

Donna Allen, 78, a Feminist and an Organizer

By [Wolfgang Saxon](#) July 26, 1999

Donna Allen, an early standard-bearer of feminism who kept an eye on the news and communications industry from her Washington home, died on July 19 of a heart attack. She was 78.

Her family said she died at a hospital but declined to identify it.

Dr. Allen came to social and political activism as a young woman, organizing farm workers on the West Coast and writing pamphlets for the American Federation of Labor in Washington. In the early 1950's, she became involved with the League of Women Voters, which was scrutinizing the Truman Administration's loyalty program for Government employees.

At the time, there was widespread fear of Communist infiltration and subversion. Dr. Allen strongly objected to loyalty oaths and their general acceptance by the press.

From this, Dr. Allen developed a lifelong interest in communications and the role of women in the field.

On the political side, she was a founder of Women Strike for Peace, which opposed nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War, and she served as Washington

representative for the National Committee to Abolish the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Dr. Allen herself ran afoul of the Un-American Activities Committee in 1965, when it questioned a visa granted to a Japanese law school dean and leading pacifist for an American lecture tour in 1963. She and two others refused to testify at a closed hearing, claiming a constitutional right to an open hearing.

The committee cited the three for contempt of Congress. A United States district judge found them guilty and gave them suspended sentences of four months in prison and \$100 fines. Those were overturned on appeal.

In 1972, Dr. Allen founded the Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press and started a newsletter, Media Report to Women: What Women Are Doing and Thinking About the Communications Media. She edited Media Report, now a quarterly, until selling it in 1987 to another publisher, but continued as president of the institute at her home to the end, organizing conferences and writing in an effort to get a woman's point of view across in communications here and abroad.

Donna Allen was born in Petoskey, Mich., and graduated in history, with a minor in economics, from Duke University in 1943. She received a master's degree in economics at the University of Chicago in 1953 and a Ph.D. in history at Howard University in 1971, with a dissertation on national health insurance.