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THE MAKING OF THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT, 1953-1970

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

The Making of the Women's Liberation Movement, 1953-1970

by

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This study is a new interpretation of the origins of the women's liberation branch of American feminism. I argue that the belief that a society free of sexism was possible, and that they themselves could create it, impelled the founders of women's liberation to action. Based on oral histories, unpublished correspondence, and organizational documents, my analysis recasts the making of the movement and shows the national influence of women in the South.

The study demonstrates that women's liberation founders were aware of the impositions of male privilege before they experienced them in the 1960s movements. They had espoused feminism growing up in the 1950s, some as "red diaper babies" or grandchildren of suffragists, others as transformative readers of Simone de Beauvoir. They knew that sexism was a political problem, although they did not know how to fight it. In the civil rights movement and the New Left, they experienced a margin of freedom for women greater than in the larger society. Their own effective organizing, and the leadership of black women, taught the founders to

challenge male domination collectively. With the preparation they brought, this experience gave them the knowledge and the courage to start a movement for women's liberation.

Historians agree that women in the civil rights movement and the New Left experienced greater gender equality than in the mainstream society. They attribute the birth of women's liberation to the clash between women's rising expectations and subordination by male coworkers. But the impression that subordination was responsible predominates.

We know little of the rising side or of the new egalitarianism women experienced in that margin of freedom. This study provides the particulars, highlighting the leadership lessons women's liberation founders learned in civil rights and the New Left, and the traditions of struggle passed on in activist families. Here then is a new view of the 1950s, a fresh picture of the distinctively democratic aspects of the movements of the 1960s, and a deeper understanding of the origins of the women's liberation movement.

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Naomi Weisstein, Pam Allen, Patricia Stephens Due, and Zoharah Simmons. Women's liberation founder Jo Freeman opened her extensive personal collection of early documents and letters to me and even helped to make copies while offering context and meaning as I scribbled notes.

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INTRODUCTION

Americans today live with the results of the second wave of feminism, such as legal abortion and public awareness of sexism and gender equality. But the origins and founders of the women's liberation branch of the vast social movement that brought about these changes are, by comparison, little known and even less well understood.¹ Despite an outpouring of new literature, the women's liberation movement appears leaderless and its birth is still understood, as a *New York Times* reviewer of a new monograph put it, as a reaction to a shocking "level of antipathy toward women" in the movements of the 1960s.²

¹ Feminism resurfaced in the early 1960s in two distinct forms. One branch, whose most representative organization, the National Organization for Women (NOW), called itself an National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for women and consisted of mostly middle-aged women. The women's liberation branch was made up of young, radical women and grew out of the civil rights and Black Power movements and the New Left.

² Janny Scott, "The Feminist Mystique," review of *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, by Ruth Rosen, *New York Times*, 2 April 2000, sec. 7, 3. Scott was not alone in this interpretation of Rosen's work. For a similar assessment, see also Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon's review, "Second-Wave Soundings," *The Nation* 3 July 2000, 28-32, and Susan Reed in the *American Prospect*, 17 July 2000, 41. The Women's Liberation Movement proudly

What does it take to make a social movement?

Consciousness that collective action was needed to overcome female oppression was a necessary, if insufficient ingredient. Knowing that what then appeared to be women's personal problems had a social basis was also critical. In the 1950s and 1960s these essential insights came together for a handful of young women who pressed the ideas into service for themselves, and for their sex. Yet the names of these pioneers are largely unknown today outside a small circle of historians of the movement and second-wave veterans.³

This study begins in 1953, the year that *The Second Sex* arrived in the United States.⁴ Simone de Beauvoir's powerful book provided an early source of feminist consciousness for a significant number of women's liberation founders. The study closes in 1970 the year the movement was established in America and its spread around the world was well

proclaimed itself "leaderless." For a discussion of leaderlessness in the movement, see Kathie Sarachild, "The Power of History," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings (New York: Random House, 1978), 42, in the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives for Action (hereinafter, "Redstockings Archives") <http://www.redstockings.org>.

³ The well-known names are those of Betty Friedan, founder of the National Organization for Women and author of *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963), and Gloria Steinem, editor of *Ms. Magazine* (1972).

underway.⁵ This is an investigation of how the founders of the women's liberation movement gained the courage and consciousness to make a movement. It chronicles the gaining of that courage and consciousness. It is not about the particulars of male domination the founders experienced or their reaction to that domination. The story of sexism, rampant in the period, while important, has been told many times, and as activist-sociologist Jo Freeman said, "social strain does not create social movements," only the potential for them.⁶

Thus this investigation has sought the impetus for the movement in the seeds of the new society that early women's liberation organizers wished to create, seeds that, as Karl Marx's concept has it, blossomed right there amidst the sexism in which the founders lived. I have focused on the

⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1953).

⁵ The research in Chapter 6 that establishes the movement by 1970 contradicts a considerable body of work that, *a priori*, calls women's liberation a "70s movement." See for example Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War against American Women* (New York: Crown, 1991), 46; Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics: From Consciousness to Mass Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 1; Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 1; and Anita Shreve, *Women Together, Women Alone: The Legacy of the Consciousness-Raising Movement* (New York: Viking, 1989).

sources instrumental to women's liberation in founders' families, in the civil rights and Black Power movements and the New Left.

This study grounds and examines the coming together of two of the several elements upon which the rebirth of the movement depended: understanding of collective oppression, and readiness for collective action. Sara Evans caught the centrality of these two ingredients in her comparison of black civil rights organizing in the South and Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) organizing the inner city poor in the North. In the South, she said, because of the visibility of segregation and overt discrimination, "one could presume a consciousness of collective oppression and had only to generate the will to act." In the North, on the other hand, neither the consciousness of group oppression nor the understanding of the need for collective action were present, and organizing began "a step back."⁷ With the American woman of all classes beset, as black playwright Lorraine Hansberry observed in 1957, by the "reign of the most devastating anti-equality myth of all," the myth that

⁶ Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (New York: David McKay Company, 1975), 44. Freeman is also a founder of the Women's Liberation Movement.

⁷ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 133.

she was already free, the process of organizing against women's subordination began more than a few steps back.⁸

But a few young women got a head start. Incipient women's liberation founders learned from socially conscious families and from reading *The Second Sex* as teenagers that because women were suppressed as a group, their own lives too would be restricted. Yet they did not consider collective solutions to the "woman question" until they experienced the effectiveness of collective action in the civil rights movement and took part in the collective protest in the New Left to stop the war in Vietnam.⁹ Some founders learned in these movements that social problems were best confronted collectively, but they did not yet understand that the limitations they faced as women were anything other than personal problems rooted in their own individual situation. In some cases, both insights drew on traditions of family activism, mostly activism on the

⁸ Lorraine Hansberry, "Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex: An American Commentary*" in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: The New Press, 1995), 129.

⁹ The "woman question" is used throughout this study to refer generally to the left tradition of discussion of women's secondary place in society. For a history of the uses of this term see Mary Jo Buhle, Paul Buhle, and Dan Georgakas, *Encyclopedia of the American Left* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 878-79.

left.¹⁰ But Judith Brown and Pam Allen grew up learning about the suffragists in their families. Whatever the order in which these two understandings occurred, once combined, their powerful mix propelled the founders into organizing for women's liberation.

Continuity was a force in the lives of these women. Their feminism was not reactive. It had been with many of them as long as they could remember.¹¹ As a result, the founders actively sought to use and transform the resources of the civil rights movement and the New Left for women's

¹⁰ In *Personal Politics*, Sara Evans was the first to point out that a number of women's liberation founders had been raised in families on the left. Kate Weigand explores legacies of the Communist Party for women's liberation. Kate Weigand, *Red Feminism: American Communism and the Making of Women's Liberation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000). Ruth Rosen has called the link between women's liberation and the old left "an important story that still needs to be recovered." See Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking Penguin), 34.

¹¹ By feminism I mean an understanding that there is an all encompassing imbalance of power between the sexes that favors men at the expense of women, and conscious advocacy for equitable rearrangement of that power. Alternatively, Cheri Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler define feminism as a movement whose goals and positions have changed over its long history. In their feminist dictionary, they include definitions of Black Feminism, Lesbian Feminism, and definitions from leading feminists in other nations. Cheri Kramarae and Paula A. Treichler, *A Feminist Dictionary* (Boston: Pandora Press, 1985), 158.

advantage.¹² And yet the story of their relationship to these movements has often cast them as victims.

Like their sisters in the larger society, women in the civil rights movement and the New Left were treated, at best, as second-class citizens. While those who began organizing the women's liberation movement were no exception, most of them were long-time leaders of local and even national movement projects. As opposed to the most oppressed women, like the native peoples in third world nations who emerged as leaders of anti-colonial revolutions, they were among the least oppressed.¹³ For a woman to take

¹² Morris has shown that indigenous civil rights organizers redirected the resources of the black community for political objectives. His model, the "indigenous perspective," does not fully fit the situation of founding women's liberation organizers in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left because their base, ultimately, was the masses of their female constituents. But for most, at first, these movements were their base. Comparing the rise of the two movements from this point of view helps us to better grasp that rather than being victims, these founders seized what opportunities they could for women's liberation and made a new movement.

¹³ Many of the organizers of successful anti-colonial revolutions had been educated beyond those they were organizing. C. L. R. James observed, for example, that "the leaders of a revolution are usually those who have been able to profit by the cultural advantages of the system they are attacking." The slave Toussaint L'Ouverture, who in Haiti, led the world's only successful slave revolt, was literate and was inspired to action after reading the revolutionary work of the Abbe Raynal. L'Ouverture had been taught to read some French and Latin by his god father. C. L. R.

leadership in male dominated movements took courage and commitment in excess to that of many of the males in more advanced positions, not to mention out thinking, and out working male leaders. Nonetheless, in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, unlike most of the rest of society, this was possible for women, if difficult. But the margin of possibility was just wide enough to allow a critical mass of women's liberation organizers to develop.

The notion that the movements of the 1960s were just a bit less sexist than the larger society has been circulating in the literature on the women's liberation movement since the earliest monographs.¹⁴ The contribution of the civil rights movement to women's liberation is routinely acknowledged, if insufficiently explored, and awareness of the usable legacy from the New Left has been growing.¹⁵ But the margin of opportunity for women in these movements has

James, *The Black Jacobins* (New York: Random House, 1963), 19-20.

¹⁴ In 1975, Jo Freeman wrote about "cooptable networks" in the New Left and black women's leadership in the Civil Rights Movement in *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 61. Sara Evans described the New Left as "marginally freer" than the society as a whole in *Personal Politics*, 116.

¹⁵ Recent work making this point about the New Left includes Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon, eds., *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

escaped scholarly attention commensurate with the immensity of its significance.

So has the ability of women's liberation pioneers to take action in their own interests. They took on non-traditional work for women, leading demonstrations and projects, confronting the authorities and serving jail time, making speeches, and writing for movement newspapers.¹⁶ Finally, in the collective interest of their sex, they redirected publishing opportunities, funds, meeting space, and most precious of all, their newfound skills, knowledge, and confidence. By 1970, they had men all across the various protest movements on the defensive. Although the men had hardly reformed themselves of male chauvinism they took the step of recognizing and opposing it. From the Black Panther Party to various factions of the New Left came statements against male supremacy in the movement and in the larger society.¹⁷

¹⁶ Freeman also noted the leadership of many early women's liberation organizers in the New Left in *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 61-62.

¹⁷ See for example Black Panther cofounder Bobby Seale on the Panther's position on male chauvinism, "The Party says no to this... they [women] just want to be treated as human beings on an equal basis, just as blacks want the liberation of their people," in *The Black Panthers Speak*, ed. Phillip S. Foner (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1970), 86-87. The Young Lords Party, a radical Puerto Rican group, had as the fifth point on its thirteen-point program "We want

The longstanding and still prevailing explanation of the origins of the women's liberation movement is that it was a result of the conflict between women's rising expectations and frustration with male domination in the civil rights movement and the New Left. This observation does describe the experience of a number of women in those movements. Yet this explanation has helped to obscure the active nature of the making of the women's liberation movement. Why? First of all, our attention is typically focused on the women's frustrated reaction to sexism rather than on the reasons for their rising expectations. And with today's heightened recognition and lower tolerance of male chauvinism, what men did to frustrate women appears very striking and leaves a strong impression. Yet it should be exactly the opposite. Women's rising expectations were the

equality for women. Down with machismo and male chauvinism." *Palante Young Lords Party* (New York: The Young Lords Party, 1971), 150. At the national SDS conference in fall 1968, a resolution was passed stating that the "'oppression of women through male supremacy' was both qualitatively and quantitatively greater than the oppression of working people in general." Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Random House, 1974), 508. From Brotha Dalou and the Attica Brothers, inmates of Attica Prison who had been indicted after the uprising there, came the statement "what good is a revolution if the men will not change their attitudes of the women in the struggle...I or any other man, can easily do house-work, cooking, childrearing...This article is written as an attempt to show that Attica has conscientious Brothas who understand our Sista's struggle." See Attica Brothers, *Fighting Back: Attica Memorial Book 1974* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Attica Brothers Legal Defense, 1974), 64.

instrumental aspect of the contradiction. They were the ignition spark and catalyst for the birth of the new movement not male domination and oppression. Why? Because women have been angry about male domination for centuries. In other words that was sort of a given. What was new in the civil rights movement and the New Left was the experience of new ideas, bold deeds, the courage of ones' convictions and victory against great odds. This taste of freedom brought an insatiable desire for more and, simultaneously, the means to contend for it.

When the particulars of the new experiences see the printed page, however, they appear unremarkable, leaving almost no impression. A woman in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) wrote an important paper, a woman in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) gave a speech or called a meeting. Because we have become accustomed to seeing women do these things, we are tempted to ask: "So what?" And so the freedom women seized in these movements, the margin of freedom that held the seeds of women's liberation, has gone largely unnoticed and appears mundane when acknowledged. So have the women themselves.

Yet in the mid-1960s, such actions--women giving public political speeches or leading demonstrations that took on the authorities--these were rarely seen in the United States except in militant social movements. The infrequency of such

activities and the men's sexist reaction to them catches our attention rather than the preciousness and social impact of their occurrence. Few people today reading Fannie Lou Hamer's electrifying remarks at the Democratic Convention in 1965 realize that her behavior was utterly outside the gender conventions of the day. But today's readers are understandably and rightly vexed to learn, for example, that a male leader found women's subordinate position in the movement humorous.

This study, then, enters the discussion of the origins of the women's liberation movement aiming to advance and spark deeper investigation of the instrumental but less noticeable side of the contradiction from which this movement grew. As the new interpretation struggles into historiographic life, its trajectory is disputed. My own learning process may help clarify some of the disputes. When I began this study Sara Evans' *Personal Politics* (1979) and Alice Echols *Daring to be Bad* (1989) were the preeminent monographs on women's liberation and I had not read them for years. I hoped that my research would help correct the view of women's liberation as a reaction to male chauvinism in the civil rights movement and the New Left, a view that I believed without reservation had been established by Evans and Echols. Rereading *Personal Politics*, I was surprised to

find I had been mistaken.¹⁸ Evans repeatedly made observations such as "within these movements [the Civil Rights Movement and New Left] they [women's liberation founders] had learned to respect themselves and to know their own strength" and "it [the Civil Rights Movement] provided new role models in the courage and capability of southern black women and female community leaders."¹⁹ I had made the same mistake with Alice Echols--who--in a clear acknowledgement to Evans--held that "the movements also gave white women the opportunity to develop skill and to break out of confining traditional roles...women began to acquire political skills...they felt themselves to be involved in socially meaningful work."²⁰ I turned to an earlier work, Jo Freeman's *The Politics of Women's Liberation* (1975) with the same result. Evans, Echols, and Freeman all explained the origins of the new movement using the model of a "threatened loss of new possibility" as Evans had put it.²¹ Indeed,

¹⁸ This is tricky. Because many their readers understood them as saying the women's liberation movement was a reaction to male chauvinism, perhaps they can be said to have helped to establish that view however unintentionally.

¹⁹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 213, 220.

²⁰ Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 26.

²¹ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 221.

Echols quoted Evans with approval, and Evans acknowledged Freeman. How, then, had the impression of male domination in the 1960s movements come to so overshadow all the useful things women found there? How had I myself misinterpreted the literature?

There are two sources of this impression--the most vivid are the first-hand accounts of male chauvinism in the civil rights movement and New Left given by women's liberation founders.²² Even as the founders' daringly aggressive and detailed criticism helped to reform those movements, it hung out the "dirty laundry" of the civil rights movement and the New Left as no other institutions was hung out. This public airing of sexism in the 1960s movements was followed in the 1980s by a body of secondary literature that reduced the experience of women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement and the New Left to shock, outrage, and derision so intense that the creation of the women's liberation movement appears to have been a

²² This is the case with virtually all the early literature. See for example the first anthologies of that literature such as Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) or facsimiles of the mimeographed papers as they were first published by the movement itself from 1967-1970 in Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives for Action, <http://www.redstockings.org>.

withdrawal into a sequestered female community for self preservation and healing.²³

While trying to get to the root of the problem of the emphasis on sexism preempting a deeper understanding of the relationship between women's liberation, the civil rights movement and the New Left, I began to notice other scholars making the same mistake I had. Claire G. Moses, the editor of the journal *Feminist Studies* wrote to me saying that the interpretation Sara Evans had established--the notion that the women's liberation movement resulted from women's spontaneous opposition to sexism in the civil rights movement and the New Left--had been overturned by the new literature, in particular Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open*.²⁴ I noticed that historian and women's liberation veteran Barbara Winslow also saw Evans and Echols as the sources of this view. As Winslow put it, "Much has been written--for example by Sara Evans and Alice Echols--about how male chauvinism in the Civil Rights, anti-war, draft

²³ See for example Allison Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983) and Shreve, *Women Together, Women Alone*.

²⁴ While singling out Rosen, Moses also mentioned Du Plessis and Snitow's *The Feminist Memoir Project* and Baxandall and Gordon's *Dear Sisters*. See Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, eds., *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998).

resistance, and student movements gave birth to the women's liberation movement."²⁵

Meanwhile, close reading of the newer literature revealed little, if any, departure from the model Evans actually did help to establish: the birth of women's liberation from the contradiction between the founders' experience of male chauvinism in the movements of the 1960s and the new ideas and skills they developed there. In their 1998 anthology Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow refer to the birth of women's liberation out of "contradictions between the radical ethos in such groups as SDS and SNCC and their proud, unthinking male chauvinism." They also discuss legacies of the civil rights movement and the New Left to women's liberation founders such as ideas that "militant resistance to unjust power would bring justice" and a daring to "confront the deep structures of society."²⁶ Two years later veteran activist historians Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon wrote of the political roots of women's liberation in the movements of the 1950s and 1960s. There, they said, women were "valued participants who gained skills and self-confidence. At the same time, they have been

²⁵ Barbara Winslow, "Primary and Secondary Contradictions in Seattle: 1967-1969," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, eds. Du Plessis and Snitow, 235.

thwarted, treated as subordinates...It is precisely this combination of raised aspirations and frustration that gives rise to rebellion."²⁷ Like DuPlessis and Snitow, Baxandall and Gordon gave examples of "identifiable legacies" of the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left for women's liberation including anti-authoritarianism and irreverence. They also noted "Women in civil rights and the New Left were on the whole less victimized, more respected, and less romanticized than they were in the mainstream culture."²⁸

This was similar to Evans formulation in *Personal Politics*: "In comparison to the division of roles in most of American society, the civil rights movement was strikingly egalitarian." Evans had also identified the indebtedness of women's liberation founders to the civil rights movement for: "language to name and describe oppression; a deep belief in freedom, equality, and community...; a willingness to question and challenge any social institution that failed to meet human needs; and the ability to organize." Evans called the New Left "marginally freer for women."²⁹ Given her reputation as the purveyor of the notion that women's

²⁶ DuPlessis and Snitow, eds., "A Feminist Memoir Project," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, 6.

²⁷ Baxandall and Gordon, eds., *Dear Sisters*, 7.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

liberation was a reaction to male chauvinism, it is ironic that of all the explanations of the birth of women's liberation, Evans gave more evidence and clearer analysis of the ways in which the civil rights movement and the New Left provided building blocks for women's liberation.

Like Evans and the others, historian Ruth Rosen used the model of a contradiction when she spoke of a "painful collision" between the new "skills and confidence" women learned in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left and their "lack of recognition" from male movement coworkers. She enumerated skills women gained in these movements, including exploring ideas and values, learning how to organize, and "thinking strategically and theoretically."³⁰ But most of Rosen's reviewers did not see in her account the picture of these movements as "nurturing women's political and leadership skills" that Claire Moses of *Feminist Studies* had seen.³¹ The *New York Times* reviewer, Janny Scott, said Rosen had pinpointed the birth of women's liberation in the "disenchantment" of women who felt that SNCC and SDS had "subordinated them."³² Another reviewer said she had learned

²⁹ Ibid., 41, 100, 116.

³⁰ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 121.

³¹ If I had read Rosen before I reread Evans and Echols, I too would have thought that Rosen was onto something new.

from Rosen's book that the movement began because of women's rage at men in the 1960s movements who "presumed them to be subordinates and sexual side dishes." Shocked by the "level of antipathy toward women" Rosen had described in the New Left, the reviewer repeated in detail the often retold story of men yelling obscenities as women's liberation founder Marilyn Webb gave a speech at an anti-war rally and Webb's later "depression" at the men's "scorn."³³ Nor did historians Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon find in Rosen's work the "nurture" of women's skills in the civil rights movement and the New Left described by Moses. Instead, they called Rosen's view of the New Left "lopsided hostility" because she did not "acknowledge adequately the role of SDS and SNCC in providing vital education, skills and theory for early feminism."³⁴

Clearly then, the model of the contradiction is inadequate to explain even that there was a contradiction as rising expectations clashed with subordination. The descriptions of sexism simply erase the instrumental legacy. Although Evans and most accounts that followed hers have argued that the movement grew out of the clash between

³² Janny Scott "The Feminist Mystique," 26.

³³ Susan E. Reed in *The American Prospect*, 17 July 2000, 41.

women's rising expectations and male domination, many of us just did not get it. We have misinterpreted each other and our readers have misinterpreted us. What is new and historiographically hopeful in all of this, however, is that historians of the movement are now beginning to realize that this is a problem. Baxandall and Gordon saw that Rosen had failed to give the impression she may have wished to give. Although Barbara Winslow wrongly held Evans and Echols responsible, she was critical of the position she attributed to them-- that male chauvinism was the cause of women's liberation. Similarly, Claire Moses found this idea inadequate to explain the birth of the movement. And so it is.

Most recently, Sara Evans has offered a corrective to the view that sexism was the cause of women's liberation, a narrative which, she rightly points out, "continues to predominate."³⁵ Repeating her original argument that the civil rights movement and the New Left, especially SNCC and SDS, were "less sexist than American society as a whole," Evans offers examples of this and provides, once again, her model of the contradiction between women's new skills and

³⁴ Baxandall and Gordon in *The Nation*, 28 July 2000, 28.

³⁵ Sara Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: The Free Press, 2003), 240.

the male arrogance that thwarted them.³⁶ Evans targets "jeremiads against the sexism on the left" among the founding women's liberation documents as the source of the erroneous idea that male chauvinism caused a rebirth of women's liberation. She distances herself and her early feminist coworkers from what she describes as the extremes of anger found in these documents.³⁷

But the anger was hardly limited to a few early papers. It was widespread, and understandably so. Little wonder, after all, that people with just grievances were very angry about them. I knew that anger well in the 1960s. The problem is neither that the anger of the founders has been exaggerated nor that the views of those who were less angry have not been taken into account. The problem is that the anger alone was impotent, amounting to little, if something new and constructive had not come along and shaped it into an instrument for social change. Anger at domination is a constant in the lives of subordinated people. The impetus

³⁶ Ibid., 16.

³⁷ Ibid., 240. Evans singles out Marge Piercy's "Grand Coolie Damn" and Robin Morgan's "Goodbye to All That." See Marge Piercy, "Grand Coolie Damn," in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 421-38; and Robin Morgan, "Goodbye to All That," in Morgan's *Going Too Far* (New York: Random House, 1978), 126.

for a movement comes from something else besides oppression, something that helps people to find an understanding of the experience that produces the courage to stand up collectively and fight.

Although Evans' new work is not likely to clear up misconceptions about the origins of the women's liberation movement by downplaying or marginalizing the anger of its early activists, her consciousness of the need for something more than the contradiction model of the movement's birth adds to the growing effort for a deeper explanation. Her most important new contribution in that regard is to frame women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement and New Left actively. Having gained skills and confidence there, Evans said, the founders began to organize the new movement by "turn [ing] these assets to their own use."³⁸

The new historiographical consciousness that something is missing from the record of the birth of the movement represents an important shift.³⁹ The emerging interpretation holds that the building blocks of continuity and instrumentality and all that supported them must be better understood if we are to get the origins of the movement

³⁸ Ibid., 16.

³⁹ Kate Weigand has also contributed to this effort with *Red Feminism*.

right. This interpretation is, however, more than a historiographical shift. Many of the historians involved in the revision, including this one, were early women's liberation activists.⁴⁰ So the shift represents a desire on the part of the activists for a deeper understanding of their own work.

I got the first idea of this turn in 1985 from reading "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation," a speech which powerfully demonstrated the causality of and gratitude due to the SNCC. This speech, given in 1983 by women's liberation founder and SNCC volunteer Kathie Sarachild at a conference of veterans of the movements of the 1960s, opened my eyes to the difference between the debt feminists owed the civil rights movement and the terrible reputation for sexism it continued to have in feminist circles.⁴¹ Sarachild compared how much more important SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael's injunction to whites to "fight your own oppressor" was to her organizing for women's

⁴⁰ This is the case with Sara Evans, Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, Ruth Rosen, Ann Snitow, Jo Freeman, Barbara Winslow, and probably others whose participation I am not aware of.

⁴¹ Kathie Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation," in the Redstockings Archives. Transcript of speech at *The Sixties Speak to the Eighties: A Conference for Activism and Social Change*, at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, 22 October 1983.

liberation than his sexism. She also talked about learning ideas for mass organizing and gaining courage from everyday people in SNCC. This was significant since Sarachild has been identified as one of the founders who was most anti-male. I soon began to hear Judith Brown, Carol Hanisch, and other founding activists talk this way too.⁴²

The evidence offered in this study is an intervention, in part, an attempt to put a stop to a repeated misinterpretation that has in turn created confusion in historical understanding. But there is more at stake in understanding the origins of the women's liberation movement. We should know, for example, that its founders' "jeremiads" against male chauvinism on the left did not result in the organization of women's liberation as an anti-left movement. And while the New Left and the black freedom movement were egregiously sexist, they were the first groups of the 1960s to begin, in response to ever greater and more furious pressure, to make a voluntary adjustment to women's liberation. They were among the few groups, unlike unions, schools, churches, sports world, press, the government, and most employers, to do this without being ordered to do so by

⁴² Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 15 August 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

the courts. Far from being the most sexist institutions of their day, these movements were the least sexist.

I have deliberately left much of the sexism out of this study. This is due to deeply held assumptions about agency and continuity--as opposed to ignorance of male chauvinism in the 1960s movements or "rose colored glasses" of nostalgia for the period.⁴³ Indeed, this writer, a participant in those movements, experienced in egregious and diverse forms the male chauvinism detailed in the first-hand and secondary accounts of the genesis of the women's liberation movement.⁴⁴

⁴³ I am indebted to Aldon D. Morris's *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), ix-xiv and chap. 11 passim, for the "indigenous perspective," his method of analyzing the origins of the civil rights movement.

⁴⁴ My earliest encounter with sexism in the student movement came when filled with the excitement of my first activist steps, I eagerly sought to volunteer for more movement work. A local "honcho," seeing this fresh, young recruit, responded with the enthusiastic invitation, "Let's go fuck on the steps of Tigert Hall," a building which then housed the university administration. Seeing this as a great way to confront the Establishment, he was serious. When I declined he was taken aback and could think of no political work for me to do. Female leaders in our SDS chapter helped me grow as an activist. Among widely read first-hand accounts of male chauvinism in the New Left are Beverly Jones and Judith Brown's "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," in *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Leslie Tanner (New York: Signet, 1970), 362-415 and Marge Piercy's "The Grand Coolie Damn" in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 421-38. All the monographs on the

This study barely touches upon some other conditions needed to fully explain the resurgence of feminism. First, the broad economic and political context of the 1950s and 1960s was wind beneath the founders' wings. Throughout most of history, after all, there has been little or no organized feminist movement although oppression always breeds resistance in one form or another. Pioneering women with radical knowledge and special skills have come into being across the ages but found themselves unable to advance the collective interests of their sex. Under conditions less conducive to change than the 1960s, a rebel intellectual, such as women's liberation founder Shulamith Firestone, might have been a lone voice producing a classic statement whose influence would have to wait for the future. Or she might have been burned at the stake as a heretic, no trace of her dreams of freedom left behind. The international context of Cold War competition between the superpowers, and the structural economic changes in America underway in the 1950s and 1960s, which saw women's liberation take off bear much more investigation. So does the consciousness of the

movement are filled with similar anecdotes. See for example Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage, 1979), and more recently Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2000).

masses of women of the period. Why were so many diverse women so surprisingly ready to take up the struggle?⁴⁵ The start of the movement depended on a particular mix of changing political and economic conditions, the readiness of large numbers of women for protest, and the support of other groups of women whose influence I have not included.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ There is much new work about the social and cultural context from which the movement emerged. But a clear connection between that context and the formation of a social movement against the oppression of women remains to be established. Joanne Meyerowitz sampled hundreds of nonfictional articles in mass circulation magazines between 1946 and 1958 and found double messages that promoted domesticity while simultaneously praising women's achievements in public life. Joanne Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique: A Reassessment of the Postwar Mass Culture, 1946-1958," in *JAH* 79 (March 1993): 1455-82. Elaine May coined the phrase "domestic containment" to describe the conservative influence of cold war politics on women. Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 15.

⁴⁶ Several founders had far greater influence than I have been able to include. Carol Hanisch, Lucinda Cisler, Ellen Willis, Dana Densmore, Laura X, Peggy Dobbins, Florynce Kennedy, and Anne Koedt are among those whose leadership far exceeds my discussion of it. A discussion of the refusal to acknowledge leadership in the movement can be found throughout work on the second wave, including Sarachild, "The Power of History," 26, and Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 119-29, 142-46. A great second tier of activists founded groups, instigated distinctive actions, and made significant theoretical contributions. My decision to focus on some early organizers over others was based, for the most part, on those who "went first," as Kathie Sarachild put it in "The Power of History," 26. Also, a critical cohort of women such as Jane Adams in the New Left and Dorothy Dawson in the Civil Rights Movement helped women's liberation come into existence although they did not take their place in that movement. The work of women such as Sharon Jeffry, Carol McEldowney, and Jane Adams constituted

Although it may be already apparent, this study is what is sometimes called "engaged history." Its principal investigator, like Sara Evans and others, I was a participant in the movements of the 1960s. The study was instigated, in part, because like Evans, I did not see my own experience in what seemed to be the common understanding of the movement's emergence. If I had been angrier at male chauvinism than Evans and her coworkers, there were times in the black movement and the student movement when I experienced a rough appreciation as a peer that was unequalled in the larger society. In the Black Power movement in our small southern town, I knew that men as well as women valued my work in a way that was far greater and felt different and better than at my paid job or in my college classes. In 1968 I played on the sexually and racially integrated SDS softball team, where the guys often caught balls that were clearly mine to catch. But I played ball on this team, nonetheless, at a time when sports at the university and in the city league were completely segregated by sex and by race.

a foundational root described by Sara Evans in *Personal Politics*. Others like Dorothy Dawson have told their stories in Connie Curry, ed., *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 85-130.

I was a novice agitator then whose heart lay in the counterculture, not a longtime local movement leader. When I attended the first national meeting of the women's liberation movement in 1968 in Sandy Springs, Maryland, the difference between me and the others there was palpable. The phrase "skills and confidence" utterly understates what they had that I did not. Their transcendent presence filled the meeting hall with sparkling energy and power I can feel today. Although the women's liberation branch of the second wave prided itself on "leaderlessness," there were leaders, women who showed this lucky new recruit how to participate in building a movement that would transform how Americans both sexes lived their lives.⁴⁷

Even the anger of the powerful could not stop the women I met at that conference, because making the women's liberation movement would not be the first time they had acted upon strongly held positions. What distinguished them

⁴⁷ The founding texts and manifestos of the movement assert leaderlessness as both the style and goal of the movement. See for example the "Redstockings Manifesto," "We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that every woman in our movement has an equal chance to participate, assume responsibility, and develop her political potential" (Morgan, 533). See also Shulamith Firestone on the movement's structure: "One of its major stated goals is internal democracy...if any revolutionary movement can succeed at establishing an egalitarian structure, radical feminism will," in Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of*

from others was years of work in the civil rights movement and the New Left, years in which they risked about everything they had, including their lives, to organize for black civil rights and against the war in Vietnam. They also had done some of the intellectual homework necessary to create social change. I immediately aspired to understand and gain the purposefulness and instrumentality that emanated from these women. Maybe it took an inexperienced person like me to see that they were not the most oppressed women in the movement, but instead, the strongest, most clear headed, and self-determined people I had ever seen congregated in one place. Here, then, are some of their stories.

Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1970), 44-45.

CHAPTER 1
TOWARD A FEMALE LIBERATION MOVEMENT

In the early 1960s, male domination limited the participation of women in the life of the nation, the family, and the community, and interfered with women's ability to determine the course of their lives. Women struggled as best they could, most of them unaware that the boundaries of their freedom were anything more than the impositions of their own shortcomings. There was no publicly held concept of sexism. Yet by the close of the decade, Simone de Beauvoir's prediction that the "myth of femininity" was "about to be dethroned" appeared to be coming true.¹ A resurgent movement for the liberation of women challenged male domination in virtually every aspect of American life. Women, heretofore burdened as individuals with what they did not know was a systemic imbalance of power between the sexes, now began to understand what they were up against. Consequently, women began working together to oppose male supremacy.

No great leader had come. The forces of history did not liberate women. Nor did angry women, fed up with male chauvinism, spontaneously arise and fight. The change from

¹ De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, xxvii.

the early to the late sixties was due, in large part, to the readiness of a handful of young women who dared to ride the crest of a wave of economic and demographic changes fortuitous to their cause, that occurred since the close of World War II. No sooner had women been dismissed from paid employment to make way for returning veterans, than they began to return to work. By 1950 women's reentry into the paid labor force reached its previous wartime peak. In 1957 the climbing birth rate began to fall again. During these years, as women returned to paid work and the birthrate slowed, incipient women's liberation pioneers were growing up, imbued with the values of socially conscious families and the feminism of Simone de Beauvoir. Far from merely coasting on changing conditions, these future women's liberation founders were just enough ahead of the times to incur reprisals for testing the limits they faced. That they did so further prepared them to lead the movement to come. Between 1964 and 1966, they took the first steps toward women's liberation. By 1968 they had started a mass, grassroots movement.

Oppressive Conditions, Unconscious Women

Considering the decade of the 1950s, the challenge of women's liberation appeared formidable. Abortion was illegal, birth control hard to come by, and women's wages were about half those of men's. As the percentage of women

in the paid labor force increased, so did the burden of the "double shift"--one paid job from nine to five and a second unpaid one at home.

In 1960, a woman was only about half as likely to go to college as a man.² The percentage of women to men in college had been declining through the mid-1950s, as had the percentage of women who graduated from college.³ For those women who did graduate, about half would take paid work, one out of three becoming clerical workers. Indeed, as late as 1968, one third of employed female college graduates were clerical workers. The percentage of women in clerical work increased in the 1950s while the proportion of women in professional fields had been decreasing since 1940.⁴

In most newspapers, advertisements for "help wanted" were segregated by sex. To purchase on credit, even a wage-earning woman was required to document her husband's permission. Women on many college campuses were subjected to curfews and dress codes with dresses required from nine to five. Repeated dress code violations were punished by weekend long detention in the dormitory. Few campuses had

² U.S. Department of Labor, *Trends in Educational Attainment of Women* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), 5.

³ Carol Hymowitz and Michaela Weissman, *A History of Women in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 326.

⁴ Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, *Handbook on Women Workers* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969), 15.

comparable requirements or penalties for male students.

Women chafed against these boundaries as individuals, some even risking their lives. Five to ten thousand died each year, for example, from illegal abortions. Yet strange as it seems, before the Women's Liberation Movement made the existence of sexism a publicly recognized problem, most women, while conscious of putting up a fight against unfair odds, were unconscious of the nature of that fight. When a woman supporting an unemployed husband had to obtain his permission for credit, she might consider this unfair. But she was unlikely to see it as sex discrimination. Aptly characterizing the unconsciousness of the period, pioneer women's liberation organizer Jo Freeman reflected on her undergraduate years at the University of California at Berkeley in the early 1960s. "I not only never had a woman professor, I never even saw one," Freeman said. "Worse yet, I didn't notice." ⁵

Whether blaming themselves or simply unconscious, most women were unaware that they were up against the socially imposed political and economic boundaries of male domination. The American woman was said to be the freest in the world; too free, according to some social commentators, for her own or anyone else's good. "Sex class," as radical women's liberation founder Shulamith Firestone put it, was

⁵ Freeman, "On the Origins of the Women's Liberation Movement from a Strictly Personal Perspective," in DuPlessis and Snitow, eds., *The Feminist Memoir Project*, 172.

"so deep as to be invisible." ⁶

As late as 1968 a woman could emphatically assert that American women were not oppressed. She could argue this with conviction despite, for example, having helped more than one friend get an illegal and often life-threatening abortion. Perhaps she even knew someone who died. Maybe she had had an abortion herself or had seen a friend deserted after telling her partner about her pregnancy. Perhaps she was a student who had seen female classmates expelled from school for pregnancy or simply for being sexually active. And she knew male students were not disciplined for these reasons. Still, in her first encounter with the notion of women's liberation, her response was, "Me, oppressed? I'm not oppressed!" And at the same time she may have been thinking, "Are these women just losers who can't find a man?"

As women posed such questions to themselves, they knew they were often disappointed. But so, after all, were men. Unhappiness and disappointment were part of the human condition or the product of neurosis brought on by unenlightened child rearing practices. Moreover, although men did not face problems such as unwanted pregnancy and its terrifying penalties, many women held themselves to blame for letting something like this happen. Often, a woman thought she could find a way around the problem or seek a new way to overcome it. She could make a guy use a condom

couldn't she? If she was smart enough she could. If he wanted her badly enough he would. If she were beautiful then he would use one. Perhaps she should get a new outfit, a new hair style, new make up, go on a diet, maybe even a new nose or new breasts. Then she could make a new plan and find a new date--the Horatio Alger equivalent of "work hard and save" for women. There was not much else to do. Women had no concept of sexism to protest, attribute a problem to, or even to level as an accusation.

Changing Conditions

The decades between the close of World War II and the start of women's liberation in the mid 1960s were stultifyingly sexist. Yet under the surface, beneath women's roiling frustration, the basis of male domination was eroding. The "myth of femininity" that Beauvoir had predicted was about to be dethroned no longer had as strong a foundation in the actual conditions of women's lives. By the end of the 1960s, 40 percent of women over sixteen years of age were in the paid labor force, and one third of married women were employed. This was a 400 percent increase since 1940 in the rate of employed married women.⁷ Fifty percent of women with school-age children were employed,

⁶ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 1.

⁷ William H. Chafe, *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 218.

including women whose husbands earned incomes well above the poverty level.⁸ Although women were no longer hired into the better paying jobs they had held during the war, they were readily absorbed into the expanding "pink collar" and service sectors.

Beyond paid employment, the birth control pill, marketed in 1960, further decreased women's dependency on men. Women had already decided three years earlier to end the "baby boom," the fifteen year reversal of the century long decline in the birth rate.⁹ But the pill, 97 percent effective, tied childbearing even less inevitably to sex. This, combined with no longer having to marry or stay married to survive economically, made women more independent than perhaps ever before. As more and more married women joined the paid work force, the percentage of women supported only by their husbands decreased. At the same time, divorce rates began rising in the 1950s and early 1960s--and would continue to climb more steeply.¹⁰ Further, more and more women of marriageable age were remaining single.¹¹

⁸ Idem, *The Paradox of Change: American Women in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 200.

⁹ David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 27.

¹⁰ Ibid., 31.

¹¹ Some scholars attributed the rise of feminism to baby

Thus changes that made greater self-determination for women increasingly possible were underway. Despite the postwar ideology of domesticity so vividly described by Betty Friedan, women appeared to be voting against the "feminine mystique" with their feet.¹² Indeed, they voted against it with their whole bodies--just about every way but through a political movement.¹³

Conditions were changing, but unless women themselves were to actively challenge the limits, how much difference would it really make? Men of high enough rank had underpaid secretaries in the work place and nearly all men had wives serving as unpaid housekeepers at home. Almost half of these women had already put in a full day's paid work. Little more

boom demography due to a "marriage squeeze." In this view, because women typically marry men an average of two to three years older, a large proportion of the girls born between 1946 and 1948 reaching their early twenties between 1965 and 1970 experienced a decreased pool of prospective mates. Boys two to three years older were born before the baby boom and were considerably fewer in number. The result was an unusual number of single young women without family responsibilities who could work in social causes. This view appears in Robert R. Parke, Jr., and Paul C. Glick, "Prospective Changes in Marriage and the Family" (paper presented at the American Sociological Association Meeting, August 31, 1966), and is cited in Maren Lockwood Carden, *The New Feminist Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1974), 198.

¹² Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell, 1963). This book has generally been considered the first important sign of the impending feminist revival.

¹³ Friedan's presentation of the dominance of the feminine mystique has been challenged by a growing body of literature that shows the complexity of the time. See for example Joanne Meyerowitz's article on double messages in the mass circulation magazines, Meyerowitz, "Beyond the Feminine Mystique, 1455-82," *passim*.

freedom than this, what little freedom women had in the premovement years of the early 1960s, could be expected. And no one called it freedom. All a woman wanted was some respect, interesting work, a little more money, and a loving mate. She figured that if she tried just a bit harder she could get them.

Testing the Limits

As sexism, unacknowledged and unnamed, wore on into the 1960s, a score of women were coming of age who would publicly expose, name, analyze, and organize a social movement to uproot and overcome it. Economic and demographic changes supported the direction of change these women's liberation founders would seek and that significant numbers of women would soon show that they wanted. Still the founders were just enough ahead of the times to meet with opposition, scorn, and rejection, especially from men. Indeed, all that the movement they organized accomplished was done against persistent economic and social opposition from men, whether family members, lovers, and coworkers, or men of great political and economic might.

The young rebels and their as yet untapped feminist constituency did not wait, however, for change to be easy. They looked for any avenue that appeared even barely open. When to the surprise and chagrin of most of its framers and enforcers, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 included a provision

against sex discrimination, blue collar women came forward in droves. They had long been frustrated by protective legislation that kept them out of higher paying jobs. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), however, made no secret of its intention not to enforce Title VII, the discrimination clause of the Act. Indeed, the Commission Chair announced his opposition to the clause in the press. Despite this, thousands of women filed charges of sex discrimination. Over one third of the charges filed in 1965 were from women and in some regions women's complaints of sex discrimination made up almost half of those filed.¹⁴ When the unions would not support them, the women sued their unions. And though it took years even to have a charge reviewed, women just kept them coming. In 1966, the National Organization for Women (NOW), self-described as a "civil rights movement" for women, and considered the moderate branch of the movement, was organized to force the EEOC to take action on the charges of sex discrimination.¹⁵ Thus when NOW held its first meetings, blue collar women were already in revolt.

The younger women who would soon start the radical women's liberation branch of the movement were impatient

¹⁴ Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Second Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), 6.

¹⁵ Betty Friedan, *It Changed My Life: Writings on the Women's Movement* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985), 89.

with male domination too. Some had been consciously resisting since childhood. Casey Hayden and Mary King, whose early critique of sexism began the chain of protest around which much of the women's liberation movement later developed, both date the origins of their egalitarian views to their childhood. Mary King said that her father, a liberal Methodist minister whose "view of social justice included women," gave her a special place near the pulpit while he preached on Sunday mornings. That he sought and took very seriously her views on the sermons made her feel "important" and "as good as any man," King said.¹⁶ Her father also read her verses from the Bible containing references to women's equality that he said had been purposely passed over by churchmen. And from her earliest years, he told her stories and gave her books that opposed racism. At college King organized against racial segregation. In 1962, the year she graduated, King joined the staff of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which became known as the shock troops of the Civil Rights Movement. She felt she was continuing on a path she had begun long before.

So did Casey Hayden. Casey was the child of a twice divorced mother who was also the only divorced woman in Victoria, the small East Texas town where Casey grew up.

¹⁶ Mary King, *Freedom Song: A Personal Story of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1987), 54, 55.

This stigma, Casey said, caused her to "identify with outsiders."¹⁷ She went to college in Austin on her mother's salary as a secretary. There during the late 1950s, at a time when little else in the South was racially integrated, Hayden socialized and lived with black and white students at the University Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and the Christian Faith and Life Community. At both of these institutions, Hayden said, each leadership slot was sexually integrated so that it was co-chaired by a man and a woman. These experiences shaped her desire for gender and racial equality in the larger society.

Judith Brown's belief in women's equality, greatly influenced by two feminist aunts, was also nurtured by years of Girl Scouting. At fourteen she was selected to attend a national Girl Scout roundup with highly qualified Scouts from across the nation. There were no men at the roundup except those who drove trucks into restricted areas to make drop offs and pick ups. Of this experience Brown reflected, "watching self-sufficiency and order with 5,000 high school girls acting like women and meeting in an outdoor arena and singing and listening to speeches was a millennial experience."¹⁸ Later, Brown would recommend that women

¹⁷ Casey Hayden, "Fields of Blue," in Curry, ed., *Deep in Our Hearts*, 337.

¹⁸ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Florida, to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, n.d., transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

develop all-female communes on which to regroup when weary from the fight against male domination.

Brown was also influenced by her father, Lawrence Benninger, who, in 1955 was fired from his job as a professor at the then segregated University of Alabama for supporting the admission of Autherine Lucy, a black woman. In 1963, Brown was one of the first two students at the University of Florida arrested for civil rights protest. Her passion for justice redoubled when, as a consequence of the arrest, the University took her Ford Fellowship for graduate school from her.

Shulamith Firestone, a rebel in her orthodox Jewish family, had sworn as a child never to marry. Already the black sheep, she was admonished by her more devout older brother for peeking through holes in the curtain that divided men and women in prayer. In her teenage years, associating dissembling with subordination, she refused to fake a smile. And as a teenager in the early 1960s, Firestone joined civil rights demonstrations with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in St. Louis where the Firestone family lived at the time.

Unlike Firestone, Kathie Sarachild was encouraged to fight discrimination against women by her family. Although the 1950s were not conducive to dissent, her mother's brave protests at Sarachild's junior high school led the school to sexually integrate its shop and home economics courses. When

Sarachild got to Radcliffe College, she challenged gender barriers to become one of the few female editors on the *Harvard Crimson*. She also protested campus curfews for female students. She campaigned on this issue and was elected to the Student Council.

Curfews for female students were also targets of incipient women's liberation founders Pam Allen and Heather Booth. Like Sarachild, Allen began organizing against the curfew as an undergraduate at Carleton College, and ran for representative to the National Student Association on that issue. Heather Booth participated in "sleep outs" at the University of Chicago to protest the curfews. In 1964, Booth, Allen, and Sarachild volunteered for Mississippi Freedom Summer where their work for black civil rights brought violent reprisal from local white opponents.

Marilyn Webb had also gotten an early start on breaking gender conventions. Daughter of a union organizer mother, Webb, at age nine, insisted on trying out for the Little League baseball team. Although a good ball player, Webb was rejected because she was a girl.¹⁹ She smarted over her rejection until she saw a chance to do something about it beginning to take shape in 1965 at a national conference of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS).²⁰

¹⁹ Marilyn Webb, interview by author, 22 May 2002, New York City, tape recording in possession of author.

²⁰ SDS was the largest and most prominent organization of the New Left student movement in the 1960s.

Variations of the stories of these young women are repeated again and again in the lives of women who took their places along side them. The childhood reputation of Dee Ann Pappas as a "toughie" led to her recruitment as an organizer of the first national women's liberation meeting. Naomi Weisstein, a founder of the nation's first women's liberation group, decided early on that marriage alone would not fulfill her. As a graduate student, when she encountered the males-only policy at Harvard's Lamont Library, she organized female students to enter the Library with her while she loudly played the clarinet. Jo Freeman, an editor of the first women's liberation newsletter, was also among the cofounders of the first group. As a child she had fought with relatives in Alabama over segregation. And although she did not connect it with feminism, she knew that unlike many of her classmates, she preferred "learning, careers, politics" to boys and clothes.²¹

The growing up years of black women's liberation leaders are filled with similar stories. Patricia Robinson, organizer of Poor Black Women, one of the earliest black women's liberation groups of the 1960s, gravitated to the left wingers in her family and her neighborhood as she grew up.²² Frances Beal organized the SNCC Women's Liberation

²¹ Freeman, "On the Origins," 171.

²² Margaret Rivka Polatnick, "Strategies for Women's Liberation: A Study of a Black and a White Group of the

Committee and wrote "Double Jeopardy," an influential paper on the oppression of black women.²³ Beal's mother was a feminist, and Beal rebelled early on against norms that valued straight hair, light skin, and subservient manners for women and African Americans.

Thus as teenagers and young adults in the 1950s and early 1960s, incipient women's liberation founders questioned and challenged the sexist limitations imposed upon women. During these years, the material conditions supporting sexism began to shift, decreasing the extent to which women's subjugation could be enforced. Across the nation women strained for freedom in constricting marriages and pink ghetto jobs that were underpaid and unfulfilling. Into this gathering storm came Simone de Beauvoir's agitational masterpiece, *The Second Sex*. Female readers took the book to heart and soon pressed its ideas into active service. Casey Hayden and Mary King went first, combining ideas from Beauvoir with lessons from their work in SNCC.

Paths to the Early Movement

Three paths converged in the making of the early movement. One path began in 1964 when Casey Hayden and Mary King sought reform of the "sex caste system" within the black freedom movement. Starting in SNCC, this path turned

1960's" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1985), 45.

²³ Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and

North through the New Left where variations on Hayden and King's call inspired advocates, generated controversy, and brought about some reform. In the fall of 1967, Shulamith Firestone and Jo Freeman blazed the trail to Chicago where it culminated in the nation's first women's liberation group, the West Side Group. From Chicago, women's liberation radiated throughout the country.

The second path also began in the South, this one in Gainesville, Florida. Out of Gainesville in June 1968, came the pamphlet "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," a powerful attack on male supremacy.²⁴ Known as "The Florida Paper," the pamphlet went beyond the idea of reforming the left, named all men the enemy of women, and called for a new, independent, mass movement to topple male domination. This course had been set in 1966 in Gainesville, at a workshop on Simone de Beauvoir put on by SDS. Veteran civil rights and new left workers Beverly Jones and Judith Brown were among those who attended the workshop. There Beverly Jones became so angry that she began work on "The Florida Paper," and Brown soon joined her. As the Chicago group, and others, too, were mired in indecision about the need for a mass independent movement, "The Florida Paper" helped to carry the day. Proclaiming that women must fight their own battles, the popular paper spread far and wide the call for an independent movement. Brown's search for coworkers with

Female," in Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 340-52.

whom she might build such a movement led to the first national meeting of its organizers.

Finally, the third path was cleared when Shulamith Firestone left Chicago for New York City in the fall of 1967. There she joined Pam Allen to organize New York Radical Women (NYRW), the nation's second women's liberation group. Firestone read Beauvoir in 1961 at age sixteen and had been thinking about women's liberation ever since. Allen first heard about women's liberation organizing from a friend in the Chicago group. Allen and Firestone recruited to NYRW a number of women, including Anne Koedt, Kathie Sarachild, Carol Hanisch, and Ellen Willis who soon became key theorists and organizers of the emerging movement. The first publication of NYRW, *Notes from the First Year* came out in June 1968, the same month as "The Florida Paper," and like it, called for a new movement independent of the New Left to fight male domination.²⁵ But at the time, the women in New York and Florida did not know each other and knew nothing of each other's work. Moreover, although Pam Allen had been a SNCC volunteer in 1964, neither she nor Firestone knew of Hayden and King's seminal position paper.²⁶

²⁴ Jones and Brown, "Toward," 362-415.

²⁵ Shulamith Firestone, ed., *Notes from the First Year: Women's Liberation* (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), Redstockings Archives.

²⁶ Shortly after she moved to New York, Shulamith Firestone read Hayden and King's paper for the first time in *Liberation*, a radical pacifist journal and sent it to Jo

The First Path

In November 1964, Casey Hayden and Mary King wrote the "SNCC Position Paper, November 1964" the first known document of the 1960s that sought action for women's liberation.²⁷ Submitted for a SNCC conference along with other position papers, it began with a list of familiar incidents of discriminatory treatment of female coworkers by SNCC men. The paper then compared the treatment of women with the racist treatment of blacks by whites. It called this phenomenon "as widespread and deep rooted and every much as crippling to women as the assumptions of white supremacy are to the Negro."²⁸ Hayden and King wrote the paper, they said, to open a discussion of the problem so that "in the future, the whole of the women in this movement will become so alert as to force the rest of the movement to stop the discrimination."²⁹ Unafraid to face death as

Freeman. Both women expressed pleasure at finding that they were not as alone as they had thought themselves to be. See Shulamith Firestone, New York, to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 17 October 1967, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman. Pam Allen, in an interview I had with her, said she did not see Hayden and King's paper until much later. See Pam Allen, interview by author, 2 January 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

²⁷ Casey Hayden and Mary King, "SNCC Position Paper (Women in the Movement)," (November 1964) reprinted in King, *Freedom Song*, 567-69.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 568.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 569.

freedom fighters in the segregated South, Hayden and King did not want to face "the kinds of things which are killing to the insides--insinuations, ridicule, over-exaggerated compensations." Still, they submitted the paper anonymously.³⁰

In 1964 Casey Hayden was a veteran civil rights activist. With black friends at the Christian Faith and Life Community, she had joined picket lines in Austin, Texas, in spring 1960 when the student sit-ins began. She had been a freedom rider, had worked continuously with SNCC since 1960, and was on the SNCC staff in 1964. She gave leadership workshops on nonviolence as SNCC's Northern Coordinator, developed Friends of SNCC groups and fundraised. She had helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party that challenged the segregated Mississippi delegation to the Democratic National Convention in 1964. The roots of Hayden's critique of sexism in SNCC grew, in part, from her earlier experience of non-sexist leadership at the YWCA and the Christian Faith and Life Community.

Mary King came into the movement in 1962. She had learned as an undergraduate that sexism was a force in women's lives from Miriam Willey, a professor at Ohio Wesleyan University with whom she had become friends. King said that discussions with Willey "opened my eyes so that I would not be swept along like flotsam, unaware, drifting on

a sea of male bias." ³¹ With other students, Willey took King on a study tour of the civil rights movement. On the tour, King met many SNCC workers and decided to join SNCC.

When she graduated, King joined the SNCC staff and soon became assistant to Julian Bond, SNCC's press secretary. She learned how to prepare press releases and met with the national news corps. She took pride in the knowledge that her developing skill at bringing publicity to SNCC's work was key in reducing the ever-present violence directed against the civil rights workers. She and Casey Hayden became roommates. When they were not going to mass meetings, they spent the evenings pouring over Beauvoir. Hayden, whose marriage had just broken up, had returned to work in SNCC and was trying to sort out what had gone wrong. "Although considerably sobered by the failure of my marriage, I felt powerful and at home in SNCC," she said.³² The two women, excited by their reading and discussions, "engaged men and women in conversations about gender" as Casey recalled.³³

Despite their outspoken views, however, they feared the ridicule their position paper would provoke. For Hayden and King, as it was for so many others, SNCC was the Beloved Community. They loved the organization and its staff and

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 77.

³² Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 350.

³³ Ibid., 352.

projects more deeply than much else they had ever known. Love of SNCC was the source of their vulnerability to ridicule from coworkers, the same love that was the source of their passion to reform the organization. As they predicted, their paper was met with laughter. At an informal gathering after the conference ended for the day, SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Toure) satirized the paper with the now notorious quip that the position of women in SNCC was "prone."³⁴ But Hayden and King's critique of male domination could not be laughed away. Ideas of feminist protest began to circulate.

The following year, in November 1965, Hayden and King, still on the SNCC staff, wrote "A Kind of Memo," (also widely referred to as "Sex and Caste").³⁵ Again they made analogies between the conditions faced by blacks and women. They outlined a "sex-caste system" in which women were exploited, and they took men sharply to task for failing to consider the issue seriously. This time, they signed the memo and sent it to forty women in the New Left, labor, peace, and civil rights movements.

Hayden and King said they considered the chances "nil" that a feminist movement would start.³⁶ "Even in our

³⁴ King, *Freedom Song*, 452.

³⁵ Hayden and King, "A Kind of Memo," in King, *Freedom Song*, 571-74.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 458.

fantasies," King reflected, "we had no hope that a movement would develop."³⁷ They were not interested in a new movement, and although they had a major part in instigating it, they did not join it when it came. Weary of the stress and penalties of breaking gender conventions in their civil rights work, they really wanted a support group of other women like themselves so that they could continue the work they were doing. And they believed that educating their movement brothers would lead to reform of sexism in the movement. Thus "Sex and Caste" called for women in the "peace and freedom movements" to "open up a dialog" and "create a community of support" for each other while working "full time on problems such as war, poverty, race." ³⁸

The Path from Florida

In Gainesville, Florida, experienced activists Beverly Jones and Judith Brown wrote about sexism in secret. Like Hayden and King, they had risked their lives in the Southern freedom movement. Also like them, they feared, as Brown put it, being treated as an "eccentricity" by movement colleagues.³⁹ They were, Brown said, "so freaked about what we were thinking," that they told no one about "The Florida

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 573.

³⁹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 8 September 1968, transcript in the possession of

Paper" until several months before they finished it.⁴⁰

Jones and Brown were local civil rights movement and New Left leaders. And they were married to local movement leaders. Outspoken, direct, successful organizers, the two women, along with their husbands, inhabited an inner circle known to participants as the "Gainesville Band." Since 1963 the Band had organized together against segregation, the war in Vietnam, and for reform of the university. They had been kicked out of school and fired from jobs together, arrested and jailed together, and then solaced and renewed one another for the next round. Loving each other's courage, they held together proudly with a bond that sometimes felt like "us against the world." In 1966, the Band undertook a series of internal study sessions. Ed Richer, a former humanities instructor at the University of Florida denied tenure for his activism, conducted a session on Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. Richer was the SDS faculty advisor, and as Jones said later, a "dead serious" feminist who hoped to inspire a revolt against male domination.⁴¹ In the workshop, he cited Hayden and King's protest as evidence that the revolt had begun, and he made a hard-hitting case for women's liberation based on *The Second Sex*.

author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴⁰ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 15 July 1986, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴¹ Beverly Jones, interview by author, 2 November 1999, New

Neither Jones nor Brown had read Beauvoir. Jones thought that Richer must be exaggerating men's low opinion of women. If this was what Beauvoir had said, though, then Beauvoir too was wrong. A heated argument broke out. The women moved away from the men to one side of the room. Brown went to sit near Jones and put her arm around her shoulders in a gesture of support. After the meeting, Jones turned to her husband Marshall. To her complete surprise, Marshall Jones replied that Richer and Beauvoir were right: women were not respected by men, even in the freedom movement. Incredulous, humiliated, and angry, Beverly Jones began to study feminism. Jones read Beauvoir, Friedan, and everything else she could get her hands on. She began writing "The Florida Paper" in secrecy but finally showed some of her work to Brown. Brown asked if she could work with her. In the paper, Jones, who had two children, demonstrated in powerful personal detail her subjugation as a housewife and mother. "There is something horribly repugnant," Jones wrote, "in the picture of women performing the same menial chores all day, having almost interchangeable conversations with their children, engaging in standard television arguments with their husbands, and then...each agonizing over what is considered her personal lot." Women were in a class struggle with men, according to Jones, in which the "relationship between a man and a woman

York, tape recording in the possession of author.

is no more or less personal a relationship than the relationship between a woman and her maid, a master and his slave, a teacher and his student." She called upon women who would "begin new lives, new movements, and new worlds," to reject romance which she compared to the "rabbit at the dog track...illusive, fake, and never-attained reward which for the benefit and amusement of our masters keeps us running and thinking in safe circles."⁴²

Judith Brown, younger and childless, wrote her section of the paper about women's oppression in the New Left, where she contended that the men "expect and require that women...function as black troops--kitchen soldiers."⁴³ Unless women formed a movement to take men on, this treatment would not improve. Education and persuasion would not bring men around because, without a struggle, men would not "relinquish...the power their sex knows and takes for granted."⁴⁴

The charges against men brought by Jones and Brown led them to propose a new movement with the potential to upset tightly knit political, social, and intimate relationships including their own. They knew from the start that men were not going to forego the pleasures and privileges of male supremacy simply because the problem was brought to their

⁴² Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 386-87.

⁴³ Brown in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 392.

attention. Thus Jones and Brown worked on the paper in isolation until 1967. Then they began to pick up the trail of Hayden and King's paper in the left press, notably the protest it was stirring against sexism in SDS.

The Path Cuts North through the New Left

Meanwhile, the trajectory begun by Hayden and King was opening out. A friend in the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) to whom they had mailed "Sex and Caste" considered putting out an expose of that union's virtually all-male leadership. And the women in SDS found the trail and blazed it. The summer before the second memo, Hayden had gone to Chicago to organize women in SDS's Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP). Following the SNCC strategy that whites would organize whites, ERAP was the white side of a planned interracial movement of the poor. Hayden, organizing poor white women, thought that the need for feminist consciousness was greater than in SNCC. Other ERAP women were feeling the same way. Hoping to raise that consciousness, Hayden wrote a draft of the paper that would become "Sex and Caste." When she and King sent out the final version in November 1965, ERAP women were included in the mailing.

A month later, leading female SDS activists to whom Hayden and King had mailed "Sex and Caste," planned a

⁴⁴ Ibid.

workshop on it at the annual national SDS conference in Champaign-Urbana, Illinois. Called "the embryo" of the incipient Women's Liberation Movement, the workshop was attended by a number of the women who went on to organize the earliest women's liberation groups.⁴⁵ This was the first time the woman question had been officially raised in SDS, and the women's public criticism of their subordinate position in the movement was met with male chauvinist derision.

Some men denied the existence of discrimination against women in SDS. Catcalls of "She needs a good screw," "She's a castrating female," greeted some of the women, who found they had to put up a struggle simply to raise the issue.⁴⁶ When the women decided they would have to meet without men present in order to get their concerns out on the floor, men insisted on their right to participate. Black SNCC organizer Jimmy Garrett, a guest at the conference, enjoyed the white men's discomfort with talk that was no longer controversial in SNCC. He defended the women's right to meet without the men. In what has been described as a walkout, the women finally excluded the men, left the conference room, and, in a separate meeting, began to air their complaints.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 157.

⁴⁶ Marlene Dixon quoted in Judith Hole and Ellen Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism* (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1971).

⁴⁷ Varying views on Garrett's role can be found in King,

They found they had much to talk about. Lack of respect from men, being ignored, or found threatening, being treated as sexual objects--all this and more came out--and was repeated by woman after woman. The discussion was wide ranging and included sexism in the larger society as well as in SDS. They also discussed their backgrounds--expectations of them as girls when they were growing up. Many realized for the first time that they were not alone in their complaints as women and that they were facing something larger than personal fears and inadequacies.

For women's liberation pioneers Marilyn Webb and Heather Booth, these discussions were the start of women's liberation organizing. Webb said that the discussion "galvanized enormous numbers of meetings of women endlessly."⁴⁸ At twenty-three and already a veteran SDS activist, Webb was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, a community organizer, and a movement journalist.

Heather Booth had come to the conference specifically for the discussion of Hayden and King's memo. Reading it, she had thought, "Oh boy, this is really true. We're going to have to find some way to work this out."⁴⁹ She wanted the women and men to meet together, and tried to hold the group

Freedom Song, 467, and Evans, *Personal Politics*, 162.

⁴⁸ Marilyn Webb quoted in Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 35.

⁴⁹ Heather Booth quoted in Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 353.

together. Finally, appalled at the men's behavior, she ended up leading a walk out of some of the women. But she was not yet ready for a separate women's liberation movement.

The women called the workshop a "Women's Caucus." It lasted three days. Webb said the discussion was the "first time we applied politics to ourselves."⁵⁰ Indeed, a post conference analysis listed women's relegation to "dish washing, cooking, cleaning, clerical work" as evidence that within SDS women were "an oppressed class."⁵¹ The lesson of excluding men from the meeting endured. When the first women's liberation groups began meeting, they took the highly controversial stand of excluding men.

Momentum was an important outcome of the workshop. Participants were fascinated with the discussions on the woman question and wanted to learn more. Some of the women were unable to resume activism "as usual" when they got home. Cathy Barrett, a southern organizer, returned home and organized a course on women at the New Orleans Free School. Heather Booth initiated a course on women at the organizers' school in Chicago. And from this point forward the woman question remained foremost in Booth's organizing. Not long after the workshop, she started Jane, the underground abortion network that radiated out of Chicago.

