

The Jane Collective: Women's Rights in Secrecy

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## Process Paper

When considering the balancing of rights and responsibilities throughout history, one documentary I watched for AP US History class immediately came to mind. *The Janes* tells the story of the Jane Collective, a group of women who ran a safe underground abortion service in Chicago during the 1960s, set in a time before *Roe v. Wade* protected the right to choose. Watching the documentary in a time after *Roe v. Wade*, when abortion is no longer considered a constitutional right, made me question how what is or isn't a right is determined or changes and more so, at what point it becomes our responsibility as members of American society to challenge it. Therefore, I set out to investigate the Jane Collective's role in the history of women's reproductive rights in the United States.

I began my research in online databases available to me through my school and the New York Public Library, getting most of my sources from them. Knowing I wanted to tell the chronological story of how reproductive rights were developed on a legal level, I started from the beginning, throughout the 1960s (before the Janes) while extending my research to present-day. Subsequently, I found Geoffrey R. Stone's analysis of the history of abortions going as far as 18th century England helpful for understanding the rhetoric surrounding abortion in the US. Additionally, I also found NPR's Radio Diaries podcast interview to be the most interesting because of the full story it provided, from Jane leaders to clients, historians, and even police officers speaking.

I created my project through a website. I started with a rough outline on Google Docs of all the pages I'd separate my ideas by and then further developed that Doc by testing out visual aid placement and drafting out how my writing will be organized. Then, I moved onto the process of planning website design to make an appealing yet informative website, which I had slight difficulties learning to navigate but ultimately figured out.

My website demonstrates that when the government does not uphold and protect the people's rights, such as restricting women's healthcare access, it becomes the responsibility of fellow citizens to form communities for advocacy and action to protect that right and ensure that it is justly restored or solidified. When the Janes observed women facing higher mortality rates and injuries due to genuine desperation for the right to choose, they built a network of trustworthy individuals to help exercise their rights and determined that in creating safe spaces to disobey, we can challenge the unjust practices of our government.

Overall, the topic of rights and responsibilities is integral to the American rhetoric of liberty and justice. Yet, in the face of the ever changing status of reproductive rights, especially in a recently post-Roe era, it is vital we question which rights are ours for the taking as citizens of the USA and acknowledge that we are all responsible for helping others feel respected by society and the laws it enforces.

## Annotated Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

Booth, Heather. *Founder of Jane Collective Talks about Abortion*. Associated Press, 2022.

<https://research-ebsco-com.i.ezproxy.nypl.org/linkprocessor/plink?id=94f896f2-d46a-3c97-86ab-cd201b0c79d2>.

In this video, Heather Booth, one of the Janes and the founder of the collective, discusses the conversation surrounding Roe v. Wade as it was being overturned in 2022. I wanted to include this to note how the Jane Collective has had an impact as an inspiration in the years since its termination as well as to help discuss the rights that are being taken away from women through the overturning of Roe v. Wade currently and the responsibility Booth claims we all share to act on it.

Kaplan, Laura. *The Story of Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service*. New York: Vintage Books, A division of Penguin Random House LLC, 1995.

Laura Kaplan, another Jane member, writes a book detailing her experience as a leader of the clandestine collective in its entirety, providing a detailed guide on the Jane Collective. As a primary source from a Jane, aside from demonstrating more of the collective's operations, this book also helped me understand the reasoning and thinking of the Janes as they recall their contribution in history and why they felt the responsibility to start it.

Scott, Martha. Distributed Jane Pamphlets, Chicago. Accessed January 16, 2025.

<https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2019/04/jane-network-abortion-feature>.

I used this Vanity Fair article featuring the Jane Collective only to obtain Martha Scott's (a Jane member's) photograph which depicts the pamphlets that women were given when they arrived at the underground abortion network in Chicago. I used this photo to help supplement reader understanding of what the counseling consisted of at the service under the "Birth of Jane" page that describes how the Jane Collective began.

Scott, Martha. Photographs of Martha Scott and the Janes, Chicago. Accessed January 16, 2025.

<https://www.npr.org/2018/01/19/578620266/before-roe-v-wade-the-women-of-jane-provided-abortion-for-the-women-of-chicago>.

