicarious trauma, prompted them to take part in peace activism, trauma lowered their resilience and left them vulnerable to disillusionment during times of organizational crisis.

Though Dorothy Whitney Straight and Leonard Elmhirst eventually married, and so there is a subtext of successful courtship, the following is not a triumphalist narrative, but rather a case study of consequences when hopeful individuals encountered inflexible national agendas that limited, or blocked, peacemaking goals in international mediation. This article illustrates how memories of the First World War could prompt a deep conviction that peace should be

---

overwhelming force,’ as in one definition of trauma, but they did think back to Manchu atrocities with a sense of vulnerability as well as horror and anger; they subjectively experience the ‘Manchu conquest’ as traumatic, and these experiences, in effect, were encoded as memory.” See Peter Zarrow, “Historical Trauma: Anti-Manchuism and Memories of Atrocity in Late Qing China,” *Memory & History*, Vol 16, No (Fall/Winter, 2004): 73.

pursued. However, with each new challenge—most centering on competing national interests—this hope was steadily eroded and replaced with disillusionment. This erosion of resilience, coupled with organizational crises at key historical junctures, prompted the rejection of certain forms of peace activism. For the couple described below, these events included the perceived failure of the Washington Conference, which destroyed their faith that peace could be obtained through international mediation, and the start of the Second World War, which prompted a rejection of all interwar peace efforts.

In the interwar period, memories of the First World War prompted a surge of participation in disarmament. Under the banner of collective security—endorsed by the Treaty of Versailles—support for disarmament continued to rise following the war until direct action was taken in 1921. The Washington Naval Disarmament Conference was held from 12 November 1921 to 6 February 1922. Peace organizations were central in the promotion of the Washington Conference and women were particularly active in supporting it, which included distributing pamphlets, discussing it in groups, and giving public presentations in support of its goals. The Washington Conference gained traction due to the rising costs of munitions, negative public opinion regarding these costs, and the desire of nations—especially the United States, Great Britain and Japan—to decrease required expenditure by reducing competition. Though there were disagreements over the extent the United States should be disarmed, popular support for disarmament in the country was high following the First World War and many women were eager to make use of their newly gained political influence and voting power to support the peace

---

9 The United States was one of the strongest supporters of disarmament in the early 1920s, though the nation had also proved to be the greatest obstacle to such a policy developing in the Paris Peace Conference. See Richard Fanning, *Peace And Disarmament: Naval Rivalry and Arms Control, 1922-1933* (University Press of Kentucky, 2015); Robert Gordon Kaufman, *Arms Control During the Pre-Nuclear Era: The United States and Naval Limitation Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

10 The Conference included nine nations: the United States, Great Britain, Japan, France, China, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal.
movement. Indeed, these women’s organizations argued that nations could cut costs and avoid future war by halting the arms race.\textsuperscript{11} Although the Washington Conference garnered a considerable amount of support and did make notable gains, the process itself had a demoralizing effect on some of those involved.

American heiress Dorothy Payne Whitney Straight, of the prominent Whitney family, took part in the initial promotion of the Washington Conference through the League of Women Voters and attended some of the early sessions. She wrote at length to her future second husband, Englishman Leonard Knight Elmhirst, about her evolving views towards the Conference. These views were directly influenced by her experience in and memories of the First World War, as well as the secondary witnessing that permeated her personal memory. Their exchange touched on such issues as their memories of the war, their efforts to pursue peace following it, and the different approaches their countries took in the disarmament movement. Notably, their memories of the war followed the accepted gendered norms of female waiting and male honor, but without the overtone of valor. Valorized male roles in this period effectively marginalized the memories of women’s wartime experience.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, such an emphasis on valor in the memory of war also limited the acceptable formulations of male experience. This article argues that while Dorothy and Leonard’s wartime experience—and their reactions to the First World War—were in many ways similar, how they communicated memories of it was directly affected by these gendered constraints. These gendered formulations of war experience were a byproduct of vicarious trauma as secondary witnessing was translated into an internalized personal narrative that followed gendered norms of behavior.

\textsuperscript{11} John W. Young, \textit{Britain and the World in the Twentieth Century} (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997).

Like many of those who lived through the First World War, Dorothy and Leonard's memories were steeped in weariness and disillusionment. Dorothy volunteered as a nurse in the United States during the First World War and lost her first husband shortly after while he was serving in France. Leonard served in the army, though not in active combat, and lost brothers and many friends. While their roles during the war, and therefore their memories of it, had differed in many respects, their exchange illustrates how it was equally devastating to each of them. This informed their peace efforts after the war. Although she was initially optimistic about the Washington Conference and convinced of the need for women to take an active role, Dorothy quickly became disillusioned with the process. This disillusionment steadily rose as she witnessed firsthand the political maneuvering and uncompromising attitudes of the countries involved—first when sitting in on sessions and later when keeping track of developments through newspapers and discussions with those who attended.

Born into the considerably wealthy Whitney family on 23 January 1887, Dorothy Payne Whitney inherited a multi-million-dollar fortune by seventeen. She, like many of her wealthy contemporaries, held a deep conviction that she had a responsibility to society, both through financial support as well as reform. She initially met her first husband, American investment banker Willard D. Straight, in 1906, and saw him off and on for several years as a passing acquaintance. After she encountered him once again on a trip to China, their acquaintance deepened to love, and after five years of courtship they married in 1911. Shortly after their marriage, they moved to Beijing and remained there for six months before the Chinese Revolution prompted their move back to New York. The Straights founded the political

---

magazine *New Republic* in 1914 and *Asia Magazine* in 1917. The latter was an influential journal with the goal of informing the American public about the Far East.

