

In Honor of a Particular Motherhood: Anna Jarvis and the Making of Mother's Day in the U.S.

Jeong-Suk Joo

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I. Introduction

This paper aims to examine Mother's Day and Anna Jarvis, the holiday's founder in the U.S., her attempts to defend the supposed integrity of the holiday, and ironies concerning her conception and protection of the maternal holiday. I became interested in this topic while working on the commercialization of holidays in the U.S., especially Mother's Day. Although Mother's Day is less prominent than other holidays, most notably Christmas, it is just as commercialized. Precisely because of this, I figured it could better illustrate the extent of the commercial takeover of holidays in the U.S.

Jarvis first celebrated Mother's Day in 1908 as a holy occasion to honor

her late mother and all mothers for their devotion to the home, and it became an official holiday in 1914. Yet, informed by the ongoing commercialization of holidays, floral and other commercial industries quickly recognized the economic value of the maternal holiday and came to turn it into a commercial bonanza. Attempting to protect her vision of Mother's Day, Jarvis waged a war against commercial industries. As her effort to stop commercialization failed, she even tried to terminate it. At first, I saw her case as an indication of ambivalence Americans felt toward the rise of commercial/consumer culture that was reshaping American culture from a producer- to consumer-oriented culture in the early part of the 20th century. In addition, Jarvis seemed to be one of the "Jeremiahs," who, according to Gary Cross, opposed and lamented the encroachment of commercial/consumer culture (2000: 111-44). I thus examined Mother's Day as one of the prime instances of the commercialization of holidays in the U.S., focusing on some of the ironies that Jarvis herself initially contributed to commercialization by designating white carnations as the emblem of Mother's Day and that she ended up opposing the holiday she helped to found.

However, further research into Jarvis and Mother's Day complicated this initial and rather clear-cut understanding. All too often obscured by her well-known quarrels with commercial industries was the fact that Jarvis made enemies out of almost anyone that embraced Mother's Day outside her specific prescription of what and how to celebrate, i.e., the private salutation to mothers for their roles at home. In fact, she was not bothered to differentiate between commercial industries and non-commercial entities like charitable and public health organizations, accusing them all of commercializing and unfairly taking advantage of "her" holiday and trying to protect it from their corrupting influences. In addition, as she insisted on her point of view and sometimes even used physical force to stop

celebration of the holiday that she did not approve of, she seemed to be concerned more with defending her power over the holiday than with the commercialization of her holiday.

Given this, in this paper I aim to examine Jarvis' clashes with those who were drawn to Mother's Day and explore why she opposed their embrace of the holiday. Yet, while she was quick to uncover their pretense and self-interests in promoting Mother's Day, Jarvis never acknowledged her own trouble, that is, her rewriting of her mother's life and legacies to fit into her Mother's Day design. Accordingly, by looking at her selective focus on her mother's life, I hope to examine her failings as well as a particular cultural construction of motherhood she memorialized through Mother's Day and helped to universalize by having it observed in the U.S. and beyond. Finally, given the timing of its emergence, I also look into the implications of Mother's Day and its advocacy of a particular motherhood for another significant development for women, the rising wave of feminism.

Below, I first briefly look at the origin of Mother's Day in the U.S. and what Jarvis intended by creating the holiday. I then examine her infamous battle with commercial industries, especially the floral industry, as the latter came to co-opt the holiday for profits. After this, I examine Jarvis' equally tumultuous conflicts with other individuals and organizations—competitors for her Mother's Day founder status, promoters of rival holidays, and charitable and public health organizations—that embraced Mother's Day to promote their non-commercial agendas. I look at some of the reasons for her oppositions even to non-commercial uses of Mother's Day, showing that her criticism, despite her harsh accusations and extreme actions, did have a point. Yet, Jarvis was not without problems, as she ignored some aspects of her mother's life and her conception of a maternal holiday. By examining this, I point out the hypocrisies of Jarvis in

criticizing others and asserting the purity of her Mother's Day vision. I also briefly discuss what Mother's Day meant for the women's movement and the ironies of Jarvis' creation and promotion of the maternal holiday.

