

A Supplement to the Seattle Voter

Celebrating Women's History 2002

Reclaiming the Past in Order to Rewrite the Future



**THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
OF SEATTLE**

Women's History Committee

Helen B. West, Chair
Annette Holcomb
Yvonne Lam
Diane Larson
Lisa Peterson
Dorothy Young Sale
Olive Spannaus

Reading Committee

Norma Shorrock, Chair
Inga Douglas
Martha Jordan

Celebrating Women's History 2002

For centuries, women have been largely absent from the pages of history books, as if their accomplishments were not worthy of the consideration afforded the men alongside whom they had lived, loved, and worked. In the last few decades, however, there has been a growing interest in and recognition of the fact that stories that ignore the role of women in shaping the world are incomplete. The initial stages to write women back into history focused on spheres in which women played the largest roles. Now we are beginning to move in the direction of integrating women into all our historical narratives, looking with fresh eyes at familiar events and topics to see if women's involvement and influence have been overlooked.

Even the most "masculine" subjects, such as war, are just beginning to be seen as topics better and more completely understood by incorporating women's roles and perspectives. Wars are always discussed in terms of the men involved—the kings and political leaders who called for them, the military generals who organized them and the soldiers who fought them. Now we recognize that all wars have had a major impact not only on the men involved, but also on the women in their lives. Women served in combat with the men, were effective spies and were often responsible for coordinating supplies. Wives and other female relatives were left behind to manage homes, bring up families and carry out businesses without men. As early as the 15th century, Christine de Pizan recognized that women could be left in charge of the family estate or business for years—as during the Crusades—and urged women to cultivate financial and management skills.

Throughout recorded history, women were "hiding in plain sight" in the sources that have come down to us. As we revisit those sources—everything from household accounts and diaries to court records, from poetry to sculpture, from tapestries to wills—looking for evidence about women's lives, we discover a wealth of information not only about them but about the men who shared their lives.

As we have for the past seven years, the Woman's History Committee celebrates Women's History Month by offering the writings of women (and some men) that describe what they were striving to accomplish and why. These primary source documents have covered a wide range of topics and concerns: from Mary Wollstonecraft's introduction to *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, written in the 18th century; to John Stuart Mill's often neglected essay on the *Subjection of Women* and to Ida Wells-Barnett remarkable essay on the "epidemic" lynchings of African Americans, both written in the 19th century; to Barbara Jordan's debate on the Articles of Impeachment delivered in Congress in the 20th century. We have offered these writings as a very small attempt to fill in the blanks of feminine thought so often neglected in history books. We do so to offer role models for ourselves as well as for our children and grandchildren.

This year we offer the writings of a time in which most of us have lived—the women's revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These were important times for the discussion of and fight for the rightful place of women in society. Like other revolutions and causes, it was carried out by a few, supported by some and rejected and ridiculed by many. We have chosen four documents that offer a spectrum of thought and concerns expressed at the time.

The name "Redstockings" was coined in 1969. It combines "blue stockings," the term pinned mockingly on educated and otherwise strong-minded women in the 18th and 19th centuries, with "red" for social revolution. Redstockings was one of the influential but short-lived radical feminist groups of the sixties that produced many of the expressions and actions that have become household words. The *Redstocking Manifesto* is a statement of their beliefs.

Veterans of the original group reformed Redstockings in 1973 and incorporated it as a non-profit educational and scientific organization for the furtherance of the women's rights movement. Today Redstockings has organized as a grassroots "think tank" for defending and advancing the women's liberation agenda.

Susan Brownmiller, author of the article, "The Enemy Within," was working as a television newswriter at ABC and marching against Vietnam when the Women's Liberation Movement erupted in 1968. Born in Brooklyn in 1935, she went on to write the well-known and controversial book, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*, published in 1975. She has published two more books: *Femininity* in 1984 and *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* in 1999.

Shulamith Firestone, just 22 years old in 1967, was a well-known member of the most radical elements of the revolution. The young woman called Shulie had rejected the Orthodox Judaism of her family in St. Louis. In 1967 she was studying at the Art Institute in Chicago. She moved to New York to paint and to organize. The diminutive Firestone (five foot one inch tall) had turned into a fearless dynamo—abrupt, impatient, self-important and consumed by a feminist vision. Her book, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*, written when she was 25, is a landmark publication of the time. "On American Feminism" is edited from the book and provides Firestone's interpretation of the history of the women's movement in the United States since the Civil War, a remarkable and controversial insight that will make sense to some and raise many questions for others.