Dorothy’s involvement in organizations significantly expanded during the First World War. In 1906 she had taken up her first position in a women’s organization—the Junior League, an organization of young New York society women—and served as president in 1907. In addition to the Junior League, she was also active in the suffragist movement, the Red Cross, and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). She was also particularly interested in labor reform. When the United States entered the First World War, Willard tried unsuccessfully to gain a post in active service. In 1917, he secured a position as head of the War Risk Insurance Bureau for the US Army in Paris. 14 Shortly after the war, he died in France of the Spanish Influenza while working to prepare the way for the American delegates to the Paris Peace Conference. Though millions died of the flu without their death being directly associating with the war, Dorothy viewed Willard’s work in France as a direct cause of the war and therefore linked his death with her views of warfare. Willard’s death left Dorothy with not only an understandable amount of trauma and grief, but also three young children and a conviction that she should continue to support Willard’s projects. These included not only the magazines, but also his alma mater, Cornell. When individuals can directly relate to a victim, such as in Dorothy’s case with the death of her husband, vicarious trauma is even more likely to occur. 15 In Dorothy’s mind, though Willard did not fall in combat, he was still a victim of the war itself.

Through Dorothy’s continued financial sponsorship of Cornell she met her second husband, Leonard Elmhirst, who was studying agriculture at the college. As part of Leonard’s campaign for better university support for international students, he contacted her about funding

---

14 Ibid., 55.
15 Pillemer, 146.
his international club. Leonard was from a landed English family, though he held no personal wealth. They were attracted to one another from the start of their acquaintance; however it took many years of indecision, caused in part by Dorothy’s loyalty to Willard’s memory and the responsibility she felt towards the United States, before they married in 1925. Her philanthropy work took up much of her time and she felt she played a crucial role in supporting the United States with her efforts. Just as she had with Willard’s projects, Dorothy financially supported Leonard’s. A few months after they met, he left to serve as the agricultural development director of Rabindranath Tagore’s International School at Sriniketan, India, with funding from Dorothy. Their letters traveled many weeks and nearly eight thousand miles to continue a conversation started in New York about their experiences in the First World War and the hopes they held that peace might be attained and assured at last.

Before what he calls the “great deluge in 1914,” Leonard planned to become an ordained priest under the Church of England, but the experience of war caused a complete breakdown and change of beliefs. At the start of the war, Leonard was declared unfit for service and instead traveled to India in 1914 as part of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). He eventually joined the Army in 1918 and served in the army education service in Scotland until he was discharged for medical reasons in 1919. The following year, in 1920, he explained to Dorothy that, against his family’s objections, he entered the Army after leaving India because “it had to be done.” Although Leonard wrote that he hated to “thrust this personal side” in front of her, he thought it was essential to understanding him and the choices in life facing him as he

---

16 Leonard Knight Elmhirst to Dorothy Whitney Straight. 27 Oct. 1920. LKE/DWE/10/A. Elmhirst MSS, The Dartington Hall Trust, Devon Heritage Center. Leonard Knight Elmhirst hereafter cited as LKE. Dorothy Whitney Straight hereafter cited as DWS.
17 Michael Young, 30.
pondered what he would do after leaving Cornell. 18 Like any such major and traumatic event, the First World War was a defining moment and likely an unavoidable topic of conversation to anyone actively working towards developing a new relationship. Over the next few months, their relationship steadily deepened past acquaintance towards friendship and they began to share more of their personal tragedies and memories of the war.

After a year of correspondence, on 6 July 1921, Dorothy wrote Leonard deeply unsettled, commenting that for the last two days “the war has been haunting me again.” Her resilience had waned as a result of a previous conversation and she wrote:

> Our reference to it the other evening seemed to revive all the old pain and horror—and I can't shake it off. I always dread going near the sea too—for I gazed across it too many months with an intensity that burned something out, and although my own pain now seems only the smallest part of the world's suffering, still it is always there - and always a part of my bond with the rest of humanity. Suffering, fortunately, opens the gates of reality. There is a look in your eyes that haunts me too—I don't think I have ever seen eyes that speak such sadness. Is it the suffering that the war caused you to see and experience—or were you always like that? Some day—please tell me.”

19 DWS to LKE. 6 July 1921. LKE/DWE/10/B, Elmhirst MSS.

Psychological research reveals that those exposed to trauma may suffer from recurrent disturbing memories, but those who do not directly experience the trauma-inducing event internally construct images of the event based on secondary information. A similar process was at work, for instance, in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks in the United States, when national survey responses revealed convincing evidence of extensive trauma-induced stress. 20 In this passage, Dorothy revealed the recurrent nature of her war memories as well as an intense level of visualization of “pain and horror” directly associated with the sea. Such strong

18 LKE to DWS. 27 Oct. 1920. LKE/DWE/10/A, Elmhirst MSS.

19 DWS to LKE. 6 July 1921. LKE/DWE/10/B, Elmhirst MSS.

20 Pillemer, 145.
associations and intrusive images are common in patients with PTSD.\textsuperscript{21} These intrusive images also negatively influence resilience.

