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**My Research Experience: *Valerie Solanas and the Creation of a Radical Feminist Ideology***

I had no intentions of researching Valerie Solanas or the radical feminist movement when I started my Fall 2012 semester in HIST208e. The research seminar required me to write a paper on activist movements in 1968, and I initially wanted to write my paper on the black power movement. It was a topic I was familiar with and interested in. But after a web search of events that happened in 1968, I discovered that on June 6<sup>th</sup> of that year, Andy Warhol was nearly assassinated by a woman named Valerie Solanas. I found that interesting because I never knew that Warhol was nearly killed, and I never heard of the name Valerie Solanas before. I Googled her name to find out a bit more about Warhol's assailant and discovered that she was an alumnus of the University of Maryland, College Park. I wanted to learn more, so I decided to make her the focus of my research for my research paper.

I think what made my research more organic, and frankly more enjoyable, was the fact that I knew almost nothing about Valerie Solanas. In a way, I felt like I was being introduced to someone I had never met before. I enjoyed learning about Solanas because her life was incredibly interesting. After graduating from the University of Maryland, she worked as a prostitute and panhandled to support herself. In addition, she was a radical feminist and believed that all men should be eliminated. She was daring, funny, and possibly a little insane. Valerie Solanas was, undoubtedly, a very colorful character.

While I did enjoy research, it was lengthy and at times difficult. I realized there was little secondary information available on Solanas. The only reliable biographies I

found about her were the introduction to the screenplay, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, and the “About the Author” section in her own book, *SCUM Manifesto* (both of which I checked out in McKeldin Library). I also visited the Art Library and checked out biographies about Warhol. I learned a lot about Warhol and the assassination attempt, but I still felt that I needed to know more about Solanas herself.

My primary source research revealed a lot about Valerie Solanas. I started with Solanas’ book, *SCUM Manifesto*, in which she argued that men had destroyed the world and that women should eliminate them. This book was instrumental to my understanding of Solanas’ beliefs and was used frequently in my analysis of her impact on radical feminism. Of course, my primary source research benefitted from the fact that Solanas graduated from the University of Maryland. I emailed University archivist Anne Turkos, and she suggested that I visit the Maryland Room in Hornbake Library. When I went there, I searched through the 1958 Terrapin Yearbook (the year Solanas graduated) and learned that she was a staff member for *The Diamondback*. At the Maryland Room I learned how to use microfilm and I was able to read articles written during her years at UMD.

With the help of librarian Eric Lindquist, I learned how to use Research Port and found newspaper articles written about the assassination attempt. A pivotal point in my research occurred when I found a New York Times article written a week after Solanas shot Warhol. The article, “Valeria Solanis a Heroine to Feminists [sic]” interviewed Ti-Grace Atkinson and Florynce Kennedy, members of the radical feminist group, The Feminists. In the article, these women claimed that Solanas was one of the most important women in the Feminist movement. I was surprised by this observation because

prior to reading this article, all of the information I found on Solanas implied that she was insignificant and insane. I began to wonder how Solanas influenced Atkinson, Kennedy and the entire radical feminist movement. So, I returned to McKeldin Library and checked out primary and secondary literature on the radical feminist movement. I noticed parallels between Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto* and the ideas of the radical feminist movement. At this point, I was able to put Valerie Solanas and her assassination attempt on Andy Warhol's life in the greater context of radical feminism and argued that she had a significant influence on the movement.

I truly enjoyed my research experience. I found that my subject matter was very interesting, unique, and unlike any other topic I had ever researched. However, I think I could have been a bit more efficient during the research portion of my paper. I spent a lot of time merely gathering as much information as I could on Solanas and not enough analyzing what I found. When I finally put my research on Solanas in the context of radical feminism, I was able to complete my research and my paper. In the future, I will begin my research with a specific research question instead of trying to discover one as I go along. Nonetheless, I was proud of my research and paper and feel more prepared for any research assignments I will encounter in the future.