⁵⁰ Webb quoted in Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 35.

⁵¹ "December Conference Impressions," *New Left Notes*, 28 January 1966.

Webb could not stop either. She wanted to continue the workshop discussion. Back in Chicago she organized a women's group that brought together a number of the founding members of the later West Side Group, considered the first women's liberation group in the nation. Webb's group met continuously from January, 1966, through spring, 1967. Talking about their lives helped Webb, as she said, to "find the words to describe a reality that was women's."⁵² This group helped to set the stage for the West Side Group, led Webb to organize a group in Washington, D.C., and helped prepare Paula Goldsmidt for women's liberation organizing in Durham, North Carolina when she and Sara Evans moved there in 1968.

While Webb's group met in Chicago, Booth, who was a member, taught courses on women, as did Barrett in New Orleans. Meanwhile, in Gainesville, Jones and Brown worked in isolation on "The Florida Paper." Hayden and King's second memo circulated throughout the movement. As they had hoped, feminist dialogue did open among women organizing against the war, poverty, and racism--a dialogue that continued to grow in militancy. More and more women spoke up and talked with one another about the politics of their treatment from men. The momentum of the 1965 workshop was maintained. In June 1967, the call for ending sexism in the

⁵² Marilyn Webb, interview by author, 22 May 2002, New York, tape recording in possession of author.

New Left begun by Hayden and King reached the floor of the national SDS conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

At the Ann Arbor conference the women's workshop brought a report to the floor of the convention, where it was approved by the plenary. The women demanded that women's liberation be fully included in all aspects of SDS, that the organization demand shared housework, provide childcare, and support abortion and birth control. This would free women to fight the issues of the day as men's equals. The report also called for an internal educational campaign that, among other activities, would study the position of women under capitalism. To legitimize their demands, the women called women's relationship with men "colonial."⁵³ Amidst sexist catcalls, hooting, and disruption from men, the report was approved. While a number of men were obviously not looking forward to having their privileges educated away, the organization had resolved, at least formally, to reform male chauvinism within its ranks.

As Hayden and King observed in "Sex and Caste," radical women had "learned a great deal in the movement." Could it be, as they said, that "a determined attempt to apply ideas we've learned there can produce some new alternatives." Was the New Left "one place to look for some relief"?⁵⁴ Beverly

⁵³ "Liberation of Women," *New Left Notes*, 10 July 1967, 4.

⁵⁴ Hayden and King, "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo" (November 18, 1965) in King, *Freedom Song*, 574.

Jones and Judith Brown did not think so.

The following month, in July 1967, the workshop report was published in *New Left Notes*, the SDS newspaper. In Gainesville, Florida, Jones and Brown, who were SDS members, read it and at first their hearts sank. Then they got angry. In a sharp attack, they aimed "The Florida Paper" directly at the report of the SDS women, blasting it for seeking reform of SDS as opposed to recognizing the need for a separate movement for women's liberation. Jones and Brown argued for the very movement Hayden and King had, in 1965, seen no chance for. They called on women to "fight their own battles," and accused the women in SDS of rejecting an identification with their own sex" in order to "advance themselves personally in the male power structure they are presently concerned with."⁵⁵ Jones and Brown called the list of demands a "sweet-talking...appeal to male conscience" and a "Tom betrayal of a whole people."⁵⁶

Jones and Brown charged that on the backs of their oppressed constituency, some women in SDS wanted to rise to token status in the New Left rather than organizing for women's liberation. They called the discussion of women's colonial status a "pathetic attempt on the part of the caucus to prove its credentials by mimicking the dominant

⁵⁵ Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 366.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 367.

group's rhetoric on power politics."⁵⁷ This approach to women's liberation was not only "immoral," Jones and Brown said, but it would not work.⁵⁸ Why? Because men simply had too much to lose to give up their privileges without the kind of battle that only a mass movement of women could make. What might a man lose? He would lose "the great maintenance force" who, Jones and Brown said, "wipe his ass and breast feed him when he is little, school him in his youthful years, do his clerical work and raise his and their replacements later, and all through his life...in the restaurants, hospitals, and homes, they sew for him, stoop for him, cook for him, clean for him, sweep, run errands...and nurse him when his frail body falters."⁵⁹ There was only one way out of this for women, including women in SDS, and that was to organize a mass, independent movement for women's liberation. It would be less than a year before Jones and Brown would make public these compelling arguments.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 363.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 367.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2

"AFTER THAT PAPER, THERE WOULD BE NO TURNING BACK"

Unbeknownst to Jones and Brown, two women in Chicago were about to take action that would bring the formation of an independent movement for the liberation of women a giant step closer. Jo Freeman had recently arrived in Chicago fresh from the southern civil rights movement. She had lived with black families in small towns in Alabama and South Carolina for over a year doing voter registration work. There the contempt she had previously felt for women changed to an attitude of respect--pride almost. When Hosea Williams, her supervisor at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), sent only the male staff to the Meredith March in Mississippi in June 1966, Freeman organized a car full of women and took off for the March. On the March she heard the term "male chauvinism" for the first time, another precursor to feminist consciousness. She was beginning to understand that, like blacks, women faced group oppression all their own. By the summer of 1967 she was actively looking for ways to organize women.

Freeman visited the SDS office in Chicago where she found out about the course on women Heather Booth and Naomi

Weisstein were teaching. She was in time to attend only the last session. There she learned that a big New Left conference, the National Conference for a New Politics (NCNP), would be held in Chicago over Labor Day weekend. She proposed a women's workshop for the conference, and traveling SDS organizer Jane Adams called a series of meetings to plan one. Although the plans failed, Freeman went to the NCNP only to find a women's workshop already on the schedule.

In the workshop Freeman met Shulamith Firestone, whose transformative teenage reading of *The Second Sex* had sent her feminist consciousness sky high. Firestone had subsequently graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago. Finding herself discriminated against as an artist because she was a woman, she decided instead of an art career to devote "my creative energy to founding a women's liberation movement."¹ Attendance at the workshop at the NCNP was her first venture at women's liberation organizing, and it had a remarkable result.

The workshop came up with a resolution to present to the plenary calling for equal pay for equal work and for abortion on demand. Freeman discovered, however, that the resolutions chairperson had pushed aside the feminist resolution from the workshop in favor of a resolution for

¹ Shulamith Firestone, Resume (photocopy, n.d.),

peace from the Women Strike for Peace, a veteran women's peace organization. The chair said that he would not accept two "women's" resolutions. When negotiations with the WSP brought a compromise that bore little resemblance to the original resolution, Freeman and Firestone angrily produced their own. After writing all night, they drew up a radical new resolution that demanded a revamping of marriage, property and divorce laws, free abortion and birth control, and an end to sexual stereotyping in the media. Only pressure on the conference leadership wrung a commitment to bring their resolution to the floor. They rounded up a posse and passed out 2000 copies of it. At the last minute, instead of presenting the resolution, the chair dismissed it in favor of "more important" issues and gave Firestone a patronizing pat on the head.² Firestone and Freeman were enraged.

When the conference was over, Firestone and Freeman called another meeting of the women with whom Freeman had originally tried to organize a workshop including Heather Booth and Naomi Weisstein. For Weisstein, who had taught the course on women with Booth for two summers, the meeting was the culmination of years of proto-feminist activities and the start of her work toward an autonomous women's liberation movement.

Redstockings Archives.

² Freeman, "On the Origins," 180.

Weisstein had learned of the woman question growing up in an old left family. She had been taught about male chauvinism by her mother and taught to oppose any form of political oppression collectively. In the New Left she became a skilled organizer. Now she would apply those skills to women's liberation with the new group as her base.

The women began meeting in Freeman's apartment on Chicago's West Side, the source of the group's name. Everyone was furious with the treatment of Firestone and Freeman at the conference and the patronizing dismissal of their resolution. As one participant remarked, "rage at what had happened at the convention kept us going for at least three months."³ "The best part about the group," Weisstein said, "was that we all took each other seriously."⁴ They decided to exclude men from meetings and to talk about how to meet the need for women's liberation. And so the West Side Group was born. Two months later, in November 1967, they announced the formation of the group in an article "Chicago Women form Liberation Group" in *New Left Notes*. In the article, they told of their intention "to take the

³ Anonymous by request, quoted in Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 114.

⁴ Naomi Weisstein in Amy Kesselman, with Heather Booth, Vivian Rothstein, and Naomi Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, eds. Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 38.

initiative in organizing ourselves for our own liberation."⁵

Although the women in the West Side Group were experienced organizers, it was hard to know where to begin. Why were women oppressed anyway? Who or what was at the bottom of it? "We asked ourselves what we should call the thing that was squelching us. Male supremacy? Female subordination? Male chauvinism? Capitalist debris?" said Weisstein.⁶ Should they organize from within the New Left or should they organize a movement for women's liberation independent of the New Left? Founding member Fran Rominski said the "main internal argument" was: "Do we work with women already in the movement or with women outside the movement, women who are totally unorganized?"⁷ The group was ready for action, yet these important questions were unresolved. Even the decision to exclude the men was difficult. And many of the women were under pressure from male coworkers in the New Left not to divide the movement by raising the woman question. They had just organized the first women's liberation group in the nation. There was, as yet, no women's movement. Where should they go from here?

⁵ "Chicago Women Form Liberation Group," *New Left Notes*, 13 November 1967.

⁶ Weisstein in Kesselman, with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 39.

⁷ Fran Rominski, Chicago, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 19 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

Many of the West Siders were still intent on reforming the New Left. In addition they hoped to convince their male coworkers to adopt women's liberation as one of its major battle fronts. Then they would focus on organizing women into the New Left. This way, they could fight against women's oppression and the war in Vietnam too. Toward that end, the West Side Group could be a pressure group to increase women's influence within the New Left. Firestone and Freeman, however, knew nothing of Hayden and King's call for reform of the New Left from within. Unfamiliar with SDS and left-wing politics in Chicago, Firestone did not read "Sex and Caste" until after the West Side Group got going. Neither she nor Freeman saw the Group as a milestone on a path begun by Hayden and King three years earlier. Instead, they saw it as the start of a new movement. And so it was.

Barely a month after the group in Chicago was off the ground, Shulamith Firestone moved to New York City to organize a "sister chapter," as the West Siders called it.⁸ On her first day there, armed with names and phone numbers from the feminists in Chicago, she wrote to Freeman that she was "very optimistic and excited."⁹ Firestone took waitressing jobs to support herself, and started recruiting

⁸ "Chicago Women," *New Left Notes*, 13 November 1967.

⁹ Shulamith Firestone, New York, to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 17 October 1967, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

for New York Radical Women (NYRW). But Firestone was not alone. Veteran activist Pam Allen had been living in New York City for about a year. She had visited friends in Chicago just as the West Side Group was getting underway. She found out about the group and about Firestone's impending move to New York. Allen leapt at the chance to organize a women's liberation group. Before she returned to New York, she hooked up with Firestone in Chicago and together they began to plan for the new group.

Allen had been growing more and more dissatisfied with her life since she left SNCC. There, she felt that she had been treated with respect as a woman. This did not seem to her the case in the larger society, however, in her new marriage or her new job as a social worker. Comparing her life in SNCC with her present situation, she concluded that her current dissatisfaction had little to do with her personally and everything to do with the arbitrary and unfair situation of women. She was bursting to find like-minded women.

Like Firestone and Freeman, Allen had no knowledge of Hayden and King's earlier work and no particular interest in ridding the New Left of male chauvinism. NYRW, the group she and Firestone organized, would, like Jones and Brown's "Florida Paper," be a new force, a new path toward a female liberation movement. But organization's roots were the same

as Hayden and King's work and "The Florida Paper," Simone de Beauvoir and the southern civil rights movement. Allen brought the influence of SNCC to Firestone's Beauvoir-inspired radical feminism. Allen was also advised by Patricia Robinson, who was organizing the radical black women's liberation group, Poor Black Women.

A mass-based, independent movement was what Allen and Firestone both sought from the start, and they recruited on that basis. They differed, in part, on what such a movement should take aim at and what was at the bottom of women's oppression. Nonetheless, they pressed ahead exuberantly and without hesitation. In November, they called their first meeting in Allen's apartment on the Lower East Side. It was barely a month after Firestone's arrival in the city.

Within a few weeks the group had a number of regular participants--among them Kathie Sarachild (then Amatniek). Like Firestone, Sarachild had her feminist consciousness raised by *The Second Sex* in her early teens. Younger still, like Weisstein in Chicago, Sarachild had learned about the woman question as a "red-diaper baby." Now twenty-four, she had been insisting for over a decade that people read *The Second Sex*, arguing against male chauvinism wherever she encountered it, and since SNCC, thinking about organizing on that model for women's freedom. Ann Koedt, one of Allen's first recruits, and Carol Hanisch, who, with Sarachild, came

a few weeks later when Firestone recruited them, were also strong leaders for an independent movement.

As they developed, NYRW and the West Side Group seeded the coming movement. From the publications, actions, and training of organizers in these groups came new groups, a new public consciousness of sexism, and theories of women's oppression. By January 1968, the West Side Group, with its ten original members, had mushroomed into four new groups with three more on the way. Later in the year, the group in Durham, North Carolina, would begin when West Siders Sara Evans and Paula Goldsmid moved there from Chicago.¹⁰ New groups evolved out of NYRW too, among them WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) and later Redstockings. The most significant contribution of NYRW came in its first few months of life with the creation of feminist consciousness-raising.

Kathie Sarachild and Ann Forer, another red-diaper baby in NYRW, first put forward the consciousness-raising method of organizing and theory production. They were among the first to dare to talk about problems many, at least for a while, saw as personal. Sarachild and Forer also insisted that the others join in. Participants in consciousness-raising took turns answering what appeared to be a personal question. From the pool of responses, they soon learned that

¹⁰ Sara Evans, interview by author, 9 November 2000, Louisville, Ky., tape recording in the possession of author.

many women shared problems they had formerly seen as individual. The collected responses also revealed that the problems were caused by the systemic imbalance of power between men and women, rather than women's individual inadequacies.

Consciousness-raising led to the formation of new groups and brought women into the movement at a great rate. At the same time, it produced theoretical breakthroughs such as the concept "The Personal is Political," described in Carol Hanisch's groundbreaking paper by the same name.¹¹ After NYRW went public with consciousness-raising, the method spread fast. Little over a year later, women in Redstockings were "speaking out" before television cameras about their own illegal abortions. In France, Simone De Beauvoir, among other well-known women, signed public petitions declaring that they, too, had had illegal abortions.

The First Two Groups Join Forces

But in January 1968 such public statements were yet to come. That month the "sister chapters" were all there was to the women's liberation branch of the movement.¹² Then the

¹¹ Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings, 204-205.

¹² At that point, although this would soon change, the National Organization for Women (NOW), consisted of about

two groups joined forces for their first public action. They called a counter demonstration and a meeting in Washington, D.C., at a large women's peace march put on by the Jeanette Rankin Brigade. Jeanette Rankin was the first female congresswoman and sole member of congress to vote against both World War I and World War II. The Brigade, a coalition of women's peace groups composed mostly of older women in the veteran Women Strike for Peace, was petitioning Congress on its opening day to call an end to the war in Vietnam. In New York, Pam Allen wrote to Jo Freeman in Chicago: "Plans are underway for the N.Y. Radical women's Group to stage a funeral of 'weeping womanhood'...We are hoping that the Chicago group will want to participate in the funeral...the idea is that we'll present the problem, you propose actions. How does that sound?"¹³ For most of the New Yorkers, the "problem" was to raise the feminist consciousness of their sisters in the Brigade.

The Brigade was depending upon the stereotype of "weeping womanhood"--"playing upon the traditional female

1,200 members who saw themselves primarily as a lobbying or pressure group at the national level. (The number of NOW members is given in Jo Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 80). See also Brownmiller's discussion of her rejection from early NOW by Betty Friedan who had informed her that NOW was "not soliciting general members," and "was to be a select committee of professional women who would lobby Congress." Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, 1999), 3.

¹³ Pam Allen, New York, to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 31 December 1967, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files

role in the classic manner," as Shulamith Firestone characterized it.¹⁴ This tactic, as NYRW saw it, was impotent and ineffective. "This power is only a substitute for power," argued Kathie Sarachild in her speech to the Brigade women.¹⁵ Instead, to gain real political power in affairs of state and over their own lives, she said, women would need to organize a movement for their own liberation.

For most of the West Side Group, however, the problem was not so much that women, as women, were organizing against the war. Heather Booth and other West Siders did argue that until women "go beyond justifying themselves in terms of their wombs and breasts...they will never be able to exert any political power."¹⁶ But the overriding reason the West Side Group thought that the march of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade was ineffective was that its demands were liberal rather than radical and its demonstration was mild mannered. There would be no civil disobedience and no arrests. And the whole idea of petitioning Congress was off

of Jo Freeman.

¹⁴ Shulamith Firestone, "The Jeanette Rankin Brigade: Woman Power?" in *Notes from the First Year: Women's Liberation*, ed. Shulamith Firestone (New York: New York Radical Women, 1968), 18. Redstockings Archives. Hereafter called "Notes I," to distinguish it from *Notes from the Second Year*, edited by Firestone and Anne Koedt.

¹⁵ Kathie Sarachild, "Funeral Oration for the Burial of Traditional Womanhood," in *Notes I*, ed. Firestone, 21.

¹⁶ Heather Booth, Sue Munaker, Evelyn Goldfield, "Women in the Radical Movement," mimeograph, Redstockings Archives.

the mark, Booth and the others held, because effective anti-war work meant "talking to people about taking power."¹⁷ Thus the two groups opposed the peace march, although for different reasons. Significantly, despite the ideological differences and the tough negotiations over the conduct of the action, the West Side Group and NYRW forged ahead with the counter demonstration and meeting. The joint action hastened the new movement by practical expansion on a number of fronts and by the presentation of a powerful new concept, "Sisterhood Is Powerful."

Sarachild came up with the slogan, and she put it on a leaflet she brought to the joint action. Her speech reflected many of the ideas in the Sisterhood is Powerful leaflet. "Why should we bury Traditional Womanhood while hundreds of thousands of human beings are being brutally slaughtered in our names," she asked, referring to the war in Vietnam.¹⁸ Answering the question with more questions, she said: "How many sisters failed to join our march today because they were afraid their husbands would disapprove? How many more sisters...failed to join because they've been taught to believe that women are silly...how many others of us fail...to argue and demonstrate...because we're afraid of seeming unattractive, silly, 'uppity.'" Women, Sarachild

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Sarachild, "Funeral Oration," in *Notes I*, ed. Firestone,

said, "must organize so that for man there can be no 'other woman' when we begin expressing ourselves and acting politically."¹⁹ To wield political power, Sarachild argued, women needed unity in a militant sisterhood. Sarachild's speech was preceded by street theatre. NYRW staged a funeral procession with a dummy representing Traditional Womanhood on a bier hung with curlers, garters, and other symbols of women's "substitute power."

In addition to presenting the concept Sisterhood is Powerful, this first joint action expanded the base of the nascent movement by calling a meeting that brought together fifty women from fourteen states. The participants made the decision to organize women back home in their local areas and to set up a newsletter to coordinate the work. Jo Freeman agreed to edit the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* (VWLM), the first women's liberation newsletter. The meeting also generated a contact list which was used for the first mailing of the newsletter and to raise money for a theoretical journal Dee Ann Pappas was planning.

The decision to organize new groups virtually doubled the size of the emerging movement. Almost immediately after the meeting, Marilyn Webb, who had recently moved from Chicago to Washington, D.C., pulled together a women's liberation group there. Dee Ann Pappas organized a women's

liberation group in Baltimore, and Anne Weills organized Berkeley Women's Liberation. Weills, who had grown up as the tomboy playmate of six brothers who were her childhood neighbors, had just had a baby. Her husband had wanted a child more than she did, but now would not share the work of child care. Anne, a leader in the New Left on the West Coast, who had fundraised for the action in D.C., had to stay home. When women returned to Berkeley all excited, her house became "a hotbed" of women's liberation meetings.²⁰

Dee Ann Pappas got the idea for a theoretical journal at the Washington action and decided to start a women's liberation group as well. Pappas thought of herself as "one of the boys" in the leadership circle of the anti-war movement in Baltimore.²¹ For a few years now, since reading *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique*, she had been trying to analyze the situation of women. These books strongly affected her, she said, and "created the first crack in my marriage." For Pappas, the deciding push to organize women came when Pam Allen taught consciousness-raising to her at the joint action. Back in Baltimore, Pappas invited the women in her anti-war group to a women's liberation meeting and they began to hold consciousness-

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Anne Weills, interview by author, New York, 14 June 2001, tape recording in the possession of author.

²¹ Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, New York, 19

raising sessions. Pappas called this detailed way of examining the concrete conditions of their lives "applying Marxist ideas in the way I was analyzing the situation of women."²²

New groups started because of the joint action in D.C., and new members flocked to the original "sister chapters." "We have gotten whole groups of new people lately, many of them from the Brigade contact, and some very promising," Firestone wrote to Freeman after the action (emphasis Firestone).²³ In Chicago, Freeman wrote, "From a rather fitful and timid start we are growing far faster than any of us had ever imagined."²⁴ Indeed, with new theory and new organizing, the action had been highly successful. And the two groups had worked together despite ideological differences. Still, Firestone and Allen were not satisfied with the way things had gone.

The Brigade protest had created opportunities that the West Side Group and NYRW had failed to make good on. In

September 2000, tape recording in the possession of author.

²² Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, 11 June 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

²³ Shulamith Firestone, New York, to Jo Freeman, Chicago, n.d. March 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

²⁴ Jo Freeman, "The genesis of the women's liberation movement" (Chicago, n.d.) This unpublished paper was probably written in February 1968 shortly after the action at the Brigade. Copy in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

particular, there was a moment when five hundred women, frustrated by the very sense of impotence Sarachild named in her speech, broke away from the Brigade to hold a counter congress. "We were not really prepared to rechannel this disgust, to provide the direction...There was chaos," Firestone said. Allen wrote, "We had...no ready program for these women...They wanted action, not rhetoric, and we had no action to offer."²⁵ Moreover, there was very little press coverage, considering that the five thousand women marching in the Brigade constituted the largest female protest since the days of the suffrage campaigns. Here was more evidence of women's impotence.

Along with their unpreparedness, Firestone and Allen were demoralized by the arguments between the New York and Chicago groups. Allen spoke of "distrust and anger," but Firestone saw the problem as one of ideology and consciousness.²⁶ The speech given by the representative of the West Side Group "did not even mention women's oppression at all," Firestone said.²⁷ Moreover, when NYRW had to fight for the time slot they had been promised for a speech, Firestone said the West Siders "insisted the feminist thing

²⁵ *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, March 1968, 3.

²⁶ Pam Allen, New York, to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 6 February 1968, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

²⁷ Firestone, New York, to Freeman, Chicago, n.d. March 1968.

wasn't important enough to make a stink about."²⁸ Firestone was right about ideological differences. Most of the West Side Group were more ambivalent about the new direction they were taking than most in NYRW. They were out there on the edge, organizing a women's liberation movement all right, but was this really the way to go? It was January 1968. History was moving very fast.

Two weeks later, the Vietnamese launched the Tet Offensive, demonstrating that the United States had grossly overstated its success in Vietnam. A month later, in March, Lyndon Johnson, discredited by Tet and increasingly unpopular because of the war, declared he would not seek nomination for President in the fall. In April, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. Black communities all over America erupted in days of uncontrolled rioting. In May a revolt of French students instigated a general strike of ten million workers that practically brought down the French government. In June Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. There was so much more to think about besides women's liberation.

The Path of the Florida Paper

Young radical women were active on many fronts, but it was clear to those who were also organizing for women's

²⁸ Ibid.

liberation, that women--not just in the peace and freedom movement--but in the larger society as well, had little chance of having much impact. For a time at least, the problem of women's liberation would have to come first. Otherwise, as Sarachild had pointed out in her speech, and the Brigade action clearly demonstrated, women would not be taken seriously. Yet it was hard to keep one's eyes on the prize. As experienced activists, should they not be planning anti-war demonstrations for the Democratic Convention that fall? That the Convention was in Chicago only further increased the pressure on women's liberation founders there. But in New York, Pam Allen and a number of others were also worried about a women's presence at the Convention. The new groups in Washington, Berkeley, and Baltimore thought this was important too. If capitalism were the cause of women's oppression, as most of them believed, why should not women's liberation groups take on capitalism wherever it was vulnerable? Why not oppose the war, the business order, and the Democratic Party as women? But if women were not taken seriously, what was the point of themselves as women?

As the West Side Group floundered, "The Florida Paper" arrived from Gainesville with its galvanizing call for a mass movement independent of the New Left. "As we begin talking to women about female liberation," said Jones and Brown, "[women] tell us they are scared. Being afraid has

been a genuine response of oppressed people to their initial encounter with a vision of liberation. Discipline and organization are the antidote...As radical women, we must set the tone...organizing projects that...speak to American women about their condition. We have not conned ourselves into political paralysis as an excuse for inaction--we are a subjugated caste."²⁹ At last Jones and Brown had overcome their own fear of rejection. Their courage would inspire others who were as deeply committed as they in New Left cadre formations in their own communities and nationally.

Naomi Weisstein explained the impact of the document this way: "After we got started, for months we were paralyzed with doubt: was there any need for an independent women's movement, since the triumph of socialism would surely dismantle the patriarchy? Then the paper came out. It transformed our thinking...Now we knew we were doing the right thing. Here was a vision of the liberation of women so real, palpable, and compelling that our doubts dissolved and we forged ahead...After that paper, there would be no turning back for us or for the rest of the movement."³⁰

Like Weisstein, Fran Rominski of the West Side Group wanted to organize a mass movement of women independent of the New Left. Yet her position on that issue "always

²⁹ Brown in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 413.

³⁰ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 23 June 1991, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

fluctuated," she wrote to Brown until she read "The Florida Paper."³¹ The reason the West Siders had not charged ahead for a new movement, choosing instead to focus on women within the New Left, Rominski said, was part of a strategy to "get the movement to adopt women's liberation as one of its major battles."³² But now, she was ready to organize women in the larger society. "The thing that most excited me about the paper," she wrote Brown, "it is something...I can give to anyone, unlike much of what has been written in the past...especially, what has come out of Chicago."³³ But Rominski did not know where to begin.

Like many women with years in the New Left, she was out of contact with women outside the movement. "I know so few women, and the ones I know are mostly in the movement," she said. She felt stuck. She wanted to let go of organizing within the New Left but did not know how to reach out. "I do need a way to get in touch with more women...for myself and Chicago," she said. She wanted to open a women's center to attract the curious but as yet uncommitted. "Give me your opinion," she wrote to Brown.³⁴

³¹ Fran Rominski, Chicago, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 19 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

Brown wanted to find women who saw the need for a mass independent movement--this was the central reason she had made a written case for it. She wanted female organizing partners like the Gainesville Band, but for a women's liberation movement. So, distributing "The Florida Paper" was the first thing to do. Other contemporaries agreed. Weisstein put up her own money to mimeograph three hundred copies. Remarkably, she was joined by Marlene Dixon, a Marxist sociology professor who had not yet joined a women's liberation group. Dixon, soon fired from the University of Chicago for activism, had been the first woman appointed to her department in over fifteen years. The massive protest over her dismissal brought the demand, among others, for a day care center at the university, a demand which women's liberation eventually won.

A year later, as women's liberation took off around the nation, Dixon, who would go on to organize a feminist led, national political party on the left, gave an interview. Although she did not indicate that she agreed with Jones and Brown's case that at least for now, men were the enemy, Dixon nonetheless welcomed "The Florida Paper" with high praise. "Then the publication of the central paper, 'Toward a Female Liberation Movement'...That started it if anything written started it. That paper just laid it on the line."³⁵

³⁵ Marlene Dixon, "On the Beginnings," in Joan Robins,

Outside of Chicago, too, the paper set the course of the early movement. The editor of the *New South Student*, the journal of the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), the Southern counterpart of the SDS, called the paper a "kind of 'what is to be done' for the movement."³⁶ SSOC distributed the paper, as did The New England Free Press, an alternative publishing house.

The paper, a "frontal assault" on proposals to reform male chauvinism in the New Left, hit women's liberation founders favoring this strategy hard.³⁷ It clearly named the enemy, proclaimed the cause of female oppression, outlined steps toward an independent movement, and, significantly, spoke to several groups of women at once. For housewives with children, Jones set forth in detail the overwhelming oppression of women--on a daily basis, at the breakfast table, in the bedroom, in routine conversations with men. And Brown gave a similar portrait of younger, childless women.

Thus, "The Florida Paper," as Rominski had predicted, could be given "to anyone." It spread rapidly across the

Handbook of Women's Liberation (North Hollywood, Cal.: NOW Library Press, 1970), 105.

³⁶ Dave Nolan to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Florida, 21 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

³⁷ Alice Echols, "Indeed, the 'Florida Paper' was nothing less than a frontal assault on the politico position," in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 63.

United States and by December 1968 had crossed the Atlantic to Sweden, where portions of it were published in a Swedish magazine. "An inquiry makes it clear that your views do have considerable impact on women," the Swedish editor wrote Brown.³⁸ "I want to organize a group. Can you help me?" inquired housewives with no connection to the New Left.³⁹ Responses to the paper such as these energized planning for the organization of a mass movement for women's liberation.

Once, the hope of reforming sexism in the peace and freedom movement, especially in their beloved SNCC, had given Hayden and King courage to write the critique that led to the first women's liberation group. But as the New Left resisted women's liberation, hope dwindled producing a paralysis in those whose hopes had been the highest. Now, "The Florida Paper," with a plan for an independent movement and a scathing indictment of male chauvinism on the left, helped to dispel the paralysis. The very origin of the paper significantly added to the optimism it generated. Gainesville was a small town in rural North Florida. It was the site of a conservative state university known mostly for football. Who ever heard of this place? If women there

³⁸ Lars Backstrom, Stockholm, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 25 December 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

³⁹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 27 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

wanted a women's liberation movement, then might not women whom no one was aware of in other such towns around the nation want one too?

A Collision Course of Collaboration

The paths leading to the early movement were converging--bringing together new ideas, fresh hope, more troops. From the trajectory Hayden and King began in 1964 came the West Side Group in Chicago, which, in turn, gave rise to a "sister chapter," the New York Radical Women. But NYRW was making a path of its own, independently of Hayden and King, whose work was unknown to NYRW founders Firestone and Allen. The joint action of the two groups at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade spawned more groups, a women's liberation newsletter, and Sisterhood Is Powerful, a theory for an independent movement. Now "The Florida Paper," from seemingly out of nowhere, broke new ground. It remained for the Gainesville and New York paths to cross. In August, 1968 in Sandy Springs, Maryland, at the first national meeting of the emerging movement, they did.

New York and Gainesville women were on "a collision course of collaboration," as Brown put it, because women's liberation founders there were "fueled by some common movement and life experience and some common insights about

what needed to be done."⁴⁰ "We knew nothing of each other or the others' publications," Judith Brown said of the New Yorkers, and the discovery of each others' work "changed my life."⁴¹ Sarachild was ecstatic over "The Florida Paper," ranking it next to Beauvoir in consciousness-raising power. "To me this...is the most powerful single women's liberation statement after *The Second Sex*," Sarachild said.⁴² This was the highest praise from Sarachild who traced to Beauvoir the awakening of her own feminist consciousness.

Sarachild came to the meeting at Sandy Springs fearing that she and a few coworkers in NYRW, as the only independent movement advocates there, would be overwhelmed by opposing views. To support their case, they brought NYRW's first publication, *Notes from the First Year*, with them to distribute. So it was heartening to say the least, to find the Gainesvillians there making very similar arguments for a mass independent movement. Here were veteran civil rights and new left leaders, utterly unknown to Sarachild, from a place she had never heard of, dedicated to building an independent movement, naming men as the enemy, and effectively using personal experience as evidence to

⁴⁰ Judith Brown, "Origins of Consciousness-Raising in the South: Gainesville or Tampa?" (Pamphlet, 1 September 1986; distributed by Gainesville Women's Liberation, Fla.), 3, Redstockings Archives.

⁴¹ Ibid.

support these positions. Sarachild felt that the interaction of Gainesville and New York thinking would hasten the emergence of the movement. But the meeting at Sandy Springs was pivotal in the life of the new movement for other reasons as well.

Back in the spring of 1968, before Sandy Springs, Jones and Brown had not been able to keep silent any longer. "The Florida Paper" was almost finished. They had called it "Toward a Female Liberation Movement" for a reason. Brown literally hoped to organize a movement by handing out the paper. In that way she would find women who agreed that a movement was needed and with whom she could then organize. Beyond that, Jones and Brown hoped that the paper would convince others who might not yet have understood the necessity for a movement. Brown believed that a meeting of women who were interested in women's liberation would be an efficient way to begin.