It is interesting to note here, that those "bibles" that the committee has come to rely on for its research for the Voter documents and for the monthly "Hidden Herstory" articles, were silent on the important movement that occurred just thirty years ago. Searching the web resulted in only scanty, incomplete information. Nothing exists about the Older Women's Liberation (OWL) who wrote the very pragmatic response to the ideals of Redstockings. Despite her important work, Firestone seems to have disappeared altogether. We have often lamented in this space that the history of the accomplishments of women does not survive past the memories of those who lived them. Can it possibly be that the women's revolution of the 1960s has not even survived the lifetimes of those who led the movement?



Redstockings Manifesto

I. After centuries of individual and preliminary political struggle, women are uniting to achieve their final liberation from male supremacy. Redstockings is dedicated to building this unity and winning our freedom.

II. Women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives. Our humanity is denied. Our prescribed behavior is enforced by the threat of physical violence.

Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing the illusion that a woman's relationship with her man is a matter of interplay between two unique personalities, and can be worked out individually. In reality, every such relationship is a *class* relationship, and the conflicts between individual men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively.

III. We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented. Men have controlled all political, economic and cultural institutions and backed up this control with physical force. They have used their power

to keep women in an inferior position. *All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women.

IV. Attempts have been made to shift the burden of responsibility from men to institutions or to women themselves. We condemn these arguments as evasions. Institutions alone do not oppress; they are merely tools of the oppressor. To blame institutions implies that men and women are equally victimized, obscures the fact that men benefit from the subordination of women, and gives men the excuse that they are forced to be oppressors. On the contrary, any man is free to renounce his superior position provided that he is willing to be treated like a woman by other men.

We also reject the idea that women consent to or are to blame for their own oppression. Women's submission is not the result of brainwashing, stupidity, or mental illness but of continual, daily pressure from men. We do not need to change ourselves, but to change men.

The most slanderous evasion of all is that women can oppress men. The basis for this illusion is the isolation of individual relationships from their political context and the tendency of men to see any legitimate challenge to their privileges as persecution.

V. We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalization and accept none that are not confirmed by our experience.

Our chief task at present is to develop female class-consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our institutions. Consciousness-raising is not "therapy," which implies the existence of individual solutions and falsely assumes that the male-female relationship is purely personal, but the only method by which we can ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives.

The first requirement for raising class-consciousness is honesty, in private and in public, with ourselves and other women.

VI. We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited woman.

We repudiate all economic, racial, educational or status privileges that divide us from other women. We are determined to recognize and eliminate any prejudices we may hold against other women.

We are committed to achieving internal democracy. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that every woman in our movement has an equal chance to participate, assume responsibility, and develop her political potential.

VII. We call on all our sisters to unite with us in struggle.

We call on all men to give up their male privileges and support women's liberation in the interest of our humanity and their own.

In fighting for our liberation we will always take the side of women against their oppressors. We will not ask what is "revolutionary" or "reformist," only what is good for women.

The time for individual skirmishes has passed. This time we are going all the way.

Why OWL (Older Women's Liberation)?

In general, the Women's Liberation Movement is a young movement. Statistics on age are not available but observation indicates the average age of women participating in the movement to be around 25. Older women in the movement are exceedingly rare. OWL (women 30 and above), unlike the younger women's liberation groups, was consciously created by women who:

1. felt different from the main body of the movement because of age, life experiences, family commitments and goal orientations.

2. felt that we experienced long years of personal oppression and participated in the events of life (child birth, child rearing, marriage, divorce, homemaking and careers) that many of the younger groups theorized about.

3. felt that our special skills and knowledge could be utilized for the benefit of the movement.

OWL addresses itself to problems that do not often arise at other meetings. Problems like:

1. How does one live equitably with a husband when the relationship is not egalitarian?

2. How does one bring up children in an oppressive society?

3. How does a mother relate to adolescent sons who are attempting to reach male maturity by emulating male stereotyped role models?

4. How does one raise a daughter?

5. Problems of rearing children when there is one parent.

6. Problems of alimony.

7. How to cope with aging and dependent parents.

8. How to pursue a job, career or *anything* while raising a family.

9. How to participate in the movement if one's husband objects.

10. How to change from 20 to 40 years of behavioral response.

We of OWL believe that we can speak to a broad segment of American women. Having shared the problems of housewives, of the poor, of the dependent, OWL is developing programs that will speak to all our needs. Programs like:

1. Pay for housewives, the housewives' bill of rights

2. Divorce referral service

3. Transitional communes

4. Job training, employment services

5. Child care, total health care

Sisters, join with us to create a new society.