I only used this NPR article about the Jane Collective to obtain Martha Scott's photos, which includes one that depicts the Janes, specifically Martha Scott, Jeanne Galatzer-Levy, Abby Parisers, Sheila Smith and Madeline Schwenk, who were all part of those arrested in 1972. I used this photo for my home page. I also used another photo from Martha Scott of herself as a visual aid for the "The Women Behind Jane" page on my website, where each woman is introduced individually.

Shaull, Lorie. *Norma McCorvey (Jane Roe) and her lawyer Gloria Allred on the steps of the Supreme Court*, 1989, Flickr. Accessed January 16, 2025.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/number7cloud/32936173946/>.

This photograph depicts the plaintiff in *Roe v. Wade* standing outside the Supreme Court arguing for keeping abortion legal while the Supreme Court hears oral arguments that may overturn *Roe v. Wade*. I used this photo to demonstrate the legacy of *Roe v. Wade* and women's reproductive rights following the 1973 ruling, which have been constantly reassessed and threatened.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Coburn, Marcia Froelke. "Chicago's Forgotten Pro-Choice Warriors." *Chicago Magazine*, March 19, 2019.

<https://www.chicagomag.com/Chicago-Magazine/April-2019/Chicagos-Forgotten-Pro-Choice-Warriors-the-Janes/>.

In this article, Marcia Froelke Coburn writes an overview of the Jane Collective from start to finish. I used this source to write about the Janes as individuals and to assess the big picture of the Jane Collective's accomplishments.

Crayton, Kareem, Ruby Edlin, and Jennifer Ahearn. "Roe v. Wade and Supreme Court Abortion Cases." Brennan Center for Justice, July 26, 2024.

<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/roe-v-wade-and-supreme-court-abortion-cases>.

In this website, the Brennan Center for Justice, an independent law and policy organization, details the facts of the *Roe v. Wade* case and describes its process, ruling, and impact. I used this

source to help explain how Roe v. Wade was passed and how the Jane Collective ceased operations following the verdict's legalization of abortion.

Diane Elze, Robin Cohen, Ellen Cantarow, Valerie Miner, Joyce Peseroff, Nora Mitchell, and Teresa Noelle Roberts. "Sojourner." *Sojourner* 13, no. 8 (April 1, 1988).  
<https://jstor.org/stable/community.28044978>.

Sojourner was a feminist periodical that communicated ideas of the feminist movement from around the country through this publication. The section I used contains interviews with the leaders of the organization, the Janes, who remain anonymous, and helped me understand the process of starting and operating the network.

Gray, Diana and Laura Kaplan. "Before Roe v Wade there was the Jane Collective." Interview by Melissa Harris-Perry. *The Takeaway*, New York Public Radio, September 3, 2021.  
<https://www.proquest.com/other-sources/before-roe-v-wade-there-was-jane-collective/docview/2731237540/se-2>.

In this New York Public Radio interview, Melissa Harris-Perry interviews her mother, Diana Gray, who is a reproductive rights activist who created a similar system to the Jane Collective, as well as Laura Kaplan, a member of the Jane Collective. I used this source to elaborate on and emphasize the Janes' capabilities in the abortion and reproductive healthcare realm as they began to perform the procedures on their own, employing it on my "Operations" page.

Kirtz, Kate, and Nell Lundy, dirs. *Jane: An Abortion Service*. 1996. Movie Poster.

<https://www.wmm.com/catalog/film/jane-an-abortion-service/>.

This movie poster from a documentary about the Jane Collective depicts the Janes at a protest in Chicago advocating for reproductive rights. I used this photo to discuss the impact of the Jane Collective in the reproductive healthcare crisis and their role in activism to fight it..

Lessin, Tia, and Emma Pildes, dirs. *The Janes*. 2022; United States: HBO Max.

This documentary, directed by Tia Lessin and Emma Pildes is ultimately what inspired the topic for this project. Watching this documentary and its interviews, videos, and thorough visual and audio explanations piqued my interest because of the way it humanizes the Janes and all of their clients as real people in history as well as because of my personal interest in reproductive rights. I used this source for its testimonies from Jane members and many primary source photographs.

Mehrtens, Michelle. "The Underground Abortion Network That Inspired 'Call Jane.'"

Smithsonian.com, October 28, 2022.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-underground-abortion-network-that-inspired-call-jane-180981032/>.