One night, desperate to find such women, Brown began dialing telephone numbers in Baltimore on the "crazy chance" one of them might belong to a woman she had admired as a "toughie" as a teenager years ago at summer camp in Gainesville. Brown had read in *New Left Notes* that Dee Ann Pappas, a woman in Baltimore with the same first name as her old friend, was starting a theoretical journal about women's liberation. But their last names were different, and Brown

⁴² Jones and Brown, "Toward," inside back cover.

had no idea where her old friend Dee Ann was living.

Brown could not believe her luck. Dee Ann Pappas was her friend from summer camp. And she was working on a quarterly women's liberation journal and organizing a women's liberation group in Baltimore. Brown and Jones took off immediately for Baltimore. Pappas then took them to Washington to meet Marilyn Webb, whose position on working within the New Left they had attacked in "The Florida Paper." Although they strongly disagreed over whether women's liberation should be organized as an independent movement, the four began enthusiastically planning a three-day meeting of women who were organizing women's liberation groups or writing about women's liberation. Brown wrote Webb after their initial planning session: "we ought to emphasize that serious disagreements be settled through position papers...rather than try to insist that the group reach an immediate consensus on issues that could make for artificial divides." She signed off, "that Sunday evening was a milestone. You're some beautiful people."⁴³

They had intended to meet in Jones's house but the number of women expected soon grew too large for this. Pappas found a Quaker camp in Sandy Springs, Maryland, the Sandy Springs Friends School, that would rent to them for

⁴³ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Marilyn Webb, Washington, D.C., n.d. July 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

one dollar per woman per night.⁴⁴ On Aug 2, 1968, six weeks after Brown called Baltimore information on the chance that her childhood friend had become a women's liberation organizer, a score of women took their seats in the large meeting hall at Sandy Springs.⁴⁵

"All of them were true leaders," said Roxanne Dunbar who had come from Boston, "militants with battle scars...from the front lines facing police dogs and jail in Mississippi and organizing antiwar demonstrations for the Students for a Democratic Society."⁴⁶ Webb and Pappas were veteran anti-Vietnam war organizers who had started out in local civil rights work. Jones and Brown had spent years in the southern civil rights movement and also worked in SDS. From New York, Kathie Sarachild and Carol Hanisch were Mississippi civil rights veterans. From Chicago, Sue Munaker and Fran Rominski were longtime anti-war activists, and Jo Freeman had been a leader in the Berkeley Free Speech

⁴⁴ Marilyn Webb, Washington, D.C. to "Hi All" [invitees to the Sandy Springs, Md., meeting], 27 July 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

⁴⁵ The precise number in attendance is unclear. Looking at the transcripts of tape recorded portions of the meeting, handwritten notes made at the time show nineteen participants, Sandy Springs Transcript, Redstockings Archives. In *Daring to Be Bad*, Echols says 20 women attended, as does Brownmiller in *In Our Time*, 31. In *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, Jo Freeman, who was there herself, says 22 were present, 106.

⁴⁶ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman: A Memoir of the War*

Movement and worked for projects of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Georgia, South Carolina, Alabama, and Mississippi. Sara Evans from Durham had been the North Carolina coordinator of Vietnam Summer, an anti-war project. The stories of the other participants were much the same. Their collective history charged the hall with confidence and power. Their wisdom and collective victories in changing the status quo filled their debates with passion and purpose.

Before they tackled questions of theory and ideology, local groups and representatives reported on their work. Plans laid at the Brigade action the previous January were moving ahead. The newsletter, *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, was publishing, and new groups in Berkeley, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore were up and running. New York Radical Women explained consciousness-raising, their new method for organizing women and analyzing women's oppression. Seemingly out of nowhere, a group was starting in Boston, organized by Roxanne Dunbar and Dana Densmore, two women unknown to the others there.

Dunbar, like many women's liberation founders, had come to her feminist consciousness years earlier through reading *The Second Sex*. When a newspaper reported that "a superwoman power advocate" named Valerie Solanas had shot pop artist Andy Warhol, Dunbar believed that shot to be the start of

Years, 1960-1975 (San Francisco: City Lights, 2001), 139.

the feminist revolution she had been waiting for.⁴⁷ In Mexico at the time, preparing to visit Cuba, Dunbar took off for Boston. She had decided Boston would be fertile ground for organizing because of its history as a 19th-century center of abolitionism and feminism. There she linked up with Dana Densmore, who had been raised a radical and a feminist by her mother Donna Allen, a member of the National Women's Party and a founder of Women Strike for Peace. Together, on July 4, 1968 Dunbar and Densmore called a women's liberation meeting and now, only a month later, their group numbered eight, and the first issue of their journal was ready.

Between the joint action of the West Side Group and New York Radical Women in January 1968 in Washington and the August meeting in Sandy Springs later that year, the possibilities for a women's liberation movement had greatly increased. Groups had formed in new cities and in cities like New York and Chicago they had multiplied. Although many women had come to the January meeting, they came as individual activists who were interested in women's liberation. Now, by contrast, most of the participants at Sandy Springs represented groups.

On the second day of the meeting, the day for theoretical argument, Jones and Brown presented "The Florida

⁴⁷ Ibid., 119.

Paper." It brought into sharp focus the issue of whether to organize independently for women's liberation, raising the unresolved question of whether capitalism or male supremacy was the cause of women's oppression. Jones and Brown were just as surprised as Sarachild to find new, unexpected allies. The New Yorkers had brought *Notes from the First Year. Notes*, edited by Shulamith Firestone, published the speech Sarachild had given at the Burial of Traditional Womanhood, with its explanation of "Sisterhood Is Powerful," the theory for a mass movement. Now two calls for a mass, independent movement were circulating. Finally on the third day of the meeting, the women laid another piece of the foundation. Leaving unresolved their fierce debate on the cause of women's oppression and the nature of women's oppression, this committed group of founders moved ahead with plans for a national conference for later that fall.

The importance of the Sandy Springs meeting lay in the creation of a national reference group. Brown observed that women now had a strong defense against those who attacked women's liberation using "personal, *ad hominem* things." Accusations against women's liberation founders of lesbianism were hurled around socially and in the press as women's liberation began to surface. Now, the anticipation of being charged with "eccentricity" had lost the power to keep Jones and Brown in isolation.

Judith Brown listened carefully as the New Yorkers explained consciousness-raising. Here was just what she and Jones had been trying to do with the anecdotal profiles of women in their paper. Brown recalled mass meetings of the civil rights movement where people "testified" about experiences of racism. And when she returned to Gainesville, armed with a national reference group and an organizing method, she immediately organized Gainesville Women's Liberation, the first women's liberation group in the South.

The Gainesville-New York alliance soon had national ramifications. Brown called it "an explosive intersection of thought, 'sparkling energy' and activism" from which "sparks have flown off and on ever since."⁴⁸ The women called their alliance "The Life Group," a mini think tank that Sarachild created to develop and spread the consciousness-raising program throughout the nation. Together, the Life Group also formulated "the pro-woman line," a radical reinterpretation of female survival techniques. According to the pro-woman line, flirting and dissembling were understood as political resistance rather than as acceptance of subordination.

Carol Hanisch, who had come to Sandy Springs with Sarachild from NYRW, saw the prospects for a national movement and conceived of a southern women's liberation organizing project. Within a week of the Sandy Springs

⁴⁸ Brown, "Origins of Consciousness-Raising," Redstockings Archives, 3.

meeting, she presented a written proposal for it to her employer, the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF), an "old" left organization which sponsored radical interracial organizing in the South. That fall, SCEF funded the southern project, making Carol Hanisch the first paid women's liberation organizer. She wrote Brown that she "never would have written that proposal if it had not been for "The Florida Paper."⁴⁹

Carol Hanisch was thinking big, emboldened by "The Florida Paper" and the Sandy Springs meeting. Why just a southern project? Why not a consciousness-raising action that would show the emerging movement to the nation? Why not protest the Miss America Beauty Pageant which was less than two months away?

As the meeting ended, Hanisch's optimistic mood was characteristic of the pioneers at Sandy Springs. They were undaunted by the depth of their disagreements or the enormity of the project before them. They did not argue whether or not they should organize a new movement or if they could do so. They knew that they were going to do it-- and they were even confident of victory. As the groups in New York, Chicago, D.C, Baltimore, Boston reported on their work, the isolation of local organizing ended. Brown had

⁴⁹ Carol Hanisch, New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 31 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

come from Gainesville, Florida. Sara Evans, a veteran of the West Side Group, had come from Durham, North Carolina. Thus Gainesville and Durham would soon have women's liberation groups. Organizing spread to the West Coast as well: Ann Weills in Berkeley, Pam Allen in San Francisco, and Seattle Radical Women.

Now, with Webb in the lead, the pioneers at Sandy Springs committed themselves to a large truly national conference that November. The November conference would commemorate the 120th anniversary of Seneca Falls, the historic meeting in 1848 that founded the 19th-century women's rights movement. The decision to hold the fall conference on the anniversary of Seneca Falls spoke volumes. Sitting in a room, debating, and listening to each other's progress, they plotted the rebirth of the women's rights movement.

CHAPTER 3

"SOMETHING HAD TO BE THERE ALREADY"

The explosion of women's liberation in 1967 and 1968 was, as Judith Brown observed, fueled by "common movement and life experiences" among the instigators.¹ Brown, who spent the years 1963-1968 in the civil rights movement and the New Left, analyzed experiences of male chauvinism in these movements in "The Florida Paper" which she shared with other early women's liberation organizers. Stopping male chauvinism was certainly their goal. What more did it take to create the women's liberation movement? What were the common life experiences of the women to which Brown referred?

Powerful forces framed the feminism of the women who first raised its banners in the civil rights movement and the New Left. Most of the pioneers were feminists well before they encountered sexism in these movements. Their reactions were based on a framework they had learned from families, teachers, and mentors as they came of age in the 1950s. This framework enabled them to identify sexist treatment as a social and political problem rather than a personal one. From the position paper of Casey Hayden and

¹ Brown, "Origins of Consciousness-Raising," 3.

Mary King in Mississippi to the West Side Group in Chicago; from New York Radical Women to "The Florida Paper" and points in between, the roots of women's liberation drew upon feminism instilled by the families of women's liberation founders, and the transformative influence of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*.²

Feminism in the Family

Betty Wright, the young black woman who was Brown's first leader in the southern civil rights movement, seemed to know that Brown's commitment to fighting injustice had been sown in well-prepared soil. As Wright put it, "Something had to be there already, for her to even be there with me."³

Like Betty Wright, Julian Brown knew this too. Julian, a civil rights and anti-war activist, and Judith were married in 1966. Reflecting on how they came to be in the movement which brought them together, "Brownie," as he was known, recalled with shameless male chauvinist adoration: "she was a queen, with truly royal bearing---tall, straight, blond, aloof. She also had the finest legs I'd ever seen on

² In "The Power of History," 27-28, Kathie Sarachild discusses the debt second wave feminists owe Beauvoir and traces and highlights the importance of *The Second Sex* at a time when political shifts in the movement were blurring its influence.

³ Betty Wright, interview by author, 10 September 2000, Salsbury, Md., tape recording in the possession of the

a woman. I loved walking behind her on a picket line."⁴ But, he said, the combination of physical presence and acute awareness of "anything that was unfair" intimidated men even as it left him "awestruck" and "honored" to win her hand.⁵

Of his wife's perception of unfairness Brownie said, "She would see this in men. And see the specifics in perspective; in the bigger picture." According to Brownie, his wife learned the "bigger picture" from her family. "It's in my genes," Judith once exclaimed to him, retelling an incident from her teenage years.⁶ Her mother, Ernestine Benninger, ironing clothes while watching the McCarthy hearings on television, had hurled her iron at the set. And not long after Judith witnessed her mother's reaction to McCarthyism, Judith saw her family subjected to its southern variety. Her father, Lawrence Benninger, a professor at the then segregated University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, was fired for supporting the admission of Autherine Lucy, the first black student to enroll there. "My father," Judith remembered, "got up in the faculty senate and suggested that her [Lucy's] admission be based on her qualifications which

author.

⁴ Julian Brown, Pierre, S.D., to Carol Giardina, Gainesville, Fla., 29 June 1991, collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Julian Brown, interview by author, 29 January 2001, Gainesville, Fla., tape recording in the possession of author.

seemed rather good."⁷

Lucy was admitted to the University of Alabama in 1956 under a court order resulting from a lawsuit brought by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). During her brief attendance she faced hostile mobs of white students and townspeople who threatened her life and assaulted her. Mrs. Benninger took Judith, then fifteen, and her younger brother Christopher to watch the brave young woman make her way onto the campus. As they watched tensely from the sidelines, Judith's mother told them that this was "like fascism."⁸ Autherine Lucy was soon expelled from the University; and Judith's father, who had been quoted in the national media as being in favor of Lucy's admission, was fired from his teaching position.

Despite his support for Autherine Lucy, Professor Benninger, fearing that his daughter's career would be jeopardized as his had been, opposed her participation in the civil rights movement. On her mother's side of the family, however, she was encouraged by her aunts, Roxane and Jane Eberlein, whom she had known since childhood as opponents of white supremacy and male supremacy. Indeed, her Aunt Jane was a contemporary in the civil rights movement.

⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Florida, to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 13 July 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁸ Judith Brown, interview by author, video recording, tape 1, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

She blocked streets around the 1964 Democratic National Convention hall to protest the failure to seat the delegation from the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Neither Roxane nor Jane had children of their own, and Judith and her brother were the only children in the extended family. Upon learning of Judith's birth, Roxane, who took a particular interest in her niece, wrote, "How I would like to have her where I could ... submit her to the most rigorous training."⁹ As a child, Roxane herself had been trained by some of the leading activists of her day. And she would pass on her activism and feminism to her niece.

The Eberlein sisters grew up in Free Acres, a Single Tax colony in New Jersey based on principles of racial and sexual equality. Years before the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, women had full voting rights in colony affairs.¹⁰ Established in 1910 by Bolton Hall, attorney for Emma Goldman and follower of Henry George, Free Acres attracted radicals and artists such as Paul Robeson, Michael Gold, and Alexander Calder. Hall, a friend of the Eberlien family, had

⁹ Roxane Eberlein, diary entry, Bern, Switzerland, 16 March 1941, in Laurel Hessing, *Treasures of the Little Cabin: A Free Acres Cabin Tells the Stories of Those who Loved it and Sought its Shelter*, Source Documents Compiled, Edited and Annotated by Laurel Hessing (Free Acres, New Jersey, 1999), 316.

¹⁰ *Constitution of the Free Acres Association* (Free Acres, N.J., n.d.), 4, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

been arrested for distributing birth control leaflets with Margaret Sanger. Roxane and Jane maintained the family home well into Judith's adulthood. Immersed in her family's political history, Judith was a frequent guest, even spending her honeymoon at Free Acres.

Judith's maternal grandparents, Ernest and Undena Eberlein, were lifelong activists. Ernest was an officer and organizer in the lithographers' union and membership chair of the Socialist Party branch to which Undena also belonged. The couple held Party meetings in their home. Before they moved to Free Acres, the Eberleins were among the first residents of Helicon Hall, a collective established by Upton Sinclair in Englewood, New Jersey. As children, the Eberlein sisters learned feminism from their mother Undena, an ardent reader of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and an active suffragist. The children had been jailed with Undena when she attempted to vote. Their father, Ernest, also a suffrage supporter, came to get the family out of jail.

Neighbors described the long-time Free Acres administrator, Ami Mali Hicks, as a "forbidding feminist" who could "vanquish a man with ten words and who held sway here."¹¹ Hicks was a member of the Women's Political Union, the militant suffrage group modeled on the tactics of the British movement and organized in the United States by

¹¹ Martin A. Bierbaum, "Free Acres: Bolton Hall's Single Tax Experimental Community," *New Jersey History* 102

Harriet Stanton Blatch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter. Hicks was particularly influential with Judith's Aunt Roxane, who in turn, helped to "train" Judith. As suffrage agitation peaked in 1920, Roxane Eberlein, then only ten, was living in New York City with Hicks, an artist and designer by trade, in the famous Biography Building in New York City which housed many artists. Theirs was a life-long friendship. When Hicks became elderly and could no longer work, Roxane stood by her and provided financial support.

Roxane was also close to Lola Kessler, whom Judith called my "patroness."¹² Lola and her husband Max were Jewish refugees from Nazi occupied Austria who were assisted by Roxane Eberlein. Roxane, an American State Department decoder in Bern, Switzerland during World War II, had secretly used classified information to assist Jewish friends, including the Kesslers. The Kesslers worked for the World Woman's Party, an international project of Alice Paul, leader of the National Woman's Party in the United States. As a teenager Judith visited Lola Kessler in New York City where Lola lavished grateful attention upon her.

In addition to Lola Kessler, Judith met other influential reformers through Roxane Eberlein. Judith's brother Christopher recalled visits to Aunt Roxane during

(Spring/Summer 1984): 47.

¹² Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 11 December 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

the late 1950s and early 1960s when she worked as an assistant to Adlai Stevenson. While visiting at Stevenson's, Judith and Christopher met women such as Eleanor Roosevelt and Helen Keller. Summing up Roxane's influence, Christopher said she had imbued in niece and nephew alike the idea that they "could change the future."¹³ Thus Judith's activist family was the "something" that as Betty Wright put it, had been "there already" when Judith began to work with her in the civil rights movement.

Judith Brown's experience was not exceptional among women's liberation pioneers. A number of the founders came from families where feminism was an important family tradition. Pam Allen, cofounder of NYRW, was raised in Pennsylvania in a deeply religious Episcopal family. As a child she learned about the Women's Rights Movement from her suffragist great grandmother. Allen's family traced its genealogy to Lucretia Mott, the militant feminist and abolitionist Quaker. As a youngster, Allen was given books about the feminist and abolitionist work in which her family members had participated.

These feminist predecessors were honored in Allen's family. In 1963 when Allen became a civil rights activist her mother remarked that she was "just like mother."¹⁴ Allen

¹³ Christopher Benninger, interview by author, 8 December 1999, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

¹⁴ Pam Allen, interview by author, 2 January 2001, San

took on women's rights that same year, although she remembered no one at her college raising issues about discrimination against women. In 1966, Allen left the Episcopal Church because it would not ordain women. Later she would focus her critique of sexism in the New Left.

Allen's family was Republican, engaged in social reform through association with a liberal tradition in the Episcopal Church. Allen was proud of family traditions of Christian pacifism. Other early women's liberation organizers have acknowledged an upbringing on the left as the taproot of their feminism.

Naomi Weisstein said, "I grew up in the church of socialism." Speaking of the years from age ten to twenty, she reflected, "I was in the closet most of the time on two accounts...my socialism and my feminism."¹⁵ Her maternal grandfather, an immigrant from Russia at the turn of the century, was an anarchist and a union organizer. The "legacy of resistance went from Grandpa, to Mary, to Naomi," Weisstein said referring to her mother Mary Menk Weisstein, and then to herself.¹⁶ Weisstein's childhood memories of her grandfather were reinforced by stories of his activism against injustice recounted by her mother.

Francisco, tape recording in the possession of author.

¹⁵ Weisstein in Kesselman, with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 32.

¹⁶ Naomi Weisstein, *Eulogy for Mary Menk Weisstein (1905-1999)* (read by Jesse Lemisch, Riverside Memorial Chapel, New

But Mary Menk Weisstein also treasured her own life in the movement. Among its unforgettable moments were playing the piano at socialist and anarchist events, in particular a memorial for Socialist leader Eugene Debs at the Workman's Circle, a Jewish socialist organization. There she accompanied Paul Robeson whose praise for her playing inspired her to train at Julliard. "My mother talked about 'male chauvinism' quite a bit," Weisstein said, "Mary got her fight from Grandpa."¹⁷ In turn, Mary taught her daughter Naomi not to accept injustice and not to submit to discrimination because she was a woman.

Like Judith Brown, Naomi Weisstein became active in the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1963, and later joined SDS protests against the war in Vietnam. There, along with male chauvinism from movement coworkers, Weisstein encountered feminist-minded women like herself and came joyously out of the "closet" for women's liberation.

In her groundbreaking monograph on the roots of women's liberation, *Personal Politics*, Sara Evans pointed out that many early women's liberation organizers came from old left family backgrounds. "I did not seek out 'red diaper babies,'" Evans said.¹⁸ But as she studied the founding organizers of the women's liberation movement she noted,

York, 7 February 1999), copy in the possession of author.

¹⁷ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 22 October 2000.

¹⁸ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 120.

"Again and again I was surprised to discover a radical family background."¹⁹ As Evans put it, "The specific connections...[were] very important." Nevertheless, having promised confidentiality to her sources, Evans protected their identities. According to Evans, "Many parents...[whose] daughters emerged as leading figures in the revival of the 'woman question'" did not wish their association with radicalism to be revealed. She called the necessity for discretion a "tragedy of the McCarthy era."²⁰ Since then, however, a number of the women Evans interviewed have spoken openly of the radical origins of their feminist ideas.

Among these women was Kathie Sarachild who often named *The Second Sex* as the source of her feminist views. Reflecting on this, however, Sarachild said, "Its funny...in a certain sense I was already a feminist...I was a 'red diaper baby' and as a result I knew there was discrimination against women, male chauvinism, a woman question."²¹ Sarachild had been raised a feminist in an "old left" family in New York City. In 1964 she joined other volunteers in Mississippi for the SNCC Mississippi Freedom Summer Project. At first, Sarachild had been unwilling to go to Mississippi

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Kathie Sarachild, statement read at the *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speak Out* (New York, 1 May 1986), tape

because she thought it meant "certain death."²² But when, despite her begging him not to go, an African American classmate at Harvard survived civil rights work in Mississippi in 1963, Sarachild decided that there was a risk of death, but it was not "certain."

Sarachild considered herself both a radical and a feminist long before then. "A brand of feminist consciousness and reading had been an important part of my life--of my energy and enthusiasm--before the civil rights movement," she said.²³ Her family sent Sarachild on a scholarship to "The Little Red School House" in Greenwich Village, a progressive school that had become something of a refuge for children of left and left-leaning parents. There, girls wore blue jeans and took shop along with the boys.

Sarachild's father Ernest Amatniek had been among the volunteers of his own generation who put his life on the line to defend the Spanish Republic in 1936. One of some 3000 young men and women who joined the volunteer soldiers of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade to fight against the assault of Franco, Hitler and Mussolini in the Spanish Civil War, Ernest too must have wondered if he would make it back

recording in the Redstockings Archives.

²² Kathie Sarachild, lecture for a course, "Feminist Activism: Learning from History" (University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla., 31 January 1994), lecture notes in the possession of author.

²³ Kathie Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation," 2, 3.

alive. Kathie felt pride in her father's participation in this, but she was equally aware and proud of something else about him. He did a great share of family household chores and their family gossiped when the men in other left households did not. In the culture of the families Sarachild grew up with, "struggle on the woman question," as one longtime activist put it--fathers sharing childcare and housework, public political lives for women--the elimination of sexism in both personal and political life, was considered a hall mark of a good home.²⁴

Brown, Allen, Weisstein, and Sarachild were not the only women's liberation pioneers with feminism in the family, although many more learned feminism as red diaper babies than from suffrage movement relatives as Allen had. While not identifiable as a majority of the early organizers, founders with feminism in the family constituted a sizable minority. The prevalence of such women in the first groups suggests that their presence is attributable to continuity rather than coincidence. But more significant than their number, these women "provided much of the key leadership," as Evans pointed out but could not openly detail in the case of "red diaper" feminists.²⁵

²⁴ Esther Cooper Jackson, quoted in Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 207.

²⁵ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 124. See also Kate Weigand, *Red*

Indeed, among founders with feminism in the family, Weisstein and Allen cofounded, respectively, the first and second women's liberation groups in the nation. The groups were important not only because they were the first, but because they were the seedbed for most of the organizing, ideas, and actions that by 1968 laid the base for a mass national movement. Brown and Sarachild were organizers and founding members of the earliest women's liberation groups. But the critical leadership Brown provided was her work on "The Florida Paper," while Sarachild was the leading developer of consciousness-raising, the movement's first program.

The work of women from feminist families was fundamental to the start of the movement. That these women had such backgrounds raises questions about what difference this may have made. Does it show that the background caused the desire or ability to start a women's liberation movement? Clearly, the women held certain feminist assumptions well before they entered the civil rights movement and New Left. Weisstein, for example, knew that "all my life politics would be part of what I did...I knew that my life could not be devoted to husband and children."²⁶ Some also knew, as was the case in Sarachild's

Feminism, and Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, for their observations about the leadership of "red diaper babies" in the Women's Liberation Movement.

²⁶ Weisstein in Kesselman, with Booth, Rothstein, and

family, that men could be expected to share housework and childcare. Thus Sarachild insisted that male coworkers share housework in the Freedom House in Mississippi and praised SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Toure) as an exemplar of egalitarian housekeeping.

In the 1950s these expectations distinguished women's liberation founders from contemporaries. They also provided a framework that helped the women to understand male chauvinist treatment as a political issue rather than a personal failing. Thus when Brown took minutes as secretary of the campus civil rights group and found herself left out of decision making, she complained that this constituted discrimination against her as a woman.²⁷

Several historians of the movement have pointed out that a feminist conceptual framework among the movement founders included "words to name" encounters with sexism.²⁸ Male chauvinism, male supremacy, oppression of women--these terms were familiar to red diaper feminists. "It was vitally important that I knew how to say "male chauvinism... otherwise, I would have thought--if I were just sexier,

Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 32.

²⁷ Dan Harmeling, interview by author, 4 September 2000, Gainesville, Fla., tape recording in the possession of author.

²⁸ Kate Weigand, "Vanguards of Women's Liberation: The Old Left and the Continuity of the Women's Movement in the United States, 1945-1970" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1995), 279. In 2000, Weigand published the dissertation as *Red Feminism*.

smarter, cooler,"²⁹ Weisstein noted as she recalled not blaming herself for the struggles she waged as one of the few women in science at Harvard in the pre-feminist 1960s. Weisstein attributed to her upbringing on the left two critical ways of understanding and dealing with sexist discrimination she faced: "it's not your fault, it's a social failing; you must resist collectively."³⁰

Unlike contemporaries who did not have radical or feminist family backgrounds, these women also knew that fighting political injustice was something that people like them did. Pam Allen's mother told her daughter approvingly that she was following in the family tradition. Her Aunt Roxane told Brown that she had had an abortion and applauded Brown for framing that experience as feminist. Family support provided the security and power of continuity. Brown wrote to Sarachild, "My essential radicalism/feminism had their genesis in my childhood," to which Sarachild responded, "I have the same feeling in me."³¹ This continuity, deep and compelling, mediated the founders experience in the civil rights movement and the New Left and, as we shall see, transformed the lessons of these movements into feminist organizing initiatives.

²⁹ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 1 March 2001.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 15 December 1985.

The Influence of Simone de Beauvoir

Feminism had been passed to Sarachild from her family in more ways than one. At age fourteen she found Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* on her mother's bookshelf and thinking it was about sex, picked it out. "I was one of the early radical feminists who considers that it was *The Second Sex* that made her a radical feminist," Sarachild said.³² Struggling to distinguish what Beauvoir added to the feminist views she already held, Sarachild described the book's impact:

The thing that *The Second Sex* did for me that was new, was that...it gave me an incredibly strong commitment because it showed how it [male supremacy] affected everything... though I was only a teenager...I was worried about how I looked...it described the enormous amount of time that women have to put in to making themselves look presentable in the world...that men didn't have to spend...the book compared high heels to bound feet.³³

Beauvoir had raised Sarachild's consciousness. "I felt literally, physically, as if my eyes were being opened...It seared me with a consciousness so strong," she said.³⁴ After

³² Kathie Sarachild, statement read at *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speak Out*.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

reading *The Second Sex* Sarachild said she could never stop thinking about the problem of male supremacy and never stop trying to fight it.³⁵ Sarachild wrote a book report on *The Second Sex* for her ninth grade class. Seventeen years later, *Feminist Revolution*, published by Redstockings under Sarachild's editorial leadership, called Beauvoir "The French woman who exposed male supremacy for this era and gave us our feminism."³⁶

Beauvoir gave feminism to women's liberation founders, as Sarachild observed, by raising their consciousness that male domination, including everyday male behavior, imposed arbitrary limitations on woman's achievement of her human potential. Moreover, Beauvoir clarified to radical women, to those who opposed exploitation and oppression root and branch, that socialism, while necessary for women's liberation, would not automatically or by itself resolve the "woman question." For some founders of the women's liberation movement, Beauvoir provided a code for living--as individuals--and also for a movement vanguard. Leading women's liberation organizers took consciousness, ideology, and example from Beauvoir. She even gave the movement they would organize its name, "women's liberation," a phrase repeated throughout *The Second Sex*.³⁷ Like the founders with

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Redstockings, ed., *Feminist Revolution*, dedication page.

feminism in the family, those who counted Beauvoir as their feminist source were distinguished by the impact of their work.

Shulamith Firestone exemplifies these women both for inspiration from Beauvoir and unparalleled leadership of the movement in its formative period. Among the handful of feminists at the National Conference for New Politics (NCNP), Firestone's boldness there had resulted in the formation of the West Side Group. Moving to New York City, Firestone organized the nation's second group NYRW with Pam Allen. Within the year, Firestone cofounded Redstockings and New York Radical Feminists, which were among the most influential groups in the new movement.

Firestone's pioneer organizing went hand in hand with pioneering work in theory including editorship of the first radical feminist journal, *Notes from the First Year* which took on the vital issues of the emerging movement. Before women's liberation, many young activists in the 1960s had considered the first wave of feminism a failure and its leaders an embarrassing collection of embattled old crones. In *Notes* Firestone restored the first wave to a position of prominence as a radical fighting force of which women could be proud and from which they could learn. And like "The Florida Paper," which came out in the same month, in *Notes* Firestone insisted that women "Put your own interests

³⁷ See, for example, pp. xxiv, xxviii, 698, 755, and 800 in

first."³⁸ Firestone edited *Notes from the Second Year* which published for the first time much of the theoretical work that had established the base of the movement, including Carol Hanisch's "The Personal is Political" and Sarachild's "A Program for Feminist Consciousness Raising."³⁹ Within the movement and academia as well Firestone's seminal study, *The Dialectic of Sex*, is cited as a "founding text of radical feminism" with its analysis of women's situation as "sex class" oppression and call for feminist revolution.⁴⁰ In the years immediately following the U.S. publication of Firestone's work, it was brought out in Japan and most of Europe.

Beauvoir was Firestone's guiding spirit. Firestone rushed out *Notes from the First Year* to bring to her in France personally. She dedicated *The Dialectic of Sex* to her as one who "kept her integrity" and "endured."⁴¹ Firestone referred to *The Second Sex* as the "definitive analysis" on the woman question, opening sections of *The Dialectic of Sex*

De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*.

³⁸ Shulamith Firestone, *Notes I*, 7.

³⁹ Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, eds. *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation. Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (New York: Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, 1970) Redstockings Archives. (Hereinafter, referred to as *Notes II*.)

⁴⁰ Deborah Rachel Yaffe. "The Second Sex: A Work in Progress" (M.A. Thesis in Women's Studies, University of Victoria, 1992), 59.

⁴¹ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, dedication page.

with quotations from *The Second Sex*.⁴² Beauvoir, Firestone said, "related feminism to the best ideas in our culture."⁴³ In turn, Firestone related her own best ideas to Beauvoir. If for Beauvoir the handicap of maternity could be managed by women through control over reproduction, Firestone proposed, through science, to eliminate reproduction from women's sphere of responsibility. If for Beauvoir socialism was the starting point for women's liberation, Firestone saw women's liberation as paving the way for socialism. Beauvoir held that male supremacy created castes that crossed economic class. Firestone found divisions between men and women the basis of class--hence her phrase "sex class." Seeing herself as building on Beauvoir at seemingly every turn, as opposed to diminishing her contribution, Firestone honored Beauvoir as her springboard.

For Firestone, the foremost radical feminist theoretician and organizer, there had been no other radical or feminist mentor. Born in Canada, Firestone grew up in the Midwest in an orthodox Jewish family, went to the girls' division of the yeshiva, and broke with her family as her life assumed a secular bohemian style while she was on scholarship at the Art Institute of Chicago. Tiny, bespectacled, with a thick mane of long black hair, Firestone was the consummate "beat" intellectual. She spent

⁴² Ibid., 7.

many hours alone with books, reading and dreaming.

Beauvoir, she said, "fired my youthful ambitions at age sixteen."⁴⁴ Firestone had embarked on a painting and writing career but in 1967, she found it "nearly impossible at that time for a woman to 'make it' legitimately" in the art world.⁴⁵ "When the struggle seemed most hopeless," Beauvoir, Firestone said "...gave us hope and strength of valor."⁴⁶ Thus Firestone drew upon Beauvoir for spiritual and intellectual vision and support.