However, only a few days later, on 11 July 1921, Dorothy’s unease was replaced by soaring optimism. She wrote to share her excitement about the July Truce ending a four-year guerilla war between England and Ireland as well as President Harding’s proposal for a Disarmament Conference. “It means international cooperation at last,” she wrote of the Conference, “at least for this country—and I am thrilled and elated over it. For of course it won’t mean disarmament merely, but lots of other problems too.” She thought that at the very least it was a move in the right direction and commented that such a step “does make one happy.”\textsuperscript{22} Leonard’s response was less expressive, but also underscored the influence of the war on his hopes for peace. Leonard replied from New York two days later adding to their discussion about the war: “We’re both in a hole over the war, we’re both out on search, which is where we ought to be and some day between us we ought to find something.” About the good news, he commented that he “nearly misbehaved” himself when he heard about Ireland and that President Harding’s proposal added “another sight of relief,” stirring some feelings of hope. He added, “It seemed as though a load had shifted which has been strapped on tight since 1914, now I come to think of it Armistice Day brought very little exhilaration, but now it looks as though people are learning just a little by experience… a little more faith and the rest will come.”\textsuperscript{23} Leonard, who on more than one occasion claimed to be a “cold blooded Englishman,” was less prone to Dorothy’s depths of despair—or her heights of hope.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{22} DWS to LKE. 11 July 1921. LKE/DWE/10/B, Elmhirst MSS.
\textsuperscript{23} LKE to DWS. 13 July 1921. LKE/DWE/10/B, Elmhirst MSS.
\textsuperscript{24} LKE to DWS. 18 Aug. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/C, Elmhirst MSS.
While the intensity of Dorothy’s despair—prompted by her memories of the war and a corresponding decrease in resilience—made her optimism correspondingly high, she was equally prone to envisioning the worst with each new challenge to peace. Such a challenge arose in the treaty talks that followed the July Truce at the close of the Irish War of Independence. In August 1921, Dorothy wrote that she had been talking over the situation between Ireland and Great Britain with good friend and editor of the *New Republic*, Herbert Croly, who informed her that Dominion Government was the only real point that remained to be resolved. Croly explained, however, just that one area could “still wreck the whole thing!” She wrote that if a settlement could not be agreed upon the alternative was “simply too horrible to contemplate—coercion that will mean virtual extermination of the Irish. And if this should be the case—then what hope is there for our civilization at all!” Notably, she pointed out that such an event would make the Disarmament Conference impossible because it would isolate the United States from England, “and the old policy of force and hate would dominate the world once more—with Japan and France setting the pace!” However, she hoped the goodwill between England and the United States, at the very least, would provide reason for resolution. She noted that, while the alternative made her “utterly sick at heart,” she had “faith in the English people” to resolve it and would not burden him further with her “momentary dreads.”25 For a generation who had witnessed the destruction caused when international diplomacy failed on an unprecedented scale, these fears were certainly justified. Such events—where national interests collided—were central to Dorothy and Leonard’s eventual rejection of international mediation.

However, both remained optimistic as the Washington Conference developed. Writing from England on 8 September 1921, Leonard said it occurred to him that it might be useful to

---

25 DWS to LKE. 20 Aug 1921. LKE/DWE/10/C, Elmhirst MSS.
“gather a joint group of men, American and British, to keep an eye on possible causes of friction,—actually taking the attitude that there will be a war unless someone prevents it.”26

Dorothy wrote back in support and commented that she had been doing her part to encourage international understanding by maintaining correspondence with a professor in Canada. She also shared, for the first time, how her inner turmoil about the war had started to ebb. This was partly due to her involvement in peace efforts, and it was during a trip to Southampton that she recognized the change. She had spent much of her time during the First World War in Southampton and carefully avoided it afterwards but decided to return in September 1921. She wrote:

There was this little window in my room which faced directly into the sunrise—and it always seemed to come to me each morning straight over from France—the sun that marked another day of war—the sun that rose with agony over those we loved. The other day—Sunday afternoon—I went down on the beach by myself and lay there for hours, gazing across that vast, dividing ocean as I used to in the war—but this time there was less strain and more peace, in spite of the ruin. For having given up the man I love, at least there is no further struggle—only the effort to find happiness and usefulness in other ways—and for him there is no further struggle either… But really, in spite of certain excitement this home coming has been awfully sad, for the two people I need most—you and Willard—are both far away—forgive me for saying it. I want you to think of me as being gay and happy, and in truth I am—only one can’t help the black moments when they come.27

Though she spoke in terms of easing strain, her memories still surfaced in direct association with the intrusive image of the sea. Her emphasis on ruin and sadness reveal the depths of her vicarious trauma and subsequent lowering of resilience. This rhetoric continues to infuse her

26 LKE to DWS. 8 Sept. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/C, Elmhirst MSS.
27 DWS to LKE. 19 Sept. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/C, Elmhirst MSS. After Dorothy’s death, Leonard wrote: “Ruth Morgan acted more than anyone as a philosopher and intimate consultant. She was a kind of Mother figure for Dorothy and her serious purposes expressed through her work for the League of Women Voters aroused Dorothy’s interest too, through Dorothy never wanted to address large audiences.” See LKE to Susie Hammond. 7 December 1972. DWE/G/5/B, Elmhirst MSS. Hammond was Dorothy’s cousin.
narrative of the war and her war memories were inextricably intertwined in her personal narrative.

However, a few weeks later, she entered a flurry of activity working with women’s organizations to prepare for the Washington Conference, and in this labor she discovered a feeling of purpose she had not felt since the war. These preparations not only effectively pulled her out of her bleak mood, but her feelings of hope once again peaked. This was prompted by witnessing hundreds of women’s organizations coming together to plan the burial of the Unknown Soldier as well as the Washington Conference. She pointed out that women’s groups wanted to tie the events together in what she called “a sort of national repentance for not having kept faith with the dead—who gave their lives—most of them—for an ideal.” The role of women in this process, she wrote, was to “voice the finer sentiments of the country” as well as drum up national support for the Washington Conference.28 When she mentioned “national repentance” she was likely referring to the lack of praise and acknowledgement soldiers received for their sacrifice when they returned from the war. For instance, a young Douglas MacArthur—who would climb to the rank of five-star general in the US Army—wrote that “no one, not even children,” greeted his 42nd “Rainbow” Division when they returned to the United States.29 This “Lost Generation” of veterans struggled to reintegrate into post-war life in a society that offered them little admiration. Though Dorothy felt the country had not “kept faith” in a way that honored their sacrifice, the significance she placed on the memorial aligned with the official representation of the Unknown Soldier, which had been carefully formulated to support purposeful warfare.30

---

28 DWS to LKE. 27 Sept. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/C, Elmhirst MSS.
The extent of interest in women’s organizations impressed Dorothy and she wrote: “The spirit is simply thrilling! I haven’t seen anything like it since the war—but again they have a great cause and it has fired them.” It was clear that the same spirit “fired” her as well, and she agreed to sit on a committee of six, comprised of three men and three women, tasked with defining “policies for the women’s groups to pursue—aims to be achieved at the Conference.”