II. The Beginning of Mother's Day

Born in 1864 near Grafton, West Virginia, Anna Jarvis was one of thirteen children of Granville and Ann Reeves Jarvis and one of four who survived. In 1891, she decided to take an independent course, leaving home to try a new life in Chattanooga, Tennessee at the urging of her uncle there and eventually settling down in Philadelphia where her brother ran a successful taxi business. All throughout this time, she maintained a close relationship with her mother, and reunited with her mother after her father's death in 1902, which was short-lived as her mother passed away on May 9, 1905. Grief-stricken, she arranged informal memorials of her mother in May 1907 at Andrews Methodist Church (now the International Mother's Day Shrine) in Grafton where her mother served as a Sunday school teacher (Bernhard 2002: 714).

From this, she came to launch Mother's Day as a day to pay tribute to her late mother in particular and all mothers in general. On the second Sunday of May 1908, she organized the first Mother's Day observance at Andrews Methodist Church in Grafton and the Wanamaker Store Auditorium in Philadelphia. Although she did not attend the service at Grafton, she sent 500 white carnations, her mother's favorite flower, to be distributed to those in attendance, which helped to establish white carnations as the Mother's Day emblem and the tradition of wearing them on the day. Jarvis also started a letter-writing campaign to promote the holiday. By 1911, Mother's Day was already observed in most states in the

U.S., as well as some other countries such as Canada, China, and Japan, a testimony to Jarvis' hard work and effective leadership. In 1912, she organized the Mother's Day International Association to further facilitate the national and international recognition and observance of the holiday. Her efforts paid off, as Mother's Day was proclaimed in 1914 as a national holiday to be observed by displaying the national flag on public buildings and private homes (Bernhard 2002: 714; Jamieson 2008: 60).

In 1908, Jarvis designated the second Sunday of May as Mother's Day, as this marked the first anniversary of her mother's death. Yet, instead of selecting the exact date of her mother's death, she chose the Sunday closest to it—thus the second Sunday of May in 1908. Jarvis wanted Mother's Day to fall on Sunday, as she meant it to be a holy day. According to Schmidt, she also created the holiday, following Protestant modes of celebrations such as prayers and hymns (1991: 903). This close identification with the Protestant traditions enabled Jarvis from the early on to seek and enlist the involvement and the support from churches and other Christian organizations in the promotion of Mother's Day. Both the Young Men's Christian Association and the World's Sunday School Association came to endorse Mother's Day and helped broaden the holiday's recognition (Getz 2004: 129).

As a holy day, what Jarvis intended to celebrate on Mother's Day was the unconditional love and care of mothers for their children and home, maternal traits she thought her mother best represented. Indeed, she referred to her mother as "the highest type of motherhood." Jarvis even invested Mother's Day's emblem, a white carnation, with maternal traits. For example, she viewed that the whiteness of the flower indicated "the truth, purity and broad-charity of mother love; its fragrance, her memory, and her prayers. The carnation does not drop its petals, but hugs them to its heart as it dies, and so, too, mothers hug their children to their hearts,

their mother love never dying.” Accordingly, as the circulars published by Mother’s Day International Association put it, Mother’s Day was a sentimental holiday of a “thank-offering” from children for motherly love and “the nation, for the blessing of good homes.” Yet, it was “not a celebration of maudlin sentiment,” but “one of practical benefit and patriotism, emphasizing the home as the highest inspiration of our individual and national lives” (Antolini 2010: 82, 84).

As a sentimental holiday, the story of how Jarvis came to conceive a day for mothers is an emotional one. Jarvis credited her mother for inspiring the idea of Mother’s Day, claiming to have overheard her mother saying during her Sunday school class that “I hope and pray that someone, sometime, will found a memorial mothers’ day” for the “matchless service” they render to “humanity in every field of life.” Upon her mother’s death, the daughter swore to fulfill her wish. Jarvis explained, “I thought this could best be done by having a day set apart to honor all mothers, and through them all womanhood” (Pomroy 1986: 133-34; Handy and DeWilde 2007; Antolini 2010: 25). Jarvis was very specific about the holiday’s spelling, using a singular possessive intentionally, since she wanted it to be personal and intimate. It was to honor the mother of each family, not the mothers of some famous people or all mothers in the world. It was the private celebration of women’s maternal roles within home (Jamieson 2008: 60). In this regard, Mother’s Day conformed to and reinforced the Victorian ideals of domesticity in the late 19th century and the traditional gender roles they upheld.

