Feminism Unfinished

A Short, Surprising History of American Women's Movements

Dorothy Sue Cobble,
Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry

LIVERIGHT PUBLISHING CORPORATION
A Division of W. W. Norton & Company
New York • London

Printed in the United States of America
First published as a Liveright paperback 2015

Manufacturing by Courier Westford
Book design by Chris Welch
Production manager: Julia Druskin

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Cobble, Dorothy Sue.
Feminism unfinished : a short, surprising history
of American women's movements / Dorothy Sue Cobble,
Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry. — First edition.
pages cm
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-87140-676-7 (hardcover)
1. Feminism—United States—History—20th century. 2. Feminism—United
States—History—21st century. 3. Women's rights—United States—History.
I. Gordon, Linda. II. Henry, Astrid, 1966– III. Title.
HQ1421.C625 2014
305.420973—dc23

2014021871

ISBN 978-1-63149-054-5 pbk.

Liveright Publishing Corporation
500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd.
Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

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Stewardesses on strike against TWA, 1970. Photograph by Cathy Cade, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

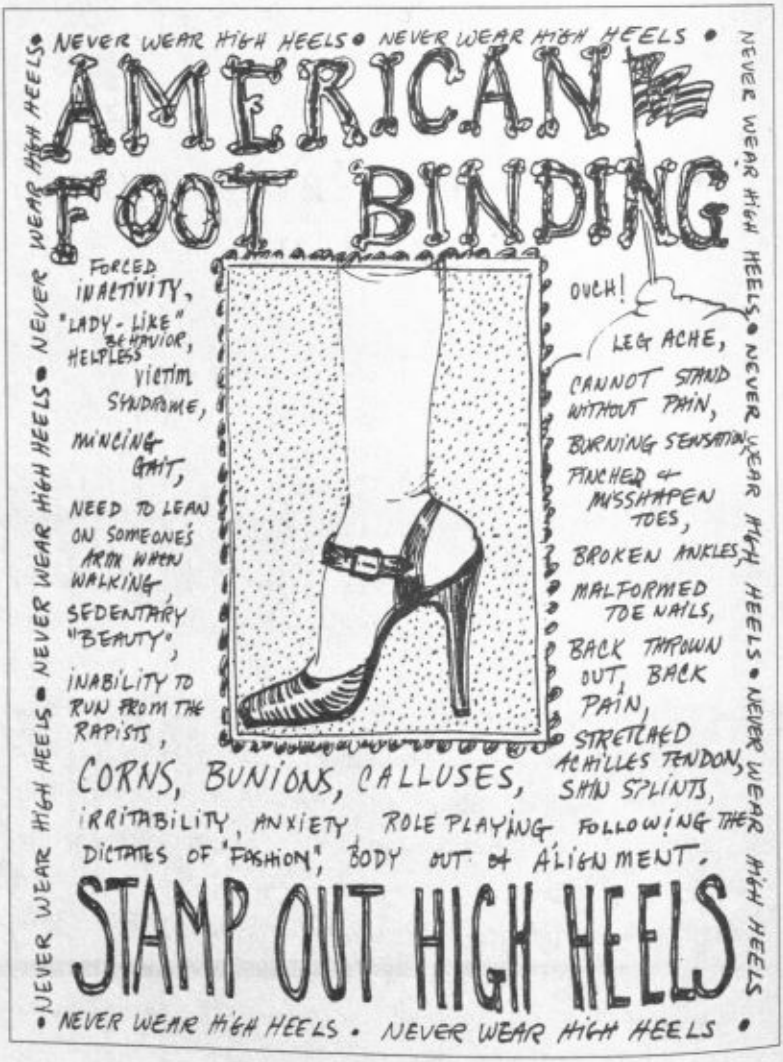
2

The Women's Liberation Movement

Linda Gordon

The young feminists' protest at the 1968 Miss America contest symbolized women's enslavement to beauty by throwing items such as hair curlers, girdles, and a bra into a garbage can. But it was probably not a ragged bra, for these protesters could afford new ones. The difference between the two bras can represent both the strength and the weakness of their movement: strength because the protest symbolized a feminist critique that reached beyond economic discrimination to encompass an entire culture; weakness because the protesters were largely (though not completely) middle-class women whose own economic security made it hard for them—although they tried—to create a movement that included less privileged women.

In that year it seemed there might be two women's movements, separate and somewhat suspicious of each other. NOW, founded in 1966, had pulled together labor union, professional, and political women to mount campaigns for equal opportunity for employed women. Between 1967 and 1969 a younger generation of women, influenced by the civil rights struggle and the anti–Vietnam War campaign, came together to form what was soon called the wom-



Cartoonist and date unknown.

en's liberation movement. They sought a more holistic transformation of the society, one that would do away with male dominance in every sphere—in private as well as public—and would challenge all the older gender patterns. Like all the other radicals of the New

Left, they tended to be somewhat disdainful of their elders for not being militant enough. But this separation of the feminist generations did not last long, and for many women outside the big cities, the separation never existed, because the movement quickly became vastly larger and more varied than the sum of its organizations. By the early 1970s, these women collectively created the largest social movement in U.S. history.

Many writers have labeled the protest at the 1968 Miss America beauty pageant as the founding event of the women's liberation movement. Identifying dramatic episodes as discrete beginnings creates a discursive trope that lives on in collective memory. The civil rights movement is said to begin when Rosa Parks wouldn't give up her bus seat to a white man. The gay rights movement is said to begin when patrons at the Stonewall bar resisted a police raid. Similarly with the 1968 Miss America pageant. All these events were vivid and photogenic, and by attracting media coverage brought attention to the movement, but to credit them with setting off mass movements is misleading. Rosa Parks was a member of a group that had been planning action for several years. Gay rights advocates had been organizing for over a decade. The women's liberation movement had already conducted several national meetings and invented consciousness raising before the Miss America event, and immediately afterward that protest was criticized by other feminists for seeming to blame the women who entered beauty contests, without spelling out how the mainstream culture socialized women into feeling that beauty was their most important trait.

To get even an inkling of the range of feminisms, we could identify many founding events. Here are a few. Every one of them illustrates a major area of women's movement activism, every one energized many further developments, and every one—in a style typical of the movement's diversity—stimulated disagreement, criticism, and new tactics.

- The National Welfare Rights Organization, established in 1966, was equally part of the civil rights and women's movements. Although led at first by an African American man, George Wiley, by 1973 it was headed by Johnnie Tillmon—a sharecropper's daughter who worked in a California industrial laundry (where she was the union's shop steward) until she became ill and was forced to turn to welfare to support her children. She advanced a feminist view of the work of raising children and analyzed the problem of single mothers as derived from the low wages that made it impossible for them to simultaneously earn for and care for their children.
- In 1968, Fran Beal published "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," which became a founding document of the Black Women's Alliance. She had been an NAACP member in college at the University of Wisconsin, and then lived for seven years in Paris, where she was educated by the movement against French colonialism in Algeria. The "Double Jeopardy" article laid out some of the foundational arguments of African American feminism: the doubled oppression—racial and sexual—of black women, the economic exploitation based on class, race, and sex, and the coercive sterilization of women of color.
- In 1969, New York was moving toward legalizing abortion—seventeen states would do so by the time of *Roe v. Wade* four years later—and as part of that legislative process, a committee of the state legislature held hearings on abortion. The committee was all male, and the "experts" testifying were fourteen men and a nun. Kathie Sarachild was so furious when she saw the lineup of "experts" on women's reproductive needs that she stood up at the hearing and demanded a chance to speak. She was, unsurprisingly, refused, but a month later the New York City feminist group Redstockings held a public speakout on abortion at the Washington Square Methodist Church. To an

audience of nine hundred, twelve women spoke of having had illegal abortions, explaining their reasons and their experiences, refusing guilt or apology. To understand the impact of the event, one needs to understand how some women's travails were made worse by being, literally, unspeakable. Breast cancer was one: it wasn't polite to speak of breasts in mixed company, and cancer in a breast seemed to stigmatize the woman herself, much as rape did (and still does in many places). Abortion was equally unadmittable: it marked a woman as not respectable.

- Also in 1969, members of the Boston women's liberation organization Bread and Roses produced the first version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the pioneer women's health manual. Originally a 190-page stapled booklet, printed on cheap newsprint paper, sold for seventy-five cents, and distributed by a New Left underground press, it became a commercial-press bestseller ten years later—with all profits going into the women's health movement. At least 4.5 million copies in thirty-one different languages have now been sold. Its information on diet, alcohol and other drugs, occupational health and safety, birth control, violence, childbirth, and parenting is now not even recognized as feminist because it has become so mainstream. But take note: at first it was banned by schools and public libraries and denounced as "obscene trash" by conservatives.
- In 1970, a hundred feminists conducted an eleven-hour "takeover" of the *Ladies' Home Journal*, the country's biggest-circulation (at fourteen million) women's magazine, to protest its discriminatory hiring and promotion—its senior editors were almost all male—and its articles that assumed women were incapable of serious reading. They demanded equal pay and promotion for women and, in particular, hiring African American women. The editor, John Mack Carter, was at first furious and stubborn but ultimately caved, agreeing that the magazine would publish a women's lib-

eration supplement. Looking back years later, he remarked, "Confrontation is certainly effective on the confrontee"—something that the women's movement was rapidly learning.[1]

- In 1971, a thousand women from all over North America met with women leaders from Vietnam in Vancouver, Canada. Most members of women's liberation opposed the U.S. intervention in Vietnam (and later Cambodia). American women in particular, infuriated and agonized by the napalm, herbicides, firebombing, village razing, and massacres of women and children to which Vietnam was being subjected, flocked to Vancouver to express solidarity with the Vietnamese struggle for independence. They had cathected emotionally with Vietnamese heroines portrayed in the news and were eager to meet them and express sisterhood.
- In 1971, a female janitor at Chicago's city hall contacted the Chicago Women's Liberation Union (CWLU) to ask for help. She did the same work as the male janitors but received lower pay, and although she had more seniority than the men, she was passed over when it came time to get daytime as opposed to night work. The CWLU then researched the civil service codes, anti-discrimination laws, and city budgets, worked with a progressive alderman to publish a study, and set off a campaign by marching on the mayor's office. Success didn't come easily, but the feminist group created an ongoing project, DARE, or Direct Action for Rights in Employment, and eventually won.
- In 1972, women at the University of Massachusetts in Boston, both students and faculty, had been agitating for a daycare center for several years. (The school enrolled many "returning" women students, working-class mothers who could not afford commercial childcare.) When the university repeatedly promised to consider the need but did nothing, a group of about a dozen mothers arrived unannounced at the president's office, with their toddlers, asking to speak with him. When he once

again said he would consider the request in due time, they conducted a mother-child sit-in. The president left. The mothers then told his secretary that they were staying and might supply the children with crayons—but not paper. That grabbed his attention, and before long there was a daycare center.

These "firsts" could have been multiplied many times.

There were no "lasts," no swan songs or concluding events; social movements fade out gradually. But the fade-outs are by no means failures. It is the nature of social movements not to endure. They make their impact through intense, mass participation, periods when participants spend prodigious energy and devote a great deal of time to activism. Except for those who can earn a living through advocacy, few people can maintain these levels of dynamism and time commitment indefinitely. Students graduate and get jobs; adults become parents; energies flag. By the 1980s activism was shrinking, vigor weakening. Like a powerful and fast-flowing river, though, it had radically changed the terrain. It moved rocks, carved out new courses, and deposited new soil, producing new gender structures. The new riverbed was felt everywhere: in health, reproductive choices, media and culture, employment, parenting, education, sex, and man-woman, woman-woman, and parent-child relations. The changes were self-perpetuating, as women sensed new opportunities and used them to make further changes.

This chapter examines the women's liberation movement that flourished from 1967 to the mid-1980s. It discusses its organizing methods, its theory, its problems, and above all its activism. But first, let me introduce some of its leaders, who may provide a taste of the movement's diversity of political identities and backgrounds.

Elizabeth Martínez, known as Betita, was born in Chevy Chase, Maryland, a suburb of segregated Washington, D.C., in 1925, the only child of a Mexican father and a Euro-American mother. Her

father, Manuel Guillermo Martínez, who spoke proudly of the Mexican revolution, had moved up into the middle class, becoming a professor of Spanish literature at Georgetown University. But in Washington, she and her dark-skinned father had to sit in the back of the buses. The girl next door was not allowed to play with the Mexican girl. A superb student, she became the first Latina to attend Swarthmore College. After graduating in 1946 she worked in New York City for a publisher, for the UN, and for *The Nation* magazine. Taking on her mother's Anglo maiden name, Sutherland, because she knew she would be unable to get an editorial job with the name Martínez, she became a skilled writer and editor and a member of New York's literati. She married the well-known writer Hans Konigsberger (later he called himself Hans Koning). Nevertheless, in 1965, already almost forty, she quit her job and joined the staff of the civil rights group SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). She had already demonstrated her interest in Left politics by persuading her employers at Simon and Schuster to publish a photographic book on civil rights, *The Movement* (1964). Then a book of her own, as Elizabeth Sutherland of SNCC, the gripping *Letters from Mississippi*. The two books together were immensely influential in mobilizing white support for civil rights.