The Enemy Within

by Susan Brownmiller

When I was 11 years old and talking in the schoolyard one day with a bunch of girlfriends from class, the discussion came around, as it did in those days, to "What are you going to be when you grow up?" At least three of us wanted to be actresses or models. Two had their sights already set on marriage, motherhood, and a house in the country. But one girl said *she* was going to go to medical school and be a doctor. This announcement was greeted with respectful silence until Martha, fat, bright, and at the head of the class, said solemnly, "I'd never go to a woman doctor. I just wouldn't have *confidence* in a woman doctor."

"Not even to deliver your baby?" I remember inquiring.

"Nope," Martha replied. "Especially not to deliver my baby. That's too important. Men doctors are better than women doctors."

It has been many years since that schoolyard discussion and I can't even recall the name or the face of the girl who had the ambitions, but I hope she wasn't sidetracked somewhere along the line. But I remember Martha. Calm, the best student, everybody's friend, more advanced physically than the rest of us—she had breasts, we didn't—and utterly positive at that tender age that men did things better than women. I will never forgive her for being the first person of my sex whom I ever heard put down women. I considered it traitorous then in the schoolyard, and I consider it traitorous now. Since that time, I have done a lot of observing of that strange phenomenon, have been guilty of it myself, I think, and have come to the conclusion that woman is often her own worst enemy—the enemy within.

One of the hardest things for a woman with aspirations to do in our society is to admit, first to herself and then to others, that she has ambitions that go beyond the routine—a good marriage, clever children. Early on, we learn that men don't take kindly to the notion of a woman entering the competitive lists. It is in the nature of power and position that all colonial peoples and all minority groups discover at a certain stage in their development. Well, O.K., so be it. But infinitely more damaging to our psyche is the realization that our ambitions are met with equal hostility—pooh-poohed, sniffed at, scoffed at, ignored, or worse, not taken seriously—by mothers, sisters, cousins, aunts and friends, who won't believe that we have set our sights on a different sort of goal than *they* have envisioned, preferring to believe that our ambition is merely a "passing phase" —which, unfortunately, it often is because of lack of encouragement.

Psychologists talk a great deal about the importance of the approbation or approval of a peer group upon the individual. It is human nature to want to fit in. The senior at college who sends away for law-school catalogues while her dormitory mates down the corridor are sending away for catalogues of silver patterns is already conscious of swimming against the tide. (How different the atmosphere must be in a men's dormitory!) The magazine researcher who took her job as a steppingstone to becoming a writer, but discovers that girl researchers are not encouraged to write by the magazine's male editors, will find little sympathy and understanding from other researchers who have taken the job to mark time until their proper engagements are properly announced in *The New York Times*. The peer-group pressure on a young woman in her 20s—as opposed to the pressure on a young man in his 20s—is decidedly against career.

I spent a wonderfully noncompetitive, warm, and friendly two years at *Newsweek* in the company of my "fellow" researchers in 1963-64 until I abruptly quit one day, wrenched myself out of the womb, because I finally realized that the warmth, the friendship, the long lunches, the joint shopping excursions to Saks Fifth Avenue, and the pleasant lack of direction among "girls" had effectively smothered my own sense of direction.

There were two full-fledged women writers at *Newsweek* during the time I was there. One did her job quietly and went about unnoticed, but the other, an attractive, sexy young lady, was rather noticeable. We hated her. Among the grievances we held against this young woman was the fact that she never deigned to talk with us researchers. Considered herself superior, we thought. Got her job through unholy machinations, we believed. Dressed terribly, we agreed. *Couldn't really write*, we fervently hoped. It took me a few years after leaving the magazine to realize what this hostility toward someone we hardly knew was all about. *She* was where *we* wanted to be. When she walked through the halls she was L., the writer, not L., a researcher. There may have been 50 male writers who daily crossed our path at the magazine, but we spared them our collective resentment because, after all, they were men and we weren't. But L. —how dare she! She threatened our collective existence! Two years later, when I was working as a television news writer at ABC (again, there were only two of us women writers), I experienced some of this collective cattiness from the ABC researchers and understood it perfectly. I also discovered that it's quite natural for writers to pal around with other writers and not with researchers. It has to do with field of interest and not with snobbery at all. L. knew it, and I discovered it.