III. Commercial Challenges to Mother’s Day

Although Jarvis intended Mother’s Day to be a sacred occasion to

celebrate mothers and the home she presided over, she soon saw that its central mission and integrity was increasingly subverted by commercial industries and other organizations that appropriated and reinterpreted the holiday according to their needs. In particular, she had long-running feuds with commercial industries. Ironically, what drew them to Mother's Day was its sentimental appeal such as the call to pay tribute to mothers for their dedication and love, the holiday's focus on the home and family, and the story of a daughter fulfilling her late mother's wish. All these well resonated with contemporary Americans—one factor that helped Jarvis' relatively quick success in having Mother's Day observed—and thus promised to be economically bankable.

Aided by Jarvis' designation of a white carnation as the Mother's Day emblem and the tradition of mothers' wearing it on the holiday, the floral industry especially came to claim the holiday as its own. For example, the florists gave away flowers on Mother's Day as a form of advertising for the holiday and an effort to make the holiday more widespread. Americans were urged to express their feelings for motherhood through flowers (Schmidt 1997: 264-66). Besides, the floral industry initiated a new tradition of wearing a red carnation if your mother is alive and a white one if she was dead in part to cope with the shortage of white carnations and in part to boost the business. By way of these attempts, the *American Florist* could assert in 1919 that "the second Sunday in May is purely a floral holiday, which can and should be made of great advantage to the entire trade" (Schmidt 1997: 260).

Jarvis was disconcerted by the commercial takeover of what was meant to be a holy day. Arguing that Mother's Day was "a day of sentiment, not profit," she accused commercial industries of being "charlatans, bandits, pirates, racketeers, kidnapers, and other termites" that were ruining "with their greed one of the finest, noblest, truest movements and celebrations

known” (Johnson 1979: 18). Especially enraged by the increase in the price of white carnations, a simple salute to her mother and chosen in part for their relatively inexpensive price, she started headline-grabbing battles with the floral industry. First, she attempted to end white carnations as the symbol of Mother’s Day by proposing to wear simple and durable celluloid buttons instead (Antolini 2010: 116). In 1920, she publicly denounced the floral industry for “profiteering” and, in 1922, called for open boycotts against the florists in response to their increase in the prices of white carnations (Rouvalis 2008).

For its part, the floral industry struck back quickly. It was dismissive of her, calling her “a crazy old spinster” (Rouvalis 2008), cutting off whatever support it had given her and no longer crediting her for her role in the creation of Mother’s Day. As early as 1913, the *Florists’ Review* kept the credit to itself, brazenly asserting that “for the success of the day, we are to credit ourselves, us, we, the members of the trade who know a good thing when they see it and who are sufficiently progressive to push it along—Mothers’ day is ours; we made it; we made it practically unaided and alone.” Reflecting this, *The Book of Holidays*, published in 1926, presented Mother’s Day as a day organized by the floral and greeting card industry without mentioning Jarvis (Schmidt 1991: 904, 916).

Yet, Jarvis continued her fight against commercial industries. In 1923, she interrupted a retail confectioner convention to protest the industry’s abuse of Mother’s Day sentiments. Another episode often cited as an indication of her extremity in her opposition to commercialization involved a bowl of salad that she ordered at the Wanamaker Tea Room and then dumped on the floor, as she found it named as a “Mother’s Day Salad” (Taylor 2008). Jarvis even sent a telegram to President Franklin Roosevelt in 1933 asking him to stop the National Industrial Recovery Act from assisting those trivializing Mother’s Day for commercial gains (Antolini

2010: 117). It was only one of many telegrams she sent him in her futile attempts to persuade him to intervene on the behalf of her cause.

It is not that Jarvis simply clung to the 19th century "anti-modern" worldview and thus irrationally feared and opposed the world of commerce and consumer culture that came to transform America from a production-to consumption-oriented society at the turn of the 20th century (Lears 1983). During the earlier days of Mother's Day promotion, Jarvis was helped by none other than Wanamaker, Philadelphia department store mogul. He provided important initial help such as endorsing the holiday, offering his stores for her Mother's Day programs, helping to publicize them, and financially contributing to her Mother's Day campaign. Even while she approached him as the superintendent of the Bethany Church Sunday School, his connection to commerce and his benefiting from the holiday by creating holiday souvenirs did not stop her from enlisting his help (Bernhard 2002; Taylor 2008; Antolini 2010: 104).