Increasingly aware of the sexism of the literary world and the New Left, Sutherland returned to New York in 1968 and joined a small women's group, where she was often the only woman of color. She began writing feminist pieces including a humorous one organized as questions and answers. "Don't some women naturally want to be housewives? A: Anyone who thinks she feels good . . . after washing the 14,789th batch of sparkling dishes isn't being 'natural'; she's literally lost her mind."[2] The group happened to be meeting on the day Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, and Elizabeth could think of nothing else; the others wanted to continue with the previously planned topic. She was shocked and

angry. "This is just too white for me. . . . I'm outta here!" She never went back.[3] This was not, however, a break with feminism. Instead she became a Chicana feminist, an identity she acted on for the rest of her life. She is eighty-nine as we write.

Born twenty-five years later than Betita Martínez, in 1950 in Chicago, Karen Nussbaum was the daughter of middle-class Jews with progressive politics. She got involved in the movement against the Vietnam War in high school and at the University of Chicago and dropped out of school in her second year: college paled compared to the thrill of the movement. In 1970, she went as a volunteer to Cuba in the Venceremos Brigade, a project of young New Leftists who tried to help the Cuban economy by harvesting sugarcane. Afterward she moved to Boston, where the women's liberation movement was at full gallop. To support herself, she got a job as a clerical worker at Harvard, a job she initially thought of as temporary but which ultimately led to her life's work. She got involved first in typical women's liberation activities—silk-screening posters, studying karate, setting up free classes for women in everything from auto mechanics to political theory. Bread and Roses, the Boston women's liberation movement organization, had joined in community protests against Harvard's taking over more and more of working- and middle-class Cambridge. In 1971, Bread and Roses women executed a dramatic takeover of an abandoned Harvard building, hoping to make it a women's center. Karen joined hundreds of other young feminists who camped out there for a week; she would head for her job at Harvard during the day, then return to the building to sleep. (Harvard capitulated by buying a house for the movement, where the Cambridge Women's Center still operates. More importantly, the takeover demonstrated the power of militant collective action.)

Soon Karen began to resent the low pay and indignities of her Harvard job and sense the discontent among other clericals. With feminist friends she formed a lunchtime discussion group among

these workers, which grew into the famous "9to5" organization of clerical workers, honored in a major 1980 film by that name; in the film three clericals (played by Jane Fonda, comedian Lily Tomlin, and country-western icon Dolly Parton) carry out revenge against an egotistical, lying, harassing sexist boss. From 9to5 the union 925, SEIU, was born, and Nussbaum became a career fighter for working women. President of the union until 1993, she was then appointed by President Bill Clinton to heard the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, then moved to head the Working Women's Department of the AFL-CIO. In 2003, she founded Working America, the community affiliate of the AFL-CIO, representing workers who do not have a union on the job.

Martínez and Nussbaum had the advantage of parents sympathetic to their progressive values. Shulamith Firestone did not. She was born Shulamith Bath Shmuel Ben Ari Feuerstein, the second of six children of Orthodox Jewish parents, in Ottawa, Canada, in 1945. Her father soon moved the family to Kansas City and changed their name to Firestone. He ruled them all in an authoritarian, censorious manner, creating a home "riddled with accusations, guilt and violence," in the words of one obituary. (Firestone died in 2013.) Temperamentally assertive, Shulie was perpetually in conflict with her father, particularly by defying his religious strictures; her sister recalled that he "threw his rage at Shulie."[4] First sent to a yeshiva, she later attended the Art Institute of Chicago, where she met young women's liberationists. She moved to New York City in 1967. A charismatic woman, she soon founded New York Radical Women (NYRW, with Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez as its only nonwhite member), at first a small consciousness-raising group, and her personal magnetism attracted followers; they remember her as "firebrand" and "incandescent." NYRW was one of a succession of New York City feminist groups that arose and disappeared, but Firestone began to

study the history of the women's rights movement and to write. With amazing commitment and speed, she wrote *The Dialectic of Sex*, published in 1970 while the women's liberation period of the movement was still in its babyhood.

The book was calculatedly provocative. Firestone even advocated laboratory, rather than sexual, reproduction as a means of liberating women—a proposal ignored by other feminists. She had a deep-seated and highly individualist need to be always walking the most radical edge. But her appreciation of the nineteenth-century women's rights movement and her brave attempt to analyze how women's subordination was carried out through every aspect of society were extremely influential. Had she not burned out so quickly, she might have fulfilled her dream of becoming another Simone de Beauvoir, the French partner of Jean-Paul Sartre and author of the globally influential 1949 feminist book *The Second Sex*.

Consciousness Raising

These three prominent feminists represent different feminist streams. But the energy behind all the streams arose from a common ground: consciousness raising (CR), a process named in 1968 that spread throughout the United States and then the world. Subordinated groups had been forever practicing CR without the name, discussing and airing their grievances—"speaking bitterness," as the Chinese revolutionaries called the process. By institutionalizing consciousness raising as a method of organizing and developing social analysis, however, women's liberation made a unique contribution to political activism. Pam Allen of the San Francisco group Sudsofloppen—a nonsensical and lighthearted name chosen to signify their open, exploratory discussions—identified four processes in consciousness raising: opening up, sharing, analyzing, and abstracting. Although some critics accused con-

"Breaking Out," 1970, author unknown.

sciousness raising of narcissism and do-nothing-ism, in its first years it was, to the contrary, laying the groundwork for activism. In fact, it *was* activism, for in changing consciousness, it made social change.

The consciousness-raising route to change involved opening

up to a small group of women about personal matters. One set of sample questions for discussion included, Are you a "nice" girl? Have you ever faked an orgasm? Do you feel guilty if your house is dirty or messy? Do you worry about being truly feminine? How do you think men see you? Do you feel competitive with other women? As one woman wrote about consciousness raising, "Nothing upside-downed my world as much. . . . I learned that maybe I wasn't so odd after all, because maybe, just maybe, patriarchal social constructions had caused the various forms of discrimination I'd experienced all my life, both as a woman and as a person of color. I was overjoyed. I embraced my new *friend, feminism.*"[5] Another wrote, "The light was blinding, and then illuminating—and, I must say, the illumination was an astonishing comfort. . . . To be a feminist in the early 1970s—bliss was it in that dawn, to be alive."[6] When others belittled consciousness-raising groups, calling them "coffee klatches, hen parties or bitch sessions . . . we responded by saying, 'Yes, bitch, sisters, bitch.'" In fact, one woman pointed out that coffee klatches were "a historic form of women's resistance."[7]

By changing women, consciousness raising changed all sorts of relations, often without conscious plan. Women's raised consciousness changed everyday experience, transforming relations with fathers, mothers, siblings, boyfriends, husbands, children, bosses, supervisors, teachers, auto mechanics, shop clerks . . . It was consciousness raising that made the women's liberation movement different from NOW: the younger women first grasped and exposed the ubiquitousness of the relationships, both public and personal, that structure domination and inequality. Within a few years, the differences between the older and younger streams of feminism began to fade.

Feminist organizing differed from that of the civil rights and labor movements, because unlike members of those movements, who knew that they were discriminated against and exploited,

many white middle-class women were unconscious of their own oppression and limited opportunities. This was partly because many of them had spent most of their years in school, where sex discrimination was less marked than in the worlds of employment and housewifery. But their lack of consciousness also arose from accepting the gender system as a "natural" and inevitable outgrowth of their sex. They had to unlearn what Marxists call a false consciousness. The impact of consciousness-raising groups can be seen in the fact that most Americans today understand the difference between "sex," a biological category, and "gender," a matter of socialization. This was a distinction entirely new in 1969.

Exploring the hidden injuries of gender had to be accomplished in small and women-only groups. The groups provided permission to complain and vent anger without fear of consequences and offered freedom to explore the intimate. They also provided comparisons that gave rise to analyses. As Amy Kesselman recalled, "It replaced self-hatred with both anger and political analysis; it made sense of the world, reconnected me with other women, and gave shape to a host of unformed thoughts and feelings that had lurked for years in the shadows of my consciousness."[8]

Women were learning by questioning *all* the conventions of gender and male dominance. As one consciousness-raising group member put it, "In the sixties I knew, successful women were successful at pleasing men."[9] It was as if they became anthropologists, studying themselves and their communities, unearthing the processes of gender and male dominance. They were claiming that they were the experts on their own lives, refusing to defer any longer to the doctors and preachers and politicians who declaimed about what was normal for women. Their meetings were not therapy, although they were supportive; they were not bitch sessions, although plenty of anger and pain was let loose. For most, they were exhilarating and empowering. As poet and journalist Susan Sutheim wrote:

today
i lost my temper.

temper, when one talks of metal
means make strong,
perfect.

temper, for humans, means angry
irrational
bad

today i found my temper.
i said,
you step on my head . . .
today i think
i prefer my head to your clumsiness.

today i begin
to find
myself.

tomorrow
perhaps
i will begin
to find
you.[10]

They were making themselves the heroes of their own lives. But they sensed that this process could only happen collectively. When women trade experiences and emotions, much depends on the responses they get. A classic example: If a woman hinted at being abused, she might get sympathy, an empathic "Aren't

men hard to put up with at times?" If instead the response was "That's awful, did you call the police?" or "That's awful, you shouldn't have to put up with that," the sympathy remains but the message changes. Suddenly women saw men with new eyes: his inconsiderate ways of making love, his refusal to share housework, his assumption that his work was more important than hers.[11] When consciousness raising worked well, it gave rise to the slogan "The personal is political," because it created the discovery that sexism—another word created by the movement and now universally understood—operated in every sphere, including kitchen and bedroom. As Pam Allen wrote, reflecting her background in the civil rights movement, "Personal liberation will happen simultaneously with the changing of society, not independently."[12]

Feminist Theory

In developing feminist theory, women in consciousness-raising groups were to some extent *re*inventing an analysis of women's subordination. Women were not just ignorant of previous feminist theory—they had been denied access to it by their education, just as African Americans had been denied their history. By the end of the nineteenth century feminists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton had elaborated a radical, sophisticated critique of male dominance and, occasionally, of gender itself. Yet the younger women were equally unfamiliar with it and with the work of New Deal–influenced feminists discussed in the previous chapter.

Ignorant of their heritage, the consciousness-raising groups did not read. Rather they started with the evidence at hand—their own lives in the 1950s and 1960s. Ignoring the past also freed them to be creative and to examine everything anew. Their process rested on existing gender characteristics, nota-

bly women's socialization toward intimate and emotional talk with other women, and then subjected those very characteristics to critique. Women's liberation founders realized that many women considered their problems to be personal and that this misconception isolated them; as in Katz and Allport's concept of pluralistic ignorance,[13] many a woman tended to feel that she was the only one who didn't like her looks, her body, her sexual activity, her housework, and so on. Enunciating their discontents, consciousness-raising group members soon recognized that those feelings were widespread and reclassified them as social, not personal. Once that was understood, they began to analyze them, asking questions like: Who benefits from sexism? Are men in general the enemy? How does sexism relate to and interact with other forms of discrimination?

The single most important feminist theoretical contribution to social theory was the concept of gender, i.e., the social structures and meanings attributed to sex difference. Distinguishing social from biological factors, "gender" would ultimately give rise to many other challenges to practices once believed to be natural. Even discriminatory practices were often considered the inevitable consequences of being a woman. When Jean Tepperman worked in a commercial bakery on a 4 p.m. to 12 midnight shift, for example, her best work friend, Mary Ann, thought it was "cute and masculine" that her husband refused to "help her" with housework and childcare.[14] To speak of gender signaled that women's subordinate position was not natural but socially, economically, and culturally constructed. Understanding sexism as *learned*—taught, like racism, to children from their earliest years—meant that it could be unlearned. It followed that what had been constructed by humans could be deconstructed and replaced with greater freedom and equality.

"The personal is political" slogan encapsulated the idea that

many problems previously considered individual and private were created by social structures: for example, the fact that women, even when employed full-time, did all the housework and childcare; the fact that few women believed they could achieve the standards of beauty and self-sacrificing motherhood—these were political issues created by sex inequality. Even the most intimate of practices, such as sexual activity, reflected political power. Feminists argued that what was considered "natural" in heterosexual intercourse was that which brought men to climax most easily, while what gave women pleasure had been labeled abnormal. One of the most widely read essays of the day was Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," and for many women, the idea that the clitoris, not the vagina, was the primary seat of female sexual pleasure came as a welcome surprise because it explained that what they had once considered their own sexual inadequacy was in fact the product of ignorance.

From here feminists began to challenge a wide range of institutions that had been labeled natural. One was marriage, but it was already being affected by cultural changes that began long before the women's liberation movement: starting in 1950 the average age of marriage increased, and the proportion of those never marrying grew, while the divorce rate had been growing throughout the century. Sex outside of marriage started becoming more acceptable as early as 1920, and that trend grew further after about 1950. Feminism gave new meaning to these trends, sending a message of female economic and social independence. Young feminists concluded that women could function well and happily without marriage, that women friends might be at least as important a source of support and contentment as a husband, that loving sexual partnerships need not be legalized by the state or the church.

There soon followed a challenge to the assumption that only heterosexuality was natural. While small numbers of gays and lesbi-

ans had been trying for several decades to counter the widespread condemnation of homosexuality, it was women's liberation's rejection of the alleged naturalness of heterosexual marriage and "missionary position" sex that opened up the common imagination to accept nonstandard sexual acts and romantic relationships. Prior to the 1970s, it seems likely that most women who were attracted to women were nevertheless married to men, because their economic security and social status required it. Women's liberation did not create lesbians but did create the space in which they could live their lives without hiding, suppressing their emotions, or denying themselves fulfilling partnerships. Less directly but equally the women's movement helped gay men to free themselves from stigma.