Women are *not* basically incompetent, but so much of their energy goes into pretending incompetence when there are attractive men around who may be watching

that the result is often the same. Schooled by their mothers to "let the man win" at Ping-pong or tennis, how can they develop a good game? They can't, of course, and the game becomes not an exercise of skill but a minuet of manners. The Ping-pong-and-tennis syndrome affects a woman's performance in practically all areas of her life. The idea is not to win. "Women is Losers," wails Janis Joplin in a repetitive, powerful lamentation. Losing has been equated with femininity for so long in our culture that it has become a virtual definition of the female role. The way to lose is not to try very hard to win, to convince oneself that personal achievement—if one is a woman—doesn't really matter at all. This peculiar attitude, which flies in the face of every success homily in *Poor Richard's Almanack*, is as unnatural as it is destructive. It has its parallels in the attitudes of the hard-core unemployed who have stripped away personal ambition and belief in their own abilities to a point where they are actually incapable of functioning. We are all familiar with the sexual double standards that men employ, but here is a sexual double standard that women hold on to for dear life: *admire individual achievement in men, but deny it for yourself*. The corollary to this dictum, by the way, is *marry the achiever*. Either way, it is a terrible denial of self-worth.

The risk of losing that intangible called femininity weighs heavily on many women who are afraid to compete with men for better jobs. This sad state of affairs has come about because of arbitrary and rigid definitions of what is masculine and what is feminine that our culture has relied on for a variety of complex reasons. We can thank the hippie revolution for knocking down some of the old criteria, particularly external ones like the length of hair and form of dress. But as long as such qualities as self-assertion, decision-making, and leadership are considered masculine—and conversely, unfeminine—a woman who worries about her femininity will never make a go of it in terms of career.

It was men who made the arbitrary rules of masculine/feminine that we suffer under, but it is women who continue to buy the stereotypes. At the early women's liberation meetings that I attended, I was struck with how all of us were unwilling to assume leadership roles, and how often a sensible comment or brilliant new insight was couched between giggles and stutters or surrounded by self-disparaging phrases and gestures. Clearly, we were women who were unused to speaking forthrightly—without the frills and furbelows of "feminine" roundabout logic designed to make a point as gently as possible for fear of offending. Since we had nobody to offend but ourselves, this namby-pambying ceased to some extent with the passage of time.

A major tragedy of the female sex is that friendship and respect between women has never been highly

regarded...But until women cease to see themselves strictly in terms of men's eyes and to value men more highly than women, friendship with other women will remain a sometime thing, an expedient among competitors of inferior station that can be lightly discarded. I, for one, would much rather compete *with* men than for them. This affliction of competition between women for the attention of men—the only kind of women's competition that is encouraged by society—also affects the liberated women who manage to secure an equal footing with men in this man's world. Watch a couple of strong women in the same room and notice the sparks fly. Many women who reject the "woman is inferior" psychology for themselves apply it unsparingly to others of the same sex. An ambitious woman frequently thinks of herself as the only hen in the barnyard, to reverse a common metaphor. *She* is the exception, she believes. Women must recognize that they must make common cause with all women. When women get around to really liking—and respecting—other women, why then, we will have begun.

On American Feminism from *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* by Shulamith Firestone

In the radical feminist view, the new feminism is not just the revival of a serious political movement for social equality. It is the second wave of the most important revolution in history. Its aim: overthrow of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex—a system consolidated over thousands of years, lending the archetypal male and female roles an undeserved legitimacy and seeming permanence. In this perspective, the pioneer Western feminist movement was only the first onslaught, the fifty-year ridicule that followed it only a first counteroffensive—the dawn of a long struggle to break free from the oppressive power structures set up by nature and reinforced by man. In this light, let's take a look at American feminism.

I The Woman's Rights Movement in America

Though there have always been women rebels in history, the conditions have never before existed that would enable women to effectively overthrow their oppressive roles. Women's capacity for reproduction was urgently needed by the society—and even if it hadn't been, effective birth control methods were not available. So until the Industrial Revolution feminist rebellion was bound to remain only a personal one.

The coming feminist revolution of the age of technology was overshadowed by the thought and writing of individual women, members of the intellectual elites of their day: in England, Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley, in America Margaret Fuller, in France the Bluestockings. But these women were ahead of their time. They had a hard time getting their ideas accepted even in their own advanced circles, let alone by the masses of men and women of their day, who had barely absorbed the first shock of the Industrial Revolution.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, with industrialization in full swing, a full-fledged feminist movement was underway. Always strong in the U.S.—itself founded shortly before the Industrial Revolution, and thus having comparatively little history or tradition—feminism was spurred on by the Abolitionist struggle and the smoldering ideals of the American Revolution itself.