Like Shulamith Firestone, women's liberation founder Ti-Grace Atkinson came to feminism through Beauvoir. Atkinson had grown up in Louisiana in a wealthy Republican family and Beauvoir provided her first experience with anti-establishment politics. Married at age seventeen and divorced at twenty-one, Atkinson read *The Second Sex* the year after her divorce and was deeply affected by it. She began to search for like-minded women. But it was 1962 and there was no feminist movement. Frustrated, Atkinson finally wrote Beauvoir in France who told her to contact Betty Friedan which Atkinson did. Beauvoir and Atkinson began a life-long collaboration and Atkinson went to visit Beauvoir

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Shulamith Firestone, statement read at the *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speak Out* (New York, 1 May 1986), tape recording in the Redstockings Archives.

⁴⁵ Idem, "Anticredentials" (n.d.) Redstockings Archives.

⁴⁶ Idem, statement read at the *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial*

in France on a number of occasions.

In 1966 Friedan organized the National Organization for Women (NOW) and in February 1967 recruited Atkinson to the New York City chapter where Atkinson soon became president. But Atkinson soon left the chapter to organize a radical feminist group. Atkinson came out for repeal of all laws against abortion and publicly committed herself to the defense of *SCUM Manifesto* (Society for Cutting Up Men) author Valerie Solanas, who had just shot artist Andy Warhol. These and other bold positions alienated much of NOW and resulted in Atkinson fomenting a walkout to found what eventually became "The Feminists," known even in the radical feminist branch of the movement for avant-garde politics and actions.

Militant among the militants, Atkinson and The Feminists believed they would "annihilate" sex roles by setting a standard for breaking out of them. Thus members of The Feminists rejected male domination in the way they lived their lives. For starters, no more than one third of the group could marry or live with a man. The Feminists wrote influential papers condemning motherhood, sex, and love as reinforcing women's oppression, and conducted actions such as picketing the marriage bureau demanding that women "destroy marriage."⁴⁷ The group's no-holds-barred, public

Speak Out.

⁴⁷ Stephen Elliott, "5 Gals Call It a Bridle Veil, Ask Salaries in Marriage Contracts," 24 September 1969, 62.

attack on male supremacy, its "walk the walk if you talk the talk" approach to feminism, especially when combined with Atkinson's intensity and striking, classical appearance, projected the politics of *The Feminists* into the national media. Atkinson became a sought after speaker and lectured across the country.

The *Feminists* exemplified the life of Beauvoir writ large. Beauvoir, after all, had exposed male supremacy with her writing, rejected marriage and motherhood, and although she and Jean Paul Sartre were lovers and partners, they rarely lived together. Beauvoir wanted to write. She wanted, as she told her American lover, novelist Nelson Algren, to "give my life meaning by working...to write good books, and by writing them to help the world to be a little better."⁴⁸ Consequently, despite Algren's fervent entreaties, Beauvoir had little choice but to reject the traditional role of woman, because, as *The Feminists* pointed out, it did reinforce dependency and subjugation. Part of Beauvoir's appeal was as a woman who "practiced [her] own ideals," "the spectacle of conscience in action" as one put it.⁴⁹ "Anything she did I wanted to copy," Atkinson said referring

⁴⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, Paris, to Nelson Algren, Chicago, 26 September 1947, in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Transatlantic Love Affair: Letters to Nelson Algren*, ed. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir (New York: The New Press, 1998), 65-67.

⁴⁹ Kate Millet, "Simone de Beauvoir...Autobiographer" (paper given at the Simone de Beauvoir Colloquium, New York, 4-6 April 1985), 3. Redstockings Archive.

to Beauvoir, "I became a feminist because of her. I went into philosophy because of her."⁵⁰ Beauvoir set a standard Atkinson "copied," not only as she led her life, but in organizing The Feminists as a women's liberation vanguard.

Roxanne Dunbar and Patricia Robinson were also among the early movement organizers who counted Beauvoir as a transformative influence. Both were strikingly different from Atkinson. Dunbar grew up in poverty in a sharecropping family in Oklahoma. Marrying into the upper middle class, she moved to California and hid her background in shame. In 1963, with a nine-month-old daughter, she read *The Second Sex*. "The book affected me powerfully with its analysis of marriage and the family as the seed of female bondage," she said. "Three months after I read the book, I left my husband."⁵¹ In the divorce, her husband won custody of their child.

Over the next five years, Dunbar resolved to "find or found" a women's liberation movement.⁵² In 1968 she moved to Boston where she organized "Cell 16," a militant women's liberation group. "At our first meeting, I read aloud the parts about the family in *The Second Sex*," Dunbar said. "I

⁵⁰ Ti-Grace Atkinson, statement read at *The Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speak Out*.

⁵¹ Roxanne Dunbar, "Outlaw Woman: Chapters from a Feminist Memoir in Progress," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, eds. DuPlessis and Snitow, 91.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 93.

explained that I could trace my rejection of marriage in a straight line back to reading *The Second Sex* in the summer of 1963."⁵³ Cell 16 became widely known for introducing karate into the movement, advocating celibacy, and cutting off its members' long hair in public demonstrations of feminist commitment. The group's journal, "No More Fun and Games," called *The Second Sex* the book that "changed our lives."⁵⁴ Like The Feminists, Cell 16 saw itself as a vanguard whose members would refuse any form of collaboration with the enemy (men) in their personal lives. Going beyond the call for a women's liberation movement independent from the New Left, Cell 16 advocated that radical feminists take over and lead the left in feminist and socialist revolution.

In 1953, when *The Second Sex* was published in the United States, Patricia Robinson was a mother with two young children, living in New York. She had been raised in Baltimore where her family owned a black newspaper chain, and she played with the grandchildren of W.E.B. Dubois who was a neighbor. The first to get the book from her local library, Robinson held on to *The Second Sex* long enough to pay a heavy fine. But unlike Dunbar and Atkinson, Robinson said she "had trouble with de Beauvoir as a model." Robinson

⁵³ Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, 128.

⁵⁴ Cell 16, eds., *No More Fun and Games*, (Boston), February 1969, no. 2, Redstockings Archives.

believed that because she was black, she and her family had been denied privileges that made achievement possible for Beauvoir despite her unconventional ways. Indeed, Robinson found *The Second Sex* "so deeply subversive" that she did not feel it was "safe" for her daughters to read until they had children.⁵⁵

While rejecting Beauvoir as a personal model, Robinson said she agreed with "everything" in *The Second Sex* because she was already an "unreconstructed socialist-feminist" (emphasis Robinson). For Robinson, Beauvoir had rightfully put "women rights...up front in the fight for a more just society."⁵⁶ As opposed to a model for ridding one's life of sex role restrictions, Robinson found in Beauvoir an ideological guide to organizing. In any struggle against injustice, Robinson would place women's rights "up front."

Thus the black women's liberation groups Robinson organized in Mt. Vernon and New Rochelle, New York in the mid-1960s fought male chauvinism in the black movement, while opposing racism and capitalism as oppressive to black women. Called simply "Poor Black Women," at the high tide of black nationalism, these groups took on male militants in no uncertain terms. When black nationalists called birth control and abortion genocide, Poor Black Women reacted

⁵⁵ Patricia Robinson, letter to be read at the *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speak Out* (New York, 1 May 1986), Redstockings Archives.

angrily: "Poor black sisters decide for themselves whether to have a baby or not to have a baby. ... For us..." they explained, "birth control is the freedom to fight genocide."⁵⁷

In the fall of 1968, Poor Black Women accused the Black Unity Party in Peekskill, New York, of male chauvinism because the Party called upon black women not to use birth control: "Poor black women...have to fight back out of our own experience of oppression...But we don't think you are going to understand us because...you want to...run the black community with your kind of black power--you on top!"⁵⁸ After their signatures, several of the women had written "welfare recipient," "domestic," and "grandmother."⁵⁹

Upon reading in the left newspaper *The Guardian* about female North Vietnamese guerrillas, Poor Black Women responded to "our great and courageous sisters." Members proclaimed, "We embrace them and will do all that is necessary here" to aid in creating revolution worldwide.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Black Women's Liberation Group, "Statement on Birth Control," in *Sisterhood is Powerful*, ed. Morgan, 360-61. Poor Black Women's statement on birth control was first published in December 1968 in *Lilith*, a women's liberation journal circulating out of Seattle, Wash., collected in the Redstockings Archives.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Pat Robinson and Group, "Letter to a North Vietnamese Sister from an Afro-American Woman-Sept. 1968," in *The Black*

In explaining how they were going about this, Poor Black Women said that they were "forming their own class and historical analysis of capitalism" and beginning to see their "oppressors as those who mean to keep them barefoot, pregnant, and ignorant of male oppression."⁶¹ Interestingly, the articles about Vietnamese women were written by Robert Allen, a leader of the black draft resistance, at the urging of his wife Pam Allen who soon began consulting with Robinson on organizing women. In 1967 and 1968, Robinson also advised Roxanne Dunbar and other white women's liberation organizers in New York.⁶²

Poor Black Women, Cell 16, and The Feminists, along with Robinson, Dunbar, and Atkinson individually, had an impact on the movement far beyond their numbers. Their position papers and letters were widely circulated in early women's liberation publications and the stands they took stimulated others to organize. One contemporary later thanked Poor Black Women for work on birth control and abortion which "broke the chains of silence."⁶³ Although

Woman, ed. Toni Cade, (New York: New American Library, 1970), 193-94.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁶² Pam Allen, interview by the author (1 January 2001, New York), tape recording in the possession of author. Evans, *Personal Politics*, 196, also mentions Robinson advising white women's liberation organizers.

⁶³ Kathie Sarachild, New York, to Patricia Robinson, San Francisco, n.d. [c. 1986], transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

SNCC had a Black Women's Liberation Committee which evolved into the Third World Women's Alliance, an independent black women's liberation group, Poor Black Women was all female and independent from the start. Its critique of the position on birth control put forth by some black nationalist groups was a predecessor of black feminist criticism and emboldened white feminists as well.

Whether as ideological guide, feminist model of noncollaboration with the enemy, source of hope and courage, and consciousness-raising commitment, or as some combination of all of these, Beauvoir had brought feminism into the founders' lives for the first time or added a decisive element to the feminist views they already held. This was true for radical feminists who were the movement's founding organizers and most influential theoreticians, founding members too numerous to name in early radical feminist groups, and even founding organizers of the movement's moderate branch such as Betty Friedan. *The Second Sex* was also a precursor of feminist literary criticism.

Radical feminist writer Kate Millet whose best selling *Sexual Politics* is credited with beginning, in 1970, the then new field of feminist literary criticism, relied heavily on Beauvoir.⁶⁴ When *Sexual Politics* came out,

⁶⁴ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Doubleday, 1970). On crediting Millet, see for example Susan Brownmiller's discussion in *In Our Time*: "Millet was inventing a whole new field called feminist literary criticism," 43.

Christopher Lehmann-Haupt of the *New York Times* called Millett the "principal theoretician...of the feminist wave."⁶⁵ But critic Irving Howe said that the "central ideas and sentiments" of Millett's book were "simply appropriated in vulgarized form from *The Second Sex*."⁶⁶ Beauvoir, on the other hand, called *Sexual Politics* a "very good book."⁶⁷ She agreed with Howe, however, about the appropriation of *The Second Sex*. Referring to Millett, Beauvoir said, "She got it all, the form, the idea, everything from me."⁶⁸

In 1967, while writing the dissertation which would become *Sexual Politics*, Millett, like Atkinson, began attending the first meetings of the New York City chapter of the NOW. Also like Atkinson, the soon to be controversial Millett moved into the radical feminist branch of the movement that was taking shape that same year. A comparison of *The Second Sex* and *Sexual Politics* supports the view of Howe and Beauvoir. Millett was well versed in Beauvoir's feminism before she attended her first feminist meeting, and also before she wrote the book for which the *New York Times* named her the movement's "principal theoretician." Although

⁶⁵ Christopher Lehmann-Haupt, *New York Times*, 6 September 1970, 8.

⁶⁶ Irving Howe, "The Middle-Class Mind of Kate Millett," *Harpers* (December 1970), 110.

⁶⁷ Simone de Beauvoir quoted in Deirdre Bair, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 654.

Millett never directly acknowledged a debt to Beauvoir for the ideas in *Sexual Politics*, in later years, speaking for her generation of young feminists, she said *The Second Sex* that it "taught us...how to think" and that Beauvoir "by the very conduct of her life, has been our model."⁶⁹

Betty Friedan, whose 1963 publication of *The Feminine Mystique* is generally considered the first important sign of the impending feminist revival, never identified herself as a radical feminist. Although Friedan was an activist on the left in the 1940s and early 1950s, in 1966 when she founded NOW, she apparently wished to shield the organization from association with her earlier radicalism. NOW's founding documents stated that the goal of the organization was to bring women into the "mainstream of society."⁷⁰ But radical feminists such as Beauvoir and many others for whom she paved the way proposed to transform the "mainstream" as socialists as well as feminists--to make feminist claims "at the same time as carrying on the class-war--as Beauvoir put it."⁷¹

Friedan did not openly combine her left-wing views with

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Kate Millett, "Simone de Beauvoir...Autobiographer," Simone de Beauvoir Colloquium, 3. Redstockings Archives.

⁷⁰ National Organization for Women, "An Invitation to Join," in *Women Together: A History in Documents of the Women's Movement in the United States*, ed. Judith Papachristou (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 220.

⁷¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *All Said and Done* (New York: G. P.

feminism. Nonetheless, she publicly acknowledged the openly radical Beauvoir as the source of *The Feminine Mystique*. "When I first read *The Second Sex* in the early fifties," she said, "I was writing 'housewife' on the census blanks." The book, Friedan said, "led me to whatever original analysis of women's existence I have been able to contribute to the Women's Movement and to its unique politics."⁷² She continued to view Beauvoir as an advisor throughout at least 1975 when she visited her in France to confer over the direction of the women's movement in the United States.

While women who would soon form the ranks of NOW devoured *The Feminine Mystique*, Casey Hayden and Mary King consumed *The Second Sex* just as Friedan had several years before them. Hayden and King's call for an end to male chauvinism in the movement changed the lives of young activist women just as *The Feminine Mystique* changed the lives of their mothers in the suburbs.

Women reacted remarkably similarly to both *The Feminine Mystique* and to Hayden and King's 1965 memo. "It was stunning in its effect on me," one reader told King.⁷³ "I started a group...to discuss the issues you and Casey raised," she said.⁷⁴ Readers of *The Feminine Mystique* wrote

Putnam's Sons, 1974), 455.

⁷² Betty Friedan, "No Gods, No Goddesses," *Saturday Review*, 14 June 1975, 16.

⁷³ Barbara Raskin quoted in King, *Freedom Song*, 466.

hundreds of letters to Friedan." It struck at the center of my being...What can we do?" asked one.⁷⁵ In 1964 and 1965 Hayden and King's statements opened the first path to the women's liberation branch of the movement, while *The Feminine Mystique* was a launch pad for NOW, the leading organization of the moderate branch. And behind the initiators of both lay the catalytic influence of *The Second Sex*.

Mary King first learned of Beauvoir from Miriam Willey, the professor who introduced her to SNCC. Willey gave her Beauvoir to read and talked with her "candidly about the discrimination and condescension she faced as a woman professor."⁷⁶ As a result, King had "become conscious of double standards all around me, one standard for men, another for women."⁷⁷

Mary King and Casey Hayden spent many evenings studying Beauvoir together. King described their copy of *The Second Sex* as "underlined, creased, marked up, and finally coverless from our study of it."⁷⁸ King called their interest in Beauvoir and Doris Lessing, the South African

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Quote from an anonymous letter to Betty Friedan in Friedan, *It Changed My Life*, 27.

⁷⁶ King, *Freedom Song*, 77.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 76.

novelist, an "insatiable appetite...especially for Beauvoir's global perspective."⁷⁹ They tried to convince female associates in SNCC to read Beauvoir and circulated around their own copy of *The Second Sex*.

When they anonymously coauthored their first critique of sexism, King said they decided not to include in the paper the "profound implications of the worldwide second-class status of women which Simone de Beauvoir had sharpened for us."⁸⁰ They restricted examples of male chauvinism to those ready at hand, King said, "because we thought the points would be better understood."⁸¹ Hayden and King, the pioneers of women's liberation, had been influenced by Beauvoir as had many others.

What did Beauvoir mean to these women? Hayden and King were already devoted to SNCC when they first read Beauvoir. Many of the others had been too young to organize a movement when they read *The Second Sex*. When they came of age in the early 1960s, however, they understood that they were oppressed as women. But instead of organizing a feminist movement, they became civil rights and New Left activists. They expressed an intense feminist reaction to Beauvoir. Why had they not immediately organized a feminist movement?

The political development of British radical feminist

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 444.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Judith Okely, whose youthful reaction to Beauvoir was similar to these women, suggests a reason why. Okely quoted an observation made by her friend Sheila Rowbotham, a founder of the second wave of feminism in England. Referring to their college years, Rowbotham said, "Judith [Okely] was always talking about Simone de Beauvoir...I didn't really understand why she was getting so worked up. My emancipation still seemed to me to be a matter of individual choice, though I was beginning to understand that the emancipation of the working class was not."⁸² Okely said "like de Beauvoir, I also saw women's but not workers' emancipation as mainly a matter of individual choice, before a socialist revolution." According to Okely, Beauvoir's "emphasis on individual choice" reinforced her view that women were individually responsible for their freedom.⁸³ Rowbotham and Okely thought freedom for workers would come from collective struggle, but for women, even after the achievement of socialism, freedom was, as Beauvoir pointed out, far from guaranteed.

If this was the case with their American counterparts, it is not surprising that feminist reaction to Beauvoir was not initially expressed in a collective form. As committed feminists they would make feminist life choices. If feminism

⁸² Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Random House, 1986), 18.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 17, 18.

was interpreted as a series of individual choices, it was not inconsistent to "be" a feminist without being in a feminist movement. There was no contradiction between living a feminist life and organizing collectively for other causes such the New Left and the civil rights movement. Beauvoir's feminism was, at least for a time, a "guide to the art of living," as one young activist put it, rather than a blueprint for building a movement.⁸⁴

Beauvoir exposed male supremacy with her writing, lived separately from Sartre, declined marriage and motherhood, and was self supporting. But Beauvoir herself did not organize a feminist movement, nor did she advocate doing so in *The Second Sex*. When she participated in collective activism in the 1960s, it was against colonialism or in support of the radical French students. The young American women who were fired with feminist commitment by Beauvoir's example similarly lived independent lives, exposed male supremacy with their writing, and organized, in their case, for black civil rights. Rather than asking why they did not respond to *The Second Sex* by organizing a feminist movement, the more appropriate question might be--what was it that prompted these already committed feminists to begin to express feminist views in the form of a movement? What was it about the civil rights movement and the New Left that

⁸⁴ Rosalyn Baxandall, statement read at the *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speak Out (New York, 1 May 1986)*, tape recording in the Redstockings Archives.

provoked a collective approach to feminism?

Did it stem from male chauvinism, ever present in these movements? Most of the founders of the women's liberation movement were already feminists well before they experienced male chauvinism in the civil rights movement and the New Left. It was in the Civil Rights Movement, however, that they would reinterpret feminism as a collective endeavor--a movement. For a number of founders, as we shall see, the Civil Rights Movement was the origin not of feminist ideas but rather of the idea of organizing collectively to change their own conditions.

From their families and from Beauvoir, they learned about male chauvinism and feminism, but like Okely, Rowbotham, and Beauvoir herself, they initially saw feminism as a series of individual choices a woman might make, such as living independently. Perhaps they took to heart what Okely saw as Beauvoir's "emphasis on individual choice." Then, when they experienced first hand the success of collective strategies in the civil rights movement and the New Left, they decided to apply them to male chauvinism. In Beauvoir's case, she did not begin to organize a movement for women's liberation until the young French women who learned feminism from her and learned collective confrontation in the 1968 uprising in Paris, invited her to work with them. *The Second Sex* was published in France in 1949. Twenty-one years later in 1970, Beauvoir joined the

Mouvement de Liberation des Femmes that had been organized that year by younger women.⁸⁵

The young American women who were inspired by Beauvoir did not begin to organize a movement for women's liberation until 1967 because the idea of a collective approach to feminism was the necessary lesson of the civil rights movement and the New Left. This lesson could not be learned and was not learned simply from experiencing male chauvinism or from reading about it in *The Second Sex*.

In 1972 Beauvoir observed, "NOW, a liberal, reforming feminist organization ... was soon outstripped by more radical movements set up by younger women ... I have corresponded with their militants ... met some of them, and learnt with great pleasure the new American feminism quotes *The Second Sex* as its authority."⁸⁶ The evidence supports Beauvoir's observation. It suggests, however, that the impetus for a movement for women's liberation--a collective political approach in contrast to simply an attraction to feminist ideas--emerged not simply from the power of feminist thought. Rather, for many of the young founders of the "more radical" branch of the movement, activism in the civil rights movement taught them how to put feminist ideas into collective practice.

⁸⁵ De Beauvoir, *All Said and Done*, 456.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 455.

CHAPTER 4

"THE IDEA OF DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT": WOMEN'S
LIBERATION FOUNDERS IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement was a breeding ground for feminists, black and white, radical and liberal. Although widely acknowledged as the birthplace of women's liberation, the consensus in the literature is that the birth was painful.¹ The evidence that supports this view includes stories about male chauvinism that have become infamous: idealistic women seeking a meaningful role relegated to office and housework; white women manipulated into sexual

¹ Clayborne Carson, for example, calls the rise of the woman question in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee "new tensions." See *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 147. See also Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 105-111 and Alvin F. Pouissant, "The Stresses of the White Female Worker in the Civil Rights Movement in the South," *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 123, no. 4 (1966): 401-407. Mary King, observed in *Freedom Song* that when the position paper on discrimination against women that she and Casey Hayden had (anonymously) written was reviewed by SNCC coworkers she felt as if "as Bertha Guber's freedom song went, I'd been 'buked and I'd been scorned," 450. Alternatively, some of the newer work has shown the uniquely democratic opening for women in the civil rights movement, particularly in SNCC. The best examples of this are: John Dittmer's *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Charles Payne's *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) 266-78; Barbara Ransby's *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of

exploitation by charges of racism and their position in the movement jokingly labeled "prone."² The view that women's liberation was a spontaneous oppositional reaction to male chauvinism such as this remains central to the origins story of the radical branch of feminism. Indeed, discussion of male chauvinism continues to mute elements of the civil rights movement that were the actual building blocks of the women's liberation movement. Overshadowed to the point of erasure is an understanding of women's liberation as born of the soil that nourished it.

Overthrowing male domination was indeed the purpose of women's liberation, but male domination did not cause the formation of a movement. Male domination has existed for millennia and women have resisted in many ways. Rarely has resistance taken the form of a social movement or led to the development and public articulation of feminist politics. Without sexism, of course, there would be no need for feminism. Sexism alone, however, is an insufficient explanation for the development of the women's liberation

North Carolina Press, 2003).

² This is a reference to the many accounts of Stokely Carmichael's fabled comment that women in SNCC were "prone." For just a few see Carson, *In Struggle*, 148; and William H. Chafe's "Social Change and the American Woman, 1940-1970," in *A History of Our Time: Readings on Postwar America*, eds. William H. Chafe and Harvard Sitkoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 230. I do not know when the account first surfaced in the literature.

movement.

Sexism was hardly new to women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement. Kathie Sarachild, who was a Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteer, said, "I had run into male chauvinism in radical men many times before. It was nothing new. What was new in the civil rights movement were the positive organizing ideas and concepts. What was new was the idea of doing something about it in a grass roots movement--along with some tools for beginning" (emphasis Sarachild).³

The idea of taking on sexism in a mass movement, the strategy "Sisterhood Is Powerful" as Sarachild later named it, was critical among the lessons learned in the civil rights movement.⁴ The effectiveness of this strategy depended on the collective power of women as opposed to individualistic approaches women's liberation founders had already been trying such as leading a feminist life or personal efforts at education and moral persuasion.

Equally important to the birth of the women's liberation movement was Black Power's injunction to whites, "fight your own oppressor," which women applied to themselves. Eventually, feminism made the idea of women

³ Sarachild "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation," 8.

⁴ Sarachild, "Funeral Oration," in *Notes I*, ed. Firestone, 21.

organizing for a women's agenda appear self-evident. In the prefeminist mid-1960s, however, as men were drafted for war in Vietnam and civil rights workers were murdered in the South, women putting their own agenda above those of others seemed selfish, irresponsible, or trivial. Or so thought many social justice-minded people, including women's liberation founders, until the application of black power logic to the woman question emboldened them.

Along with the idea of fighting their own oppressors and the strategy of massing against sexism in a grass roots movement, women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement took lessons from their experience with a new form of leadership. On the cutting edge of change, where violence and the threat of violence--often perpetrated by law enforcement--were constant, women and men risked their lives following female leaders. Down back roads in Mississippi guarded by the Ku Klux Klan, on the floor of the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, through hostile white mobs, and into the jailhouse, educated middle class men, black and white, followed black women, some younger than themselves, some poor and barely literate black women. So did educated, sometimes well-to-do white women. The last had become first and this was clear for all to see in political campaigns and rural civil rights projects.

Young black women such as Patricia Stephens Due of CORE

and Ruby Doris Robinson of SNCC were respected organizers and administrators. They headed demonstrations, projects, and whole organizations. Older black women such as Ella Baker and Fannie Lou Hamer of SNCC were leading theoreticians and political strategists.⁵ Some were ideologically feminist and some were not, but the behavior of the black female leadership of the civil rights movement broke the gender conventions of the day and in the process, set some new ones.

Women's liberation founders working in civil rights were acutely aware that they had witnessed and partaken of a new standard of equality and respect for women. Between 1963 and 1966, as they reentered white America from black communities in the South, they began protesting for the equality and respect they now knew were possible. Their protest was fostered by another change they experienced in the small towns and farms where they lived and worked. As one Freedom Summer volunteer from Harvard put it, "my reference group had changed." The opinion of "Harvard intellectuals," no longer mattered as the "test of success for my life."⁶ For this young woman and others like her who initiated the struggle for women's liberation, the approval

⁵ Chana Kai Lee, Hamer's most recent biographer, makes this clear in *For Freedom's Sake: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

⁶ Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's

of white male authorities and peers no longer carried its former significance.

Not all women in the civil rights movement drew feminist lessons from it. Nor did all influential early women's liberation organizers participate in the civil rights movement, although most did. Some, such as Shulamith Firestone and Naomi Weisstein, joined local civil rights protests rather than going South to work in a movement project. But others, like Judith Brown, left school for over a year to staff a CORE voter registration project in the Black Belt counties of the Florida Panhandle. Mary King and Casey Hayden were on the SNCC staff for several years. Heather Booth, Pam Allen, and Kathie Sarachild were Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers, and Sarachild returned to Mississippi in 1965 to continue working with SNCC.

Among the civil rights organizations, SNCC and CORE far outstripped the others in training future women's liberation founders. Remarkably, 70 percent of the women who volunteered in the largely SNCC organized Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964 were subsequently involved in the women's liberation movement, including many of its founders.⁷ Like women's liberation founders volunteering in

Liberation," 8.

⁷ McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 183, and see also Lynne Olson,

the Freedom Summer Project, those on the staff of SNCC and CORE lived in a "Freedom House" in the black community or in the homes of local black activists. All of them worked under black leadership--many under black female leadership. In these conditions of "total immersion," as one former volunteer put it, the civil rights movement best conveyed its lessons to women's liberation founders.⁸

The Lesson of Collective Strategy

The foremost lesson was that a mass movement could be a possible and effective way to fight male supremacy. It was put forth in writing by Hayden and King in their anonymous "SNCC Position Paper," in 1964 and again in 1965 in "A Kind of Memo," the letter they wrote to other female activists.⁹ In the "Position Paper," Hayden and King made analogies between sexism and racism--"to bring forward the fact that sexism was comparable to racism--a novel idea at the time," Hayden later reflected.¹⁰

"What can be done?" they asked, and suggested a .

Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970 (New York, Scribner, 2001), 354.

⁸ Heather Booth, interview by author, 15 April 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

⁹ Hayden and King, "SNCC Position Paper (Women in the Movement)"; and Hayden and King, "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo" in King, *Freedom Song*, 567-74.

^e Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 365.

continuum of possibilities beginning with "probably nothing" because "most men...are...too threatened" and many women are too concerned with male acceptance.¹¹ Nevertheless, they called for the "whole of the women in this movement" to "force the rest of the movement to stop the discrimination."¹² Strongly implied was that in order to stop sexist treatment of women, the "force" of many unified women would be needed.

Hayden and King were more explicit about a collective approach to sexism in the document they mailed to "women in the peace and freedom movements" in 1965.¹³ Again they pointed to similarities between racism and discrimination against women. This time, however, rather than limiting the discussion to sexism in SNCC, they compared broad patterns of racism and sexism in categories such as "problems of work" and "personal relations." To deal with this "sex caste system," they modestly dropped the bombshell about starting a movement but then retreated: "the chances seem nil that we could start a movement."¹⁴ Referring to their civil rights work, Hayden and King said, "We've learned a great deal in the movement...a determined attempt to apply ideas we're

¹¹ King, *Freedom Song*, 569.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 571.

learned there can produce some new alternatives."¹⁵

Hayden and King raised the woman question as they had learned to raise other issues in SNCC--by calling for discussion and writing position papers. In such a context, however "nil" the chances, a movement against sexism was the logical outcome of the analogy they drew between racism and the "sex-caste" system. After all, if a movement was the best strategy for fighting racism, and racism and "sex-caste" were analogous systems, even if a movement against sex-caste discrimination was unlikely, would it not be the appropriate strategy? In the next few years many of the women who read Hayden and King's memo would decide to test the chances of a movement against sexism.

Like Hayden and King, Sarachild was in SNCC when she first got the idea of taking on male supremacy in a movement. As a "red diaper baby" she learned about the woman question in her family. Reading *The Second Sex* as a teenager further raised her consciousness about feminism. But, as she said, "When I read *The Second Sex* I became a personal feminist...the only thing possible before organized...feminism began."¹⁶

Sarachild had been a volunteer on a project in

¹⁴ Ibid., 573.

¹⁵ Ibid., 574.

¹⁶ Sarachild, statement at the *Simone de Beauvoir Memorial*

Batesville, Mississippi in 1964 and returned there in March 1965 to work on a SNCC film project. "I didn't think about women's liberation as a possible movement until I came back down in March," she said. "Another volunteer...came running up to me," she remembered, "and he said, 'Oh Kathie, you'll be so excited to know that there's something going on called 'women's liberation.'"¹⁷ He reported that there had been a women's sit-in the SNCC office, a feminist position paper at a conference, and that Dona Moses, the wife of Bob Moses, the Mississippi project director, had reclaimed her maiden name.¹⁸

"A movement was starting on this issue, a movement like SNCC," Sarachild said. She had "always known the issue," she said, "but the positive thing of...a grass-roots movement, such as had been spreading through the South but in this case of women...It was the possibility of a movement...that I don't think any of us had conceived of...that it was possible to have a movement about it even though it was an old issue" (emphasis Sarachild).¹⁹

Speak Out.

¹⁷ Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation," 7.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Kathie Sarachild, transcript of remarks on the panel, "SNCC Women and the Stirrings of Feminism," in *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC*, ed. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 149.

According to Sarachild, hearing about women's liberation in the context of "a dynamic grass-roots movement in the wilds of Mississippi ignited the feminist part of my brain in new ways...I remember...being thrilled with the sense of new possibilities."²⁰ Male chauvinism, as Sarachild said, was not new, but the idea of forming a movement to do something about it--that was new. "We saw that it was necessary," she said, "to put the major part of our energy and resources into reaching women...we saw that our own liberation depended on our reaching the masses of women--or else women would continue to be played off against one another" (emphasis Sarachild).²¹

Heather Booth, also a Freedom Summer volunteer, was beginning to get the same idea. In 1964, however, Booth had little background in feminism. Booth's family, though supportive of her participation in the civil rights movement, had not taught her about male chauvinism, nor had she read *The Second Sex*. Her mother thought *The Feminine Mystique* was important and recommended the book to her. But Booth said that as a high school student, she "did not really understand it when I read it then."²²

²⁰ Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation, 7.

²¹ Ibid., 8.

²² Booth, interview by author, 15 April 2001, Washington,

Since childhood Booth's family had encouraged her to take action against injustice. In elementary school she stood up for two fellow students, one taunted because of his race, the other picked on because he was Italian. In high school Booth quit the cheerleading team because blacks were not allowed on it. When lunch counter sit-ins began in the South, she protested at a local Woolworth's with her neighborhood CORE chapter.