These challenges to the "natural" extended to sex segregation in the job market, which had rested on assumptions of what came naturally to women and men. Feminists understood that men could be nurses and nursery school teachers, and women could be politicians, surgeons, priests.

From the civil rights concept of "structural racism," the new feminists came to understand structural sexism: that is, discrimination against women did not necessarily arise from sexist or misogynist *attitudes* but from *structures*, i.e., the most basic organization and institutions of the economy, society, and culture. The fact that a man earned more for the same job was not his fault, and he could not individually opt out of that situation. Unequal pay was an economic structure practiced by employers on the basis of calculations about profit and preventing worker organizing, as well as dominant social assumptions about women—such as that women worked for "pin money"* and were mainly supported by

*The phrase "pin money," from the French *epingles*, originally referred to an allowance a man gave his wife for her domestic needs, as for sewing pins. The phrase then morphed to refer to a small, inconsequential amount.

husbands' wages, that women couldn't handle machines, or that women couldn't assume authority.

The most interesting theoretical questions were those that provoked disagreements, even anger, among feminists. Starting in about 1969, Shulamith Firestone and several New York City groups, and Roxanne Dunbar's Cell 16 in Boston, labeled radical feminists,* argued that the oppression of women by men was the oldest and most basic form of injustice and emphasized that women's oppression created direct benefits to men—such as wives who provided sex and housekeeping services. Their analyses of male dominance tended to position women as victims and to assume that men were unlikely to change. By articulating direct conflict between women and men in this provocative manner, they helped all women to acknowledge their own anger. Some radical feminists even experimented with attempting to cut themselves off from men. This emphasis on male-female antagonism gave birth to a separatist stream of feminism, which somewhat unrealistically discussed seceding from male-dominated institutions altogether. Some thus defined lesbianism as a political choice—indeed, the only truly feminist political choice—rather than an innate sexual orientation. A less radical but related stream of thought, cultural feminism, sought to replace male superiority with female superiority, on the grounds that women were a kinder, more cooperative sex, and that if women ruled, the world would be freer of conflict and other ills. Convinced that women's institutions and communities would naturally be less competitive and aggressive than men's, cultural feminists thought it a high priority to get women into positions of authority, in both private and public sectors. Cultural feminists were often the builders of small women's enterprises,

*It is worth noting that "radical feminism" in England meant something different.

such as bookstores, coffeehouses, country retreats, and communes. Many of this stream became eco-feminists, arguing that the history of humanity's ruthless drive to dominate nature—and despoil it—stemmed from male aggressiveness. A key problem of cultural feminist analysis, however, was assuming that all women were alike and denying women's own capacity for aggression and exploitation.

Boston's Bread and Roses, Chicago's Women's Liberation Union, and several other organizations called themselves socialist feminists, although by socialist they did not refer to any of the socialisms of the Communist bloc. They also distinguished themselves from Marxist feminists because, while they respected Marxist analysis of class exploitation, they did not believe that Marxism contained adequate explanations for race and gender hierarchies. While they recognized that capitalism and the rule of the profit motive was one major source of injustice, along with sexism and racism, they believed feminists needed new analyses to understand how sexism worked. Many activists in this stream did not accept the socialist label but sought a modified, regulated capitalism, like what Europeans call social democracy. These feminists were at first called "politicos," because they emphasized collective political engagement with the "male" world of activism, rather than withdrawal from it. The Combahee River Collective of African American feminists, which arose in Boston in the mid-1970s, insisted that feminism was not about individual success but involved changing conditions for all women. These groups argued that many aspects of injustice came together and required complex, situationally specific explanations: they did not assume that gender discrimination was the major issue in all situations. They tended to emphasize structural sexism and to deemphasize the sexism of individual men, assuming that men could change, could even benefit from equality with women, could be feminist themselves. They did not

assume that putting women into power would automatically solve problems, reasoning that it was power itself that created ruthlessness; they pointed to Margaret Thatcher, the 1980s British prime minister, as Exhibit A, because her conservative policies rolled back many of women's gains. They also recognized that many men stood against injustice. In short, they were continuing the social justice feminist tradition discussed in the previous chapter.

Although most feminists recognized that many men, both individually and in the aggregate, gained material benefits from women's subordination—men got someone to do the housework and raise the children, higher wages, greater chances at promotion, and sexual gratification that was not necessarily reciprocal—the majority was optimistic that the movement could defeat sexism. They believed that men also stood to gain from women's liberation, that men would experience pleasure from egalitarian love and friendship, and liberation from the often demanding gendered constraints of normative masculinity. (And many men did.)

Meanwhile, NOW continued a liberal feminist orientation, focusing primarily on changing laws and creating equality between the sexes. By the early 1970s, however, the various streams of feminism converged, in a unity created in part by the virulent anti-feminist backlash. And in many parts of the United States, especially outside the biggest cities, feminists were typically unaware of or dismissive of these theoretical differences. They knew only that women were rising up.

All these theoretical tendencies prized women's relationships with women. Women have always cherished and leaned on mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, but the strongly heterosexual and heterosexist culture of the mid-twentieth century had cast women's relationships with other women into the shadow of the romantic heterosexual bonding that was, supposedly, a woman's chief desire and destiny. The women's movement brought female friendship

into a position of honor, not in second place after heterosexual dating and marriage.

Then there was the lesbian question—and little else about this history has been so distorted by the media. Women's liberation contributed mightily to the large-scale "coming out" of lesbians through shattering assumptions about what was natural, in sex, in love, in family life, and by viewing marriage as an option, not a necessity. By disrupting the myths about women's sexual desire and pleasure, it deposed the penis from its position as necessary for women's sexual pleasure. Some in the women's movement, particularly among the older generation, feared that their movement could be stigmatized if it were associated with lesbians, and Betty Friedan, a leader of NOW, announced at a 1970 NOW meeting that a "lavender menace" was threatening the movement. Her fear reflected in part her anxiety about her own potentially stigmatizing background as a "Red," which she hid—understandably, given the frenzied repression of leftists she had lived through. Friedan's homophobic statement is widely remembered, but few note that later that year at a Congress to Unite Women, the whole audience laughed and cheered when a group proudly wearing T-shirts reading LAVENDER MENACE took over the stage.[15] Friedan soon reversed herself, and in 1971 NOW adopted a resolution supporting gay rights; besides, Friedan's attitude was never widespread in women's liberation. Gay and straight women worked together in camaraderie and friendship in most women's liberation groups, and many women first came out as lesbians in consciousness-raising groups. Lesbians formed separate groups, such as the Washington, D.C., Furies, but lesbians were often persevering activists in causes of greater concern to straight women, such as birth control and abortion rights. Lesbian feminists, never a monolithic group, divided in their analyses of what their sexual preference meant. Some argued, extending the cultural-feminist perspective, that lesbianism was

the highest form of feminism, and that heterosexual women were compromisers; to them lesbianism was a political choice. Others believed that their sexual attraction to women was intrinsic and had little to do with their politics.

Race, Class and Feminism

By the late 1970s, many of these differences came to seem trivial—a remnant of an overly ideological moment of the past. As the backlash against the women's movement arose, to be discussed further below, feminists tended to shed concerns with doctrinal differences and to understand themselves as members of a general liberal/progressive swath of Americans.

One fissure within women's liberation, however, was never bridged: its dominant white and middle-class composition gave rise to accusations of racism and privilege directed at it. The confidence, the articulateness, even the vocabularies of the college-educated women who dominated many feminist groups in the 1970s often functioned to silence working-class women. One working woman's complaint poignantly illustrated that class divide: in Bread and Roses, the middle-class majority, whether students, housewives, or professionals, usually wore pants or jeans; when she arrived, directly from her job, wearing skirts and nylons, she felt the majority regarding her as if she were unfeminist! But the problem was not merely one of style. Sisterhood talk and a one-size-fits-all feminist program were not harmless; in reflecting the class and race upbringings and cultures of those who dominated the movement, middle-class women built walls around themselves. Despite their best intentions and despite their conscious opposition to racism, their priorities and assumptions sometimes blinded them to the situation of women of color and poorer women. The bonding produced by small-group consciousness raising led many white women

to assume that all women had the same grievances and priorities. Middle-class whites did not take sufficiently into account the situation of women who experienced racism, low wages, ill health, and dangerous neighborhoods. Those poor and working-class women, in turn, frequently felt that the women's liberation movement did not represent them—even though many of them were feminist in the generic sense that they recognized women as disadvantaged. Moreover, many were activists on issues that reflected their interests as women, as we will also see below.

Many other feminists of color shared Elizabeth Martínez's experience—that white feminists were oblivious to the depth and strength of racism in the United States, and to the need to put civil rights foremost. Less well articulated but equally prevalent was the middle-class domination of the movement and the obliviousness it sometimes produced to the experience of working-class and poor women. These perceptions and resentments often took the form of mistaken accusations that the movement excluded women of color. (In fact, middle-class white feminists, feeling guilty about their privileges, made many of these accusations.) There was never exclusion; feminist groups badly wanted nonwhite and poorer members. But their experiences and priorities were at times so different, and their conversations so insular, that their groups *felt* exclusionary to women of color. As Barbara Emerson, who grew up saturated in civil rights activism—she is the daughter of Hosea Williams, a civil rights leader who was close to Martin Luther King Jr.—put it, "It was a white women's movement, not necessarily because it was exclusionary of women of color, but simply because the agenda was a white women's agenda."[16]

Many women's groups focused projects on the urgent needs of working-class and low-income women, such as healthcare, welfare, daycare, and working conditions. However, the white-dominated groups sometimes made the mistake of formulating projects first

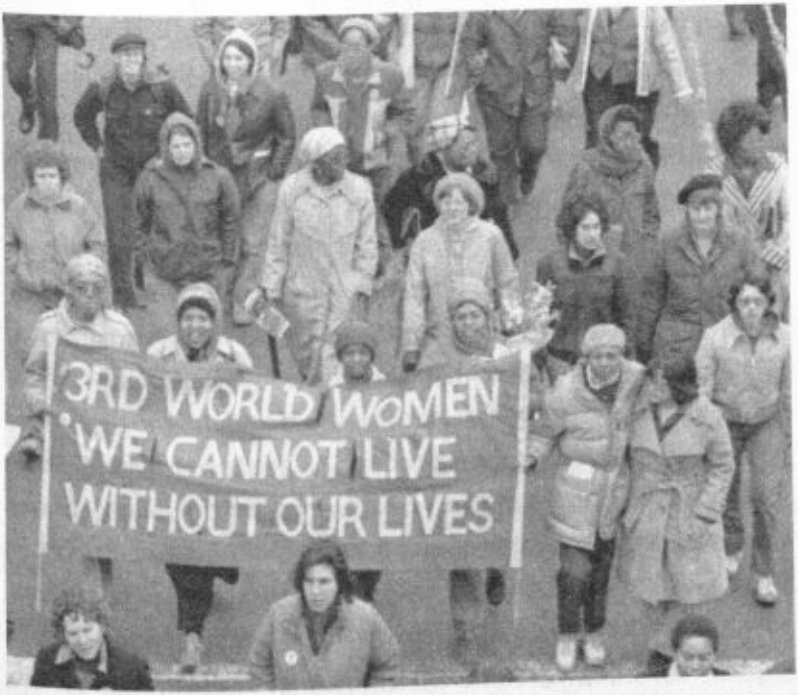
and *then* trying to recruit working-class women, oblivious to the arrogance implied in that process. At the same time, many white feminists allowed their guilt feelings to insult people of color in an opposite way, through automatic agreement with any black opinion, a deference that was actually disrespectful.

Nothing illustrates this pattern, and a problem faced by African American feminists, better than the uncritical support white feminists gave to the Black Panther Party. This urban northern Black Power group, founded in 1966 in Oakland, California, arose in response to police brutality. Their protests sometimes took the form of armed posturing, beginning with a notorious march on the state capitol in Sacramento with guns in hand. Centuries of white oppression had prevented African American men from inhabiting the positions of authority that white men took for granted; to this was added, as African American feminist historian Robyn Spencer points out, a theory of black "emasculation at the hands of superpowerful black women,"[17] a theory promoted as much by self-appointed white experts on black poverty and crime as by black nationalists.[18] Although the Black Panther Party's original agenda could have been written by a feminist group, calling for full employment, decent housing, and education, its early practice was as much about gender as about race, asking black women to step back into the protection of their men. Numerous male civil rights activists charged that feminism was an attempt to impose "white" values, although, as Fran Beal pointed out, "when it comes to women he [the black man] seems to take his guidelines from . . . *Ladies Home Journal*."[19]

While the need for race solidarity led some women of color to accept the doctrine that they should "step back," others resisted male dominance in the movement. From the beginning female Panthers pressed for power. Sixteen-year-old Tarika Lewis walked into the Black Panther Party office, asked to join, and demanded her own gun. It was Panther women who created the positive programs

that brought the party widespread respect: free breakfasts, clothing, medical care, and classes on politics and economics. Women in the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party, which had grown out of a Chicago turf gang, became incensed when they observed the position (literally) of women in Amiri Baraka's Afrocentric group: his female followers were required to approach him on hands and knees. Denise Oliver, who observed this, told other female Lords that "if we didn't do something we would end up on our hands and knees" like them. So they conducted a "sex strike," refusing to have sex with their male partners until the Lords agreed to add women to the leadership and get rid of the call for "revolutionary machismo," among other demands.[20]

Black feminism and other feminisms of color emerged from



A Boston demonstration, 1979, led by the Combahee River Collective. Photograph by Ellen Shub.

both male-dominated and autonomous women's groups. One pioneer was the Third World Women's Alliance, which developed when a black women's group started by Fran Beal in 1968 wanted to reach out to Latinas. The name reflected the New Left notion that people of color in the United States shared the oppression of "Third World" people, and that Western imperialist domination over the "underdeveloped" world was of a piece with domestic racism. The group's core analysis—that women of color had to struggle against race, class, and gender domination at the same time—was common among all feminists of color, but there was no more homogeneity among them than among white women. Moreover, many African American women, like Barbara Emerson, did not feel disadvantaged as women, but rather asserted the strength and leadership of black women—at least until black nationalism became the dominant stream of the black movement.