The early American Woman's Rights Movement (W.R.M.) was radical. In the nineteenth century, for women to attack the Family, the Church, and the State was for them to attack the very cornerstones of the Victorian society in which they lived—equivalent to attacking sex distinctions themselves in our own time. The theoretical foundations of the early W.R.M. grew out of the most radical ideas of the day, notably those of abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison and such communalists as R. D. Owen and Fanny Wright. Few people today are aware that the early feminism was a true grass-roots movement: They haven't heard of the torturous journeys made by feminist pioneers into backwoods and frontiers, or door to door in the towns to speak about the issues or to collect signatures for petitions that were laughed right out of the Assemblies. Nor do they know that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the most militant feminists of the movement, were among the first to stress the importance of organizing women workers, founding the Working Woman's Association in September 1868. Other pioneer female labor organizers such as Augusta Lewis and Kate Mullaney were in the feminist movement.

This radical movement was built by women who had literally no civil status under the law; who were pronounced civilly dead upon marriage, or who remained legal minors if they did not marry; who could not sign a will or even have custody of their own children upon divorce; who were not taught even to read, let alone admitted to college (the most privileged of them were equipped with a knowledge of embroidery, china painting, French, and harpsichord); who had no political voice whatever. Thus, even after the Civil War, more than half this country's population was still legally enslaved, literally not owning even the bustles on their backs.

The first stirrings of this oppressed class, the first simple demands for justice, were met by a disproportionate

violence, a resistance difficult to understand today when the lines of sexual class have been blurred over. For, as often happens, the revolutionary potential of the first awakening was recognized more clearly by those in power than it was by the crusaders themselves. From its very beginning the feminist movement posed a serious threat to the established order, its very existence and long duration testifying to fundamental inequalities in a system that pretended to democracy. Working first together, later separately, the Abolitionist Movement and the W.R.M. threatened to tear the country apart. If, in the Civil War, the feminists hadn't been persuaded to abandon the cause to work on "more important" issues, the early history of feminist revolution might have been less dismal.

As it was, although the Stanton-Anthony forces struggled on in the radical feminist tradition for twenty years longer, the back of the movement had been broken. Those thousands of women, at the impetus of the Civil War, had been allowed out of the home to do charity work. The only issue on which these very different camps of organized women could unite was the desirability of the vote—but predictably, they did not agree upon why it was desirable. The conservatives formed the American Suffrage Association, or joined the sprouting women's clubs, such as the pious Woman's Christian Temperance Union. The radicals separated into the National Woman's Suffrage Association, concerned with the vote only as a symbol of the political power they needed to achieve larger ends.

By 1890, further legal reforms had been won, women had entered the labor force in the service capacity that they still hold today, and they had begun to be educated in larger numbers. In lieu of true political power they had been granted a token, segregated place in the public sphere as clubwomen. But though indeed this was a greater political power than before, it was only a new-fangled version of female "power" of the usual sort: behind the throne—a traditional *influence of power* which took modern form in lobbying and embarrassment tactics. When, in 1890, with their leaders old and discouraged, the radical feminist National merged with the conservative American to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), all seemed lost. Conservative feminism, with its concentration on broad, diminutive, single-issues like suffrage, with its attempt to work within and placate the white male power structure—trying to convince men who knew better, with their own fancy rhetoric yet—had won. Feminism, sold out, languished.

Even worse than the conservative feminists were the increasing number of women who, with their new-found bit of freedom, jumped enthusiastically into all the radicalisms of the day, the various social reform movements of the Progressive Era, even when at odds with feminist interests.

These "reformers," the women "radicals" of their day, were at best influenced by feminism. They were neither true feminists nor true radicals because they did not yet see woman's cause as a legitimate radical issue in itself...Developing politically in movements dominated by men, they became preoccupied with reforming their position within those movements rather than getting out and creating their own. The Woman's Trade Union League is a good example: women politicians in this group failed at the most basic undertakings because they were unable to sever their ties with the strongly male chauvinist AFL, under Samuel Gompers, which sold them out time and again. Or, in another example, like so many VISTA volunteers bent on slumming it with an ungrateful poor, they rushed into the young settlement movement, many of them giving their lives without reward—only to become the rather grim, embittered, but devoted spinster social workers of the stereotype. Or the Woman's Peace Party founded to no avail by Jane Addams on the eve of American intervention in World War I, which later split into, ironically, either jingoists groups working for the war effort, or radical pacifists as ineffective as they were extreme.