In addition, she initially had an amicable relationship with the floral industry. At first, she viewed the florists as an ally in promoting and securing white carnations, thus talking to florist organizations about her movement for Mother's Day and receiving donations from them. Jarvis even personally designed Mother's Day placards that florists could display on their shop windows. In addition, she herself was no stranger to the world of business and publicity. She served as the advertising editor of the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company in Philadelphia, a position she gave up in 1912 to devote herself to the newly-created Mother's Day International Association (Schmidt 1991: 911; Schmidt 1997: 268; Johnson 1979: 16). Given this experience in advertising, she was well aware of the importance of publicity and the value of big names, thus seeking endorsements for Mother's Day from such well-known figures as John Wanamaker, Theodore Roosevelt and Edward Bok, editor of *Ladies Home*

Journal (Antolini 2010: 80).

She was also well-informed of legal matters. In 1912 when she created the Mother's Day International Association, she copyrighted "Mother's Day," "second Sunday in May," and the white carnation, thus protecting her work as her own intellectual property ("Anna Jarvis" 1948). Jarvis would sternly warn that those using the holiday without her permission were violating her copyright and repeatedly threatened to sue them. She did not shy away from exercising her legal rights, reporting having 33 pending lawsuits when she battled against commercial industries. In order to avoid the charge of violating her copyright, commercial industries frequently responded by changing the location of apostrophe (Antolini 2010: 111). For example, the above quote from the Florists' Review used the term, "Mothers' day," instead of Mother's Day. Although a less than ingenious measure to settle the problem, this became a common strategy adopted by those trying to avoid legal actions from Jarvis.

In short, Jarvis was neither untainted by the commercial world nor helplessly victimized by it. Yet, since she intended Mother's Day to be a sentimental celebration of mothers for their love and devotion, she feared that commercial industries' pecuniary interests were undermining the basic tenet of the holiday. Besides, commercial industries casually violated her copyright and disregarded her status as the holiday's founder. Jarvis thus remained opposed to commercial industries' involvement in Mother's Day to the rest of her life.

IV. Other Rival Claims for Mother's Day

Jarvis' battle with commercial interests, given its sensational nature, garnered a lot of media attention at the time it was waged. Even at the

100th anniversary of Mother's Day, newspaper articles never failed to mention her feud with the floral industry. Yet, overshadowed by this media focus was the fact that she had equally tumultuous relationships with non-commercial elements, as diverse individuals and organizations—notably contenders to her status as a Mother's Day founder, rival holiday promoters, patriotic women's organizations and charitable foundations—came to incorporate Mother's Day in their respective visions. Her conflict with them was like a rerun of her clash with commercial industries. As with commercial industries, she was more than willing to protect the putative purity and integrity of the holiday from any deviation and threatened to sue those violating her copyright over the holiday. Her adversaries, much like commercial industries, used the alternative spelling, while also arguing that, as a national holiday, Mother's Day was no longer private property to be protected by copyright.

In a sense, her battle with commercial industries shaped and strained her relationships with non-commercial interests. It was so, since her less than pleasant encounter with them made her suspicious of those embracing and promoting Mother's Day outside her specific design, questioning their motives. Most often, she concluded that her adversaries were driven by greed and/or by personal ambition, seeing them as “pirates looting the day's popularity for personal gain” and “trying to get something” without contributing to it (Antolini 2010: 14). In addition, her eventual failure to salvage the holiday from the commercial takeover made her all the more obsessed with defending her vision of Mother's Day and the kind of motherhood it celebrated.

However, if her battle with the florists and other retailers could find sympathy among those concerned with commercialization and the encroachment of consumer culture, her attack on non-commercial organizations—especially those seeking to harness Mother's Day for

humanitarian and charitable causes—may seem to be problematic. As she opposed even non-commercial uses of Mother’s Day, it seemed that she was concerned more with defending the holiday as her turf than simply opposing its commercialization. In addition, her sharp language—calling her non-commercial adversaries under various demeaning labels such as “anti-mother propagandists,” “Mother’s Day imposters,” “charity charlatans” or “Christian pirates” (Antolini 2010: 14, 17, 70)—was fit more for news headlines than sensible critique. Yet, her opposition to even non-commercial uses of Mother’s Day reveals sound principles that certainly deserve a serious consideration.