The development of separate feminisms among African Americans, Latinas, Asian Americans, and American Indians did not weaken the overall force of the women's movement. Political scientist S. Laurel Weldon has shown, in fact, that women's movements were stronger and more successful when there were multiple groups organized by racial/ethnic and other identities.

Feminist activism among women of color and white working-class women often took forms rather different from the white and middle-class projects that are usually identified as feminist. Some developed as labor struggles, such as the victorious two-year strike (1972–74) of garment workers at the Farah Company in El Paso, Texas; four thousand Chicana workers defied violent intimidation, sparked a national boycott of Farah clothing, and won union recognition. In 1969, four hundred hospital workers in Charleston, South Carolina, won a dramatic 116-day strike sparked by the firing of twelve black aides for attending a grievance meeting. As one striker, Bessie Polite, said, "We was women and we didn't have no weapons. . . . I felt like

they wouldn't hardly hit us with those big clubs." To which Ernestine Bryant added, "When you're working around people who discriminate against you . . . they call you like 'hey, girl,' . . . you just really feel like—you know—fighting."[21] These labor struggles and other feminist campaigns by working-class women gained support from the Coalition of Labor Union Women; founded in 1974, the group arose from the intersection of long-term pressure by women within the AFL-CIO with the influence of women's liberation.

Much women's activism focused on children, and the converse is also true: movements for children are typically women's movements. This kind of activism was not new, but the women's movement energized it. Women campaigned for better garbage collection, traffic lights, guards at school crossings, parks and playgrounds and swimming pools. Women were frequently the leaders of campaigns against toxic wastes in their neighborhoods. In 1978, Lois Gibbs, a working-class mother only twenty-seven years old, discovered that her son's elementary school was built on top of a toxic waste dump. At first she thought that she "just had to go to the right person in government and he would take care of it." She remembered being very upset to find that "democracy isn't democracy," and added, speaking with familial feelings of betrayal, "It's like finding out your mother was fooling around on your father." She then started a movement that forced the cleanup of Love Canal and led to the creation of the "Superfund" for environmental safety.[22] Not all women-led campaigns were praiseworthy, for it was also women who protested public housing, halfway houses, school desegregation and busing, and even harassed people of color moving into their neighborhoods. In fact, conservative women modeled some of their tactics on feminist activity, as when anti-abortion protesters copied New Left tactics such as sit-ins and chaining themselves to fences.

Although Chicano (male) activists stubbornly resisted Chicana feminism, that did not stop the development of feminist conscious-

ness among Chicanas. At the 1971 Mujeres por la Raza conference in Houston, a survey of the six hundred in attendance showed that 84 percent resented not receiving equal pay for equal work, and 72 percent felt discriminated against within the Raza movement. In Chicago at a meeting of a Latino/a American student group, one woman rebelled when the group's president announced, " 'The girls are going to go and prepare something [to eat] while we discuss this political question.' . . . I was single. I didn't even cook. . . . Why the heck was I going to cook for some guys? Cristina and I didn't budge. . . . The rumor thereafter was that Cristina and I were lovers. . . . Then, they started saying that we weren't heavy chested and that made us more masculine. . . . From then on, we raised issues . . . related to Chicanas." They called a Latina women's conference, La Mujer Despierta (Women Awake), in 1973.[23]

American Indian women had a history of leadership greater than that of other ethnic groups; women led, for example, the first Indian activism of the civil rights era—the 1960s "fish-ins" defending tribal rights. But with the Indian seizure and occupation of Alcatraz Island in 1969–71, and then the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, male violent rhetoric and armed posturing, much like that of the Black Panthers, accelerated, and women got sidelined—and began to criticize the men. After the Wounded Knee defeat, Indian women founded Women of All Red Nations and campaigned against coerced sterilization (see below) as well as sexism.

Asian American women traveled a different trajectory: the Vietnam War affected them strongly and intensified their commitments to Asian American civil rights and anti-imperialist activity. They created fewer distinctly feminist organizations but many centers and projects for women—cultural centers, health clinics, battered women's shelters; moreover, the Asian American New Left was less sexist and less violent than were the black and Indian New Lefts.[24]

Still, the nonwhite feminist groups also shared strategies: fighting racial/ethnic as well as gender discrimination; pushing bread-and-butter issues. Major concerns crossed all racial ethnic lines: ending rape, harassment and domestic violence; making reproduction control accessible to all; criticizing sexist representations of women; honoring divergent family forms and sexual preference; insisting that women get equal access to professions, jobs, salaries and promotions.

Another thing all feminists of color shared: denunciations by their racial/ethnic brothers. They accused women of undermining already fragile male egos, fragmenting and thereby weakening civil rights efforts, destroying families and damaging their children, losing their own culture, threatening community solidarity, and accepting white women's values. When Elizabeth Sutherland reclaimed her Mexican American identity and her father's name—Martínez—and moved to New Mexico to join a movement for her own people, some of her *compañero/as* charged she was *agringada* (whitened) because of her feminism. (This was a bitter irony for the girl who had had to sit in the back of the bus in Washington.) She criticized the use of images of "*our women*/ in postures of maternity, sadness, devotion/ tears for the lost husband or son/ *our women*, nothing but shadows/reflections of someone else's existence/ BASTA!"[25] She saw, moreover, that her sister Chicanas had plenty of resentment about their own experience of male dominance; in rejecting feminism they were primarily rejecting a movement they saw as white and middle-class, and they also saw the need for male-female solidarity in fighting anti-Mexican racism. The relative strength of feminism among women of color seems to have been correlated with the degree of nationalism in the New Left group they were embedded in: Asian American women had an easier time promoting gender concerns because the Asian American New Left was not particularly nation-

alist. Anti-feminist attacks were also virulent among whites, however, usually on the similar ground that the women were playing "identity politics" and thereby fragmenting progressive unity.

Feminism and the New Left

In the early 1970s, almost all the younger participants in the women's liberation movement had previously participated in other parts of the New Left. Most writers have narrowed their understanding of the "New Left" by referring exclusively to the white student-intellectual movement that coalesced around campus and anti-war activism in the 1960s, then broke up into sectarian fragments from 1968 to 1970. A closer look shows the New Left as a developing, interlocked chain of social movements that began in the 1950s with civil rights, extended through campus protests, the anti–Vietnam War campaign, the women's liberation and then gay liberation movements, taking in also the environmentalism that continued throughout. These movements shared anti-authoritarian impulses, a recognition of the need for new analyses of injustice and exploitation, strategic orientation toward defiance, tactical reliance on direct action and civil disobedience, rejection of conformist culture, and creativity in pioneering new cultural and communitarian forms and innovative tactics. Recognizing this "long New Left" is vital for understanding the women's liberation movement.

From the constricted, predominantly white, male and heterosexual misconception of the New Left flowed another misconception: that feminism arose by "breaking off" from the New Left. True, women had been criticizing their treatment in the labor, civil rights, peace, and environmental movements for decades, but that criticism did not usually mean divorce, any more than does criticism of family or friends. In fact, women's liberation grew from and remained an integral part of the New Left. Participation in

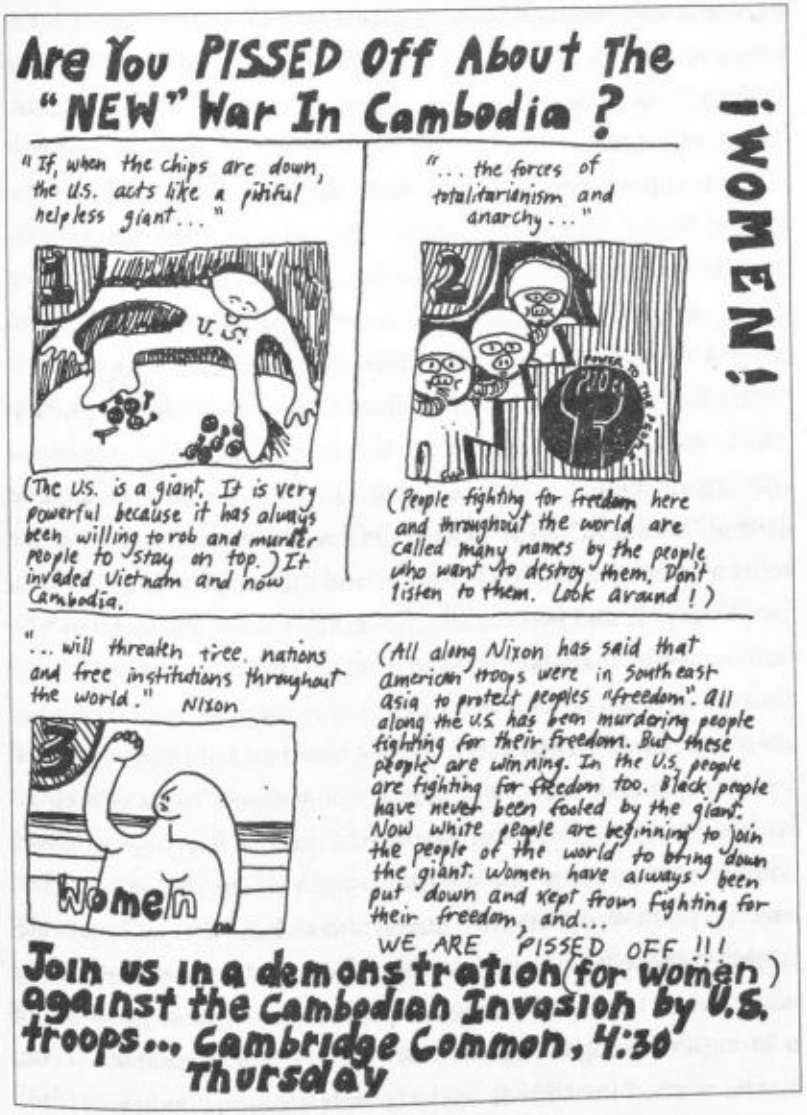
earlier movements sharpened feminists' analyses of injustice and their confidence that collective action could create change.

The single greatest influence on women's liberation was civil rights, and many early feminists were veterans of that movement. Elizabeth Martínez's life's work shows it clearly. From her childhood experiences of racism through her writing and editing work in New York, she was gripped by the southern civil rights movement, despite not being an African American. Though she wasn't typical—not many people will quit their jobs to join a dangerous struggle in alien territory at age forty—her integration of feminism with civil rights and other progressive causes was typical. Pam Allen, the first codifier of consciousness raising, also came from civil rights. She went to Mississippi in 1964 a devout Christian, convinced that God would protect her, but that was before the killings of three of her fellow civil rights workers; twenty-five years later she found a letter her father wrote to his congressman saying, "Get her the hell out of there," and she was grateful that the letter did not succeed.[26] As Catherine Stimpson, noted scholar and founder of the feminist journal *Signs*, wrote, the civil rights movement "scoured the rust off the national conscience."[27] By exposing the mechanisms of white domination and proving that a social movement could defeat some of those centuries-old mechanisms, it shaped and invigorated feminism. In one way the civil rights influence was too great, because feminists compared women's oppression to African Americans'—an extremely limited and misleading analogy. True, both race and sex inequality are profitable for others: employers who could pay low wages and husbands and boyfriends who received domestic services. (If husbands had to pay for domestic services, not to mention the labor of child raising, the great majority of them would not have been able to live on their wages.) But the differences between race and sex inequality are far greater: almost all women live with and love

men, as fathers, brothers, husbands, sons; and women's subordination was naturalized far more deeply than that of blacks. Furthermore, in the rhetoric of analogizing women to blacks, black women dropped out of the picture. (One classic feminist book put the hidden exclusion behind the analogy perfectly: *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men.*)

Within the civil rights movement, SNCC exerted the greatest influence on the rest of the New Left. Hundreds of northern students, white and black, volunteered for the summers of 1963 and 1964. Although not many stayed for two years, as Betita Martínez did, even a summer was intense enough to change them forever. SNCC's commitment to internal democracy, nonviolent resistance, and grassroots organizing, along with the extraordinary patience and bravery of its staff and supporters, showed that even the least powerful people could make social change. The horrific rage and violence of the southern white resistance also produced an impact: volunteers experienced vicious beatings in Selma, saw cross burnings and firebombings by the White Citizens Councils in Mississippi, and experienced the murders of their friends. Many other women watched this violence on TV. They were learning the intensity with which those who held power would resist sharing it. Sexual attacks on black women were commonplace, as white men had virtually never been prosecuted for these crimes. In 1959, in the first case to lead to a conviction, Betty Jean Owens was pulled out of a car in Tallahassee by a crowd of white men who had decided to "go out and get a nigger girl," then raped seven times.[28]

As civil rights advocates were winning major legal and legislative victories, most young feminists were also participating in the anti–Vietnam War movement. This campaign was sparked by Students for a Democratic Society, a national campus organization that grew rapidly in the mid-1960s, and the draft resistance movement. Both were even more male dominated than civil rights, for two



Anti–Vietnam War leaflet, 1970, Bread and Roses.

reasons: only men could be drafted, so only men could resist the draft; and SDS gained mass support largely through big demonstrations, public "teach-ins," and charismatic speeches—at a time when most women were too diffident, due to their conventionally

feminine upbringing, to take on assertive public roles. Karen Nussbaum was active in SDS and Black Panther support activity at the University of Chicago, and her older brother was a draft resister. Betita Martínez was no longer a student, but she and virtually all civil rights supporters saw U.S. imperialism—especially the United States' invasion of small, distant, and entirely unthreatening Vietnam to impose the kind of political system it wanted—as a global extension of racism. That war turned "peaceniks" into critics of American economic and military imperialism.