This frenzied feminine organization activity of the Progressive Era is often confused with the W.R.M. proper. But the image of the frustrated, bossy battle-ax derives less from the radical feminists than from the non-feminist politicians, committeewomen for the various important causes of their day. In addition to the movements we have mentioned...the whole spectrum of Organized Ladyhood was founded in the era between 1890 and 1920: The General Federation of Women's Clubs, the League of Women Voters, the American Association of Collegiate Alumnae, the National Consumer's League, the PTA, even the DAR. Although these organizations were associated with the most radical movements of their day, that in fact their politics were reactionary, and finally fatuous and silly, was indicated at first solely by their non-feminist views.

Thus the majority of organized women in the period between 1890-1920—a period usually cited as a high point of feminist activity—had nothing to do with feminism. On the one hand, feminism had been constricted to the single issue of the vote—the W.R.M. was transformed into a suffrage movement—and on the other, women's energies were diffused into any other radical cause but their own.

But radical feminism was only dormant: The awakening began with the return of Harriet Stanton Blatch, the daughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, from England, where she had joined the militant Woman's Social and Political Union—the English Suffragettes of whom the Pankhursts are perhaps the best known—in opposing the Constitutionalists (conservative feminists). Believing that

militant tactics were needed to achieve the radical goals espoused by her mother, she recommended attacking the problem of the vote with the discarded strategy of the Stanton-Anthony faction: pressure to amend the federal Constitution. Soon the American militants split off from the conservative NAWSA to form the Congressional Union (later the Woman's Party), beginning the daring guerrilla tactics and uncompromisingly tough line for which the whole suffrage movement is often incorrectly credited.

It worked. Militants had to undergo embarrassment, mobbings, beatings, even hunger strikes with forced feeding, but within a decade the vote was won. The spark of radical feminism was just what the languishing suffrage movement needed to push through their single issue. It provided a new and sound approach (the pressure for a national amendment rather than the tedious state-by-state organizing method used for over thirty years), a militancy that dramatized the urgency of the woman issue, and above all, a wider perspective, one in which the vote was seen as only the first of many goals, and therefore to be won as quickly as possible. The mild demands of the conservative feminists, who had all but pleaded that if they won the vote they wouldn't use it, were welcomed as far the lesser of two evils in comparison with the demands of the Woman's Party.

But with the granting of the vote the establishment co-opted the woman's movement...The granting of the vote to the suffrage movement killed the W.R.M. Though the antifeminist forces appeared to give in, they did so in name only. They never lost. By the time the vote was granted, the long channeling of feminist energies into the limited goal of suffrage—had thoroughly depleted the W.R.M.; the master-planners were all dead. The women who later joined the feminist movement to work for the single issue of the vote had never had time to develop a broader consciousness: by then they had forgotten what the vote was for. The opposition had had its way.

Of all that struggle what is even remembered? The fight for suffrage alone—not worth much to women, as later events bore out—was an endless war against the most reactionary forces in America at the time... The work involved to achieve this vote was staggering. Carrie Chapman Catt estimated that:

to get the word "male" out of the constitution cost the women of this country 52 years of pauseless campaign...During that time they were forced to conduct 56 campaigns of referenda to male voters, 480 campaigns to get legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters, 47 campaigns to get state constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions, 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include woman suffrage planks,

30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms and 19 successive campaigns with 19 successive Congresses.

Thus defeat was so frequent, and victory so rare—and then achieved by such bare margins—that even to read about the struggle for suffrage is exhausting, let alone to have lived through it and fought for it. The lapse of historians in this area is understandable, if not pardonable.

But, as we have seen, suffrage was only one small aspect of what the W.R.M. was all about. A hundred years of brilliant personalities and important events have also been erased from American history. The women orators who fought off mobs, in the days when women were not allowed to speak in public, to attack Family, Church, and State, who traveled on poor railways to cow towns of the West to talk to small groups of socially starved women, were quite a bit more dramatic than the Scarlett O'Haras and Harriet Beecher Stowes and all the Little Women who have come down to us. Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman, freed slaves who went back time and again, with huge prices on their heads, to free other slaves on their own plantations, were more effective in their efforts than the ill-fated John Brown. But most people today have not heard of Myrtila Miner, Prudence Crandall, Abigail Scott Duniway, Mary Putnam Jacobi, Ernestine Rose, the Claflin sisters, Crystal Eastman, Clara Lemlich, Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont, Doris Stevens, Anne Martin. And this ignorance is nothing compared to ignorance of the lives of women of the stature of Margaret Fuller, Fanny Wright, the Grimke sister, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Stanton Blatch, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Alice Paul.