Other members of the committee included educationalist John Dewey, activist Ruth Morgan and lawyer Manley Hudson, who had just spent several months in Europe serving on the League of Nations Disarmament Committee. While Dorothy seemed concerned that the committee might require a good deal of her time, she wrote: “I’m willing to do anything I can to really help—for it seems, by all odds, the most important thing to be done for the immediate and future benefit of all our countries…”

At the beginning of October, she was still hard at work “thrashing out policies” and “grappling with resolutions” along with women’s organizations. She noted that none of them really knew the “intricacies of the subject” and that they felt “like the blind clutching the blind” when it came to considering the best policies in relation to the Pacific. However, she thought that they could effectively “make articulate the real demand on the part of the women that some effort be made to eliminate as far as possible causes of friction in the Pacific—and competition in naval armaments—and that the desire be manifested for international cooperation and good will.” Leonard found her news about the committee very promising and encouraged her saying, “All power to your voice,—the Spirit will provide however weak the flesh.”

---

31 Ibid.
32 Ruth Morgan served as a mentor for Dorothy and played a vital role in shaping her interests and religious views. Morgan served as a leader of the National League of Women Voters starting in 1923 until her death in 1934 and led the Department of International Co-operation to Prevent War. See DWE/G/8/A, Elmhirst MSS for obituaries.
33 DWS to LKE. 27 Sept. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/C, Elmhirst MSS.
34 DWS to LKE. 3 Oct. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/D, Elmhirst MSS.
on behalf of his country and those who wanted to keep hold of the Anglo-Japanese alliance when they recognized that it was, as Dorothy argued, “a stumbling block to peace.”35

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was one of the main reasons the Washington Conference had been held because it was set to expire in 1922. It was not yet clear at that point, however, that the alliance would not be renewed, which would have maintained the status quo balance of power in the Pacific. Leonard explained to her the “idealistic” views about a possible alliance that had been circling in British political circles. He wrote that since the US was concerned about China’s autonomy, and because it was “so very much top dog in these days,” all four countries would need to be included in a Quadruple Alliance. Leonard, however, did not agree with such maneuvering. “It seems once again to me,” he wrote, “to be a question of treating nations as you treat individuals. A little understanding, a great willingness to trust your neighbour and determination at every step to call out the best in him, and to trust him at every step and his ability to play the noblest game in statesmanship regardless of hidden interests.” This utopian view of international politics—wanting it to work as a community would operate—was asking quite a lot of the Washington Conference, though Leonard did note that prevailing methods were far from fulfilling this ideal.36 After the close of the Washington Conference, this sentiment would be foundational to their subsequent efforts in community development.

In reply, Dorothy shared the latest news about her disarmament work, noting that, while there was not “very much optimism expressed over the [likely] results of the Conference,” she felt that there was still hope for change. In addition, she remarked that the Washington

35 LKE to DWS. 12 Oct 1921. LKE/DWE/10/D, Elmhirst MSS. On 21 October 1921, Leonard wrote about a conversation with British political scientist Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson: “He sees as I think very few folk over here do see the extent to which England lies in the hands of America, your country. You are supreme, and able to make at any moment a sweeping gesture at which the other countries must all bow their heads. It is a terrible responsibility you have.” See LKE/DWE/10/D, Elmhirst MSS.
36 LKE to DWS. 18 October 1921. LKE/DWE/10/D, Elmhirst MSS.
Conference was the culmination of long-held hopes in many women’s organizations. “Our Disarmament enterprise is going splendidly now,” she wrote. “It’s interesting as a manifestation of public opinion in foreign affairs—and as a sort of spiritual culmination of the women’s movement.”37 By this time, it was clear that the Washington Conference—though it would result in a limitation of naval armaments—would not make sweeping changes that would mark a clearly established and maintainable peace. Although the challenges were daunting, at this point Dorothy remained committed to seeing it through because on it rested not only her hopes, but also those of hundreds of women’s organizations. For many years, social reform in women’s activist organizations—including suffrage and women’s rights—had mixed freely with the pursuit of social justice issues, including poverty, violence and peace.38 In Dorothy’s view, which she felt aligned with those of women’s organizations, the Washington Conference had the potential to effect great change for such social justice issues.

Dorothy’s work preparing for the Washington Conference kept her optimism high leading up to the opening events. In a letter on 27 November 1921, she recounted the first events of the Washington Conference and positive results it had already achieved. “The Conference in Washington,” she wrote, “has really been a great event!” She was part of the procession that marched the body of the Unknown Soldier to Arlington Cemetery on 11 November 1921. She described the service as “very solemn and impressive” and wrote that “there was something rather fine in hearing that vast throng of people repeating the Lord’s Prayer, led by the President.”39 Women across the country took the opportunity to not only remember their dead, but also hold disarmament meetings. One article in the *New York Times* illustrated just how

---

37 DWS to LKE. 24 Oct. 1921. LKE/DWE/10/D, Elmhirst MSS.
39 DWS to LKE. 27 Nov 1921. LKE/DWE/10/E, Elmhirst MSS.
interwoven the concepts of memory, memorial and hope for disarmament were for these women.

After noting that similar events took place in San Francisco and Detroit, the article painted a vivid scene of Philadelphia’s Armistice Day events. “Philadelphia memorialized the victory of her troops,” the article explained, “honored the memory of her dead and breathed a silent prayer for the success of the Armament Limitation Conference for two minutes at noon today.”  

40 Men and women across the country hoped that the Washington Conference would serve as a foundation for lasting peace. Indeed, Dorothy’s were not the only high hopes at the start of the Washington Conference.

The day after the procession, 12 November 1921, the Washington Conference convened. Dorothy was pleasantly surprised by Secretary Charles Evans Hughes’ opening speech, which shocked even the most ardent supporters of naval disarmament when he proposed that many tons of extant warships be scrapped in the US.  