After Mother’s Day was officially established, Jarvis began to face with challenges to her status as the founder of Mother’s Day from what she called “Mother’s Day imposters” who claimed to have founded Mother’s Day, including the floral industry. In particular, Frank Hering came to claim for the founder status based on his proposal for a maternal day in 1904. He also secured endorsements from such influential groups as the Fraternal Order of Eagles (he was a chair of the Eagles’ Old Age Pension Commission) and the American War Mothers that named him as the “Father of Mothers’ Day” (note the spelling to avoid the legal charge from Jarvis) in 1925.

Despite his public standing, Jarvis thought he was simply using Mother’s Day popularity to advance the Fraternal Order of Eagles’ agenda of assisting destitute mothers and, through this, his political career (Johnson 1979: 18). In fact, Hering and other “Mother’s Day imposters” seemed to be opportunistic, since their claim to the founder status came only after Mother’s Day was officially proclaimed as a national holiday in 1914. If Hering was indeed the original founder of Mother’s Day, he could have come forward with the claim earlier than, not after, 1914 (Antolini 2010: 93). In addition, the American War Mothers’ crowning him as the “Father

of Mother's Day" was more like a marriage of convenience, coming after Jarvis' refusal to give it any share in Mother's Day. Moreover, it is questionable whether Hering and other claimants for the founder status would be willing to uphold their claim by assuming more responsibilities, like paying for the expenses required to promote Mother's Day as Jarvis did through her Mother's Day International Association (Antolini 2010: 98, 194-996).

Jarvis' critique of the proposal to create rival holidays such as Parents' Day and Father's Day was also not groundless. At first, a day for fathers would seem to be a natural step from a day for mothers. Yet, she was against Father's Day, seeing it as a commercial scheme to tap into Mother's Day sentimentality by creating a day similar to it. Her view was neither completely incorrect, nor out of touch with contemporary Americans. Father's Day, though created as a sentimental homage to fathers, was soon taken over by retailers, prompting Jarvis to comment that it was a marketing ploy of "some necktie, tobacco, whiskey, and lottery promoters." Agreeing with her, most Americans saw it as a joke and long failed to take it seriously (Stephens 2004: 140, 141-43). In part because of this lack of public support, Father's Day, though its first celebration was held in 1910, was declared as a national holiday only in 1972. Jarvis was also sharply critical of Robert Spero, who proposed Parents' Day and celebrated it in New York City on Mother's Day from 1923 to 1941. According to her, celebrating Parents' Day on Mother's Day enabled him to assume "ownership" of her holiday, while also evading legal actions for violating her copyright. Jarvis certainly had a point, because Spero came up with the Parents' Day idea only after his plan to hold Mother's Day celebration in 1923 was met with ire and the threat of a lawsuit from Jarvis (LaRossa 1997: 175; Antolini 2010: 147-49).

Jarvis' disapproval of rival holidays ultimately reflected her concern that

they could pose competition to Mother's Day and diminish its significance. As for Father's Day, she argued that, since the national calendar was already crowded with days for fathers such as Washington's Birthday for the Founding Fathers and Thanksgiving for the Pilgrim Fathers, there was no need to marginalize the only feminine day by adding another day for fathers (Johnson 1979: 18). Jarvis was even more critical of the proposal to create Parents' Day, since she feared it could supplant Mother's Day. In a telling example, one of her slogans was "Don't Kick Mother out of Mother's Day" ("Mother's Day, Inc." 1938).

Jarvis also clashed with several organizations that attempted to utilize Mother's Day for humanitarian purposes. In 1933, a Senate Resolution was passed, calling for Americans to celebrate Mother's Day not just by displaying the national flag, but by donating to organizations that provided aid to economically distressed families, especially mothers and children not supported by male breadwinners. It encouraged various benevolent organizations to enlist Mother's Day to raise funds for mothers in need of help as well as to promote reform in areas such as health care and mothering skills. For example, the American War Mothers, which already conflicted with Jarvis over issues such as its endorsement of Hering and its adoption of carnations as its emblem, sold white carnations on Mother's Day to raise funds for its charitable works. The Golden Rule Foundation urged people to donate in their mother's name on Mother's Day for the welfare of the "Forgotten Mothers," and the Maternity Center Association seized Mother's Day as a chance to educate mothers on health care and childrearing tips based on "scientific" approaches to motherhood to reduce the infant mortality rate (Antolini 2010: 17, 197-98, 208, 213-14, 219). In this way, they invested Mother's Day with new meanings and activism beyond the traditional domestic sphere as advocated by Jarvis.