In all these movements, men dominated the leadership (though SNCC was more sexually egalitarian than SDS), while women did the organizational maintenance work. Men seemed to assume control "naturally," while women deferred to them. That deference reflected the sexual objectification and subordination of women, problems that had permeated male culture for eons. Women who had written brilliant political and historical analyses in their college courses were afraid to speak in large meetings mainly because of their awareness of being seen but not heard and of being evaluated by their sexual desirability. It was not only men's "ways of seeing," in John Berger's sense, but also men's ways of hearing: a woman might make a point, then a man might make the same point, and the point was thereafter referred to as his. Men automatically regarded other men as their audience, comrades, co-strategists, or adversaries. For many women, becoming a feminist grew out of a process of recognizing how men—often unconsciously—could render women invisible as subjects, only visible as bodies.

Still, feminists' growing understanding of the depth and, often, subtlety of sexism rarely removed them from these other New Left causes. Women's libbers, both individually and through their organizations, continued to work on anti-war, civil rights, and civil liberties issues. They marched against the Vietnam War carrying banners like FEMINISTS FOR PEACE or WOMEN AGAINST IMPERIAL-

ISM. They introduced feminist analyses of the motives behind the arms race, military interventions, and support for dictatorships like those in Vietnam, Chile, El Salvador, and Uruguay. Eco-feminists, adopting a term from French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne, connected male domination over women with the destruction of nature. Many flocked to organizations fighting nuclear power, such as the Clamshell Alliance. African American and American Indian women were particularly prominent in environmentalist protest, in part because toxic projects are so frequently sited in the neighborhoods of poor people of color. Many were shy at first, not accustomed to speaking in public or even to speaking to strangers. One environmental activist explained, "Twenty years ago I couldn't do this. . . . I had to really know you to talk with you. Now I talked. . . . I waited until my fifties to go to jail. . . . I never went to no university or college but I'm going in there and making speeches." Some were even frightened at first; one American Indian woman opposing a landfill on the Los Coyotes Reservation said, "People here fear the government. . . . When I became involved in opposing the garbage, my people told me to be careful . . . they annihilate people like me."[29] Not all became lifelong activists like Martínez and Nussbaum, and many never owned any of the common labels, such as "feminist," "peacenik," or "environmentalist," but the majority supported the progressive causes of the New Left for the rest of their lives.

Feminism was not always welcomed by male leftists. Some of them not only criticized but cursed the early feminist spokeswomen. When Marilyn Webb and Shulamith Firestone took the stage to speak at an anti-war rally in 1969, male hecklers shouted, "Take her off the stage and fuck her," and the legendary pacifist leader Dave Dellinger responded by trying to get the women off the stage rather than admonishing the hecklers. Angela Davis was called domineering by black men who feared she would "rob them

of their manhood."[30] Kathleen Cleaver felt she had to "genuflect" to the male Black Panthers.[31] Even supportive men assumed that women's liberation should aim at mobilizing women to support the older New Left issues, and when confronted with criticism about sexism, they often became defensive. To convince men to listen to women sometimes required arduous and repetitive pressure, while others took in the lessons quickly and began to act on them. What is important here is that most feminists blamed not men in general, or the left in general, but *the structure* of sexism, and continued to press from within the Left.

Women's Liberation Organizations

Just as earlier New Left movements influenced feminist practice, so they influenced women's liberation's organizational preferences. From SNCC came the principle that social change required personal transformation and empowerment, which in turn required face-to-face organizing. From both the civil rights and anti-war movements came the understanding that the United States was not thoroughly democratic but was governed by politicians whose greatest loyalty and accountability were to wealthy donors and lobbyists. So they disdained representative democracy. They favored decisions made by groups in which everyone participated in full discussion of issues and options.

This radical egalitarianism may have been the perfect form for the content being produced, i.e, consciousness raising. Small groups allowed all the assembled experiences to be added to the discussion, provided the group was small enough that everyone could contribute but just large enough to include a range of experience. Meeting in living rooms, some crowded onto sofas, others sprawled on the floor, often nibbling snacks, less often drinking wine since the typical members had little money, the participants

experienced not a meeting as much as a late-night intimate conversation. The size meant that everyone spoke because there was no pressure to be articulate or to have an "analysis." The analysis came after, not before, exchanging experiences.

Most women's liberation activists felt no inclination to create larger organizations: they created none on the national or state level and only some citywide. This decentralization resulted in extraordinarily productive bursts of creativity. Small groups could engender quick decision making and action. They could dream up projects and act on them without first seeking approval from larger organizations; rather than sit through long meetings discussing the pros and cons of different proposals, or prioritizing among competing proposals, the small groups could simply begin. Even the citywide groups, such as Chicago's CWLU and Boston's Bread and Roses, divided among smaller project groups. Over time these projects *were* the women's liberation movement.

Some believe, however, that the movement would have been stronger had it created more multi-issue organizations. In contrast to NOW, an organization with fifty years of staying power, women's liberation harbored extreme suspicion of formal pyramidal structures. One scholar labeled NOW the "bureaucratic" and women's liberation the "collectivist" branch of the movement.[32] Although that distinction did not apply universally—some NOW chapters were like women's liberation groups, and vice versa—it is true that most of the younger feminists were allergic to hierarchical organization and leadership. Their groups rarely elected officers and usually rotated jobs, a pattern that made it harder to hold people responsible for the tasks they undertook and accountable to the membership. (It was not uncommon for someone to volunteer for a task and then fail to attend the next meeting, leaving the group in the dark about whether the task was accomplished.) Few organizations established membership requirements, such as dues or

initial orientation or committee assignments. Decisions were not final because new members could challenge them at any time. One exception to this pattern was the long-lasting Chicago Women's Liberation Union (1969–77). Its relative longevity derived from its ability to compromise between effectiveness and democracy, its insistence that all members be actively engaged in at least one project, and its creation of respect for leadership.

True, the movement might have accomplished even more had it integrated the freewheeling creativity of decentralization with the strategically targeted clout of a disciplined national organization. But movements can only grow from the longings of their activists, and this generation of feminists acted not only out of passion for social justice but also out of rejection of authority. As it was, they wrought massive change.

It may be, however, that decentralization and consciousness change have their greatest impact only in the pioneering moments of movements, and that staying power requires stronger organization. Luckily NOW, the National Organization for Women, continued to hold together a national network. As the last chapter showed, NOW was more diverse than women's liberation: labor union leaders and women of color helped start it; Caroline Davis of the United Auto Workers and Jamaican American Aileen Hernandez of the International Ladies' Garment Workers were among its first officers. Focused primarily on employment discrimination, it was able to campaign for reforms that benefited working women of all classes. NOW consistently supported civil rights legislation.

While most women's liberation members de-emphasized electoral campaigns, NOW threw its energies into the two-party official political system. As it began its work, there were thirteen women in Congress; in 2013 there were ninety-eight. With NOW's support, New York's Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005) became the first African American woman in Congress, in 1969. She was a feminist

heroine who deserves far more recognition than she has received. Born in Brooklyn to West Indian immigrants, her father a factory worker and her mother a domestic, she went to Brooklyn College, worked as a schoolteacher, and ran her campaign on the slogan "Unbought and Unbossed," signaling her independence from the Democratic Party political machine. When she won, she told her constituents, "There may be some fireworks," and she set them off herself, by immediately challenging the seniority system in the House, which had assigned her to the Agriculture Committee—hardly relevant to her Brooklyn constituents. She became skilled at rounding up Republican support for her priorities, as in a bill to extend the minimum wage law to domestic workers. An expert on child welfare and education, she was responsible for the country's first federal legislation providing comprehensive childcare assistance to needy families and managed to get it passed with bipartisan support—only to have President Nixon veto it, surprising even members of his own Republican Party.

NOW's chapters were autonomous and diverse, but its national office initiated both lobbying and demonstrations on issues as diverse as getting women appointed to federal commissions, responding to rape, and impeaching Nixon. NOW's Legal Defense and Education Fund, founded in 1970, became a powerhouse of expertise and litigation for judicial and legislative victories. It won the famed Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which virtually revolutionized women's sports. In 2013 college women began using it to combat campus rapes. It pressured the mass media to be more responsive to and respectful of women. It trained feminist lawyers, produced the Rape Shield Law, and in alliance with union women won the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978.

Through the 1970s NOW was increasingly deploying its "troops" in the battle for the Equal Rights Amendment. In earlier decades many social justice feminists had opposed the amendment on the

grounds that it might cancel legislation that supported women's needs, such as pregnancy benefits, as chapter 1 explained. Now labor unions were part of the pro-ERA alliance as well. Women's numbers and positions in the wage labor force had changed so much that the potential loss of protective legislation was less threatening to women than the continued discrimination against them. By the time the amendment passed in Congress in 1972, the lay of the land had shifted: the opposition came no longer from the social justice feminists and labor unions but from the right wing. The anti-ERA lobby gained massive corporate and conservative religious funding and propagandized by appealing to people's fears: opponents argued that the ERA would destroy the family, free husbands from having to support wives and children, send women into combat, end separate women's and men's toilets, uphold abortion rights and homosexual marriages and destroy businesses. Although a majority of the states ratified it, a constitutional amendment required approval by three-fifths, and this hurdle the movement could not vault. Conservatives were able to keep the United States as one of the only nations not to guarantee women equal rights, a bitter disappointment to millions and a foretaste of the power of the backlash, to be discussed at the end of this chapter.

In retrospect, many feminists came to believe that it was a mistake for NOW to focus so exclusively on this single project. In fact, the NOW and women's liberation branches of the feminist movement carried on with campaigns about many other issues. It would take a multivolume book to discuss them all, so this chapter focuses on a few of the most striking.

Bodily Health and Harm

Paradoxically, the issue with which women's liberation has been most identified, abortion rights, is where it actually had little suc-

cess. After the initial limited legalization of abortion through *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, the anti-abortion-rights movement made abortions steadily less accessible. The history of this conflict merits careful attention because the opposition made it symbolize the whole movement.

All known human societies have tried to control reproduction, and abortion was a common means. It was legal in the three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—provided it was accomplished before "quickening," the old term for the moment when a pregnant woman could first feel a fetus move. The same women who assisted in childbirth usually performed abortions. In the mid-nineteenth century, moral reformers in the United States and Europe initiated a campaign to ban reproduction control, and they made little distinction between what we today call contraception and abortion. Between about 1840 and 1890, all U.S. states banned *all* methods of reproduction control, and in 1873, a federal law did likewise. By the early twentieth century, however, the changing economy made those restrictions unacceptable, especially for those who could not afford large families. A grassroots campaign to legalize contraception, now called birth control, produced a compromise: legalizing contraception but continuing to prohibit abortion. In the 1960s, several new factors—such as the medical ability to detect fetal pathologies and the growing acceptability of sex outside of marriage—made the ban on abortion unacceptable. The very fact that people had grown accustomed to being able to plan their reproductive lives intensified women's demands for abortion: if contraception failed, they needed a Plan B.

At first, *Roe v. Wade* brought significant gains to women and their families: greater safety, lower costs, an end to stigma, and greater opportunity in education and employment. In 1965, illegal abortion was responsible for 17 percent of pregnancy-related deaths; by 1999, only 0.3 percent of women having legal abortions

suffered any serious complications. In the four years between 1972 and 1976, deaths from abortion went from thirty-nine to two per million. Equally important was that women who aborted could be guaranteed not only sterile, safe procedures, but also discussions with sympathetic female counselors who made sure that pregnant women considered all their options, and accurate medical information as opposed to dishonest propaganda—for example, that abortion caused cancer or sterility, that fetuses feel pain, or that all unwanted children can be adopted.

Agitation to repeal the abortion prohibitions began well before women's liberation became a mass movement. Seventeen states had liberalized their abortion laws *before Roe v. Wade*, and observers believed the reform wave would soon spread throughout the country. Once the powerful women's movement took up the cause, however, feminism became the face of abortion, and that allowed abortion opponents to brand it as radical and not traditional. The Catholic hierarchy, of course, opposed it from the outset, as it opposed contraception. Evangelical Protestants endorsed abortion rights until secular Republican Party strategists pulled the evangelical leadership into the anti-abortion campaign. These creators of the "New Right" sought to break the Democratic Party's electoral majority. By de-emphasizing traditional Republican issues (conservative economic policy and anti-Communism) and focusing instead on "social" issues (gender and sexual matters), they planned to win over some traditional Democratic voters. They painted abortion as a tool of radical feminists who were using it to "destroy the family."