And yet we know about Louisa May Alcott, Clara Barton, and Florence Nightingale, just as we know about, rather than Nat Turner, the triumph of Ralph Bunche, or George Washington Carver and the peanut. The omission of vital characters from standard versions of American history in favor of such goody-goody models cannot be tossed off. Just as it would be dangerous to inspire still-oppressed black children with admiration for the Nat Turners of their history, so it is with the W.R.M.: The suspicious blanks in our history books concerning feminism—or else the confusion of the whole W.R.M. with the (conservative) suffrage movement or the reformist women's groups of the Progressive Era—is no accident.

It is part of a backlash we are still undergoing in reaction to the first feminist struggle. The few strong models allowed girls growing up in the fifty-year silence have been carefully chosen ones, women like Eleanor Roosevelt, of the altruistic feminine tradition, as opposed to the healthily selfish giants of the radical feminist rebellion. This cultural backlash was to be expected.

Men of those days grasped immediately the true nature of a feminist movement, recognizing it as a serious threat to their open and unashamed power over woman. They may have been forced to buy off the women's movement with confusing surface reforms—a correction of the most blatant inequalities on the books, a few changes of dress, sex, style, all of which coincidentally benefited men. But the power stayed in their hands.

II

The Fifty-Year Ridicule

How did the Myth of Emancipation operate culturally over a fifty-year period to anesthetize women's political consciousness?

In the twenties eroticism came in big. The gradual blurring together of romance with the institution of marriage began serving to repopularize and reinforce the failing institution, weakened by the late feminist attack. But the convalescence didn't last long: women were soon reprivatized, their new class solidarity diffused. The conservative feminists...had been co-opted, while the radical feminists were openly and effectively ridiculed; eventually even the innocuous committeewomen of other movements came to appear ridiculous.

In the thirties, after the Depression, women sobered. Flapperism was obviously not the answer: they felt more hung up and neurotic than ever before. But with the myth of emancipation going full blast, women dared not complain. If they had gotten what they wanted, and were *still* dissatisfied, then something must be wrong with them.

In the forties there was another world war to think about. Personal hang-ups were temporarily overshadowed by the spirit of the War Effort—patriotism and self-righteousness, intensified by a ubiquitous military propaganda, were their own kind of high. Besides, the cats were away. Better yet, their thrones of power were vacant. Women had substantial jobs for the first time in several decades. Genuinely needed by society to their fullest capacity, they were temporarily granted human, as opposed to female status.

The first long stretch of peace and affluence in some time occurred in the late forties and the fifties. But instead of the predictable resurgence of feminism, after so many blind alleys, there was only "The Feminine Mystique," which Betty Friedan has documented so well. This sophisticated cultural apparatus was hauled out for a specific purpose: women had gotten hired during the war, and now had to be made to quit. Their new employment gains had come only because they had been found to make a convenient surplus labor force, for use in just such time of crisis—and yet, one couldn't now just openly

fire them...A better idea was to have them quit of their own volition. Woman, still frantic, still searching, took another false road.

This one was perhaps worse than any of the others. It offered neither the (shallow) sensuality of the twenties, the commitment to a (false) ideal of the thirties, nor the collective spirit (propaganda) of the forties. What it did offer women was respectability and upward mobility—along with Disillusioned Romance, plenty of diapers and PTA meetings, family arguments, endless and ineffective diets, TV soap operas and commercials to kill the boredom, and, if the pain still persisted, psychotherapy. *Good Housekeeping* and *Parents' Magazine* spoke for every woman of the middle class, just as *True Confessions* did for the working class. The fifties was the bleakest decade of all, perhaps the bleakest in some centuries for women.

The "private solution" of the sixties, ironically, was as often the "bag" of politics...as it was art or academia. Radical politics gave every woman the chance to do her thing. Many women, repeating the thirties, saw politics not as a means towards a better life, but as an end in itself. Many joined the peace movement, always an acceptable feminine pastime: harmless because politically impotent, it yet provided a vicarious outlet for female anger. Others got involved in the civil rights movement: but though often no more directly effective than was their participation in the peace movement, white women's numbered days in the black movement of the early sixties proved to be a more valuable experience in terms of their own political development. This is easy to detect in the present-day women's liberation movement. The women who went South are often much more politically astute, flexible, and developed than women who came in from the peace movement, and they tend to move towards radical feminism much faster.