Jarvis' opposition to the use of Mother's Day by these organizations was

not because she was against philanthropy, but because of their underlying assumptions on mothers and motherhood. Jarvis saw that charitable organizations depicted mothers as victims of economic hardship and the object of pity in their attempt to raise funds for mothers in need (Antolini 2010: 228). Yet, through Mother's Day, she unconditionally praised mothers for their dedication to home. To her, mothers could never be poor with love from their children, and only their children's failure to pay tribute to them could make them poor or victimized (Johnson 1979: 19). In addition, she believed mothers were competent and in control of domestic duties and mothering skills and did not need the tutelage from medical or other experts, who were almost always men. Unlike the Maternity Center Association that stressed the education of mothers on health care and mothering skills, she saw them having full authority as well as autonomy (Antolini 2010: 216). In short, she was against the patronizing attitudes of charitable organizations, as they assumed that mothers needed protection and education from outside authoritative figures. Jarvis thus considered that charitable and public health organizations were ideologically corrupting and "commercializing" Mother's Day and the conception of motherhood the holiday upheld. Like others, she thought, they were exploiting the popularity of Mother's Day for their personal ambitions and institutional interests, while using their putative humanitarian concerns as a cover.

V. Rewriting Mother's Legacy: Mothers' Day vs. Mother's Day

As Jarvis upheld *her* conception of Mother's Day as legitimate and insisted on *her* way of celebrating it, she was harshly critical of commercial and non-commercial entities alike, accusing them of

commercializing Mother's Day. It had to be either her way or no way. Despite this undemocratic dichotomy, her position is not without defense. Her critical stance revealed her sincerity toward Mother's Day and provided insights into the underlying self-interests of her rivals. However, Jarvis' position becomes indeed problematic and indefensible, when it comes to the little known, but critical, fact that she even rewrote her mother's life and disregarded her mother's "Mothers' Day" legacies to fit into and defend her own "Mother's Day."

As mentioned above, Jarvis claimed to create Mother's Day to fulfill her mother's wish that "someone, sometime, will found a memorial mothers' day" for the "matchless service" they rendered to "humanity in every field of life," which she overheard as a child. Yet, even though Jarvis created Mother's Day in the name of her own mother and, through this, celebrated the type of motherhood she thought her mother best represented, neither Mother's Day nor her view of motherhood reflected her mother's life and legacies. Jarvis' remembrance of her mother, Ann Reeves Jarvis, was almost about her roles within the private sphere of home. Her recollection of her mother seemed convincing in the light of the Victorian era stricture that relegated women to the domestic sphere and reserved the religion as their only public activities. Given her mother's dominant presence at home, Jarvis' Mother's Day fittingly celebrated mothers within the domestic realm.

Yet, the daughter failed to acknowledge other aspects of Ann Jarvis' life as a mother. Jarvis recalled her mother's loss of nine children made her mother's life one of sorrow and anxiety, even though she faced it with fortitude (Johnson 1979: 16). However, undoubtedly saddened by this experience, Ann Jarvis neither remained consumed with grief nor handled it personally by seeking comfort in faith. Infant death was a common experience for many mothers at that time. Learning from her brother who

was a doctor that infant death was often caused by the poor sanitation, Ann Jarvis came to organize Mothers' Day Work Clubs in 1858 with mothers of the nearby towns. It educated mothers on the importance of sanitation and on how to improve it in an effort to bring down infant mortality, and also provided nursing care and help for sick mothers. After the Civil War, she helped to bring together the community torn apart by the opposite loyalties. In an attempt to heal the breach, she organized a Mothers' Friendship Day in 1868 and asked mothers to bring both Union and Confederate soldiers. Despite initial tension, Ann Jarvis and mothers, playing anthems of the North and the South, eventually succeeded in reconciling them (Pomroy 1986: 129-33; Rouvalis 2008; Jamieson 2008: 59).

In short, while the daughter rarely portrayed her mother outside home and church, Ann Jarvis had been socially and politically active. In particular, it was her maternal experience of losing children that led her to embrace the roles beyond the domestic sphere and provided a common ground for social activism among mothers who shared a similar experience. Ann Jarvis was also involved in the construction of Andrews Methodist Church in Grafton and later its administration, not just its Sunday school as the daughter remembered (Pomroy 1986: 133). In the light of these activities, the "mothers' day" Ann Jarvis wished to create for the mothers' "matchless service" in "humanity in every field of life" was not a private celebration of their roles within the domestic realm as Mother's Day was. Instead, it was likely to encompass both private and public aspects—literally "every field of life"—of motherhood, commemorating mothers' services to all members of the community.