The plan worked, for two reasons. First, while the nineteenth-century anti-abortion campaign argued that abortion allowed women to evade their God-dictated destiny for motherhood and domesticity, that argument could never have gained traction in the mid-twentieth century. So the new campaign focused on the fetus

and its "right to life," an issue almost never mentioned in the previous century. Second, Republican funders threw massive resources into the anti-abortion-rights cause. The opposition succeeded in limiting abortion through burdensome restrictions, especially by prohibiting the use of Medicaid funds for abortion—so that the poor, who most needed to reduce their childbearing, could not do so—and by driving out abortion providers through a terrifying campaign of violence. The American Coalition of Life Activists circulated "Wanted" posters—mimicking official police placards identifying suspected criminals—with the photographs and, often, *home addresses* of physicians who performed abortions, identifying them as "war criminals" and, recalling the Nuremberg Laws, guilty of "crimes against humanity."[33] These posters contributed to a terrifying wave of violence against abortion personnel. From 1977 through 2001, assailants in this campaign murdered 3 doctors, 2 clinic employees, 1 clinic escort and 1 security guard; attempted 71 other murders; executed 41 bombings, 165 arson attacks, 82 attempted bombings, and 372 clinic invasions; and caused $8.5 million in damage. This was enough to drive even staunch supporters of reproductive rights out of the practice, and those who remained were heroes indeed.

Anti-abortion advocates also labeled abortion rights as a white people's cause, which is not the case. Women of all races were and are divided on the issue, just like men, but black feminists were staunchly in favor. Blacks have a higher abortion rate than whites, because they have more unintended pregnancies and because they are poorer, according to a poll by the Public Religion Research Institute, and in 2012, two-thirds believed that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, despite anti-abortion sermons by some black ministers. Immigrant Hispanics supported abortion rights in smaller numbers, 41 percent, but among those born in the United States, 55 to 57 percent agreed that abortion should be legal in all or

most cases. Numerous prominent women of color led in the campaign for abortion rights, including Dr. Helen Rodríguez-Trias, Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, National Council of Negro Women president Dorothy Height, NOW president Aileen Hernandez, and many more.

Because of the strength of the anti-abortion movement, over the last forty years many feminists had to devote time and money to defending reproduction rights exclusively. This need to concentrate on a single issue contributed to the decline of multi-issue feminist organizations. Still, other campaigns to protect women's bodily safety gained successes.

One, the movement for free choice in sterilization, won significant victories. About sterilization, women of different classes had different complaints. When prosperous women sought sterilization, physicians could arbitrarily refuse their requests on the grounds that they were too young or hadn't yet had "enough" children (on the assumption that physicians knew better than the women what was in their best interest), while poor women, and particularly people of color, had been frequently subjected to involuntary sterilization—a practice used since early in the twentieth century. State authorities could threaten to cut women off welfare if they did not agree to be sterilized, or get them to sign consent forms at moments of painful labor and delivery. One egregious case gave the widespread practice publicity in 1973: Alabama authorities sterilized Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf, African Americans aged fourteen and twelve, not only without consent but without even their or their mother's knowledge, on the grounds that they were "at risk" of early sexual activity. The National Welfare Rights Organization and the women's movement protested loudly enough to get a federal investigation into what were widely known as "Mississippi appendectomies."

Latinas were in the lead in this campaign. In the mid-1970s

in Los Angeles, ten low-income, Mexican-origin women filed suit against obstetricians who had coerced them into sterilization within hours of giving birth. Their stories showed the abuse clearly: Helena Orozco testified that a "doctor said that if I did not consent to the tubal ligation that the doctor repairing my hernia would use an inferior type of stitching material which would break the next time I became pregnant, but that if I consented to the tubal ligation that the stitches would hold as proper string would be used." Jovita Rivera testified that "while I was in advanced labor . . . and in great pain, the doctor told me that I had too many children, that I was poor, and a burden to the government and I should sign a paper not to have more children . . . that my tubes could be untied at a later time and I could still have children."[34] Nevertheless, the judge ruled against them. They continued to organize and soon found over a hundred similar victims. Sterilization had been pushed on women in Puerto Rico without informing them of other, temporary birth control methods, and this was happening in New York as well. Dr. Helen Rodríguez-Trias, a Puerto Rican, founded the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse in New York City in 1973. Then women of the Puerto Rican Young Lords Party also joined the campaign, which they situated within a larger program for reproductive rights. Instead of following the nationalist line, that birth control itself was a form of genocide against Puerto Ricans, the Lords women developed a holistic program calling for reproductive rights, including abortion, but also including the right to bear children.

Soon these activists formed a national organization, the Committee for Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse (CARASA), based on a simple but radical premise: that women should have the right to decide their reproductive options without coercion. CARASA argued that women needed not only legal but also economic and social rights. Giving women true choice, the

Poster, probably from CARASA (Committee fo Abortion Rights and Against Sterilization Abuse), probably 1974–75, designer unknown.

group argued, should include economic help in raising children when necessary and in accessing contraception and abortion when desired. CARASA was able to get the federal government to issue stringent regulations designed to prevent involuntary sterilization in 1979, including notably a required thirty-day waiting period to ensure that women were not pressured into a decision under stress. It never succeeded, however, in repealing the federal ban on Medicaid funding for abortion.

Women's bodies have been violated for centuries by rape, harassment, and assault, and by the relative impunity of so many male culprits. The size of the problem before the women's liberation movement is unknown, precisely because so few women complained, which was, in turn, because they knew their chances of getting justice were slim. The all-out feminist campaign against domestic violence generated a sea change in public opinion. Women as well as men once regarded male "punishment" of wives as acceptable and did not categorize such aggressions as pushing, slapping, or threatening as constituting domestic violence,

let alone criminal assault. Shortly before the women's liberation movement, anywhere from one-quarter to two-thirds of Americans thought such "mild" assaults acceptable or even, in male opinion, necessary or good. Today very few Americans would admit such an attitude to a pollster. Still, the problem has not disappeared by any means. The Domestic Violence Resource Center estimates that one in four women has been attacked by a partner or ex-partner and three out of four women know someone who has been. Every day in the United States, three women and one man are killed by partners or ex-partners. Of course, these figures represent both greater consciousness that these assaults are crimes and greater willingness to report them.[15]

One approach to domestic violence was the establishment of battered women's shelters throughout the United States. In 2012, on an average day, some 1,900 shelters served an average of sixty-four thousand women and children, and twenty-nine thousand more were counseled. African American women are disproportionately likely to use shelters because they lack the resources to find housing on their own when they leave abusive partners. No such refuges existed before the women's liberation movement created them, and no physical space ever met a greater need. Many abused women had previously had no place they could go with their children—and few mothers were willing to leave marriages without their children. A program originating in England, shelters were opened by American feminist groups starting in 1967. Thousands of women volunteered to staff these facilities and to raise money for them. National coordination produced shared policies: no men allowed; locations not made public; no drugs or alcohol; all residents cooperating in cleaning and maintenance; and consciousness-raising sessions aimed to expose residents to the feminist understanding that domestic violence was a means of enforcing male dominance and erupted most often when that dominance was threatened.

"Hotlines" also proliferated, allowing women to learn that support was available. Feminist groups pressured medical clinics to post information about getting help, and doctors to raise questions about injuries they would once have ignored—or accepted pretexts about, such as "I ran into a door." Feminist pressure caused police forces to change their responses to domestic violence calls: instead of acting to separate the couple and pacify the man—or, worse, sympathize with man's complaints about the woman—most police departments have revised their procedures, and twenty-two states have made arrests mandatory.

A marker of the feminist achievement was the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act of 1984, which provided federal grants. (Since then there has been a political seesaw: Democratic administrations supported the program, and the Clinton administration added the Violence Against Women Act; Republican administrations cut the funding and tried to repeal the laws.) Although these government commitments represented major feminist victories, their funding does not match the need. Every day approximately ten thousand needy women and children ask for help but cannot get it because of inadequate funding. Twenty-three thousand calls come in to anti-violence hotlines *every day*. An additional problem is that accepting federal money requires shelters and hotlines to conform to guidelines that often prohibit feminist discussions with victims, which many activists believe weakens their ability to help women permanently free themselves from violence through understanding its roots and symptoms. Men can also be victims, especially gay men, and it has often been difficult for male victims to report this, because it makes them feel humiliated and weak; about two thousand several networks have been established to support them, such as the Gay Men's Domestic Violence Project.[16]

The feminist campaign against violence against women worked

Leaflet by Women Office Workers of New York, 1979.

not only to protect women and children but also to support research and analysis of the problem. For example, it is now well known that abuse often occurs when a woman tries to separate from her partner; and that many abusive relationships begin with a very controlling, even imprisoning, partner. One woman's story: The husband of a woman I'll call Sheila would not permit her to work outside the home or do anything independent. Each day when he left for work,

he recorded the odometer reading on the car and took the phone with him. His need to control became so extreme that he started to dish out her food portions, telling her that she needed to lose weight. He became violent when he suspected any resistance from her. She finally prepared to escape with her three children after getting advice from a feminist hotline in rural California, whose staff told her to gather up her important papers, such as the kids' medical records, bank and insurance information, and personal keepsakes in case she could not go back to the house, which turned out to be true.

The feminist impact against rape may well have been even greater. For this form of violence the historical data are even sparser, because for centuries the cost of reporting was trivial for the culprit and massive for the victim. We learn more by looking at definitions. Before the women's liberation movement, the dominant notion of rape was an assault by a stranger on the street, and rape of children was widely considered a one-in-a-million occurrence, also done by strangers—"dirty old men." So the women's movement had to redefine rape itself: by making people aware not only that the majority of rapes are perpetrated by people who know the victim, and those of children by male family members, but also that rape includes marital rape, homosexual rape, and rape without intercourse. As early as 1971, at least four big cities had rape crisis centers, and soon it was impossible to keep up with the momentum—speakouts, support groups, hotlines, counseling, training for police and medical personnel. There were some fifteen hundred antirape projects by 1976.

One feminist tactic against violence was the "Take Back the Night" march. The first one was probably held in Philadelphia in 1975, sparked by the murder of a young woman walking home from work. That march "went viral," even though there was no Internet then. The phrase and the events were picked up the fol-

lowing year at an international tribunal in Brussels, and soon there were marches across the globe. These marches repudiated, both symbolically and in practice, the widespread acceptance of the view that women should not move through a city alone at night, and that it was at least partly their fault if they were assaulted. "Take Back the Night" represented putting the blame for violence against women where it belonged: on male assailants.

Women's liberation's impact on bodies was probably strongest not in struggling against harm but in working for health. *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, first published in 1971, inaugurated a sea change in women's knowledge of their own bodies. Its major impact was not in communicating information but in promoting new attitudes—that women should learn about their bodies and should face health questions with the understanding that they need not defer to physicians or other moral authorities in making decisions. Out of this first publication and countless local projects arose the National Women's Health Network, now almost forty years old and thriving. One aspect of this influence was the geometric increase in female doctors as women flooded the medical schools, partly out of desire to practice medicine in a woman-friendly way. (In 1905, 4 percent of physicians were women, and that number was virtually unchanged until 1970; in 2011, women were 48.3 percent of med school graduates.) The movement forced changes in medical research, making it no longer acceptable to study only male diseases or use only male subjects in drug testing. The women's movement particularly transformed childbirth, through insisting on women's choices about where, when, and how to deliver babies and—perhaps surprising to many—winning a difficult battle to include fathers in childbirth, in or out of hospitals.

Discrimination in health care is by no means gone. Females earn less than male physicians, are less often promoted, and are less often appointed to medical school professorial or leader-

ship positions. Female physicians cluster in lower-status fields of medicine—such as pediatrics—not so much because these fields require less expertise as because they reflect political values, e.g., that caring for children and women is less prestigious than caring for men. Female patients, particularly poor ones, frequently receive less aggressive treatment when they need it. With these problems continuing, it is hardly surprising that in the 1970s some feminists wanted to reject mainstream medicine altogether. Some learned to do their own cervical examinations, and many experimented with holistic, nonstandard practices, from herbal medicines to rejecting vaccination.

Two issues divided feminists in the 1970s and 1980s: pornography and sex work, especially prostitution. The disagreements show once again that there is no single feminist analysis or program. The pornography issue provoked an angry, name-calling conflict, the "sex wars," at a 1982 conference at Barnard College, which aimed to generate feminist discussion about sexuality (outside the pro- and anti-abortion framework that so dominated the public discourse). Organized in the provocative spirit of the early women's liberation movement by feminists who adopted what came to be called a "pro-sex" line, the conference included speakers who opposed the censorship of pornography (on the basis of a civil liberties principle of free speech and because they doubted that porn was any more insulting or dangerous to women than nonsexual media that depicted women in subordinate roles), criticized a stream of prudery within the women's movement, and affirmed a human right to sexual pleasure. Even more controversial, the conference included Gayle Rubin and Pat Califia, who defended S-M (sadomasochist role-playing) sex.

Providing a platform for these defenders of pornography infuriated another stream of the women's movement. Anti-pornography activists, such as Andrea Dworkin, attacked the conference as pro-

moting patriarchal values and convinced Barnard College to confiscate the conference program on the grounds that it contained some pro-sex statements as well as conference information. These feminists considered pornography to be inevitably coercive, exploitive, and denigrating toward women. "Male sexual aggression is the unifying thematic and behavioral reality of male sexuality," Dworkin wrote. "Pornography is the essential sexuality of male power: of hate, of ownership, of hierarchy; of sadism, of dominance."[37] A Dworkin ally, law professor Catharine MacKinnon, who had earlier been key in expanding federal anti-discrimination laws to include sexual harassment, wrote model bills that criminalized pornography by defining it as a violation of the civil rights of women, a form of sex discrimination, and an abuse of human rights. These bills provided that those who claimed to be harmed by pornography would be entitled to sue for sex discrimination (although, clearly, substantiating that harm would be most difficult). The "pro-sex" feminists criticized this legal strategy as well as the fact that the anti-porn activists allied with Christian conservatives in proposing and supporting these laws; such ordinances were enacted by several city governments but overturned by the courts. This controversy has subsided, but feminists' differences about pornography remain.