In 1963 when Booth entered the University of Chicago she knew that the difference in dormitory curfews for men and women discriminated against women. But she did not organize against sexism collectively until after she returned from her summer in Mississippi. She then began to apply to sexism the mass tactics of the civil rights movement. Over the next two years, Booth organized "sleep outs" of female dorm residents to protest sexist curfews. In 1966 a friend who had been raped was treated in a sexist manner at the student health center. Booth used the collective strategy of organizing a sit-in at the health center until the friend received the medical care she needed.²³ In 1967 this trajectory of collective protest against male chauvinism culminated in Booth organizing the West Side group, which was, in turn, the beginning of the

D.C., tape recording in the possession of author.

²³ Heather Booth quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 352.

women's liberation movement. Mississippi Freedom Summer was a pivotal point after which Booth would respond to sexism with collective action.

The Lessons of Black Power

Working in SNCC gave women's liberation founders like Booth, Sarachild, Hayden, and King ideas about collective action they applied to sexism. It also provoked debates over where to aim the action. In 1964, along with the influx of hundreds of white volunteers in Freedom Summer, the decision of a number of them to remain in or return to Mississippi intensified discussion in SNCC over the role of whites in the movement. Stokely Carmichael, among other black leaders, argued that whites should now turn to organizing whites.

This was interpreted in a number of ways including whites organizing white support for black civil rights and whites organizing poor whites along class lines for an interracial alliance. "'It's time to fight your own oppressors.' I remember he [Carmichael] used that phrase..." recalled Sarachild, "And even then I was thinking, 'Fight your own oppressors,' what would that mean? I knew there was a class problem...I began thinking about it in connection with women's liberation...I almost thought it was my duty as

a white organizer to start thinking about it."²⁴

Casey Hayden, with two years on the SNCC staff, was also reflecting on class and women. "Working with whites...by now seemed the clear message...It was unthinkable to me to go back to the white community of the segregated South," she said.²⁵ Hayden and her half sister had been raised in East Texas where their mother supported the family on a secretary's salary. "I wanted to organize white welfare women," said Hayden.²⁶ She decided to go north to work in the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP), the national SDS project that was organizing whites into an interracial movement of the poor. According to an ERAP colleague, Hayden told them, "Women...should organize women...and that struck us all as...a very novel idea."²⁷ It was spring 1965. SNCC supported the plan of women organizing women and continued to pay Hayden's salary (\$9.64 a week).

That summer, on SNCC's payroll, Hayden organized white welfare mothers in Chicago into the SDS project. "I realized working in Chicago," she said, "how difficult it was to organize women within a setting that lacked feminist consciousness. The first step, therefore, was to create that

²⁴ Sarachild quoted in "SNCC Women," in *A Circle of Trust*, ed. Greenberg, 148.

²⁵ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 368.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 369.

consciousness."²⁸ To raise feminist consciousness, Hayden said, her first step was to begin writing "Sex and Caste." The "clear message" from the idea "fight your own oppressors," led Hayden to organize women; and then, with King, to write the paper which located women's "oppressor" in a "sex-caste" system and helped sparked the rise of the women's liberation movement.²⁹

Fighting one's own oppressor was also the theme of "The Florida Paper," which, in 1968, focussed the emerging movement on sexist treatment of women by men, and urged women to "work for female liberation first, and now."³⁰ "People," Beverly Jones argued in "The Florida Paper," in what would become a classic feminist statement, "don't get radicalized (engaged with basic truths) fighting other people's battles."³¹ According to Jones, many whites in the civil rights movement thought they had no particular problems until they were enlightened by Black Power.

Jones analyzed white consciousness in the civil rights movement where she had been active for fifteen years.

"People who set about to help other people," Jones said,

²⁷ Richie Rothstein quoted in Evans, *Personal Politics*, 145.

²⁸ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 370.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 368.

³⁰ Brown in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 398.

³¹ Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 364.

"... maintain important illusions...[about] the full measure of their own individual oppression."³² Getting thrown out by SNCC, Jones held, was the "best thing that ever happened" to white men because they took on the draft, university reform, and "the business order. The best thing that may yet happen to potentially radical young women is that they will be driven out of both these groups," she said, and "start fighting primarily for the liberation and independence of women." ³³

Interestingly, like Hayden in ERAP before the 1965 memo, Jones, in the period before she wrote "The Florida Paper," had turned to organizing women, although not for women's liberation. In 1963 Jones formed Gainesville Women for Equal Rights (GWER), a black and white, women-only group to campaign for black civil rights in the deep South. Then Jones coauthored "The Florida Paper" which jolted emerging women's groups toward independence from the New Left. Throughout the paper, Jones, and coauthor Judith Brown gratefully acknowledged their debt to Black Power.

Instead of feeling pushed aside, Brown, Jones, and Sarachild were attracted to black power's admonition "fight your own oppressors," and quickly applied it to women. But Hayden, the first to apply the lesson to women, did not

³² Ibid., 365.

share their excitement. As women began organizing women, she found it "unattractive," she said, because they were "emulating black nationalism."³⁴

Hayden was right. Women's liberation did emulate black nationalism, and like Hayden, some historians have found aspects of the relationship problematic. Scholars and feminists alike have pointed to problems such as dedicated white women pushed out of civil rights work and Black Power threatening the new influence and confidence of white women in the civil rights movement.³⁵ They also pointed to male chauvinist aspects of black nationalism, particularly the view of black women as emasculating matriarchs and the pressure on black women to assume a subordinate role in the movement and in the family.

There were, however, lessons from Black Power that were invaluable to women's liberation founders. Again and again early women's liberation arguments for a separate, independent movement of women relied on analogies with Black Power. At the first national meeting of the emerging movement in Sandy Springs, Maryland in 1968 Beverly Jones maintained: "If women want to gain equality or freedom,

³³ Ibid., 366.

³⁴ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 371.

³⁵ See for example Rosen's discussion of Casey Hayden's reaction to black nationalism in Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 112-13, and Evans, *Personal Politics*, 99, 100,

here's the analogy with the blacks...we have to organize against the people who are oppressing us...Men are the enemy...I am interested in organizing other women to organize other women to take their power away from them."³⁶ Representatives of NYRW agreed: "The black analogy is very good...we have to organize politically separately."³⁷ Later, NYRW cofounder Pam Allen observed, "Organizing separately mirrored the rise of black separatism...and is one way that movement influenced us."³⁸

Indeed, separatism, the organization of a female constituency against sexism, clearly distinguished the women's liberation or radical wing of the movement from the moderate branch led by NOW which admitted men to membership and into leadership positions. Three years before "The Florida Paper," the symbiotic relationship between Black Power and the separatist tendency of the nascent radical branch of feminism was evident at a national SDS conference in one of the earliest public discussions of Hayden and King's memo.

There women had tried to talk about male domination with men present. Booth, who had been strongly affected by the memo said, "the men were...denying our reality in a way

³⁶ Beverly Jones in Sandy Springs meeting transcript, 10.

³⁷ Kathie Sarachild in Sandy Springs meeting transcript, 15.

that was so shocking." ³⁹ As women began forming all female discussion groups, some men refused to leave. Black power advocate Jimmy Garrett, a black man participating in the conference as a SNCC representative, argued vehemently with the white SDS men that the women had a right to meet separately as women.⁴⁰

Black power leaders in Florida were also supportive of separatist views on women's liberation. Recalling "real respect" from black power organizer Jack Dawkins, Brown said, "He can be 'empathetic' the way white men can't be."⁴¹ "He understands perfectly why I want to fight for my own self, my own sex," she wrote to contemporaries in 1968.⁴² Black power leader Joe Waller (later Omali Yeshatela) also encouraged Brown. "He agrees right down the line...he...welcomes any effort of a white person to organize other whites," Brown said.⁴³ Brown reported that these men were interested in forming a Black Power/women's

³⁸ Pam Allen, New York, letter to author, n.d. March 2001

³⁹ Heather Booth quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 354.

⁴⁰ Evans offers different versions of Garrett at the SDS conference, Evans, *Personal Politics*, 163.

⁴¹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 22 November 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴² Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 8 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

liberation coalition. "The most enlightened male response," Brown said, "comes from the very militant black power people."⁴⁴

Another important early borrowing from Black Power by women's liberation founders was the strategy taken by Firestone and Freeman at the National Conference for New Politics in Chicago in 1967. The Conference, attended by over 3000 delegates from various black, left, and liberal organizations, included a caucus of black delegates. Although less than fifty percent of those in attendance were black, the black caucus sought and won a guarantee of fifty percent of the votes and fifty percent representation on all committees.⁴⁵

Shulamith Firestone and Jo Freeman followed the example of the black caucus. The resolution they developed called for, among other demands, fifty-one percent of the conference votes and fifty-one percent representation on committees because women were fifty-one percent of the population. When the conference chair refused to bring the resolution to the floor, Freeman threatened to "tie up the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ William A. Price, "Behind the NCNP Meeting," *Guardian*, 16 September 1967, 9.

conference in procedural motions." ⁴⁶ Although they lost the battle for the resolution, as historian Alice Echols noted, "black power enabled them to argue that it was valid for women to organize around their own oppression."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 60.

⁴⁷ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 49.

CHAPTER 5

"I'LL BOW TO NO MAN'S WORD":
THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION FOUNDERS

Casey Hayden and Mary King had blazed a trail for a separatist women's movement they themselves would not follow. They mourned deeply the loss of the "Beloved Community" of early SNCC and "lost heart," as Hayden said, for movement work. When they raised the call for women's liberation that community had been their source of strength. As it "eroded," Hayden said, she "crashed and burned...lost everything."¹ King said, "I was lost...In some ways, I have never recovered from the loss of SNCC."² As Black Power and women's liberation kept pace in the mid-1960s, for King and Hayden the "circle of trust" that characterized the SNCC community disintegrated.

What was that community and how had it contributed to the birth of women's liberation? Despite her sense of loss, looking back, King put it this way: "SNCC...[was] ahead of its time...SNCC was able to promote and respond to the leadership of women in a manner that antedated an articulated ...struggle for women's rights. Even if not

¹ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 371.

fully ready for the questions we raised," SNCC, King said, "provided the crucial nourishment that allowed Casey and me to pose our concerns."³

The person most responsible for SNCC's nourishment and responsiveness to female leaders was Ella Baker, the group's founder and guide.⁴ Baker, the legendary organizer whose life in the black freedom struggle began in the late 1920s in Harlem, had been well educated and trained for leadership from her earliest years. Baker refused to be daunted by limitations on her activism because she was a woman. Married in 1940, she kept her maiden name and spent the first six years of married life traveling the country as field secretary and then director of branches for the NAACP.

From the start, Baker had organized women, first in a housewives cooperative and a union for domestic workers in Harlem. She went on to support female cadre in the civil rights movement. If a woman had potential, Baker wanted to see it developed. Some of the women Baker worked with were already feminist, some became feminist, and others simply did exemplary movement work that was outside the gender

² King, *Freedom Song*, 515, 540.

³ *Ibid.*, 543.

⁴ In *I've Got the Light of Freedom*, 268, Charles Payne attributes SNCC's distinctive ability to develop female leadership to its having been "founded by a woman." Although he did not name Ella Baker, it is clear that he is referring to her.

conventions of the period, particularly those for white women.⁵

In 1946 Baker gave a leadership-training workshop for activists attended by Rosa Parks, then an NAACP officer in Montgomery, Alabama.⁶ This was a crucial point in Parks' deepening commitment to the movement and the two women became lifelong allies. When Parks refused to give up her seat to a white rider on Montgomery's segregated bus line, setting in motion the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Baker and Parks teamed up to conduct a fundraising tour for the boycott throughout the Northeast.

But Baker was critical of the male leadership of the boycott. She noted with irritation, "The[se] women who had demonstrated a kind of dedication, and who had enough intelligence...and had enough contacts...to have been useful, to have found a role to help move people along...no role was provided for them."⁷ Determined to use the momentum generated by the boycott to build a grassroots movement

⁵ Barbara Ransby has described Baker's influence on the women in SNCC. See Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

⁶ The workshop, under the auspices of the NAACP, was held in Atlanta and was the first time Parks had traveled outside the Montgomery area. According to Parks, Baker was a profound influence on her life, see Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 142.

⁷ Joanne Grant, *Ella Baker: Freedom Bound* (New York: John

across the South, Baker helped launch the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). She hoped to make mass organizing for the vote a major SCLC front in which women would have a "role to help move people along."

Citizenship schools were an important part of voter registration. To lead them, Baker recruited veteran civil rights worker Septima Clark. The schools trained hundreds of teachers in twelve southern states to prepare an often barely literate constituency to register. Clark saw to it that the schools also fostered consciousness of women's rights. Like Baker, Clark struggled to bring women into equal participation with men in the civil rights movement.

Yet try as she might to democratize the NAACP and SCLC, Baker was unable to influence either to a point where women's abilities were fully used or appreciated. SNCC would be different; if not free of male chauvinism, it was well ahead of the others. Clark said the young men in SNCC understood what Baker wanted them to do whereas those in SCLC "couldn't see" her "contribution."⁸

In 1960 Baker founded SNCC, which she continued to advise throughout its organizational life. She forged an organization with many bold, effective female leaders whose behavior was far outside the norms of the day for race and

Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1998), 108.

⁸ Ibid., 213.

sex. Referring to women's changing role in the civil right movement, Baker observed, "The movement...was carried largely by women...Black women have had to carry this [supportive] role." However, the younger women were now "insisting on equal footing," Baker said. "Society seems to assume that [supportive role] is the best role for women." But, she continued, "certainly the young people who are challenging this ought to be challenging it, and it ought to be changed."⁹

Among the challengers was Diane Nash, a young black woman who led SNCC's direct action wing. Nash had been recruited by Baker and was the group's first paid field organizer. Under Nash's leadership SNCC sustained the Freedom Rides after CORE discontinued them because of the severity of mob violence encountered by the riders. Nash's courage and commitment inspired others, among them Casey Hayden, who participated in a Freedom Ride through Georgia.

By 1965 when Hayden and King raised their feminist critique for the second time, SNCC's top post was held by veteran black staff member Ruby Doris Robinson. Robinson, then twenty-three and the youngest in SNCC to serve in this capacity, was renowned for forceful leadership. Some accounts place Robinson at the head of a strike by SNCC's

⁹ Ella Baker, "Developing Community Leadership," in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, ed. Gerda

female office staff that brought the organization to a "screeching halt" in protest of sexual harassment by male staff.¹⁰ One coworker said that Robinson, upon overhearing him repeat Stokely Carmichael's (Kwame Toure) quip about the "prone" position of women in SNCC, emerged from her office and "just knocked me right across my face."¹¹ A black female co-worker said Robinson's influence "gave other women courage" because "she was the figure [men] clearly back off [from]."¹² Robinson died two years later, but her reputation had already begun to reach mythical proportions. Many wrongly attributed Hayden and King's first unsigned feminist paper to Robinson.¹³

But Hayden and King had written both papers. It was to Baker that King attributed the ideological influence that prompted her work on the two earliest calls for women's liberation in the 1960s. Hayden and King had both worked under Baker's supervision at the YWCA before Baker recruited them to the staff of SNCC. King said: "through Ella Baker's influence on me, the principle [let the oppressed themselves

Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 352.

¹⁰ See for example Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 151.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹² *Ibid.*, 152.

¹³ See for example Robin Morgan's introduction to her

define their own freedom] gave rise to the document on women."¹⁴ Hayden had recognized the need to raise feminist consciousness and organize women around their own agenda. Hayden said of Baker, "How deeply I had incorporated her into myself...She seemed to know that however much we think and talk...it is action that makes social change happen."¹⁵

Hayden believed that what was important in SNCC was the "capacity to unlock people and situations into action."¹⁶ Along with Baker, Hayden counted Diane Nash as a critical influence. She called Nash's brand of nonviolent direct action "existentialism carried to the streets."¹⁷ She thought it was key to women's liberation. "It took one out of the role of victim and put her in total command of her life. By acting in this clear, pure way..." Hayden said, and "by risking all for it, we were broken open, released from old and lesser definitions of ourselves in terms of race, sex, class, into the larger self of the Beloved Community."¹⁸

SNCC, the birthplace of women's liberation, founded by

anthology, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, xxi.

¹⁴ King, *Freedom Song*, 456.

¹⁵ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 346.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 342.

a woman who would "bow to no man's word" as Baker described herself, was survived, appropriately, by its Black Women's Liberation Committee, one of the earliest black women's liberation organizations.¹⁹ Many black women first trained in SNCC continued as political leaders and feminists. Among them, Kathleen Cleaver was on the Central Committee of the Black Panther Party and Angela Davis went on to leadership in the Communist Party. Both Cleaver and Davis were advocates of women's liberation whose work on the "woman question" was widely read in radical circles. Former SNCC worker Eleanor Holmes Norton fought sex discrimination as the first female chair of the Equal Employment Opportunities Commission (EEOC). Summing up SNCC's influence, Hayden said: "the tools developed in analyzing racism were translated, inside SNCC itself, into an analysis of gender."²⁰

Direct action, along with ideological tools such as the idea that the oppressed define their own freedom, became weapons against sexism. The leadership example of black women such as Nash and Baker who had taught women like

Hayden and King how to fight was also part of the arsenal. SNCC Executive Secretary Ruby Doris Robinson put it this way: Negro women can be pretty hard on a man. I mean, white

¹⁹ Baker, "Ella's Song," in Grant, *Ella Baker*, vii.

women don't do so much of this as far as I know, but we fight (emphasis Robinson)!"²¹

The Lessons of Women's Militancy

The militancy of black women influenced "Florida Paper" coauthor Judith Brown. In 1963, Brown, then 22, joined CORE. "My first two movement experiences were in militant civil rights groups led by black women," Brown recalled, "I was used to seeing a woman lead, be outspoken, take risks, confront men on male supremacy and confront white people on racism."²² Brown had worked for a year as assistant to Patricia Stephens Due in a CORE voter registration project in Quincy, Florida, the county seat of a majority black county in the Florida Panhandle. Brown said Due had taught "a very high degree of militancy--and I had seen her make it work. Pat transformed the scary stuff into winning and converting more and more people...this was my best model."²³

When Brown began working with Patricia Due, Due was twenty-three, a year older than Brown and already a veteran civil rights leader. She bore little resemblance to the

²⁰ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 366.

²¹ Ruby Doris Robinson quoted in *Freedom's Daughters*, 372.

²² Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 15 August 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

²³ Ibid.

local "mama" often referred to in civil rights movement literature.²⁴ Nineteen when she began organizing, Due was called a "sparkplug" and known for "boundless energy and remarkable poise."²⁵ In 1959, while a junior in college, Due, with her sister Priscilla, had organized a CORE chapter at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College (FAMU), a historically black college in Tallahassee, the state capitol. On February 13, 1960, twelve days after the Greensboro sit-ins ignited a national chain reaction, Due led a sit-in at the Woolworth's lunch counter. This made Tallahassee the third town outside of North Carolina to stage sit-ins.²⁶

Faced with mobs armed with knives, ax handles, and guns, Tallahassee CORE continued the sit-ins for a month. "Fill the jails, if necessary," Due urged as marches grew to one thousand strong and students were beaten and arrested.²⁷

²⁴ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 51.

²⁵ Glenda Alice Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Tallahassee, Florida* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 120.

²⁶ According to Clayborne Carson, sit-ins in Hampton, Virginia on Feb. 10 were the first outside of North Carolina, see *In Struggle*, 11. Students in Rock Hill, South Carolina, sat in on Feb. 12 and in Tallahassee, Fla., on Feb. 13, see August Meier and Elliot Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement 1942-1968* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), 104; The Nashville sit-ins also took place on Feb. 13, see Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*, 206.

At their trials, Due, her sister, and six other defendants accepted jail sentences rather than pay the fines. From her cell, Due wrote a widely circulated letter, "Through Jail to Freedom." "We could be out on appeal," she said," but we all strongly believe that Martin Luther King was right when he said, 'We've got to fill the jails in order to win our equal rights.'"²⁸

The "jailbirds," as they called themselves, came to the attention of the national media and began to receive mail from all over the world.²⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote to them saying:"Your valiant witness is one of the glowing epics of our time."³⁰ As pioneers of the "jail-in," when they had served their sentences, the sisters and three others embarked on a national tour. They were hosted by Eleanor Roosevelt and Jackie Robinson, and spoke at Adam Clayton Powell's Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York. They then returned to Tallahassee to continue direct action activities. In late 1963, Due initiated a CORE voter registration project in which Brown became her right hand. A September night rally and the tumultuous months that

²⁷ Meier and Rudwick, *CORE*, 106.

²⁸ Patricia Stephens Due, "Through Jail to Freedom," letter published in James Peck, *Freedom Ride* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962), 79.

²⁹ Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise*, 106.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

followed readied Brown for this work.

At the rally, Brown, along with coworker Dan Harmeling, joined five whites from Florida State University and hundreds of black students from FAMU. The Tallahassee students, under Due's leadership, had been working all spring to integrate the town's segregated movie theatres. Now, Due asked the rallying students to march on the theatre. Singing at the top of their lungs, the students marched down the main street in Tallahassee directly into a large crowd of white men armed with ax handles and chains. Harmeling described what followed:

Judy and I were walking to the Florida Theatre. Judy squeezed my hand...The Vicious beating of a white civil rights worker in the Ocala jail had us worried. We were too far in front to turn back and ahead a jeering white mob. Judy stepped forward, lifted her sign, and began the picket. Three hundred and forty-eight people arrested, days in jail, a trial, guilty verdicts, more jail time, and Judy lost her financial aid for graduate school.³¹

This was Brown's first arrest. It was the eve of Birmingham Sunday. The next day the jailed civil rights workers learned that four black children, Denise McNair, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Addie Mae Collins had been killed in Sunday school when the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was dynamited. Reflecting on

³¹ Dan Harmeling, Gainesville, Fla., letter to the author, 29 June 1991, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

the arrest, Brown said:

When I saw her [Patricia Due] getting dragged and kicked to a police car, I instantly changed my mind about not being arrested, and spent my first full day in jail on Birmingham Sunday. When we heard about the bombing that day, I was filled with gratitude to be in jail...I changed overnight...I don't know if I would have followed a man to jail.³²

Though grateful to be in jail, Brown was badly frightened there. She and three other female civil rights workers were packed into a cell for the night, while white female inmates jailed for non-political reasons were freed from their cells. These inmates pushed broomsticks tipped with razor blades through the bars at Brown and her comrades who barely escaped being cut by huddling at the far end of the cell. Their attackers, later fast friends with the civil rights workers, said the jailers put them up to the attack. Although frightened, the demonstrators adopted the "jail-no-bail" strategy pioneered by Due and remained in jail for weeks. FAMU students brought them food and massed in the streets outside singing freedom songs and demanding their release.

As a result of the arrest Brown's Ford Foundation Fellowship was taken from her, and she was suspended from

³² Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 15 August 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

the University of Florida. But she had already decided she wanted to work with Due on the voter registration project and wasted no time attempting to convince Due that she could do it." How much effort and thought and change I had to go through to pursue her so she would allow me to follow her," said Brown.³³

At Due's request, Brown set out to recruit out-of-town volunteers for a voter registration drive. The volunteers received no salary but lived with local black families or in a Freedom House in a black neighborhood. Five of Brown's recruits were men who came to live in the Freedom House in Quincy, the new base of operations for the project. Quincy was the county seat of Gadsen county, one of five in Florida listed by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission for disfranchisement of blacks and violent repression of black civil rights.³⁴

Brown was arrested at her first presentation on voter education in Gadsen County. Jailed for three days along with another white female civil rights worker, the two were locked into a cell and left alone with eight male inmates who had been encouraged by the guards to rape them. Fortunately the men refused to go along with the jailers.

³³ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 21 November 1988, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³⁴ Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise*, 165.

Patricia Due compared civil rights work in Gadsen County with "going into a lion's cage without a weapon."³⁵ For Due, Brown, and the other volunteers, nights in the Freedom House brought no relief from the violence of their days. Volunteers were trained in nonviolence and pledged to maintain it. But the Freedom House was guarded at night by black neighbors armed with shotguns. During the course of the summer, the house was shot into by nightriders. One of Brown's recruits, a white Marine veteran, was seriously injured when the white attackers hit him in the face with a rifle. Brown wrote about night in the Freedom House:

By night the dark draws down it's awful curtain, and all the specters begin to walk. Tonight there are grown men playing a game in the bushes. They wait...Seven rifles are aimed into my house. We wait...Scott runs into the house with his face laid raw. "I'm a Marine, you know...I was taught to disarm and kill a man with a rifle...I could do it blind and I let him hit me." God, oh God, they are still outside my house. The night is clear again, all of our people in the hundred-mile range are accounted for. The lights are turned off... 3 a.m. and I hear a shot... "My God, Pat, they are shooting at us now."³⁶

To provide even minimal protection, the project maintained a strict system for volunteers to check in at regular intervals. Remarkably, with no authority other than

³⁵ Ibid., 174.

³⁶ Judith Brown, "CORE Voter Registration Drive" (Judith Brown's notebook of the Big Bend Voter Education Project, Quincy, Fla., 1964), 42-45. Collection of the Judith Brown

that vested in her by Due, Brown often found herself accounting for the whereabouts of volunteers before the Freedom House shut down for the night. For the male volunteers, some older than Brown, the experience of reporting to a woman was undoubtedly their first.

The project continued for over a year and included, at its peak, eight counties in the Florida Panhandle, four in the Black Belt or "Old South" section bordering on Georgia and Alabama. In these areas many black families lived on large tobacco plantations under almost feudal conditions. In two of the counties, Lafayette and Liberty, there had never been a black voter.³⁷

When the project ended in 1965, North Florida saw more newly registered black voters than any other region in the South.³⁸ Among these voters was Mrs. Pearlie Williams a 109 year-old woman who had been born a slave. It was "about time," she said, "to register and vote."³⁹ But as black registration rose, so did the violence directed at the civil rights workers. Cars were firebombed, staff beaten and threatened with death over the telephone, shots fired into the Freedom House, and crosses burned at the homes of

Endowment.

³⁷ Rabby, *The Pain and the Promise*, 173.

³⁹ Judith Brown, "Freedom Day Last Monday in Quincy," *Gadsden County Free Press*, 1 August 1964, Collection of the Judith

African Americans. Brown later wrote,

I was not in the Civil Rights Movement as an office worker in a "white" thing. I was in the field with Pat in small towns in dangerous situations. It scared the shit out of me, but although we got pushed around, shot at, arrested a lot, we made it out alive and we accomplished our goals. So my experience was very positive.⁴⁰

As Brown said, her first two movement experiences were in militant groups led by black women. Brown's work with Pat Due was the second of the two. The first had come in summer 1963 with a CORE chapter in Dunnellon, Florida led by Betty Wright, who was a year younger than Brown. Wright was a student at FAMU that Due had organized into Tallahassee CORE. Through Wright, Brown had been introduced to Due.

When FAMU adjourned for the summer, as Wright put it, "there was just too much momentum."⁴¹ Wright returned home to Dunnellon, a small town south of Gainesville, and immediately organized a CORE chapter which began picketing a segregated theater. A national CORE staffer sent in to assist was arrested and brutally beaten in jail. Pickets began at the jail and students in Gainesville, Brown among them, came to join in. As the students drove back to

Brown Endowment.

⁴⁰ Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 15 August 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴¹ Betty Wright, interview by author, 10 September 2000, Salsbury, Md., tape recording in the possession of author.

Gainesville after demonstrations they were often chased by carloads of armed white men. Wright would accompany the students back to their homes.

According to Dan Harmeling, who was part of the student group, Wright, then twenty-one, was respected as the CORE leader by older adults of both sexes in Dunnellon and also by the students from Gainesville. Brown, Harmeling remembered, admired Wright and spent the summer working with her. Harmeling called Wright "dynamic--clearly someone who would inspire people."⁴² Brown, said Wright, was "part of my support."⁴³

Thus Brown learned from Betty Wright and Patricia Due the fundamental lesson of the effectiveness of powerful female leadership. Wright and Due led with their courage, they directed political strategy for the campaigns they waged, and although they were just about Brown's age, they led the groups they had organized. Although younger than many of their recruits, they were college students, which may have added to their status among less educated supporters. But older black women with little or no college education were also often key political strategists. They

⁴² Dan Harmeling, interview by author, 4 September 2000, Gainesville, Florida, tape recording in the possession of author.

⁴³ Wright, interview by author, 10 September 2000, Salsbury, Md., tape recording in the possession of author.

prevailed over better-educated men regardless of race because of the strength of their commitment and an ability to righteously argue their position.

Annie Devine of CORE and Fannie Lou Hamer and Victoria Gray of SNCC were three such women. From small Mississippi towns, they were among the founders and elected leaders of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party that challenged the segregated white male Mississippi delegation at the Democratic National Convention in 1964. Devine, Hamer, and Gray had led campaigns in their communities, worked in voter registration drives, and in the process, like most of their coworkers, endured bombings, shootings, and other violent intimidation. Hamer had been severely beaten in jail and she received permanent injuries.

At the Democratic Convention, the Freedom Democrats sought support for their seating challenge from other state delegations. In a now famous widely televised speech describing the firing, eviction, beating, and attempts on her life she experienced in the course of trying to register to vote, Hamer, the deputy chair of the Freedom delegation, "questioned America."⁴⁴ Lyndon Johnson, seeking the presidential nomination, feared the defection of white southern Democrats and opposed the Freedom Democrats.

⁴⁴ Fannie Lou Hamer quoted in Kay Mills, *This Little Light of Mine: The Life of Fannie Lou Hamer* (New York: Penguin

Accounts of the deals and angry debate surrounding Johnson's attempt to silence the protest with a two seat compromise have become political legend.⁴⁵ Among their tactics, liberal Democratic Party leaders enlisted an array of influential men including as Martin Luther King, Jr., Hubert Humphrey, Bayard Rustin, Roy Wilkins, and Walter Reuther to win the Freedom Democrats to the two-seat compromise.

Black Freedom delegate Henry Sias recalled that he and quite a few others wanted to accept the compromise, in part because of the importance of the men who advocated it. But when he took the floor to recommend acceptance, "Mrs. Hamer just hollered out" Sias recalled. "Mrs. Hamer and Mrs. Devine...tellin' me what a shame it was for me to do that, I hushed right then...I changed my mind...Those two women just shamed me right there."⁴⁶

Devine, Hamer, and Gray convinced the Freedom delegation to reject the compromise. Gray described herself as speaking against it "in no uncertain terms."⁴⁷ Hamer backed down Hubert Humphrey when he told the Freedom

Books, 1993), 121. See also Lee, *For Freedom's Sake*.

⁴⁵ See Steven F. Lawson's account of this in *Black Ballots: Voting Rights in the South, 1944-1969* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).

⁴⁶ Henry Sias quoted in John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 301.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Democrats that their refusal to accept the compromise could cost him the Vice Presidency. "You're afraid to do what you know is right," Hamer said, "you just want this job. I lost my job and I know a lot of people have lost their jobs...if you take this job you won't be worth anything."⁴⁸ Years later civil rights leader Andrew Young, while ambassador to the United Nations under President Carter, discussed the significance of Hamer's civil rights work for the rise of feminism world wide: "Mrs. Hamer was special, but...also representative. Hundreds of women spoke up and took leadership...and from the civil rights movement...learned the lessons that inspired the women's movement...now a global upsurge."⁴⁹

Young was right. When women like Fannie Lou Hamer and Patricia Stephens Due "spoke up and took leadership," they impressed not only the men they confronted, but also young women like Heather Booth, Judith Brown, and Pam Allen who would go on to found the women's liberation movement. It was unusual enough to see a woman lead thousands of demonstrators or debate influential men in public, high stakes political strategy sessions. Even more remarkable, however, was that the views of women who spoke up were

⁴⁸ Fannie Lou Hamer quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 320.

⁴⁹ Andrew Young quoted in King, *Freedom Song*, 470.

"heeded" as Heather Booth observed when she worked with Hamer in Mississippi Freedom Summer.⁵⁰ In North Florida, organizing voter registration with Pat Due, Judith Brown was taught how to "speak up." Brown recalled that Due made her understand that speaking up was an "obligation of following" her.⁵¹ Pam Allen, a volunteer in a Freedom School in Holly Springs, Mississippi, came to similar conclusions working under Barbara Walker, a black woman a year younger than her who ran the Freedom School. Allen said she "saw the respect the guys had for Barbara."⁵²

Immersion and Transformation

But the phenomenon of men heeding outspoken, serious women was not limited to black women who led projects. It occurred with some of the white women too as the transformative effects of their own "risking all" work deepened their sense of historical mission. It was not that they imitated the black organizers, but that in time, particular aspects of the daily work began to make over the white activists. Enduring constant violence forced the white

⁵⁰ Heather Booth quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 352.