Ann Jarvis was not alone in seeing motherhood as a force for reforms and betterment for all and proposing a memorial maternal day that celebrated the public facet of motherhood. Julia Ward Howe, a suffragist

and author of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, likewise proposed a Mothers' Day, which was first celebrated on June 2, 1873. Recognizing that mothers suffered the greatest loss from wars as they sent their husbands and sons to wars, Howe dedicated the day to oppose wars (LaRossa 1997: 174). Accordingly, from maternal experiences, both Ann Jarvis and Howe became socially and politically engaged and put forward a maternal holiday that incorporated this aspect. Given this, as Stephanie Coontz points out,

Mother's Day originated to celebrate the organized activities of women outside the home. It became trivialized and commercialized only after it became confined to special nuclear family relations. The people who first inspired Mother's Day had quite a different idea about what made mothers special. They believed that motherhood was a *political* force. They wished to celebrate mothers' social roles as community organizers, honoring women who acted on behalf of the entire future generation rather than simply putting their own children first (1992: 152).

Ironically, it was none other than Ann Jarvis' own daughter that confined the maternal holiday to the domestic sphere, all in the name and memory of her mother.

It was unlikely that Anna Jarvis was not aware of her mother's social activities. Rather, her exclusion of her mother's activism outside the home was more likely to reflect her experience of motherhood that was quite different from her mother's. Unlike her mother, who experienced motherhood as a mother, Jarvis, having never been married and a mother, understood it from the perspective of a child. She thus predominantly experienced motherhood as mothers' emotional and physical care of their

children, not as a social and political force. As such, while her mother thought of a maternal holiday as a celebration by mothers, the daughter conceived it as a salute to mothers by their children. Besides, it is argued that Jarvis' selective focus on her mother's activities was driven by her desire to secure legitimacy as the leader of the Mother's Day movement. She would have faced ridicule and resistance, had she proposed a day for mothers based on maternal experiences that she never had. Yet, she could claim to be relevant to her mother's domestic activities as a child and thus legitimate as a leader of Mother's Day (Antolini 2010: 57, 83-84).

Accordingly, it is very likely that she consciously left out her mother's social and political involvement, focusing only on activities that fit into her own view of motherhood and the maternal holiday. Interestingly, Jarvis' rival claimants to Mother's Day including Hering shared her view of the holiday as a celebration of mothers by their children. Especially, her archenemy, the floral industry, did more than anyone else to help establish and propagate her model of the holiday, although for its economic gains. Yet, even while Jarvis had the entire nation and the world pay tribute to mothers through her Mother's Day, she ironically helped to undermine their power by disregarding and reversing the legacy of maternal social activism and empowerment of her mother and Howe. Jarvis and her rivals alike no longer viewed mothers as active agents capable of bringing out social reform and betterment, instead reducing them to the passive object of affection, praise, pity or tutelage and/or regarding their actions as one of sacrifice and service to others (Antolini 2010: 86, 228).

At the same time, Jarvis' rewriting her mother's legacies and relegating mothers to passive roles further obscured the social and political aspects of motherhood. It is significant that this occurred at the time of the growing women's participation in the labor market, the increase in divorce rates and the rising tide of the women's suffrage movement (Jones 1980:

175-195). Amid these changes, Jarvis' glorification and reaffirmation of women's maternal roles within the domestic realm through Mother's Day—even though she herself was said to be supportive of women's suffrage and only meant to pay tribute to maternal traits and domestic values (Johnson 1979: 18)—was wittingly or unwittingly played in the hand of conservatives who were against women's empowerment. Given this, LaRossa argues that the religious and political conservatives came to support Mother's Day, seeing it as a chance to remind where women belonged, i.e. home, (1997: 176).

Despite the grave socio-political implications of her editing of her mother's life, Jarvis never admitted this fact—most people were not familiar with her mother's activities and knew her through the daughter's account. Nor did she address the conservative ramifications of her action. In addition, she did not seem to recognize the irony that marked her creation and promotion of Mother's Day, i.e., extolling and reinforcing domestic roles for women, even though she herself enjoyed active social roles as the founder of the holiday. Her position is all the more ironic given that her energetic campaign for Mother's Day was largely possible, since she was free from the motherly care and domestic duties. In short, while her life was reflective of more assertive and independent womanhood of the early 20th century, she prescribed conservative values to other women.