Sex work, from Playboy bunnies to prostitution, never produced strong antagonism, but feminists did differ—and continue to differ—about it. Each of three different policies toward prostitution—prohibition, legalization, and decriminalization—had advocates. Among prostitutes themselves, some supported legalization, which exists in some rural areas of Nevada, whereby prostitutes are licensed and inspected; supporters believed that this system provided greater safety. The majority of prostitutes, however, called for decriminalization, the repeal of all laws governing the practice. They argue that sex work is a form of labor that any

individual should be free to undertake. Some even asserted that sex work could empower women and increase their autonomy. Influenced by women's liberation, some sex workers began to organize. The earliest and best-known group was COYOTE, "Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics," founded in 1973 by the flamboyant and glamorous feminist sex worker Margo St. James in San Francisco. None of these groups managed to change local laws, however, even though freer sexual norms were simultaneously reducing moralistic outrage. Many 1970s feminists hoped to abolish prostitution entirely, since they considered it always damaging to women and degrading to all, through its commercializing of an activity that should be free of economic pressure. They argued that women and girls are often coerced into sex work, sometimes by men, and often by an economy that deprives women of opportunity for better jobs. They also pointed to the fact that sex workers were far more vulnerable to abuse than other working women.

Still, all feminists and sex workers agreed about fundamental principles and problems. All condemned policies that criminalize the sex workers as opposed to their clients or employers. All believed that sex workers need legal and social protection from violence, exploitation, and other hazards of the occupation, including disease. All condemned coercing people into sex work, of course. Defining coercion, however, exposes the complexity of the issue. Obviously "trafficking" is coercive, when women (or men) are duped, kidnapped, imprisoned, or otherwise forced into prostitution. The data show, however, that the incidence of sex trafficking has been exaggerated (while the incidence of nonsexual trafficking of low-wage workers has been underemphasized). But when poverty and the lack of other work force people into only sex work, is that not coercion? When sex work pays a living wage, or just a higher wage than other jobs, is that not coercion? When we consider what conditions make free choice impossible, we see that

sex work becomes a microcosm of the more universal problems of inequality—gender inequality and all other forms of inequality and poverty as well.

Work

The single greatest factor changing women's lives in the twentieth century was that most had to earn wages. Some chose employment because it offered a stimulating career; for most, however, jobs were necessary to support themselves and their families. In part because men's real wages—that is, their buying power—were falling, more families needed women's wages. Women's employment was a major factor strengthening feminism: there is nothing like seeing one's hard work and competence disregarded to make women notice the inequality of the sexes.

But 1970s feminism also involved rethinking and redefining what counted as work. The notion that women were naturally oriented toward housework and child raising had held sway for centuries, and in capitalist society, where work was redefined as earning money, domestic labor had lost its status as work. While most women recognized the labor involved, many contributed to maintaining the assumption that it was "naturally" women's responsibility. By retaining that responsibility, women also retained control over it—no small value. In practice, many men had long contributed to household labor, but the ideal, that the family should consist of male breadwinner and nonemployed wife/mother, remained.

Feminists retheorized domestic labor, in part by identifying its economic value. A "wages for housework" campaign never produced practical demands; who would or could pay these wages? Most men could never afford to hire a housewife, even at minimum wage. Still, the "wages for housework" idea illustrated how the economy depended on women's unpaid labor. Moreover, the

majority of women in couples continued to do the bulk of the work even if their hours of employment equaled those of the men they lived with. So feminists began insisting that men share the domestic work, with some success. Men's response affords an example of how consciousness change became behavior change: as more women expected this sharing, more men accommodated to it—and often found they enjoyed it.

Recognizing domestic work as work underlay feminist support for what was then called "welfare," Aid to Families with Dependent Children. A part of the Social Security Act of 1935, this program guaranteed, in principle, aid to the children of poor single parents. Over the years the grants became steadily lower (the usual way that conservatives sought to undercut social programs they opposed but did not wish to to condemn publicly), discriminatory (subjecting recipients to privacy-invading eligibility tests), and stigmatized (recipients being labeled lazy and criminal). In the mid-1960s, a

Welfare rights demonstration, 1977. Photograph by Diana Mara Henry. Copyright © 1977 by Diana Mara Henry/www.dianamarahenry.com.

largely African American welfare rights movement began asserting rights to fair and respectful treatment. Though its members would not have called themselves feminists—associating that label with privileged white women—they often *were* feminists, in that their analysis focused on the disrespect for women's domestic labor. Some women's liberation groups sought alliances with welfare recipients, as Mothers for Adequate Welfare did in Boston, and supported the national welfare rights movement.

Backing welfare rights was an attempt by women's liberation to support the different needs of poor women of color. However, welfare issues exposed a disagreement within the women's movement, a disagreement that reflected different concerns. NOW, with its base among employed women, at first saw wage work as the route to gains for women, so it pushed for subsidized childcare to enable women to take out-of-home employment and did not offer support for the welfare rights movement. By contrast, many poor lone mothers wanted to be able to care for young children themselves, as prosperous mothers could, and fought requirements that they should be forced into the low-wage labor market and then pay those same low wages to babysitters. They received support from the more left-wing women's liberation movement, which wanted to support poor women and to make the point that domestic labor was an honorable vocation.

That women were traditionally responsible for all housework and childcare is a large part of the reason for their lower wages: paying women less had been justified by the notion that they took jobs only for "pin money," to afford "extras," while fathers or husbands supported them. This assumption had never been true for all women, and as the marriage age rose, as separation and divorce increased, and as children grew more expensive, most women's wages became vitally necessary to their families. Paying women less increased profits for employers, lowered men's wages, and

weakened labor's collective power in bargaining with employers—yet many working men still supported this inequality, conditioned by assumptions about women's "natural" role. Besides, the labor market was sexually segregated, so women were slotted into "women's jobs," which paid less. (Even in 2013, female-dominated jobs paid an average of $408 per week and male-dominated jobs $553 per week.) A self-reinforcing logic operated here: women's jobs paid less because women did them, and women did them because the jobs paid less. The women's movement challenged all these aspects of employment discrimination, with considerable success.

An early campaign targeted the sex segregation of job announcements and advertisements. Heretofore they were listed in separate newspaper columns. For example, these ads appeared in the 1968 *Raleigh News and Observer*:

HELP WANTED MALE

Wanted: Office Supervisor. Wholesale distribution office offers rapid financial advancement to young man who learns over-all operation quickly. Start $400.

HELP WANTED FEMALE

Wanted, settled white lady to work nights in rest home. Some experience and transportation.

Wanted, General Office "Gal Friday" type job for stable, personable lady in one girl office. Starting $80.

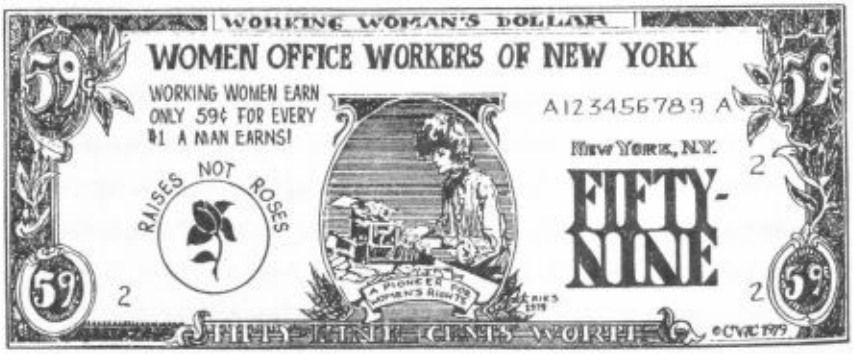
Attorney Sylvia Roberts, a founder of NOW, won the first sex-discrimination victory under the EEOC in 1969, arguing for Lorena Weeks, who was banned from a better job because it required being able to lift more than thirty pounds. Women laughed about that, since they carried kids and groceries weighing much more. So

Weeks came into court with her heavy manual typewriter—which she often had to move around in her workplace—and indeed, it weighed more than thirty pounds. In 1973, after NOW women had been picketing city newspapers for several years, the Supreme Court, still all male, finally ruled 5–4 that segregated employment ads constituted unlawful discrimination. (Chief Justice Warren Burger's dissent charged that the decision opened a "treacherous path" toward government regulation.)[13]

Desegregating want ads would have achieved little, however, without women's increasing ambitions and assertiveness in pursuing the jobs. As the value of most men's earnings fell, and fewer husbands could single-handedly support a whole family, more women recognized that they would be permanently employed. With aspirations raised by the women's movement, they made gains because they *used* the anti-discrimination laws to bring grievances that forced the EEOC to act. In 1970, women earned on average 59 percent of men's wages; in 2011, 77 percent. (This differential exists today *despite* women having more education than men.) The improved ratio narrowed the gap considerably but did not always improve women's standard of living. Women's earnings in comparison to men's rose in large part because men's real wages fell (now $22 per week *lower* on average than in 1980)—thus many women gained relatively but became poorer in absolute terms.

Employed women's grievances went far beyond wages. Sexual harassment had hounded employed women for centuries. Some of their first strikes, two hundred years ago, protested lewd behavior by foremen. Women in the armed forces had been slotted into the worst jobs with the least benefits and subjected to widespread rape and harassment. In the 1970s, waitresses and saleswomen typically had to buy uniforms or clothing that conformed to standards of appearance imposed by employers and sometimes highly sexualized. Lack-

59 Cents, A Woman's Dollar



Leaflet by Women Office Workers of New York, 1979.

ing clear job descriptions, they were often called upon to perform arbitrary and insulting tasks, to put in exceptionally long hours, or to give up breaks and holidays at the whim of employers. They were called "girls," whatever their age, and addressed by first names, while a male superior was always "Mr." Women found this disrespect galling. For clericals, nothing symbolized the disrespect they felt more than being asked to make coffee—and their resentment emanated directly from feminist consciousness raising. That their bosses felt entitled to make this demand expressed their expectation that women "naturally" performed domestic chores. Expectations spilled from their homes into their offices; clerical work appeared not only as a job category but also as an emanation of femininity. It was not accidental that Aretha Franklin's 1967 hit "R.E.S.P.E.C.T." became the virtual anthem of the women's movement.

Women's liberation generated a wave of organizing in female-dominated jobs, and it was here that Karen Nussbaum found her life's work. College-educated women were still limited to jobs as secretaries, for which they were usually overqualified, and brought organizing campaigns into job categories that male-dominated labor unions had neglected. The most famous of them, 9to5,

began in 1972 when Karen Nussbaum and Ellen Cassedy, both Harvard University clericals, started the office workers group 9to5, which created a sister organization, the union SEIU 925. Women Employed (WE), an offshoot of the CWLU, began in 1973. One of its early studies of clerical work—which WE, cleverly, managed to get funded by the Playboy Foundation—began with this telling anecdote from a receptionist: "A client came onto the floor . . . looked directly at me and asked, 'Isn't anyone here?' "[39]

All these organizing projects flowed from consciousness raising, as well as feminism's osmosis into the consciousness of many who had never experienced consciousness-raising groups: the strategies reflected, first, interrelated and quite possibly inseparable demands for tangible gains and respectful treatment, and second, personal relationships as the basis of organizing. 9to5's first ten members spent a year just talking, venting resentments, and musing about how to bring in more workers. They began a newsletter that focused on disrespect as well as the male/female wage gap. They began to offer services such as workshops providing free legal advice and courses on leadership skills. In 1973 the group sent Ellen Cassedy to Chicago to attend the Midwest Academy, run by Heather Booth of the CWLU. What she learned confirmed a personalized recruitment method: before anyone could become a 9to5 member, she had a private lunch with an older member. This provided an orientation and created a personal relationship. New members were then immediately given some responsibility, a task to accomplish; this method not only enabled the group to identify potential activists but also made the new person feel needed—a vital part of becoming part of a community.

Even the services 9to5 provided to individuals who never became active members served to educate and raise consciousness. Many workers complained about workplace problems but did not identify them as sex discrimination—for example, a service represen-

tative at New England Telephone who said she was "treated like a child" or one at an engineering firm who thought it natural that the draftsmen were all men. By taking such cases to the EEOC, the complainants were learning about sex discrimination. By asking questions that stimulated thinking, 9to5's surveys functioned as a form of consciousness raising.

When office-worker organizers tried to reach clericals in the banking and insurance industries, however, those mega-corporations struck back with massive anti-union publicity, threats, and firings and successfully held off unionization. The early successes of clerical organizing, ironically, rested on discrimination against women, which put middle-class and working-class women into the same clerical jobs and thus created a cross-class alliance. When feminist pressure opened managerial and professional jobs to educated women, that class alliance was broken, and the union movement weakened accordingly. As throughout the labor movement, unionizing achieved only limited gains with respect to overall social justice issues. 9to5 organizers found that women responded less positively when they brought in other issues, such as the Vietnam War, so kept their focus specific to clerical work. Many workers were afraid of the labels "feminist" and "union," and 9to5 did not use them.