By 1970 the rebellious daughters of this wasted generation no longer, for all practical purposes, even knew there had been a feminist movement. There remained only the unpleasant residue of the aborted revolution, an amazing set of contradictions in their roles: on the one hand, they had most of the legal freedoms, the literal assurance that they were considered full political citizens of society—and yet were unable, and not expected to employ them. They had the freedom of the clothing and sex mores they had demanded—and yet they were still sexually exploited...At first, because feminism was still taboo, their anger and frustration bottled up in complete withdrawal or was channeled into dissent movements other than their own, particularly the civil rights movement of the sixties, the closest women had yet come to recognizing their own suppression. But eventually the obvious analogy of their own situation to that of the blacks, coupled with the general spirit of dissent, led to the

establishment of a women's liberation movement proper: The anger spilled over, finally, into its proper outlet.

But it would be false to attribute the resurgence of feminism only to the impetus generated by other movements and ideas. For though they may have acted as a catalyst, feminism, in truth, has a cyclical momentum all its own. In the historical interpretation we have espoused, feminism is the inevitable female response to the development of a technology capable of freeing women from the tyranny of their sexual-reproductive roles—both the fundamental biological condition itself, and the sexual class system built upon, and reinforcing, this biological condition.

The increasing development of science in the twentieth century should have only accelerated the initial feminist reaction to the Industrial Revolution. That the scientific revolution has had virtually no effect on feminism only illustrates the political nature of the problem: the goals of feminism can never be achieved through evolution, but only through revolution. Power, however it has evolved, whatever its origins, will not be given up without a struggle.

III

The Women's Liberation Movement

In three years, we have seen the whole political spectrum of the old women's movement recreated. The broad division between the radical feminists and the two types of reformists, the conservative feminists and the politicians, has reappeared in modern guise. There are roughly three major camps in the movement now, themselves subdivided.

1. *Conservative Feminists*. This camp, though now proliferating into myriads of similar organizations, is perhaps still best exemplified by its pioneer (and thus more hard-core feminist than is generally believed) NOW, the National Organization of Women, begun in 1965 by Betty Friedan after her reverberating publication of *The Feminine Mystique*. Often called the NAACP of the woman's movement, NOW concentrates on the more superficial symptoms of sexism—legal inequities, employment discrimination, and the like.

Thus in its politics it most resembles the suffragist movement of the turn of the century, Carrie Chapman Catt's National American Woman Suffrage Association, with its stress on equality with men—legal, economic, etc., within the given system—rather than liberation from sex roles altogether, or radical questioning of family values. Like the NAWSA, it tends to concentrate on the winning of single-issue political gains, whatever the cost to political principles. Like the NAWSA, it has attracted a wide membership, which it controls by traditional bureaucratic procedures.

2. *Politicos*. The politicos of the contemporary women's movement are those women whose primary loyalty is to the Left ("The Movement") rather than to the Women's Liberation Movement proper. Like the politicos of the Progressive Era, contemporary politicos see feminism as only tangent to "real" radical politics, instead of central, directly radical in itself; they still see male issues, e.g., the draft, as universal, and female issues, e.g., abortion as sectarian.

3. *Radical Feminism*. The two positions we have described usually generate a third, the radical feminist position: The women in its ranks range from disillusioned moderate feminists from NOW to disillusioned leftists from the women's liberation movement, and include women for whom neither conservative bureaucratic feminism nor warmed-over leftist dogma had much appeal.

The contemporary radical feminist position is the direct descendant of the radical feminist line in the old movement, notably that championed by Stanton and

Anthony, and later by the militant Congressional Union subsequently known as the Woman's Party. It sees feminist issues not only as *women's* first priority, but as central to any larger revolutionary analysis. It refuses to accept the existing leftist analysis not because it is too radical, but because it is *not radical enough*: it sees the current leftist analysis as outdated and superficial, because this analysis does not relate the structure of the economic class system to its origins in the sexual class system, the model for all other exploitative systems, and thus the tapeworm that must be eliminated first by any true revolution.

But, if any revolutionary movement can succeed at establishing an egalitarian structure, radical feminism will. To question the basic relations between the sexes and between parents and children is to take the psychological pattern of dominance-submission to its very roots. Through examining politically this psychology, feminism will be the first movement ever to deal in a materialist way with the problem.



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