⁵¹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 22 November 1985, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁵² Pam Allen, interview by author, 2 January 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

workers to "be prepared, irrevocably, to give one's life" as one put it.⁵³ To act, as Hayden had said, "in this clear, pure way" gave them a kind of presence or "transcendence" they admired in the black leaders.⁵⁴

Of necessity, the young white women began to take themselves very seriously. One night when the SNCC project director was away Heather Booth and twenty other Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers gathered in their project's community center. They learned that the center was threatened with bombing and that armed men lay in wait for the returning project director. But it was more dangerous to leave the building than to stay in it. Booth said they turned out the lights and spent the night "re-emphasizing their conviction that this summer is necessary and right."⁵⁵ They also maintained contact with local police, the FBI, newspapers, and project headquarters.

Booth later wrote home that fear "almost paralyzed" her. To "still the tension," she said, she thought about what could be gained in the "larger scope of the whole

⁵³ Sally Belfrage quoted in McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 70.

⁵⁴ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 340, 342; Hayden quoted in McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 71.

⁵⁵ Heather Booth, Hattiesburg, Miss., to "Mom and Dad," summer 1964, in *Letters from Mississippi*, ed. Elizabeth Sutherland Martinez (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1965), 127.

Project."⁵⁶ Another female volunteer said, "I learned a lot of respect for myself for having gone through all that."⁵⁷

Judith Brown found that she could lead men in the CORE project despite (or perhaps because of) the violence project workers routinely faced. Five of Brown's recruits were men who came to live in the Freedom House in Quincy, Florida, and this was the first time Brown led men.

Pam Allen also experienced new, more egalitarian relationships with men. Allen had observed the way the men respected Barbara Walker, the Freedom School director. But before Freedom Summer ended, to her surprise, Allen found herself treated in a similar manner. One memorable example came in the form of encouragement from a black male co-worker with whom she was having a love affair. This man, Allen said, "expected me to be a great Freedom School teacher" even when it meant that her work came ahead of his needs.⁵⁸ "No man I'd known would have thought a woman's teaching was more important than he was," said Allen.⁵⁹ Summing up the summer, Allen described it as "one of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 151.

⁵⁷ Vivian Leburg quoted in Evans, *Personal Politics*, 73.

⁵⁸ Pam Allen, interview by author, 2 January 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

⁵⁹ Pam Allen quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 309.

expansion, not male chauvinism." ⁶⁰

Although Allen spent only a few months in Holly Springs, life after Freedom Summer was unsatisfying by comparison. The project became a standard by which she measured jobs she would hold, places she would live, and future relationships with men. Her last year in college, a social work job in New York City, and marriage to a leader in the draft resistance movement left her feeling isolated and purposeless. Trying to understand the difference between her sense of purpose in SNCC and how much less meaningful life had become Allen said "It seemed to me there was a connection between my dissatisfaction with my life and my being a woman."⁶¹

The dissatisfaction that Allen connected with being a woman resulted, in part, from her earlier "expansion." Like Brown, she had gotten "used to seeing a woman lead" and men taking women seriously. She now wanted these things in equal measure in the world outside the project. Other women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement surpassed their own expectations for courage and persistence. They too gained a qualitatively new feeling of recognition and respect from male coworkers. They learned that women could

⁶⁰ Allen, interview by author, 2 January 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

⁶¹ Pam Allen, letter to author, 21 December 2000.

prevail in debates, and plan, execute, and win campaigns against far more powerful men. Having experienced more nearly equal relationships with men, new goals came into view.

Booth said that there was something about the work in Mississippi that she wanted "for the rest of my life."⁶² Led by local black activists, Booth had learned that to successfully do work of great significance, "you didn't have to know enough according to some white person's standard or some man's standard."⁶³ Indeed, her work in Mississippi had lacked establishment approval or protection. Brown had undergone a similar shift in perspective when on her first day in jail, she found herself grateful to be there. Casey Hayden once quoted Henry David Thoreau, jailed for refusing to pay taxes because the government sanctioned slavery. When Ralph Waldo Emerson visited the jail, he is alleged to have said: "Henry David, what are you doing in there?" Thoreau had replied: "Ralph Waldo, what are you doing out there?"⁶⁴ And so it appeared to women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement: those who defied authority were on the right side while the authorities were usually on the wrong one.

⁶² Heather Booth quoted in McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, 127.

⁶³ Heather Booth quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 352.

Elected officials, judges, police, and pillars of the community perpetrated injustice by enforcing segregation, withholding the franchise, and arresting, jailing, and violently intimidating and even murdering movement workers.⁶⁵ The Justice Department and the FBI usually did little to stop the injustice. Moreover, authorities on the wrong side were predominantly male and white. At the same time, poor, black people, many of them women, were leading incipient women's liberation founders in work they loved, teaching them and protecting them. These experiences produced a change in "reference group" that for some white civil rights workers became permanent.

Alone in Batesville, Mississippi with only the local country people, Sarachild, a Radcliffe graduate and one of few female *Harvard Crimson* editors, remembered thinking she would be bored because "if we couldn't talk about books, movies, heavy politics, what was there?"⁶⁶ To what she self-critically described as her "surprise," Sarachild found

⁶⁴ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 19.

⁶⁵ Among those whose lives were taken by white authorities in the early years of SNCC was farmer and civil rights worker Herbert Lee, participating in a voter registration drive. He was shot to death in Liberty, Mississippi, in September 1961 by E. H. Hurst, a Mississippi state legislator, who was never even brought to trial. See Dittmer, *Local People*, 109. Lee's name became legend in "We'll Never Turn Back," the anthem of the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project.

⁶⁶ Kathie Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for

herself engaged in challenging, analytical political discussions with the local Batesville activists, most of whom were farmers. The experience with the local people, Sarachild said, "totally changed" her "reference group."⁶⁷

The reactions of these women involved a downward shift in the significance of white male authorities and peers. Booth no longer felt insecure confronting men. Brown turned away from male leaders. For Sarachild, the approval of "the Harvard intellectuals" as a test of success had been replaced by that of everyday working people.⁶⁸ Combined with positive experiences the women had with female leaders, the shift in reference group helped prepare women's liberation founders to take on men on women's behalf and to look to women as a potentially militant constituency.

When they went into the civil rights movement, most women's liberation founders already knew that sexism was a political system that affected many aspects of their lives. But they did not know what to do about it. In the movement they began to develop the idea of taking on male supremacy collectively. Whether to change a law, bring publicity to an issue, raise bail, or back down more powerful opponents,

Women's Liberation," 7.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

they saw the effectiveness of mass action and solidarity. They also understood that everyday people could and would organize together against conventional wisdom and great odds. At the same time, they learned how to organize and honed practical skills such as speaking up, writing position papers and press releases, recruiting, and direct action. By applying the logic of Black Power to the woman question, they began to come up with some answers. Fight your own oppressor. Organize your own female constituency to force men to share power and privilege.

Women's liberation founders in the civil rights movement developed confidence in their ability to change the world. Although they had not led the campaigns and projects they worked in, they had worked hard in them and risked their lives in the process. The houses Brown and Sarachild lived in were shot at by nightriders. Booth's center received bomb threats. Allen and Brown had been chased by armed white men. The women had gained confidence in their courage and perseverance in the face of almost paralyzing fear. Their courage and commitment had been recognized by coworkers, including male coworkers. And if they had not led a project, they had seen women their own age successfully lead projects, demonstrations, campaigns, and organizations. They also learned, as Booth pointed out, that one need not have Establishment credentials to be expert enough to figure

out how to take on the Establishment.

The civil rights movement was a seedbed for radical feminists because it provided women with an arsenal of ideological and practical weapons with which to oppose male supremacy. The shock troop tactics of SNCC and CORE transformed women's liberation founders who worked in southern projects into brave, confident organizers who had experienced a new standard of equality and respect for women. "Maybe not as much as they should have been," Booth observed, but women, even summer volunteers, "were listened to. It was more of an equal society (emphasis Booth)." ⁶⁹ Thus SNCC and CORE afforded singular preparation for women's liberation. For a time, women's liberation founders had lived on an intense, dangerous, cutting-edge where conditions more nearly approximated equality between the sexes than any they had known. Soon they would seek to recreate this democratic situation in the larger society by organizing a movement for women's liberation.

Neither the civil rights movement nor SNCC and CORE were free of sexism. But in addition to sexism, SNCC and CORE had something else not readily available in American society in the first half of the 1960s; the ability, as Mary King had put it, to "promote and respond to the leadership of women." As women's liberation founders in SNCC and CORE

⁶⁹ Heather Booth quoted in Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 352.

developed into organizers, the lessons of their civil rights work all came together. They had experienced a new standard of equality they were beginning to think they could organize for collectively not only within the movement, but in the rest of society as well.

But how to proceed? King and Hayden made the first moves in SNCC. Hayden had begun organizing women in ERAP, the Chicago SDS project, where she realized the need for a setting with "feminist consciousness." When Sarachild returned to Mississippi, she witnessed within SNCC what she thought was the birth of a new movement for women's liberation. But rather than start a new movement, Hayden and King hoped to create a feminist setting within their beloved SNCC." The movement" they wrote in the 1965 memo, "is the one place to look for some relief."⁷⁰ By movement they meant organizations working on "problems such as war, poverty, and race."⁷¹

As Sara Evans pointed out, Hayden and King wanted to fix the organization they were in. By 1965 King had been working in and around SNCC for over three years and Hayden since its inception in 1960. They hoped that collective pressure from within would be sufficient to reform SNCC. Booth, Allen, and Sarachild would take another path. The contradiction that divided Hayden and King from Booth,

⁷⁰ King, *Freedom Song*, 573.

Allen, and Sarachild would be hotly debated among women's liberation founders as they struggled for a strategy for women's liberation. Should they, could they, reform male chauvinism in organizations working on war, poverty, and race, or should they organize a new movement for women's liberation? The next two years would prove decisive.

⁷¹ Ibid., 571, 573.

CHAPTER 6

"WE COULD PUT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN THE STREET":
WOMEN'S LIBERATION FOUNDERS IN THE NEW LEFT

"I already believed you could change the world because of the anti-war movement," said Dee Ann Pappas, "so then you could do it for women too."¹ In 1967 Pappas was organizing demonstrations in support of the anti-Vietnam war protesters jailed for pouring blood on draft files who later became known as the "Catonsville Nine." "We could put thousands of people in the street" said Pappas recalling the demonstrations with pride, "my feminist consciousness grew in that context."²

Pappas was one of the handful of women who organized the first national meeting of the emerging women's liberation movement in Sandy Springs, Maryland in August 1968. Earlier, that spring, she had pulled together a women's liberation group in Baltimore, Maryland. Soon she would establish and serve as editor for *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, one of the longest running women's liberation journals of the 1960s.

In the anti-Vietnam war movement Pappas gained the skills and confidence that would, in part, generate the

¹ Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, 19 September 2000, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

women's liberation movement. Like Pappas, a number of women's liberation founders held leading positions in the New Left at the local level, although a few, like Marilyn Webb, played a national role. This raised their expectations for the larger society and brought organizing advantages, resources, and clout to newly emerging women's liberation groups. In July 1968 Judith Brown wrote to Jo Freeman, then editor of the Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement, "I am one of those exceptions...I have become, through tenacity and longevity the local 'radical.'. . .And the movement guys are so up tight about female liberation and its espousal by one whom they know is the radical leader anyway (myself)...I am threatening because...I have organized or helped to organize every extant group here."³

Jo Freeman, a leader of the feminist uprising at the National Conference for New Politics, had begun her movement work in 1963 as an officer of SLATE, the radical students' political party at the University of California at Berkeley. She had gone on to a seat on the executive committee of Berkeley's Free Speech Movement (FSM). Contrary to the view of historian and women's liberation activist Ruth Rosen that "Power came and went depending on a woman's relationship to men in the inner circle," the status of Brown and Freeman

² Ibid.

³ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 26 July 1968, transcript in the possession of author,

was their own.⁴ Interestingly, it appears to have been the least rather than the most oppressed women in the New Left who founded the women's liberation movement.

Further, in addition to frequently cited "networks" used by women, the New Left provided institutional support that helped get the emerging Women's Liberation Movement off the ground. It is well known that women's liberation founders conducted workshops for women only and recruited for new groups at SDS conferences. The first public discussion of Hayden and King's paper was at a workshop at a national SDS conference. Unnoticed for the most part, however, has been financial support such as that provided by the Washington, D.C. based Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), for organizing the first national women's liberation conference at Lake Villa, Illinois in November 1968. Historian Alice Echols mentioned a grant from IPS for \$1500 to fund the conference, but during the several months preceding the conference IPS also supplied stipends for conference organizers and other related expenses.⁵

Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

⁴ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 117.

⁵ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 107; Laya Firestone, Helen Kritzler, Charlotte B. Weeks, Marilyn S. Webb, Washington, D.C., "[Letter] to Women..." 8 November 1968, "we are making \$25/week each...We do not see our work in Washington as the center of a new bureaucracy," the four women working at IPS wrote to the women who would be attending the conference, letter in the possession of the author, Redstockings Archives.

Institutional support also came from "free universities" and left presses and publishing houses. In some of the first cities where women's liberation groups developed, Chicago, New Orleans, Seattle, Gainesville and others, "free universities," modeled after SNCC's Freedom Schools and instigated by SDS's Free University Committee, were organized by various local New Left formations. In 1965 and 1966 alternative universities were organized across the country as part of the national New Left mission to make relevant and "redefine the vocation of the intellectual."⁶ These "free schools" were the site of women's liberation classes and workshops that were building blocks for the earliest groups. In addition, early women's liberation groups often recruited through the left press. Printing outfits on the left such as the New England Free Press printed and distributed thousands of copies of early position papers like "Toward a Female Liberation Movement."

Perhaps least touched upon in the literature were men in the New Left who "helped spread word of women's liberation," as historian Ruth Rosen put it. But Rosen stipulated that such help came, when it did, "only through repeated derision and ridicule."⁷ The examples of ridicule

⁶ See James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 158, for a discussion of early SDS organizers' ideas about linking intellectual work and social criticism with activism.

Rosen supplied were repeated many times as women's liberation founders in the New Left raised the woman question. There were, however, significant instances in which men on the left spread word of women's liberation with notable effect and did not frame it derisively.

Chicago group cofounder Heather Booth (then Tobis), for example, found out about the workshop at the national SDS conference workshop on Hayden an King's "Sex and Caste" through her professor Richard Flacks. In fall 1965 Booth was a freshman at the University of Chicago working on a paper about women in an introductory social science course taught by Flacks. Flacks, Booth said, knew she was interested in the woman question and encouraged her to go to the SDS workshop.⁸

Flacks was an important SDS leader who pioneered the "teach-in" method of anti-Vietnam War organizing which would sweep campuses across the nation in the next two years. He was older than most, and a movement stalwart, sometimes considered a "father figure" in SDS.⁹ Flacks' support for women's liberation was not an isolated case. In New York City, Bill Price, a staff reporter for the left newspaper

⁷ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 131.

⁸ Booth, interview by author, 15 April 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

⁹ For a discussion of Richard Flacks role in SDS see Maurice Isserman, *If I Had A Hammer...The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 206.

The Guardian, linked key radical feminists Kathie Sarachild and Carol Hanisch with each other and with Shulamith Firestone, who, with Pam Allen, was then organizing NYRW. Sarachild and Hanisch were among the early core of the group. According to Hanisch and Sarachild, Price, like Flacks, was a genuine supporter of women's liberation.

Supportive men in and around the New Left, more often than not, had been raised in old left families or had roots in the old left where they learned about women's liberation. Sometimes the old left played a more direct role. The old left rooted Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF) provided office space to the first group in New York City and supported a paid organizer in Gainesville, Florida. In Seattle, the first women's liberation group was instigated by Clara Fraser, one of the leaders of the Freedom Socialist Party. Both SCEF and the Freedom Socialists were associated more with the old left than the New Left.

Finally, the New Left was a major source of ideas that were carried into women's liberation. Evans noted the passing on of strongly held concepts such as the "importance of the personal, the need to change the quality of human relationships, and the importance of participatory democracy."¹⁰ The concept "do what the people say do" had migrated from SNCC into the New Left as "Let the People

¹⁰ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 125.

Decide." It moved into the women's liberation movement in the form of a particularly intense version of participatory democracy or "structurelessness" that hastened the spread of women's liberation although it did not serve the movement well in the long run. The view that "the people" rather than a leader or an organizer, would decide their own course of action may have passed into SNCC from the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee which trained many civil rights activists and was a spot where Ella Baker and SNCC held meetings. Some women's liberation founders took inspiration from the ideas and from female leaders of third world liberation movements, especially Vietnamese and Chinese women. They learned about the women of revolutionary Vietnam and China through New Left sources. In Gainesville, Beverly Jones, coauthor of "The Florida Paper," had first encountered ideas about women's liberation in the workshop on *The Second Sex* given by Ed Richer, SDS's faculty advisor who endorsed Beauvoir's feminism.¹¹

In these and other ways, women's liberation founders encountered opportunities in the New Left that were catalytic agents in the emergence of the new movement. At the same time they experienced sexism, they learned compelling ideas of freedom organizing and gained confidence

¹¹ Beverly Jones, interview by author, 2 November 1999, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

that they could change the world. Some, like Beverly Jones, were already confident of their organizing abilities because of work in the civil rights movement. For Jones, the New Left was important because it was there that she first learned about Beauvoir. Other founders, like Dee Ann Pappas, developed confidence, skills, and analytical tools in the New Left that they applied to the woman question. Rather than the most oppressed, unrecognized women in the New Left, women's liberation founders ranked at least even with or surpassed the status of male comrades. Unlike in the larger society, their status in the New Left hardly depended on romantic liaisons with important men.

In addition to legacies of skills, confidence, and ideological tools, the New Left was a source of institutional support through its think tanks, presses, news media, publishing houses, free universities, and even funding. There were men along the continuum from New Left leaders to rank and filers who supported and helped link women's liberation founders. Rather than "leaving the left," organizing the women's liberation movement meant expanding and transforming the left: bringing in new constituents, analyzing new problems such as childcare and housework, and beginning much needed reform of self-defeating male chauvinist politics and practices.¹²

¹² The reference "Leaving the Left" is to the title of chapter 4 in Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 94-140.

The cases in which the New Left played a formative role in women's liberation are not a collection of exceptional examples selected because they support the arguments. Neither, however, are these events, people, and experiences randomly selected or held out as representative of all, most, or even a substantial minority of the New Left.

The focus here on the formative experiences of women's liberation founders, who, by definition, were somewhat exceptional. It does not encompass the broad sweep of women's activities in the New Left. Nor does it portray the full round of experience of the founders there, where along with new opportunities that served as building blocks for women's liberation, the founders confronted their share of sexism. New Left men in the literature on women's liberation fall far short of the example of Richard Flacks, Jesse Lemisch, and Bill Price. In the period from 1964 through 1968 most left organizations did not endorse early women's liberation ideas on even the limited basis of the Institute for Policy Studies or the SCEF. SDS documents at the national level show few women in leadership positions, and we read little about women in the New Left who organized thousands of people or wrote columns in national newspapers. Nevertheless, further research may show that the positive experiences of women's liberation founders in the New Left were not limited to women in leadership roles.

For now, the evidence consists of the experiences of a

small number of women at the initial phase of the movement they were creating. These are the experiences of founding women's liberation organizers and theorists whose activities from 1964 through 1968 established the base of the emerging movement. Their positive experiences are important not because they were typical, but because they were instrumental in the birth of the women's liberation movement.

Women's Liberation Founders in the New Left

One of the new opportunities women's liberation founders availed themselves of in the New Left was leadership--a career open to talent. There, much more so than in the larger society, they gained chances to take on greater responsibility in accord with their abilities. As a result, along with the skills they used to start the women's liberation movement, incipient founders gained, in the New Left, the confidence to start a new movement--a major undertaking. Their leadership in the New Left was not derived from the status of higher-ranking mates, but was based on their own courage to confront authority and their growing skills and accomplishments in theory and organizing. Indeed, when women's liberation founders married New Left coworkers, the woman was often the senior activist in the couple.

In summer and fall 1968, as Judith Brown organized

Gainesville Women's Liberation, circulated "The Florida Paper," and worked to build a national movement, she considered herself, as she wrote to Jo Freeman in Chicago, "one of those exceptions," a female leader in the New Left. Brown wrote of her need for a "national reference group to point to," so that local women's liberation recruits would know they were "part of a historical process recognized in other parts by other people."¹³ Complaining angrily that the literature needed to strengthen local women's liberation organizing was not arriving promptly from Chicago, Brown wrote, "This movement is emergent at best; it's unheard of around here; it's illegitimate. I lend it my legitimacy in Gainesville because I'm known as a militant person who has always taken a lead in changes in the movement and in getting racked up."¹⁴

Brown was an exception. But she was not a "token woman." She had been "from the beginning" with the "Gainesville Band," as the local cadre called their circle of movement decision makers.¹⁵ Brown's most recent "rack up"

¹³ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, n.d. July 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

¹⁴ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 3 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

¹⁵ Marshall B. Jones, *Berkeley of the South: A History of the Student Movement at the University of Florida, 1963-1968* (Gainesville, Fla., unpublished manuscript, 1968), 138, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

had taken place only two months before "The Florida Paper" came out in 1968. Brown and activist professor Marshall Jones had been jailed along with twenty-four others they led in a street sit-in that blocked the central Gainesville intersection. The sit-in was in protest of a memorial on the death of Martin Luther King, Jr. put on by white politicians "all active in sustaining the segregated order," and "ministers, none of who[m] had been associated with King in his lifetime," as Jones put it.¹⁶

With the exception of local black power leaders, Brown had incurred, by 1968, more jail time and counted more arrests in the previous five years of movement activity than any other Gainesville activist. She and Dan Harmeling were the first University of Florida students arrested for challenging segregation--for which Brown had lost a Ford Fellowship to graduate school. Brown, Harmeling, and his brother Jim led a militant faction of the Student Group for Equal Rights, a local civil rights group Brown had helped to organize. In the next few years Brown led movement coworkers against the war, for academic freedom, in support of Black Power, and then for women's liberation. Brown, tall and physically strong, was a good shot and a fine athlete, with a sharp tongue and a short temper. The very leadership abilities she used to start the women's liberation movement she had honed as one of the few female leaders in the New

¹⁶ Ibid.

Left.

But Brown did not feel exceptional among women's liberation founders, whom she saw as peers. Referring to the women she met at the first national meeting of early women's liberation organizers, Brown wrote to Jo Freeman, "Let me tell you something, my sister, this is my reference group..."¹⁷ Brown was right. Most of the women at the meeting, including Freeman, were, like Brown, veteran leaders of various New Left groups and campaigns.

Jo Freeman's political career began in fall 1961 as an officer in the University Young Democrats at the University of California at Berkeley. She had been arrested three times in Berkeley protests before she went south with SCLC in 1965. She was the only woman on the negotiating team of the Free Speech Movement that met with Berkeley President Clark Kerr while the students held a police car hostage for thirty-six hours. At the largest of the fall 1964 sit-ins at Sproul Hall, when police rushed the students and arrested the main speaker, Freeman picked up the microphone and continued the speech until she too was arrested and jailed. By the time she attended the national women's liberation organizers' meeting at Sandy Springs, Freeman, like Brown, was a movement veteran. Her work in the civil rights

¹⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 3 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

movement and the New Left had earned incarceration in six different jails in three states--and a considerable amount of self-confidence. "The men in the Free Speech Movement and the Civil Rights Movements had not been able to shut me up," Freeman said.¹⁸

Historian Kirkpatrick Sale described early New Left activists as "extremely bright...intellectual...diligent readers, active thinkers and talkers, prodigious writers...committed, energetic...they had a vision and they backed it up."¹⁹ Sale had been speaking of men, but as Evans pointed out, what he said "could apply to the women as well."²⁰ "The few radical women who could argue against male supremacy," Evans said, "also tended at first to be the ones most capable of competing with men."²¹ As Rosen observed, they were "arguably more" capable than the men.²²

Beyond "capable," or even "more capable" competition, Kathie Sarachild early on found herself ahead of male movement coworkers. A member of TOCSIN, a movement group at Harvard, and an editor of the *Harvard Crimson*, her pathbreaking articles in 1962, were the first in the Harvard

¹⁸ Jo Freeman, "On the Origins," 187.

¹⁹ Kirkpatrick Sale, *SDS* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 89.

²⁰ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 110

²¹ *Ibid.*, 125.

community to oppose increasing American involvement in Vietnam. In 1967, when she went to the first meeting of NYRW, she was putting her talents as a professional film editor to work on the production of anti-Vietnam war film strips.

When Naomi Weisstein cofounded the Chicago women's liberation group in 1967, she was a professor at Loyola University and a scientist of growing stature. Weisstein had battled discrimination from faculty and fellow students in graduate school at Harvard to finish first in her class.²³ She had moved to Chicago in 1964 where she and her husband Jesse Lemisch were active in SNCC and SDS. She described her life in the New Left during these years as "driven by a kind of moral force...and a vision of what the world could be like."²⁴ Weisstein had an opportunity to see and make a kind of "new world."

In spring 1966 the Johnson Administration ended student draft deferments for the Vietnam War. This meant that the lower a student's academic ranking, the more vulnerable he was to the draft. Colleges gave local draft boards the students' class rankings and campuses across the nation were

²² Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 116.

²³ Jesse Lemisch, "Remarks on Naomi Weisstein" (remarks given at the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Women's Liberation Movement, Honoring Founders and Activists, 13 December 1997), 2, transcript in the possession of author.

²⁴ Naomi Weisstein quoted in Evans, *Personal Politics*, 172.

swept by massive protests. At the University of Chicago, SDS called a sit-in at the administration building and students moved in for five days. The sit-in was the beginning a series of confrontations that would eventually result in ending the University's cooperation with draft boards.

To oversee the community inside the administration building which included sleeping, eating, studying, and meeting areas, students set up their own government based on participatory democracy. "We had such feelings of...being able to make the new world right there," Weisstein said. "We were setting up the institutions...They were going to be fair and just and generous and democratic and all this was going on while the sexism was going on...schizophrenia...and yet feeling the ecstasy." By 1967, despite the sexism, Weisstein had become a respected anti-war leader, chosen by the SDS chapter at Loyola as its official faculty advisor.

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A small group of talented, activist women such as Weisstein took advantage of the slender margin of freedom for women on the left to learn leadership skills of social change. At the same time these women caught a glimpse of greater equality between the sexes, they gained the skills and confidence to fight for it--not only in the New Left but also in society as a whole.

²⁵ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 11 June 2001.

Marilyn Webb (then Salzman) had also risen to considerable status within the New Left by the time she began organizing for women's liberation. In summer 1967 she was the Director of Vietnam Teachers in the Schools on the national staff of the Vietnam Summer Project. The Project organized over 20,000 door-to-door workers who spread opposition to the war on a community by community basis.²⁶ Webb coordinated the recruitment of high school teachers and developed anti-war curricula for them to use in their classes.

That same year Webb organized a women's liberation group in Washington, D.C., and later, with Dee Ann Pappas, Judith Brown, and Beverly Jones, she pulled together the national women's liberation organizers meeting in Sandy Springs. In fall 1968 she used her influence in the New Left to gain support for a "Woman's Project" from the Institute for Policy Studies, a leftwing think tank. The Project included stipends for three organizers and related expenses for the first conference of the emerging movement in Lake Villa which Webb also helped organize.

Webb went on to found the nationally distributed women's liberation newspaper *Off Our Backs*, which, among the early journals, is the only one continuously publishing into its fourth decade. Her journalism career had begun in high

²⁶ Sale, *SDS*, 354.

school with "See it with Salzman," an award winning column in the student newspaper. A few years before she established *Off Our Backs*, Webb had been Bureau Chief of the Washington, D.C. office of the left newspaper *The National Guardian*. There Webb honed skills that she used to establish the women's liberation newspaper.

In the literature on women's liberation, one most often encounters Webb at a demonstration in Washington, D.C., in January 1969, where her speech for women's liberation was greeted by movement men shouting, "Take her off the stage and fuck her."²⁷ Perhaps worse than the sexism of the men in the audience was the failure of hitherto respected male movement leaders to try to stop the outrageous behavior of the crowd. Webb, shocked and angry, was alienated from the anti-war movement. This kind of treatment was not, however, characteristic of Webb's previous five years in the New Left. On the whole, Webb considered New Left activists "the smartest people I ever met."²⁸ Webb said her work in the New Left gave her a "sense that history wasn't done yet and there were things I could do to make a difference...a sense of hope and possibility."²⁹

²⁷ See for example Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 134; Evans, *Personal Politics*, 224; Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 117; and Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 57.

²⁸ Marilyn Webb, interview by author, 13 June 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

In the fluid and often exhilarating work of doing "things...to make a difference," as Webb put it, women who would soon strike the earliest blows for women's liberation developed the skills they needed to do so. As their abilities and confidence grew, these women became intolerant of male coworkers attempts to enforce a sexual division of labor and invoke sexist penalties against them for assuming such "male prerogatives" as giving speeches at major demonstrations. Women like Webb had learned how to organize collectively. As they broke into untraditional roles for women in the left, they became increasingly dangerous to the sexist order within and without the movement.

Dee Ann Pappas was another women's liberation founder who attributed her ability to organize the new movement to her work in the anti-war movement. Pappas had been recruited by Webb to the team that organized the women's liberation meeting in Sandy Springs. They met the previous year during Vietnam Summer. Like other participants at Sandy Springs, Pappas had been active in the New Left for about five years and was then one of the senior radicals in her group, the Baltimore Defense Committee. The Baltimore Defense Committee organized in 1967 to defend the "Catonsville Nine," a group loosely connected to a national underground of peace activists who opposed the Vietnam War by destroying draft files. The "Catonsville Nine" had originated as the

²⁹ Ibid.

"Baltimore Seven," whose best-known member was priest and poet Father Daniel Berrigan. The group had been arrested in Baltimore for pouring their blood on draft files. Berrigan and others went on to destroy more files in nearby Catonsville by burning them with homemade napalm. The Defense Committee brought people to Baltimore from all over the country to support the defendants. During the trials, "adrenaline was flowing twenty-four hours a day," Pappas said.³⁰ The Defense Committee housed hundreds of out-of-town supporters including various luminaries who were called to testify for the defense. The Jesuits donated their hall where mass meetings of three to five hundred people occurred daily, and downtown Baltimore was filled with demonstrators as thousands marched in support of the defendants. Pappas felt like "our little group got put on the map."³¹

As Pappas developed as an organizer, her politics became increasingly radical. When she began to work for women's liberation she felt "moved by history...It had to be done, I could do it, and I had to do it."³² Pappas had learned, she said, "how to organize, go door-to-door, how to call meetings, how to start a group." When she started *Women: A Journal of Liberation*, "at that point I really

³⁰ Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, 14 June 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

³¹ Ibid.

believed that I was Lenin and the magazine was my *Iskra*, the spark, the tool to organize women in America."³³

Pappas' participation in the movement began with local civil rights work registering black voters in Baltimore in 1963 while she was on scholarship at Johns Hopkins University. She moved on to civil disobedience in anti-war "pray-ins" on military bases and then organized teachers against the war. She was working with the Baltimore Defense Committee when she started organizing for women's liberation. Although not the senior radical in town like Brown in Gainesville or an ideological front-runner like Sarachild at Harvard, Pappas was a senior activist in the Baltimore Defense Committee, on an equal footing, at least in her own estimation, with the men.

The work of these women's liberation founders advanced the New Left agenda and established their credentials as radicals. This experience was essential preparation for founding the new movement. But if they were taking their rightful place in the New Left and achieving their goals, why did they start a movement for women's liberation? According to Evans, the reason was the ever-present male

³² Ibid.

³³ Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, 23 September 1985, New York, tape recording in the possession of author. *Iskra*, Russian for "spark," was the name of an underground newspaper founded by V. I. Lenin in 1900. *Iskra* was the newspaper of The Russian Social-Democratic Party, Lenin's party.

chauvinism that constituted a "threatened loss of new possibility."³⁴ But is the existence of a threat, however imminent, sufficient explanation for the start of a new social movement? Are there not innumerable unfortunate historical moments at which people threatened with losses simply lose without managing to organize to oppose the threat, much less advance their cause?

In the case of the women's liberation movement, the impetus to start a new movement was not the threatened loss of a new possibility. Rather, the impetus combined the experience of new possibility (in the form of a margin of freedom for women in the New Left) with the women's newfound ability to defend and expand that margin in the movement and in the larger society as well. The margin at once supplied the vision, the thing to be defended and expanded, and the weapons with which to do so. A particular group of women had come to possess the ability to defend and advance the partial equality they had partaken of and now wished to make whole.