Nevertheless, 9to5 and similar women's organizing influenced thousands, perhaps even millions, of women workers toward increased self-respect; and when these efforts combined with the massive cultural transformations wrought by the rest of the women's movement, they brought higher wages and made supervisors understand that office workers were not their wives. By parodying "National Secretaries Day" with slogans like "Raises, Not Roses," the movement hammered in the understanding that clericals were workers who would not be bought off with one day a year of thanks. But the movement soon changed the slogan to "Raises *and* Roses"!

For employed mothers, childcare was an absolute necessity.

(Fathers—there were few single fathers then—were not typically held responsible for their children.) Working-class women, whose wages were usually not high enough to pay for daycare centers, relied on family members or "home daycare," done by other working-class women who cared for a few children other than their own in their homes. In the World War II period, the need for women to work in defense plants had led to government-subsidized childcare; after the war these programs were usually cut, despite women's agitation to keep them. Now women's liberation groups took up the fight—especially at universities and other large employers. Elsewhere daycare cooperatives arose, sometimes staffed entirely by parents, sometimes with professional staff paid through a sliding scale in which those who could afford higher fees subsidized those who couldn't. Responding to women's pressure, federal programs begun in the early 1970s offered limited numbers of very poor families some childcare help. On the whole, however, the women's movement did not make a major dent in the childcare problem, and low-wage women workers cannot usually afford high-quality daycare centers providing children with safe and stimulating play environments.

Meanwhile, women pushed their way into professions that discriminated or even excluded them: law, medicine, and the university professoriate most visibly, and even the ministry. In 1970, Barbara Andrews, a woman disabled from cerebral palsy who used a wheelchair, became the first pastor ordained in an American Lutheran church. In 1972, Sally Priesand became the first female rabbi, but only after being repeatedly rejected by a rabbinical school; she finally earned her degree as the lone woman among thirty-five men, many of whom claimed she was only there to find a husband. When the Episcopal Church refused to accept female ministers, a group of women deacons and bishops conducted an "irregular" ordination in 1974, and just two years later the official church capitulated. Evangelicals started a feminist journal. Seminaries filled with women.

Major denominations began rewriting liturgies, changing "mankind" to "humankind" or "people of faith" and even removing "He" for God and replacing it with "Our Lord" or the like.

Culture

Cultural change happens particularly slowly, with few precise milestones, so we may not notice it or what created it. In fact, feminism transformed popular culture, though often it took decades for everyone to see the results.

The influence of women's liberation was most visible in clothing. Before the 1970s, working women had to wear stockings, garter belts or girdles, high heels, and dresses. By 1980, a generation of feminists had legitimated comfortable low-heeled shoes, rejected girdles, and made pants acceptable for all occasions. Many women still love heels and skirts, but they have a choice. The 1970s radicals tended also to reject makeup and the carefully coiffed hair of the 1950s, but this by no means meant a rejection of beauty; it merely changed standards of what *was* beautiful. Civil rights had similarly made "natural" black hair beautiful and fashionable, and white women with curly hair adopted a version for themselves.

Feminist influence likewise affected attitudes toward female bodies, for which delicacy had once been the norm. Much of the credit for this transformation should go to Patsy Mink, congresswoman from Hawaii, who brought us Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, prohibiting sex discrimination in schools. Title IX drew tens of thousands of women into active sports, and they then redefined strong, muscled bodies as beautiful. Of course, merchants soon capitalized on these new norms, and, as always in a consumerist society, styles that were once rebellious and countercultural soon became new standards, sometimes as conformist or even coercive as the old.

The Fat Chance Performance Group, celebrating "real" women's bodies. Photograph by Cathy Cade, courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The feminist health movement contributed mightily to new practices of eating and cooking, by promoting whole grains, fresh produce, and organic food. Feminists were often active in starting food co-ops, and their presence stimulated for-profit stores to compete by offering healthier foods. But these new standards were deeply stratified by social class and race. Vegetarianism, whole-grain food, and organic produce were simultaneously products of cultural feminism and of gentrification, and these changing tastes became markers of privilege among those with the time to do fine cooking and to keep their children's diets pure. Working-class women, by contrast, often unable to afford healthier food, were more often involved in campaigns to nourish children through improving school lunches and providing school breakfasts.

Many women's liberation groups created cultural projects. The CWLU created a graphics collective that made beautiful silk-screened posters, on global as well as American issues. Poetry

poured out of the movement. Women's rock bands formed and played at "women's lib" dances, encouraging women previously confined to singing to play instruments. Naomi Weisstein started a band in Chicago because she was enraged by the Rolling Stones' glee that a girlfriend was "under my thumb." With her sister musicians she began writing lyrics that allowed feminists to rock out, such as these:

Poppa don't lay that shit on me,
I can't accommodate.
You bring me down,
It makes you cool.
You think I like it?
You're a goddamn fool.

These bands were the pioneers. There were hugely popular women's singing groups previously, like the Supremes and the

Women's Liberation Rock Band, 1972–73. Photograph by Virginia Blaisdell.

Andrews Sisters, but almost never female instrumentalists. Feminism made women's rock commercial, from the 1970s all-"girl" rock band the Runaways to Madonna in the 1980s and the riot grrrls in the 1990s. Some feminist cultural projects became institutionalized, such as the national women's music festivals and the "womyn's music" they promoted.

Television incorporated some feminist themes quickly. At times feminism was negatively caricatured: *Maude*, a sitcom that ran from 1972 to 1978, featured an overbearing, hectoring social worker/therapist who preached women's equality. But *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* offered a more complex and more daring group of people. CBS told the show's creators that "American audiences won't tolerate divorce in a series lead any more than they will tolerate Jews, people with mustaches, and people who live in New York," but the show broke all these rules. Moore was single, committed to her job, and not seeking marriage; what's more, she had strong female and workplace friendships but was not afraid to be in charge. It took until the 1980s to get the first big-time female-buddies cop show, *Cagney and Lacey*, which ran through 125 episodes with thirty-six Emmy nominations and fourteen wins; Helen Mirren's breakthrough role as the star of *Prime Suspect* could not have happened without this predecessor. One African American woman, Teresa Graves, played a cop in *Get Christie Love!*, but the series did not last, and the few sitcoms that showed blacks with respect, like the Cosby show, remained headed by men.

Hollywood roles for women had long presented only two main options for whites—beautiful "good girl" or evil seductress. For women of color there was only one—faithful servant. Katharine Hepburn had been an attorney, but she was unique. By the mid-1970s this changed. The stars still had to be young, white, and beautiful, but their strength, independence, and complexity increased. Overtly feminist Hollywood films did not appear until the 1980s;

the most striking of them was 1988's *The Accused*. In it Jodie Foster, who got her start playing a teenage prostitute in 1976's *Taxi Driver*, showed us a real working-class rape victim. Based on an actual gang rape in a working-class bar that had prompted major feminist protest, the film presented a feminist view of rape without polite euphemisms. It proclaimed that neither flirtation nor sexy dress justifies rape, that the victimized woman need feel no shame, and that the right response is to press charges and refuse to be intimidated by public stigma—making the woman a hero rather than a victim.

It was far more difficult for the women's movement to break into the male-dominated fine arts. The witty feminist art group Guerrilla Girls created parodic posters and donned gorilla masks to ask, Why are there so few female artists in the museums? Even in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the gains have been small. While women conductors and composers are becoming more common, men continue to dominate all the major orchestras. Women had long been iconic stars in dance, and leaders in modern dance, but in ballet women choreographers are still hard to find, with the exception of that crossover from jazz dance Twyla Tharp. Judy Chicago created a sensation with her 1974–79 *Dinner Party* ceramic installation that featured many vagina-like images, smoothing the way for Eve Ensler's *Vagina Monologues* in 1996. Perhaps the most influential group of women visual artists were Chicana muralists working in the Southwest: Judy Baca, Barbara Carrasco, Sonya Fe, Carmen Lomas Garza, Ester Hernández, Judithe Hernández, Yolanda López, Patricia Rodríguez, and others produced a virtual explosion of grassroots feminist imagery. The greatest gains have been literary. Female novelists, short-story writers, poets, and essayists of all racial/ethnic groups now abound, although the most influential book review outlets still disproportionately ignore them, and "chick lit" is still a category inviting dis-

dain. Slowly female playwrights are getting work produced even on Broadway.

Perhaps the biggest gender change in high culture was the transformative impact feminism had on the universities. Women now earn more BAs and PhDs than men do, and this resulted in part from a change in who is teaching them. The young feminists of the 1970s and before rarely met a female professor, and that mattered: even the kindliest male professors rarely mentored their female students equally with their male students. All three of us college professors writing this book, like all professional women and college students, benefited directly from feminism and the affirmative action programs pushed by the movement. I never had a female college or university instructor, and was never taken seriously as a student. In graduate school I was one of two women studying history, and we two, unlike the men, were never invited to the dinners with visiting scholars and never recommended for jobs. As I write, in 2013, I work for a department that is half female, and women receiving PhDs in history outnumber the men. Similar gains now show in most humanities fields, while women remain minorities, even small minorities, in the sciences.

This change happened on two levels. First, women students, armed with the feminist critique of androcentric—often called patriarchal—curricula, demanded change, and already in 1970 the first women's studies program opened. Before long there were hundreds, and today it is rare for a college or university not to have a women's studies program. Second, women began earning higher degrees and, thanks to anti-discrimination complaints and women's caucuses within professional organizations, got hired as faculty. Once in universities, they soon made it impossible for traditionalists to maintain that they were inferior scholars, and they also began to mentor women students, which in turn created more professional women.

Academic women transformed not only who taught but also what was taught. In anthropology and sociology, some gendered research had been traditional, but economics, history, and literature ignored gender. For a scholar to write about women was to write about something unimportant, while men took on the "big questions." In literature, women's writing, with a few exceptions, was a marginal genre. The generation entering the universities in the 1970s changed that. Scholarship about women and gender flourished to the extent that by the 1980s, students often learned at school what the previous cohort of feminists had reinvented. The bottom-up demand for women's studies courses created, in a feedback loop, more jobs for women in the colleges and universities. Women's studies in turn nurtured gay, now LGBT, studies programs and scholarship. Soon scholars and courses began to examine masculinity as a gendered construction as well.

Much of "women's studies" happened outside academic institutions. Throughout the country 1970s women's liberation activists created "women's schools," and many still continue. They reflected women's desire to learn material that had previously been offered only to men—classes in auto mechanics and self-defense were ubiquitous—but also material that would develop their movement: classes in women's history, feminist theory, and economics. They both reflected and strengthened women's confidence that they could take on "male" work, from biology to truck driving. Many of the classes at women's liberation schools differed only slightly from consciousness raising, because they provided opportunities for women to meet in small groups, while other classes involved extensive reading and study.

One of the most enduring material achievements of 1970s feminism is *Ms.* magazine, founded and symbolized by the formidable Gloria Steinem. At age twenty-nine, in 1963, she was already a journalist who not only wrote the news but also featured in the news,

because of her article about going undercover as a Playboy Bunny. Her beauty helped smooth the path for her ambitions, but her unfaltering commitment has by now guided them for over forty years. She too was a product of women's liberation, having been deeply influenced by the 1969 speakout on abortion mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. She continued that speakout in print, in the 1972 first issue of *Ms.*, by publishing the names of women who had had illegal abortions. (One writer listed that as one of the "100 Media Moments that Changed America.")[40] The editors originally intended to publish a newsletter until Steinem raised some major funds and the first three hundred thousand copies of a real magazine sold out in eight days. Its success was one measure of feminist enthusiasm, at a time when even women's magazines were edited by men and when most female journalists were confined to "human interest" rather than news assignments. Over its history *Ms.* has been attacked for being too radical and not radical enough, and weathered intense debates about what advertising to accept, if any; but it has managed to maintain its coverage of issues important to women of all classes, ethnicities, races and ages. In 2001 the Feminist Majority Foundation took ownership of the magazine, whose banner reads, "More than a Magazine—A Movement!"

THERE IS NO definitive end point for the women's liberation movement, especially since many organizations and projects begun in the 1970s are ongoing. The National Organization for Women continues strong to this day. Indeed, some feminist activities accelerated just as others slowed. But several phenomena marked an important transition. By the mid-1980s, a critical mass of college graduates had studied with feminist professors, often in women's studies courses. By the late 1980s, even larger groups of young

people, both male and female, had been raised by feminist parents. Moreover, some of the mass media presented feminist characters and communities—even if that f-word was not mentioned—which presented alternatives to the majority representations that remained organized around male authority figures and heroes. In other words, feminism was moving to new generations in three ways: formal education, parental upbringing, and mass culture. So it should come as no surprise that a revival of feminist energy appeared early in the 1990s.

That renewed energy was also responding to an angry backlash. Led by conservatives, parts of the Republican Party, and Christian fundamentalists, the anti-feminist opposition was funded by massive corporate donations. The backlash also pulled in millions who imagined that feminism would somehow destroy families. It attacked affirmative action, gay and lesbian rights, and women in politics; it challenged and sometimes weakened laws against sex discrimination; it promoted commercial products, from movies to advertisements, that featured women in traditional roles and suggested that women who stepped out of them would suffer. It moved most Republicans and Protestant evangelicals from accepting abortion rights to opposing them, and its intensive propaganda made many women who needed abortions suffer from guilt. Ultimately the backlash even attempted to attack contraception, which almost all Americans considered a basic necessity of life as long ago as the 1930s. The next chapter discusses women's activism since the 1980s in the context of that opposition.

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