41 “It was so utterly unexpected,” she explained, “that it left one gasping for breath at the end!” Indeed, it seemed to wipe away her doubts about the conference while also raising her hopes about the tone of international diplomacy. She continued:

No one had prophesied anything so definite—so outspoken—so irrefutable! It was really extraordinary! A new method of diplomacy at last! I walked away from the Conference with Mr. H. G. Wells—and even he was staggered! It was so much better, so much finer and so much braver than anyone had dared hope. It now remains to be seen whether the high water mark of the Conference was struck that first day or not! Mr. Hughes made a great beginning—he opened the way for a sincere and determined effort—and it seems impossible to go back to the old bickerings and bargainings in the face of the high purpose and honesty that has been shown. And the general public, this time, is really participating. Oh Leonard--it’s a better world than it was a few weeks ago!  

42 DWS to LKE. 27 Nov 1921. LKE/DWE/10/E, Elmhirst MSS.
Yet, as the Washington Conference continued it became apparent that the opening was a “high water mark” that would not be maintained. Though Dorothy’s optimism peaked repeatedly over the course of the Washington Conference, her equally quick descent into despair reveals inadequate resilience in the face of adversity. Dorothy would become increasingly disillusioned with the process as each new obstacle arose—just as she had when the debate over Dominion Government had threatened to wreck the tentative steps towards peace between Ireland and Great Britain.

Initially, when faced with the mounting challenges against an agreement in the Washington Disarmament Conference, Dorothy still clung to hope about what the process could achieve and laid blame on certain nations for blocking progress. Writing at the end of November 1921, Dorothy felt that the main impediment to the Washington Conference was the “French attitude” and desire for “their pound of flesh.” She felt that their mindset was “rousing all the old hatreds of Germany and Russia.” However, she thought Great Britain and the United States were “playing well together” and there was hope that Japan would be “reasonable.”43 However, by the end of December, she had lost hope in her previous grand plans of what could be achieved. “Things started off so well,” she lamented, “and are going so badly now!” She was thrilled to be invited by Secretary of Commerce and future President Herbert Hoover to sit in on political conferences for a day, describing the experience as “on a high plane.” However, this seemed to be a momentary spike in her mood related to the experience of rubbing elbows with the political elite and seeing them at work. The Washington Conference was in a deadlock, the Japanese were “proving hard customers” and even Great Britain had been a disappointment. “It’s terribly

43 Ibid.
discouraging,” she wrote, “to see the attitude of all these countries revealed—England included!”

She continued:

I’m afraid, after all, there are no such things as principles in politics. It’s all a game, and you play to win for yourself, your party or your country. Perhaps one should not expect anything different! Perhaps it’s only the outward forces of life to change the general current of events, and not men themselves and control! Perhaps we’re just poor blind creatures in the “fell clutch of circumstance.” Perhaps we do just nourish “a blind life within the brain.” But oh—how utterly stupid it all is! One nearly goes wild at moments contemplating the utter blindness and futility and stupidity of mankind… In Washington there hasn’t been the slightest indication of a new spirit or new intelligence in the world!.. What is the end of it all, Leonard?—are we ever going to learn a new way of reconciliation?44

While she seemed to have lost all faith in the political maneuvering of the Washington Conference at this point and noted that the United States and Great Britain had made missteps, she still mainly blamed France and Japan. While she was able to cling to this blame and a hope that the US and Great Britain could pull it through, her disillusionment remained incomplete. Leonard wrote back advising Dorothy not to let the “blundering of politicians” upset her. He reminded her that these were “still the men who made the war and the new generation will not catch up on them just yet.” He was still confident the world would indeed “learn a new way of reconciliation.”45

Mirroring the rising Anglo-American solidarity, in a series of letters at the beginning of 1922 they expressed their faith in each other’s countries and the hope they still held that Great Britain and the United States could achieve something notable on behalf of the peace movement. She maintained her confidence in his country, noting: “I know that England is coming through, simply by virtue of her intelligence and common sense and that sound sterling character.”46

Leonard wrote in a similar vein on 11 January 1922, pointing out that the United States had not

---

44 DWS to LKE. 25 Dec 1921. LKE/DWE/10/E, Elmhirst MSS.
45 LKE to DWS. 31 Jan 1922. LKE/DWE/10/F, Elmhirst MSS.
46 DWS to LKE. 11 Jan 1922. LKE/DWE/10/F, Elmhirst MSS.
come to its newfound power by accident, and he was confident it would “come out on top in the end.” Reasserting his faith in the United States and in her, he explained that, while he may sometimes bitterly complain about the US, his faith was “unbounded” and he longed to return. “Perhaps,” he wrote, “we’ll be able to work on the problem together yet.”47 This faith would not remain for long.

When the Washington Conference closed in early February 1922, both were left disillusioned with the process, with governments and with the vagaries of politics. The treaties that came out of the Washington Conference focused on limiting the relative naval strength of countries in agreed ratios, as well as the ratio of the different types of ships each country could maintain. Despite limitations, the treaties were well supported in the United States, both politically and in the popular press, such as in the *New York Times*. Much of this support stemmed from the hope that a decrease in defense spending would bring with it tax relief.48 Despite such positive opinions of what it had accomplished, Dorothy and Leonard viewed it as a failure because it had not achieved the ringing endorsement for peace they had spent so many months hoping it would. In short, they viewed it as an organizational crisis, which prompted the same sort of personal reassessment described at the beginning of this article: they began to question their personal assumptions, values, and goals. “I have for long suspected,” Leonard wrote, “that little was to be hoped from politicians, governments, treaties, and conferences at Paris or elsewhere, but I was reserving final judgment until the close of the Washington Conference.” He continued, noting that politics was “not the cure,” and argued that “the young men and women, and the educational systems of the world, on these the whole burden