VI. Conclusion

Jarvis, creating Mother's Day in memory of her late mother, intended it to be a sentimental celebration of all mothers. Yet, it was soon evident that the holiday had a life of its own. Ever since Mother's Day was

declared as a national holiday in 1914, various individuals and organizations came to appropriate it, investing it with diverse meanings and interpretations according to their respective agendas. As Jarvis adamantly held to her original vision of Mother's Day, she perceived them as a threat to the holiday's purity and integrity as well as to her copyright over the holiday. Jarvis thus vigorously opposed them, exposing their pretense and self-interest in appropriating Mother's Day.

However, while she held exacting standards to her rivals and was quick to point out their foibles, she never problematized her own pretense. Even though she did not permit her rivals to reinterpret Mother's Day, she took liberties with her mother's life and legacies to fit into her own sentimental vision of the holiday. At least in this aspect, she was concerned more with securing her position as the founder of Mother's Day than honoring her mother. Moreover, by reversing her mother's advocacy of social and political activism of mothers and celebrating and reinforcing their domestic roles through Mother's Day, she came to serve a conservative agenda at the time when women demanded for more active social and political roles.

Jarvis' almost obsessive attachment to Mother's Day reveals that she and Mother's Day became eventually one and the same. As she completely devoted herself to the holiday, Mother's Day became who she was and what she was to herself and to others. Yet, her efforts to keep the holiday under her care were not successful. Despaired, she tried to end the holiday rather than watch its defilement. In 1943, she asked for signatures for a petition to repeal the holiday and later filed a lawsuit to stop its observance, all in vain. Right before her death in 1948, she even said that she regretted having created Mother's Day (Jamieson 2008: 61; Schisgall 1960).

In the end, her self-imposed role as the defender of Mother's Day took a heavy financial toll on her, depleting most of her sizeable inheritance.

Broke, bitter, blind and partially deaf, she died in 1948 at a Pennsylvania mental institution. As if it were the final insult or tribute to the founder of what had become a big floral event, the bill was in part paid by a group called the Floral Exchange (Johnson 1979: 19). A sort of poor comfort to Jarvis could be that, while she failed to stop the commercialization of Mother's Day, she was far more successful defending it from her mother's vision. Despite occasional attempts to link Mother's Day with social issues, it still remains as a sentimental holiday celebrating the 19th century ideal of motherhood as seen from the perspective of children.

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Abstract

In Honor of a Particular Motherhood: Anna Jarvis and the Making of Mother's Day in the U.S.

Jeong-Suk Joo

This paper aims to examine Mother's Day and Anna Jarvis, the holiday's founder in the U.S., her attempts to defend the supposed integrity of the holiday, and ironies concerning her conception and protection of the maternal holiday. Jarvis first celebrated Mother's Day in 1908 as a holy occasion to honor her late mother and all mothers for their devotion to the home and family, and it became an official holiday in 1914. Yet, floral and other commercial industries soon recognized the economic value of the maternal holiday and came to turn it into a commercial bonanza. In addition, other individuals and organizations came to appropriate it, investing it with diverse meanings and interpretations according to their respective agendas. As Jarvis insisted on her vision of Mother's Day, she perceived them as a threat to the holiday's purity and integrity. As a result, she vehemently opposed their embrace of the holiday, exposing their pretense and underlying self-interests.

Yet, while she was quick to spot others' foibles, she never acknowledged her own problem. Jarvis disregarded her mother's social and political activism to fit into her design of Mother's Day, i.e., a private celebration of mothers' domestic roles. This selective focus on her mother's life and legacies reveals Jarvis' failings as well as a particular cultural construction of motherhood she memorialized through Mother's Day. At the same time, her glorification and reaffirmation of traditional

gender roles came to serve conservatives who were against the growing women's roles outside the home. This was ironic, not the least because her energetic campaign for Mother's Day was largely possible because she was free from the motherly care and domestic duties.

Key Words: Mother's Day, Anna Jarvis, Motherhood, Commercialization, Women's Movement

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이름: 주정숙

소속: 중원대학교

주소: 충북 괴산군 괴산읍 문무로 85 MII 819

이메일: jjoo@jwu.ac.kr