In this article, Michelle Mehrstens explains the Jane Collective in more detail, mostly referencing *The Janes* (2022). I used this article to elaborate on how the Janes' payments and monetary management functioned to make their abortions more affordable.



O'Donnell, Kelly Suzanne. "Reproducing Jane: Abortion Stories and Women's Political Histories." *Signs* 43, no. 1 (2017): 77–96. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26552982>.

In this journal article, Kelly Suzanne O'Donnell, a historian of gender and medicine and visiting assistant professor at Bryn Mawr College, writes about the Jane Collective while placing it onto a timeline for women's rights to healthcare overall, focusing on how the narrative of the Janes influences pro-choice activism today. I used this journal article in my "The Women Behind Jane" and "Conclusion" pages to reflect on how the Jane Collective is an example for social rights activism.

Rocawich, Linda. "Desperation: Before Roe v. Wade--After Roe is Reversed." *The Progressive*, 01, 1992, 18, <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/desperation-before-ro-v-wade-after-is-reversed/docview/231932789/se-2>.

In this magazine article for *The Progressive*, Linda Rocawich discusses illegal abortion, citing women who detail their experience with unsafe and harmful illegal abortions, which I used for the historical context of the ramifications of withholding the right to reproductive healthcare. In this article, she also speculates on discussions of overturning Roe. v Wade, which I used to study and write about the continuous pattern of the right to abortion's vulnerability.

Rous, Nahanni. 2021. "Episode 70: Jane: Abortion before Roe | Jewish Women's Archive." Jewish Women's Archive. 2021. <https://jwa.org/podcasts/canwetalk/jane-abortion-ro>.

This podcast episode, led by interviewer Nahanni Rous at the Jewish Women’s Archive, includes interviews with a number of the women behind Jane, such as Heather Booth, who was the founder, Jeanne Galatzer-Levy, and Judith Arcana, where they detail their perspectives on the Jane Collective. I used direct quotes from the Janes to elaborate on my research and used an audio file from the episode to reflect on the abortion movement in my “Conclusion” page. I also used the photos of the Janes on their website to introduce them individually on my “The Women Behind Jane” page as well as their photo of a Jane advertisement.

Stone, Geoffrey R. “The Road to *Roe*.” *Litigation* 43, no. 1 (2016): 43–49.

<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26402017>.

In this journal article, Geoffrey Stone, a legal scholar and professor at the University of Chicago’s Law School, writes about the history of abortion and reproductive rights for women dating back to the 18th century, which I used to provide background context for my research on the Jane Collective and why this group felt responsible to engage in this network of abortions.

Surana, Kavitha. “Under Georgia’s Abortion Ban, She Died after Delayed Care.” ProPublica, September 16, 2024.

<https://www.propublica.org/article/georgia-abortion-ban-amber-thurman-death>.

This ProPublica article covers the story of Amber Thurman, a woman who died in Georgia in 2022 after being denied an abortion due to Georgia law. I referenced this article to discuss how

women's lives have once again become at risk since the overturning of Roe v. Wade in my "Conclusion" page.

Wallsgrave, Ruth. "JANE: The Abortion Service Transformed into Feminist Practice." *Off Our Backs* 19, no. 9 (1989): 17–17. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25797018>.

Ruth Wallsgrave, a writer in *Off Our Backs*, a women's news journal, recalls a panel featuring the Janes in which they discussed the Jane Collective, touching on topics like the uneven power balance within the group and how they operated in secrecy, which many other sources did not mention. I used this source to expand on the other interviews and testimonies for my writing.

Willis, Wynette, Heather Booth, Martha Scott, Jeanne Galatzer-Levy, Ted O'Connor, Leslie Reagan. The Story of Jane. Interview by Joe Richmond. *Radio Diaries NPR*, 2018. <https://www.radiodiaries.org/women-of-jane/>.

In this NPR interview, three leaders of the Jane Collective (Booth, Scott, and Levy) recall the procedure of the Jane Collective. I found this source most interesting because of the other interviewees, which include a client of the collective (Willis), a police officer at the time of the Collective (O'Connor), and a historian (Reagan), making this interview all encompassing in its perspectives of this one organization, which I used to elaborate on my research, specifically discussing the Janes' arrests.