47 LKE to DWS. 11 Jan. 1922. LKE/DWE/10/F, Elmhirst MSS.
48 Fanning, 9.
rests. Either youth must win through or the world will perish.”  
49 The following month, on 6 March 1922, Leonard wrote dejectedly that, “in spite of the war, men still rush to cut each other’s throats for a livelihood, either by militarism or industrialism. I may be wrong,—but I look in vain for someone to tell me to what aim, ideal, object or goal the West is driving.”  
50 Dorothy replied on 15 April 1922 in a similar state of disillusionment. “The suffering of the world today is like a horrible black shadow even over the sunny places,” she wrote. “Even hope has gone” and in its place, “fear, which in Europe was heretofore an emotion, has now itself become a disease.” She continued:

Oh—if one only knew what one could do about it all! The helplessness of being only one little individual—utterly impotent to effect anything—is the terrible fact that comes home to one, at every turn. The poor old world goes on blindly beating its head against the wall of destruction—but perhaps through trial and error—unless it’s too late—something else will be attempted one of these days.  
51 With the close of the Washington Conference—a key organizational crisis—they no longer placed their faith in international mediation. Philosopher and psychologist William James viewed such fundamental changes as “transformations,” that extended beyond the ordinary developments of character attributed to normal growth and change. Moments of transformation sometimes prompt radical changes in worldviews and ways of thinking. As James stated, “all we know is that there are dead feelings, dead ideas, and cold beliefs, and there are hot and live ones; and when one grows hot and alive within us, everything has to re-crystallize about it.”  
52 Such a transformation prompts a decisive change in personal energy—a change of focus. While it would be years before Dorothy and Leonard committed to direct action—in the form of a progressive

49 LKE to DWS. 3 Feb 1922. LKE/DWE/10/F, Elmhirst MSS. 
50 LKE to DWS. March 6 1922. LKE/DWE/11/C, Elmhirst MSS. 
51 DWS to LKE. 15 April 1922. LKE/DWE/10/G, Elmhirst MSS. 
52 James described the set of ideals that people devote themselves to as the “habitual center of personal energy.” William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (Signet Classic, 2003), 169.
school and community development project at Dartington Hall in Devon, England—the end of the Washington Conference marked an important shift in their peace activism. Rather than hoping for sweeping changes at the governmental level, they began to focus their efforts on education and community.

Writing at the end of May 1922, Dorothy lamented the recent failures of League of Nations disarmament efforts, placing no small blame on her own country. “We aren’t willing to accept things as they are at the moment and try to make the best of a bad bargain,” she wrote, “but we must go on asking that things shall be different and according to our liking. Oh,—it drives me wild—it’s so utterly unreasonable and uncompromising.” That said, she noted there were “many wonderful things happening every day which compensate for all these horrors.” The most important examples, she thought, were efforts made in education.53

However, as Dorothy and Leonard’s confidence shifted to education and youth following the Washington Conference, the failure they perceived in international mediation also brought back memories of the First World War. While the Washington Conference did result in a reduction of naval armaments and treaties setting up spheres of influence in the Pacific, it was clear by the protracted talks and continuing tensions that it was certainly not the ringing declaration of peaceful mediation for which they had dreamed, but rather a continuation of political maneuvering. Leading up to and during the Washington Conference, their hopes seemed to serve as a balm for the wounds left by the war, and discussions of the war’s negative impact disappeared from their exchange over the months it was held. However, when faced with the realities of just how little the Washington Conference had accomplished, at least when compared to its lofty goals, their resulting decrease in resilience opened the conversation once more.

53 DWS to LKE. 29 May 1922. LKE/DWE/10/G, Elmhirst MSS.
In the summer of 1922, Leonard wrote Dorothy from India about how the war had affected him. Although thousands of miles separated them, their experience and memories of the First World War united them in a common cause: pursuing a lasting peace. Leonard recounted a conversation with Scottish geographer and town planner Patrick Geddes on 9 July 1922, which seemed to sum up Leonard’s views of the war. Leonard had been serving as director for Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore’s international school Santiniketan, and Geddes was visiting to provide advice on how to set up the surrounding community. Geddes said that Leonard was “still suffering from ‘war-shock,’” though he may not realize it. Geddes told him to remain hopeful because readjustment would “take a long time and many forward steps in the world's history must be laid at the door of men who passed through the furnace of war in their most impressionable days.” Leonard explained that Geddes’ own son had died during the war and commented, just like Leonard, “he too had been through fire.”

Leonard’s choice of words is interesting, especially as it contrasts with Dorothy’s memories. Dorothy, as she recounted her trips to Southampton, wrote in terms of waiting and “burning something out,” but Leonard, who never saw combat, wrote in terms of “going through fire.” Dorothy presented her experience as fundamentally defined by waiting, which clearly aligned with the expectations of women’s roles during the First World War. Indeed, British propagandists summed up this expectation quite effectively with the slogan “Wait, Weep and be Worthy.” However, while the war had certainly been much closer to home for Leonard while he lived and served in Britain, there would have been many similarities in their experiences. He waited for news of his brothers while working with the YMCA in India. Dorothy gazed across

---

54 LKE to DWS. 9 July 1922. LKE/DWE/11/C, Elmhirst MSS.
the ocean wondering about her first husband. Both received devastating news, but presented the experience in very different, arguably gender-defined, ways. Though he had served in Scotland, rather than at the front, he still counted himself among the men who “passed through the furnace of war.” Leonard wrote on 2 August 1922:

> When my brothers and friends were killed, when the war was over I set my face to a goal which I felt was theirs, and the world’s, though the world might not see it, and so there can be no hauling down the flag,—and, except when I am physically spent, such a wish rarely overpowers me. Only sometimes I get very, very tired. I know now that I have a message to give,—but I do not know whether I have the strength to give it.\(^{56}\)

Dorothy experienced a similar change after the war and the death of her first husband. “When Willard died,” she wrote, “something ended finally for me,—romance and lightheartedness and all the poetry of my existence just went out, somehow—and for years I had a sort of green sense of growing older.”\(^{57}\) While Leonard presented the impact of war as something that spurred action and a sense of mission, Dorothy described it as prompting an emotionally desolate stasis. Though gendered expectations and vicarious trauma influenced how they presented their memories of the First World War, it similarly, and fundamentally, altered their lives. While Dorothy and Leonard remained committed to peace and pacifism at this point, the inflexible national agendas they witnessed during the Washington Conference and its perceived failure prompted a rejection of international mediation. Memories of the First World War had provoked a rather desperate hope in a clarion call for peace that simply was not feasible in the context of interwar politics. The trauma of the war may have increased the desire to avoid conflict, but it also effectively lowered resilience and the ability to persevere in the face of adversity.

> Though the Washington Conference had turned their focus away from international mediation, it was only one phase of their disillusionment. Dorothy still took part in peace

\(^{56}\) LKE to DWS. 2 Aug. 1922. LKE/DWE/11/A, Elmhirst MSS.

\(^{57}\) DWS to LKE. 25 December 1924. LKE/DWE/12/A, Elmhirst MSS.
organizations until the start of the Second World War completed the process. While she had been very optimistic about the Washington Conference and what work she could do with women’s groups, Dorothy intimated it was Leonard who brought back a sense of balance and purpose in her life. For Leonard, it was the chance to pursue the “message” he had for the world: a community-based school. Drawing on his experience working at Tagore’s school in India, he developed a similar plan for a Western country. As William James described, their faith in international disarmament movements had grown cold and dead, while a spark was ignited in their hearts for what would become Dartington Hall. After Dorothy agreed to marry him, which took many years and several different proposals, he saw a way to bring his “message” to fruition. With this marriage came the financial support required to live out his dream of establishing a school based on Tagore’s model. While Leonard would have preferred to keep working in India, he was well aware that Dorothy would never agree and sought a compromise. Once given the opportunity, he had no doubts that his community-based school should be located in England.58 Dorothy, however, took convincing.

Not only did Dorothy fear the strain on her children if she were to uproot them from their lives in the United States, she also felt it was her duty to remain in her country and serve in any way she could. However, a very serious, yearlong illness leading up to their marriage, which was partially caused by the increasing demands on her time and energy, radically changed her view. “I realized then that I was not indispensable to my own country,” she wrote, “and that I would not feel guilty of desertion if I departed and joined Leonard in England.”59 After their marriage, the couple poured their time, and Dorothy’s significant fortune, into Dartington Hall. Compared to their aspirations for the Washington Conference, their investment at Dartington was a small-

---

58 Michael Young, 9.
scale plan for change. They hoped to establish a community that would have an increasing international impact as other communities adopted the idea and it spread.

Similar to Tagore’s school in India, which served as inspiration, Dartington focused on rural reconstruction. They set about reviving such areas as farming, forestry, and cider making; they also introduced weaving with wool from their own flocks. At the same time, they focused on progressive education in the Dartington Hall School. At the start, the school made a significant break from common educational practice in Great Britain. As former student, and the Elmhirsts’ biographer, Michael Young explained, the school was to have “no corporal punishment, indeed no punishment at all; no prefects; no uniforms; no Officers’ Training Corps; no segregation of the sexes; no compulsory games, compulsory religion or compulsory anything else, no more Latin, no more Greek; no competition; no jingoism.”60 Students worked on the estate and within the local community while earning a progressive education centered on the liberal arts. Dorothy and Leonard hoped to set an example of education combined with community that would address what they saw as not only an ineffective educational system, but also one that produced intercultural conflict.61

After Dorothy’s illness and their marriage, she began to distance herself from her home country. In a visit to the US a few months after their marriage, Dorothy, who was pregnant with their first child, seemed to have completed the process of expatriation. “Oh Jerry,” she wrote, using Leonard’s pet name, “the school is such a beautiful subject to dream about. I find myself longing to get back to it. New York seems too much and too little, like the old life, to be very real to me now.”62 Though Dorothy continued to financially support her work in the United States, she had concluded her expatriation.

---

60 Michael Young, 131.
61 LKE to DWS. 19 May 1923. LKE/DWE/11/C, Elmhirst MSS.
62 Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst to LKE. 7 November 1925. LKE/DWE/12/C, Elmhirst MSS. Dorothy Whitney Elmhirst hereafter cited as DWE.
States, her involvement steadily decreased after she left the country and in 1935 she revoked her US citizenship for tax reasons.63

While Dorothy had abandoned international mediation at the end of the Washington Conference, she still supported individual efforts to oppose rearmament and remained a pacifist. However, as Europe drifted ever closer to another World War, another phase of disillusionment—centered on her commitment to pacifism—began. In 1935, she sent money to British politician Kate Spurrell, who was running as the Independent Labour Party candidate in the General Election and actively opposed rearmament. Spurrell was unsuccessful in her campaign, but Dorothy continued to send her funds and was “glad” to do so because of Spurrell’s “stand against war and re-armament.”64 The following year, in 1936, Dorothy held fast to nonviolence, though events would soon prompt another reassessment of her views. Dorothy explained in a letter sent on 16 March 1936 that a group met at Dartington each week to discuss non-violence. “We feel that while nations continue to think in terms of power politics there is no solution,” she wrote. “Conflicts, we are sure, can only be solved by lifting them to another level. And I see no hope in the present tangle unless we are ready to renounce the old methods.”65 During this time, Dorothy—along with such figures as Vera Brittain and Aldous Huxley—was part of the pacifist Peace Pledge Union (PPU). The PPU pledge was “I renounce war and I will never support or sanction another” and, at the time, it aligned with Dorothy’s beliefs.

However, in the late 1930s, after the school had been established for over a decade, Dorothy’s worldview once again shifted. Though still committed to the goal of peace, she abandoned pacifism. By January 1939, she started to decrease her financial contribution to the

64 DWE to Kate Spurrell. 22 November 1935. DWE/G/S2/C, Elmhirst MSS.
65 DWE to Ellen Wilkinson. 16 March 1936. DWE/G/S2/A, Elmhirst MSS.
Peace Pledge Union. Over a year later, in May 1940, she wrote to completely cut ties and resign from the PPU, though she agreed to remain in their files in case she were to change her mind. “Events have made it impossible for me to remain a complete pacifist,” she explained. “For many years I have tried to believe Hitler could be reasoned with—could even be won over by fair and just means: but today I can no longer believe this.” She continued: “The forces he represents in the world must, I believe, be resisted. I can see no other course.” In an unsent draft, she included more insight into what prompted her decision:

The events of the last few months have led me away from absolutism—my feeling about war has changed but little, if at all—but what I find I cannot accept is a pledge—a fixed and unalterable commitment to a certain course of action. Perhaps when the time comes for an ultimate decision I shall join you, but for the moment, I must be free.

Another key organizational crisis—the start of another World War—prompted her to sever fully her associations with pacifist organizations. By this time, it had also become clear their hope that Dartington Hall School would serve as a template for English education, and later the world, was unlikely to come to fruition. On 26 May 1944, Dorothy responded to an inquiry from the Peace Pledge Union asking her to rejoin. “I appreciate your attitude about your old members,” she wrote, “but I really should feel happier if my name were removed from your file.” She explained that it might be possible she would join again in the future, “but in my present mood, which is a rather complicated one, I should like to feel that I am entirely free from all the old Peace Organizations.” The Washington Conference, individual efforts to oppose rearmament, and her own pacifist pledge had all failed to prevent another World War and she no longer placed faith in any of the old peace organizations. These efforts had not forestalled another World War and her

---

66 See DWE to Stuart Morris. 24 January 1939. DWE/G/S2/C, Elmhirst MSS.
67 See DWE to Stuart Morris. 29 May 1940. DWE/G/S2/C, Elmhirst MSS.
68 Unsent letter. DWE to Stuart Morris. May 1940. DWE/G/S2/C, Elmhirst MSS.
69 DWE to Patrick Figgis. 26 May 1944. DWE/G/S2/C, Elmhirst MSS.
disillusionment in them was complete. For Dorothy, the First World War had prompted a certain desperate hope that peace could be attained through peace organizations, but a second utterly shattered it.

Their hopes for Dartington Hall School also met with disappointment. Though beloved by most students and heralded as an oasis for the arts, Dartington was unique, rather than an internationally adopted template. Their progressive liberal arts school committed to community development began to struggle after the death of its founders. Dorothy lived at Dartington until her death in 1968. This prompted Leonard’s retirement and after a second marriage, he moved to California, where he died in 1974. A little over a decade later, in a faltering economy, Dartington’s many small industries began to fail and the school closed its doors in 1987. Those in charge of the Dartington Hall Trust worked hard to create new sources of revenue, though it did come close to complete closure. What remains is still an oasis for a thriving arts community, including providing a haven for writers and the International Summer School for Music. However, what was once a hope for peace is now a ghost of its former self in the form of tourist attraction and convention center.

At the beginning of their courtship, Dorothy and Leonard felt adrift because of the First World War, but both were excited about the possibility of swiftly established peace on an international scale. As this article has illustrated, Dorothy and Leonard’s memories of the war prompted their involvement in peace organizations in the interwar period, but how they communicated these memories was directly influenced by vicarious trauma and acceptable norms of gendered representation. In Dorothy’s case, the accepted formula of female waiting belied her active role as a nurse during the war. For Leonard, such expectations prompted him to write in terms of “going through fire,” despite lacking the combat experience generally
associated with such a claim. Additionally, though their war memories initially prompted them to take part in peace activism, such involvement effectively displaced discussions of their war memories in their correspondence, at least until the perceived failure of the Washington Conference seemed to open up those healing wounds. The emotional legacy of the war decreased their psychological resilience and left them prone to cycles of hope and despair. However, it took key organizational crises—namely the close of the Washington Conference and the start of the Second World War—to provoke a rejection of certain types of activism. Though their conviction that cultural change was essential remained, the Washington Conference caused them to lose faith in international mediation and the start of the Second World War resulted in a complete dismissal of all interwar peace organizations. While they remained committed to peace, they no longer supported it on an international political scale, choosing instead to focus on a little corner of the world that might serve as a beacon for the rest.

This case study has illustrated how, in the case of two interwar peace activists, hope was steadily eroded and replaced with disillusionment. This took on a cyclical nature as hope and despair rose to relative prominence in turns until key historical developments seemed to close irrevocably avenues where peace could be pursued. Future studies can help determine how these cycles of hope and despair leave peace activists prone to disillusionment during times of organizational crisis. As the recent proliferation of trauma studies was, in many ways, spurred by the experience of 11 September 2001, it is fitting to provide an example of this cycle in a more contemporary context. Rev. Chloe Breyer, executive director of the Interfaith Center of New York, explained her reaction to 9/11 in such a way that suggests similarities to Dorothy’s interwar experience. Rev. Breyer explained that soon after the attacks she held a “great hope for awhile” that 9/11 “could not only break down barriers between people in New York, but also
between people in the U.S. and our fellow nations with which we share the planet.” However, near the time of the 29 January 2002 “Axis of Evil” State of the Union Address, Rev. Breyer realized this was unlikely to develop. “We have this huge amount of sacrifice and pain and it is for nothing because clearly we haven’t learned that much,” she wrote. “Then I went through a time of being very, very disillusioned…” She explained that it was through her work for the organization 9/11 Families for Peaceful Tomorrows that this feeling of disillusionment began to ease, just as Dorothy had described her participation in the Washington Conference as a sort of balm for her war memories.\(^{70}\) As this example illustrates, a similar process of decreased resilience and increased disillusionment is still at work in our present culture, though we lack the hindsight to assess what organizational crises might provoke individuals to repudiate peace movements. As this case study demonstrated, memory of conflict can prompt high hopes for change, but trauma leaves individuals prone to disillusionment.

---

\(^{70}\) Quoted in R. William Franklin et al., *Spiritual Responses to 9/11: Will the Dust Praise You?* (New York, 2003), 151.