The importance of this understanding is not that it recasts the New Left as more egalitarian than we had previously understood it to be. The New Left was less sexist than the larger society, but as has been well documented, most notably in the early papers of the women's liberation founders themselves, it was still intolerably sexist. For

³⁴ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 221.

the founders, however, the New Left was just fluid enough to give them something to fight for and the means with which to do so. This understanding recasts the story of the origins of radical feminism. It enables us to better sift through the evidence of how the movement began and to reexamine the priority the literature has given to sexism as fuel for the movement. I am not arguing that there was no sexism in the New Left. I am arguing that there was always sexism. Thus the new organizing of a collective fightback against it must have been caused by something else, something new.

The vision, the margin of opportunity, and the organizing weapons were the new and instrumental aspects of the experience of women's liberation founders in the New Left. These women were leading activists in New Left campaigns at the national and local level and, unlike so many of their sisters in the larger society, their status was based on their own achievements, as opposed to those of the men with whom they were involved.³⁵

Yet the genesis of women's liberation is held to have depended, in great part, on the humiliation and "status deprivation" experienced by women in liaisons or marriages with men at the top levels of SDS.³⁶ Historian Ruth Rosen highlights as a seminal and motivating grievance women's

³⁵ Not all women's liberation founders were in relationships with men.

complaints that their status in the movement depended upon their connection with a man in the SDS "inner circle" and that they could lose their standing in New Left if the man left them. While this may well have been the case in the SDS "inner circle," it was not characteristic of women in the New Left who founded the women's liberation movement, the majority of whom were not in the "inner circle."

Most of the women who organized the earliest women's liberation groups, called the first national women's liberation meetings and demonstrations, and wrote the influential early papers were not among those whom Rosen claims suffered status deprivation.³⁷ The status of Ann Weills and Marilyn Webb, for example, founders who were in SDS's "inner circle," was based on their own work just as was the status of the founders who were not in the circle. Indeed, instead of having a romantic liaison with a higher-ranking mate, a number of women's liberation founders had started off as the senior activist in the couple. Moreover, some of these women, instead of deriving an artificially elevated status from a higher-ranking male, suffered a decreased importance. That is, their status in the movement

³⁶ Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 117-20.

³⁷ Only four of the women Rosen mentioned as suffering from status deprivation took part in formative women's liberation organizing and action. Those four were Casey Hayden, Anne Weills, Marilyn Webb, and Vivian Rothstein. The others did not attend the early national conferences, or write the women's liberation papers that crisscrossed the country in

diminished as the status of their mate grew.

Pappas, for example, although not ranking above the senior men in the Baltimore movement, shared with other women's liberation founders a background as the senior movement person within her marriage. She married in 1964 and the couple worked together in the New Left. When she and her future husband met, Pappas said she "already had a certain level of political consciousness," while he "didn't want anything to do with activism." But, Pappas said, "I was just really adamant and he kind of became active through me... I pulled him along." By 1967 "my husband was definitely a movement leader."³⁸

Judith Brown, Pappas's old friend from Gainesville, had also married a less experienced activist. Brown and her husband "Brownie" met on a picket line desegregating a restaurant in 1963. Married in 1966, they worked together for civil rights, Black Power, and against the war in Vietnam. Brownie said he was "awe-struck" by Judith because "She had actually done my most noble and wished-for fantasy--she had been a subsistence worker doing voter registration...She had worked ...with Pat Due and CORE...I was honored that she dated and married me."³⁹ By 1968 when

1967 and 1968.

³⁸ Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, 14 June 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

Brown began organizing for women's liberation, Brownie, like Pappas's husband, had begun to catch up.

Having managed to avoid a jail term after going AWOL from a Marine reserve unit, Brownie had done his share of anti-war organizing and was a law clerk at the renowned radical firm of William Kunstler and Arthur Kinoy. Well schooled in women's liberation, he referred female friends to the insurgent NYRW. Also, he tried (to no avail) to interest Kunstler and Kinoy in assisting in the defense of Valerie Solanas, who had shot pop artist Andy Warhol and was then receiving support from some quarters of the women's liberation movement. Although Brownie was catching up with his wife, neither he, their activist band, nor Judith herself considered her status dependent on his.

In Chicago, Weisstein and her husband Jesse Lemisch were in a similar situation as New Left coworkers. Weisstein said of Lemisch, "I was a little more senior, a little more ready for riot in the 1960s."⁴⁰ And Lemisch reflected, "Naomi had become the leader of the anti-war movement at Loyola--a small Jewish woman from New York, called 'Dr. Weisstein,' taking on the Jesuits."⁴¹

³⁹ Julian Brown, Pierre, South Dakota, to Carol Giardina, Gainesville, Fla., 29 June 1991, transcript in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

⁴⁰ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 20 June 2001.

⁴¹ Lemisch, "Remarks on Naomi Weisstein," 4.

The first of the movement relationships of the 1960s in which the wife was a founding voice for women's liberation and also the senior activist of the two may have been the marriage of Sandra "Casey" Cason and future SDS leader Tom Hayden. When they met at a National Student Association (NSA) conference in 1960, Casey, as she was nicknamed, had been involved in civil rights protests in Austin and had committed herself to the newly formed SNCC. Casey attended the NSA conference as a guest speaker whose identity as an activist was already established. Tom, on the other hand, although aspiring to something more, saw himself, as he put it, "as a student writing about students taking action"--students such as Casey.⁴² Tom interviewed Casey for his campus newspaper and quoted her eloquent remarks in the article he wrote. Tom's identity was just shifting from student journalist to activist. He had not yet joined SDS and was not a member when he and Casey married. The SDS gathering in Port Huron, Michigan, which signaled his leadership in the movement was still a year away.

In the months following the NSA conference Tom courted Casey, and they married the following year. Tom joined SDS and the couple moved to Atlanta because Casey wanted to continue working with SNCC. So Tom became the SDS field secretary in the South and set up an office in Atlanta. His

⁴² Tom Hayden quoted in James Miller, *Democracy is in the*

identity, reputation, and moral authority as an activist who "put his body on the line," as the saying went, was developed on Casey's turf--the southern civil rights movement. In the militant and dangerous civil rights protests of 1961, Tom first experienced mob violence. He went to McComb, Mississippi, when Herbert Lee, a local black NAACP leader was murdered by white state legislator E.H. Hurst. A photograph of Tom Hayden on the ground being beaten by a white attacker in McComb went out over the wire services. He was, as he put it, "confronting commitment."⁴³ It was from this base--into which he had been drawn by Casey--that Tom Hayden emerged as a movement leader at the SDS conference in Port Huron in June 1962.

That fall, Casey and Tom moved to Ann Arbor and Tom began graduate school. To pay the rent, Casey went to work as a secretary. Although she continued to engage in movement activities, away from her beloved SNCC community it was hard, she said, to maintain her "strong sense" of herself.⁴⁴ The couple split up that winter, and Casey returned to the South. "Tom and I held together as a couple well in the South...We were close to SNCC," Casey observed.⁴⁵ She had begun as the senior activist in the relationship, but away

Streets, 48.

⁴³ Ibid., 59.

⁴⁴ Hayden, "Fields of Blue," 349.

from her own movement base, despite the fact that her job paid the bills, she lost power in the relationship. (Their split had been precipitated by Tom's infidelity.) Instead of taking her status from her husband, Casey enabled Tom's status to grow. Her status, on the other hand, did not grow because of the rise in his.

Women's liberation founder Pam Allen experienced a similar reversal. Like Casey Hayden, Pam Parker had been the senior activist when she and Robert Allen married. She "was so well known for her activism," wrote Evans, "that her new husband joked about being 'Mr. Pam Parker.'"⁴⁶ In the two years that followed, Robert assumed increasingly important responsibilities in the anti-war movement while she supported the family and felt that others considered her Robert's "appendage." Although Pam continued to participate in the movement, she felt more and more isolated.⁴⁷

The same thing happened to Ann Weills (then Scheer), cofounder in spring 1968 in Berkeley, of one of the first women's liberation groups on the West Coast. Weills had also begun her marriage as the senior activist in the couple. As her husband rose in the movement, as she put it, "Being married to him diluted my power."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 347.

⁴⁶ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 202.

⁴⁷ Pam Allen, letter to author, 21 December 2000.

Weills' activism began as the enthusiastic protegee of the Hallinan family, her next-door neighbors as she grew up in Marin County, California. She had been the tomboy playmate of the six Hallinan boys whose mother, Vivian, was a leader in Women's Strike for Peace and father, Vincent, ran for President on the Progressive Party ticket in 1952 after Henry Wallace's run in 1948. As a child, Weills went to the Hallinan's fundraising parties for the *People's Daily World*, the Communist Party newspaper. To the shock of upscale Marin County, the parties, held on the Hallinan's large estate, brought hundreds of black and white workers to the neighborhood, invited because Vincent was the attorney for Harry Bridges, the leader of the International Longshoremen's Association, the left led longshore union. When Hallinan was jailed during the height of McCarthy era repression, young Weills was taught to box along with his sons, so they could defend themselves from attacks for being "reds." Thus Weills, like the Hallinan children, grew up agreeing with radical politics as soon as she was old enough to understand them. In high school they fantasized together about running away to join up with Che Guevara. Shortly after graduating from high school, Weills organized a Young Socialist Club and then joined the WEB DuBois Club, the youth group of the Communist Party. DuBois Club members

⁴⁸ Ann Weills, interview by author, 15 June 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

formed the core of the Bay Area Coalition to End Discrimination where Weills got her start and then rose to leadership in civil rights work. From there she moved easily into the leadership of the anti-war movement.

When she met Robert Scheer, whom she would later marry, "I was the 'heavy.' I had already been arrested and jailed," Weills said, while "he was a beatnik." Scheer courted Weills by going to her trial. "He definitely deferred to me," she said.⁴⁹ But that changed as Scheer's movement career developed and Anne ended up with an ever-increasing share of childcare responsibilities.

Thus several women's liberation founders, when they started organizing for women's liberation, were or had been in relationships in which they were the senior activist in the couple. They did not rise in the New Left because of relationships with their men. On the contrary, some, like Casey Hayden, Pam Allen, and Ann Weills started out as the senior activist in the relationship but saw their own status diminish as their husbands became more influential. Unlike many of their sisters in the larger society, the romantic liaisons of these women included love and respect for political commitment from men who followed their political leadership. For Hayden, Weills, and Brown, deference on that basis was a part of the courtship.

⁴⁹ Weills, interview by author, 15 June 2001, New York, tape

Brownie fell in love with his wife because as a civil rights activist she'd done his "most noble thing." Bob Scheer was a beatnik who courted his wife by attending her trial, while Tom Hayden courted a woman whose commitment to the movement he sought to emulate.

Vivian Rothstein, an early member of the West Side Group in Chicago had been active in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (FSM) and had gone South to work for civil rights in Mississippi. She went on to increasing responsibilities as an SDS activist and was critical of men's monopoly on movement leadership. "Still, it was hard to complain," she said, "The movement gave me opportunities that barely existed for women in the larger society--to be a social critic, to develop a vision for eradicating poverty and racism, to stand up to the power structure...In contrast, the primary jobs for women outside the home in those days were in ghettoized female professions--as teachers, nurses, and secretaries. The movement encouraged me to make history and to fight for social justice in society at large."⁵⁰ Rothstein captured the contrast between the work of women in the larger society and the margin of opportunity for purposeful work experienced by women's liberation founders in the New Left.

Instead of status derived from a mate or unsatisfying

recording in the possession of author.

⁵⁰ Rothstein in Kesselman, with Booth, Rothstein, and

jobs outside the movement, women's liberation founders saw themselves changing the world through their work in the New Left. In the New Left, the seeds of the new society, as Marx's concept holds, including a new society for women, lay in the ashes of the old. Most women's liberation founders did not make it into the SDS "inner circle" although they might have, had they been male. But far from being the most oppressed women in the New Left, as leading organizers in their own right, they appear to have been among the least oppressed.⁵¹

Moreover, these women had learned to fight for and win the changes they wanted made. Before the women's liberation movement got off the ground, some had been part of the organizing that saw the passage of the hallmark civil rights legislation of 1964 and 1965. Others were part of the organizing that convinced Lyndon Johnson not to run for a second term because the American people had rejected his war policy.

As Evans observed, the women best able to argue against male supremacy were the men's most capable competitors, indeed, they were often more able than the men. Because

Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 31.

⁵¹ Of course not all women's liberation founders were seriously involved with or married to men. Some later identified as lesbians. Others had shorter relationships with men, sometimes movement coworkers, sometimes not. They all complained about sexist treatment inside and outside of the movement.

these women had risen to leadership on their own merits, not on artificial status derived from a mate, they could not be demoted because the men had not promoted them to begin with. The status of these incipient women's liberation founders rose in the New Left because they continued taking on new, out-of-role responsibilities, because their work advanced the New Left agenda, and, as Brown put it, because they "got racked up." If they had not developed new skills and the confidence born of the political punishments and victories that resulted, they would not have been able to start the women's liberation movement.

The Pivotal Support of Men

In addition to exhilarating, purposeful work that encompassed, as Vivian Rothstein put it, "opportunities that barely existed for women in the larger society," women's liberation founders in the New Left had male colleagues who were instrumental in some of the critical, early steps in the creation of the new movement.⁵² In the prefeminist mid-1960s when the women's movement consisted of little more than women avidly reading *The Feminine Mystique*, *The Second Sex*, and Hayden and King's paper "Sex and Caste," several incipient organizers of the new movement were encouraged to pursue the woman question by men who believed in women's

⁵² Rothstein in Kesselman, with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 31.

liberation. The contribution of these men did not represent great sacrifice or courage. Instead, what they did was pivotal because of the critical historical moment at which they acted, and because the women they influenced went on to found the new movement.

In 1965, two years before Heather Booth cofounded the West Side Group, Richard Flacks, Booth's professor at the University of Chicago, recognized the budding feminist in his freshman social science class. Although Hayden and King's paper had been circulating less than a month, Flacks had read and agreed with it, and thought it was important. The paper was not on the official agenda of that year's annual national SDS conference in Champaign-Urbana, but Flacks knew that it would be discussed there in a workshop. Flacks, Booth said, told her about the workshop and "encouraged me to go."⁵³ The workshop was Booth's introduction to the idea of women's liberation.

Bill Price, a New York reporter for the *Guardian* newspaper, was another male who helped in the early stage of the movement. Price, an older white activist, saw Black Power and women's liberation as central to the radical agenda. Thus his article in September 1967 dealt with the women's actions at the National Conference for a New Politics (NCNP) and particularly with the feminist

⁵³ Booth, interviewed by author, 15 April 2001, New York,

resolution introduced by Shulamith Firestone and Jo Freeman. Price opened the section on the women at the conference with these words: "Another pattern appeared, too, visible most easily to older veterans of campaigns against male chauvinism." After detailing the demands of the resolution, he supported them with observations about the male chauvinist treatment of women at the NCNP and in society as a whole.⁵⁴

Price met Shulamith Firestone at the conference. When she moved to New York from Chicago shortly afterwards, the two stayed in touch. Meanwhile, Kathie Sarachild read Price's article in the *Guardian* and excited by the news of women's liberation, began looking for Price. When she found him, he put her in touch with Firestone and Pam Allen who were recruiting for the newly forming NYRW, the nation's second women's liberation group and the first in New York City.

Like Sarachild, Carol Hanisch too found her way to NYRW through Price. After he introduced her to Firestone, Hanisch became a key member of NYRW. Hanisch said she had "lots of good discussions with Bill," who "had a consciousness of the woman question."

Thus Bill Price spread word of the nascent movement to some of the very women whose work was to be fundamental in

tape recording in the possession of author.

⁵⁴ Price, "Behind the NCNP Meeting," 9.

its establishment. He was an "old" leftist active in the New Left--a HUAC target who had refused to give names, been black listed in the mainstream newspaper world--and, as he put it, was "an older veteran of campaigns against male chauvinism" on the left.⁵⁵

Young SDS rank-and-filer George Brosi also helped recruit for NYRW by linking its cofounder Pam Allen with Cathy Barrett, another early organizer. Barrett had attended the SDS workshop on "Sex and Caste" and had gone on to originate a course on women at the Free School in New Orleans. Her course was a forerunner of the women's liberation group that later formed in that city and was among the earliest in the South. Brosi and Barrett were both southern activists, and Brosi knew of Barrett's feminist organizing in New Orleans. During this early period when the movement had barely begun, Flacks, Price, and Brosi's linking of nascent women's liberation founders constituted badly needed and significant support.

In addition to linking key movement founders, a handful of men in the New Left advocated and defended the emerging movement in public letters, talks, and courses. In these prefeminist times other men viewed a genuine male supporter as a traitor to his sex. In this role he was likely to be punished, or as the Redstockings Manifesto aptly put it,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9.

"treated like a woman by other men." ⁵⁶ Price, for example, remembered that the *Guardian* editor greatly disapproved of his profeminist coverage of the NCNP. ⁵⁷ After his article publicizing and denouncing male chauvinism and praising feminist agitation at the conference came out, he began to be excluded from the paper's staff meetings and had difficulty publishing his work.

In another case, Naomi Weisstein recalled that in 1967 her husband Jesse Lemisch was beaten up by "some SDS asshole" for advocating women's liberation. ⁵⁸ This did not appear to deter Lemisch, who went on to develop curricula for courses on women liberation and to fire off angry letters to editors protesting male chauvinism in the left press. In July 1968 he wrote to the *Guardian* protesting a cartoon which approvingly depicted "The Movement" as a virile, macho male about to rape a fawning, bloated female figure labeled "Establishment." If the movement favorably portrayed itself as a rapist, Lemisch wrote, it had "nothing to contribute to human progress" and "deserves to be

⁵⁶ Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto" (July 7, 1969), collected in *Redstockings: First Literature List and a Sampling of Its Materials* (New York: Redstockings Archives, 1989), 7.

⁵⁷ William ["Bill"] A. Price, interview by author, 11 February 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

⁵⁸ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 20 June 2001.

obstructed and brought to a dead stop."⁵⁹ A few months later he followed this up with a letter insisting that the *Guardian* and the New Left "must choose sides" against the exploitation of women by the "hippy, druggy, acid, rock wing" of the movement.⁶⁰ His public advocacy for women's liberation appears to have begun shortly after he and Weisstein married, when in the mid 1960s they gave talks together around Chicago about equality in marriage.

Perhaps the most striking instance of men in the New Left spreading word of women's liberation in these critical years was the workshop on *The Second Sex* organized by University of Florida SDS faculty advisor Ed Richer, a serious Beauvoir advocate who sought to foment a feminist revolt. Richer got his wish when his workshop turned out to be the birthplace of "The Florida Paper."

These events are little known compared to the wide currency of the obscene hoots at Webb or Carmichael's quip about "prone" women. Yet the importance of the men spreading word of women's liberation cannot be overstated because the women to whom the men spread the word became the movement's founding organizers. Thus accounts of the paths the women took to women's liberation are of historical interest.

⁵⁹ Jesse Lemisch, New York, to *Guardian*, New York, 23 July 1968, transcript in the possession of author.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 15 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author.

Certainly these incidents were not typical, but they were generative.

Before fall 1968 the linkages these men made among the pioneering early organizers hastened the movement's emergence at a time when women's liberation organizers and ideas were few and hard to find. To understand this is to understand the mixed, fluid atmosphere of the New Left which contained within its ranks both support for women's liberation and the most virulent male chauvinism. So it was that in 1967 male radicals could respect Naomi Weisstein as Loyola SDS faculty advisor even while a fellow SDS member beat up her husband Jesse for his feminism.

More perplexing perhaps, was the coexistence of male chauvinism and profeminist views within the same man. Ed Richer publicly advocated Beauvoir and a feminist revolt at a time when few women or still fewer men did. At the same time, however, he could and did rely on male privileges to take advantage of women in traditional female roles. Male chauvinism in the New Left suppressed women's liberation. And yet New Left men who were more profeminist than the rest helped the movement to form. Thus the actions of a handful of men in the New Left were pivotal in the early growth of the new movement.

CHAPTER 7
INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT ON THE LEFT

Between 1965 and 1968 institutional support on the left hastened the birth of women's liberation. The new movement was built upon the resources of the ubiquitous schools for organizers and Free Universities and upon the conferences and meetings where women's liberation founders gave workshops, issued statements and demands, and recruited. It gained access to alternative media--newspapers, radio stations, and printing and publishing outfits, and occasional but pivotal grants or stipends from various left organizations. Cooperation from these sources during the gestation phase of early women's liberation ran the gamut from difficult to attain without great protest, to unexpected surprises such as SDS advisor Ed Richer's workshop on *The Second Sex* at the Free University of Florida in Gainesville.

But there was also a great deal of male chauvinist ridicule in the New Left directed at women's liberation founders as they first raised the woman question. We know about the male chauvinist ridicule. And we know about the times the founders were ignored and prevented from raising the woman question such as the silencing of Firestone and

Freeman at the NCNP. We also know that the anger founders felt on such occasions was a powerful spur to action. Indeed, anger over the sexist treatment of Firestone and Freeman at the NCNP provoked the first meeting of the West Side Group in Chicago.

The birth pangs of women's liberation dominate the literature of the early movement and its historiography for a reason. When resources on the left were accessible, they came fraught with and despite male chauvinist opposition. In much of the primary and secondary literature the significance and heat of the fight itself overshadows the usefulness of the outcome. That the left's resources were too often taken in a fight, that the women involved were righteously angry over prices paid to obtain them, that they came too little too late, must not obscure our understanding that the hard won classes, workshops, and media coverage were building blocks for the new movement.

Then, too, there were times when women's liberation founders advocated women's cause at New Left conferences, held meetings in offices of left organizations, and advertised their meetings through left media without incident, which was nothing more, really, than the way it always should have been. This is not, however, a moral evaluation of male chauvinism in the New Left. The point is that in the critical years between 1965 and 1968 as the foundation of the new movement was laid, women's liberation

founders created and sometimes found opportunities in a variety of organizations on the left that enabled them to publicize their activities and ideas, recruit, call meetings, put on conferences, and circulate and debate some of their earliest position papers and manifestos. When Hayden and King's memo, "Sex and Caste," was presented at the annual national SDS conference in 1965, for example, besides the forty women to whom they had mailed the paper, and others with whom the recipients had shared it, women outside these personal networks gained access to its ideas.

The New Left roots of women's liberation are well established in the literature, especially the role of communication networks among women within it.¹ What is not often clear, however, is the historical context. In this pre feminist period, such opportunities were not available in churches, schools, or other institutions in the larger society, although eventually, as the movement gained strength, calls to fight sexism would permeate virtually every aspect of American life from neighborhood Little Leagues to the Catholic Church. In the mid-1960s, however, these small, fiercely fought for outlets were vital because there were few, if any, others.

It was not that the left made sacrifices or took risks when women's liberation workshops were held at conferences

¹ See for example Freeman's discussion of the role of communications networks in the origins of women's liberation in *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 56-68; see also

or covered in newspapers. On the contrary, this usually attracted new participants and readers. Nor was the significance of such opportunities the amount of the work they represented or the space they used. Instead, the significance of these seemingly small things lay in their value to the emerging movement. In these years a single reader of a meeting notice often resulted in a new recruit who start a national women's liberation newspaper or call a demonstration that put the new movement on the map. These were times when linking one women's liberation-minded woman with another meant the start of a city's first group or the beginning of the first, second, or third group in the nation.

The priceless character of institutional support for women's liberation in the New Left can only be understood in the context of the period. In the mid-1960s there were no women's centers, women's studies departments, feminist journals, women's bookstores or presses. The only "women's centered" spaces were female ghettos, the laundromat, the women's page in the newspaper with its fashion tips and recipes. Moreover, there was very little public or even private consciousness of sexism. Before 1968, although a vast ferment of female rebellion against male domination rippled just below the surface, only a handful women's liberation groups had formed, and the National Organization

Evans, *Personal Politics*, 218-20.

for Women (NOW), begun in 1966, had only one thousand members.² As pioneer feminist Cindy Cisler put it, locating the women's movement then was "a little like trying to find the early Christians."³ Contemporary Jo Freeman reflected, "I had my antennas tuned to any possible signs of female revolt. In 1966 I picked up a few tremors...I first read of the National Organization for Women...in 1967...The letters I wrote were never answered...Clearly something was happening but I couldn't find it."⁴

After 1968 the movement became easier to find because it had begun to develop its own newspapers and journals. Moreover, the protest of the Miss America Pageant in September of that year attracted the attention of the national media. And while mainstream broadcast and print media rarely portrayed the movement to feminist liking, they did spread the word.

Between 1965 and 1968, however, the slender margin of institutional support on the left provided the most visible and often the only signs of the new movement's emergence. By providing publications, space for classes, conferences, offices and equipment, and more rarely stipends for women's liberation organizers, the New Left was the means through which women's liberation pioneers found each other and

² Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 87.

³ Cindy Cisler quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 74.

⁴ Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, xi.

recruited the founding members of the earliest groups.

Courses at the Free Universities

From 1965 through 1968 courses and workshops at free universities and movement schools helped lay the foundation for early women's liberation groups in Chicago, New Orleans, Seattle, Boston, and Gainesville. These were among the first cities where groups formed. The women who taught the courses often organized groups. Sometimes, as in Seattle and Gainesville, courses themselves evolved into groups. The courses included history, literature, and commentary on the woman question and often used *The Second Sex* and *The Feminine Mystique*. In these courses, women interested in women's liberation found and formed ties with like-minded women.

The courses helped to create a women's liberation constituency. Soon the participants would seek avenues to change as well as study the subordinate condition of women. In Chicago and New Orleans the first courses on women were started at already existing "free schools" after women's liberation founders attended the workshop on "Sex and Caste" at the annual SDS conference in 1965. Staughton Lynd, former director of the freedom schools for Mississippi Freedom Summer had started a "radical organizer's school" at the University of Chicago.⁵ There, in 1966 and 1967 at Lynd's

⁵ Naomi Weisstein, letter to author, 27 May 2001.

Radical Research Center, Naomi Weisstein and Heather Booth taught courses on women that "covered everything from beauty pageants to child rearing."⁶

In 1966, the New Orleans Free School sponsored a women's course which was organized and taught by Cathy Cade, who later started the city's first women's liberation group; by Cathy Barrett, soon to become a founding member of NYRW; and by Peggy Dobbins, who would go on to help organize the early women's liberation group Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH).⁷ Sociology students as well as activists, Cade, Barrett, and Dobbins set up an academic curriculum on the sociology of women in the Free School course. Often, however, they found themselves discussing sex and housework, issues then considered personal rather than political. Although the course did not immediately produce a group, its organizers continued to work for women's liberation. Dobbins and Barrett left New Orleans to found and join groups in other cities, but Cade, who stayed in New Orleans, was able to pull together an ongoing group there in November 1968.

In 1965, the Free University of Seattle offered the course "Women in Society" which spawned Seattle's first independent women's liberation groups. The course was taught by Radical Women, a component of the Freedom Socialist

⁶ Weisstein in Kesselman et al., "Our Gang of Four," 36.

Party. Janet Hews, who took the course and later founded *Lilith*, the first women's liberation journal on the West Coast, called the course "An excellent class...great friendships were formed because of this class...We gravitated together with New Left young women...discouraged with male chauvinism within SDS." ⁸

In Boston, in a free school sponsored by the Boston Draft Resistance Group, Roxanne Dunbar found Dana Densmore, with whom she would organize Boston's first women's liberation group, by giving a workshop on Valerie Solanas' SCUM Manifesto. Dunbar, who was new to Boston, was unsure of how to get started. Densmore, who had already been awakened to women's liberation by her mother Donna Allen, was seeking, as she put it, "the right catalyst to launch me into activism."⁹ Convinced that women's liberation would entail a social revolution, Densmore, was looking for "comrades who were ready for revolution," and was wondering how "would I find any such comrades?"¹⁰ Densmore was doing anti-draft counseling with the Boston Draft Resistance where she saw the announcement for Dunbar's workshop. Densmore was the only woman in the workshop who responded to Dunbar. But

⁷ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 204.

⁸ Janet Hews, Seattle, to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 3 December 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

⁹ Dana Densmore, "A Year of Living Dangerously: 1968," 74.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

now there were two instead of one--which made all the difference. As Densmore said, "Roxanne and I left the workshop talking about organizing a women's revolution."¹¹ A few days later they set a date for a meeting and began recruiting.

The Free University of Florida in Gainesville had provided the workshop on *The Second Sex* that was the source of writing of "The Florida Paper." Ed Richer, who gave the workshop, was also the organizer of the Free University. Thus the free schools provided space, ideas, and opportunities to find coworkers.

Women's Liberation Meetings at New Left Conferences

While courses on women's liberation proceeded at the free universities, women's liberation workshops and meetings at New Left conferences also built the constituency for the emerging movement. Indeed, the courses in Chicago and New Orleans were a direct result of momentum generated by the workshop on "Sex and Caste" at the national SDS conference in 1965. Heather Booth and Cathy Barrett, who attended the workshop, went on to teach women's liberation classes in those cities. In the SDS workshop with Booth and Barrett was Marilyn Webb, who founded the women's liberation group in Washington, D.C. Before the SDS workshop provided the first public discussion of "Sex and Caste," the document had

reached a much smaller circle of friends and coworkers. Now "Sex and Caste" was printed and distributed with the other conference papers to approximately 360 attendees from sixty-six SDS chapters around the nation.¹²

When the women's workshop issued a statement criticizing discrimination against women within SDS and the larger society, the SDS newspaper *New Left Notes* published a summary of it. This helped to spread the word about women's liberation to thousands of women in the student movement.¹³ Remarkably, the article about the workshop called women "an oppressed class," a view soon to be hotly contested within the New Left and the women's liberation movement. The article located evidence of the oppression of women not only in SDS and society as a whole, but within "'radical' marriages," presaging the controversial theory that the "personal is political."

In 1966 national New Left conferences held women's workshops that continued to pave the way for women's liberation action and debate. At "We Won't Go," an anti-war conference in Chicago, the passive role of women in the draft resistance movement was debated by budding feminists in SDS and more traditionally-minded women who argued that

¹¹ Ibid., 75.

¹² Sale, *SDS*, 248.

¹³ "December Conference Impressions," *NLN* (Chicago), 28 January 1966, 4.

support of the draft resisters was women's "duty."¹⁴ Also in 1966, for the first time in SDS, plans for the national conference included childcare. The childcare provisions were announced in the hope that: "This will work to resolve the age-old debate about who should stay home. Equal amounts of time will be spent [in childcare] by both parents."¹⁵ The national struggle for institutionalized childcare and equal sharing of childcare between men and women was another fight soon taken up by the new women's liberation movement.

In 1967 New Left conferences saw the two pivotal women's liberation workshops, one at the national SDS conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in June and the other at the NCNP in Chicago that September. At the June SDS conference, the women's workshop brought to the floor of the convention an analysis of women's oppression and an agenda that included free public child care, abortion, and shared housework. It called for the establishment of a study committee on the problem. Had the workshop statement not been published in *New Left Notes* it would have amounted to yet another small step, perhaps a study committee, on the way to the new social movement. Instead, the article sparked a debate that raged throughout the emerging movement: should there be an independent, grass-roots movement for women's liberation or should women, could women, reform the left by

¹⁴ Evans, *Personal Politics*, 184.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186.

working from within to add women's liberation to the left's agenda? Because of its publication in *New Left Notes*, a nationally distributed newspaper, the statement from the workshop reached Gainesville, Florida, where Beverly Jones and Judith Brown's vehement rebuttal helped to stir a national debate.

In 1967 and 1968, space on the left to meet and to publish was a springboard for the emerging movement. Women's workshops at New Left conferences debated the need for an independent movement and issued statements. The left press published the statements, which spread the debate throughout the left. In this early period the pioneers of the new movement were often isolated from like-minded women. Without space on the left for meetings and publicity, there were few opportunities to discuss and distribute opposing women's liberation manifestos and position papers. The New Left provided this space. It was highly contested space, but it was vital because, as yet, it was the only space there was.

The woman's workshop at the NCNP whose resolution Bill Price wrote about in article in the *Guardian* brought Kathie Sarachild, an important proponent of an independent movement, into NYRW. Sarachild's hopes for a women's liberation movement had been growing for three years, and she soon became one of the strongest voices for an independent movement. Thus as a venue for debate, the workshop at the NCNP generated publicity that linked women's

liberation pioneers in NYRW, a group whose work lay the foundation for the resurgent movement.

Women's meetings at New Left conferences were vital to the formation of the new movement because its pioneer organizers recruited there for the earliest women's liberation groups. A women's caucus at a regional SDS conference supplied the first recruits for the first meeting of NYRW. NYRW cofounder Pam Allen said, "Shulie...found out about the meeting and we'd planned our first women's meeting so I could announce it there."¹⁶ According to Allen, the caucus discussed problems women had in SDS, but when she proposed independence the women argued against her. Nonetheless, when the meeting ended, six women came up to her to explain that they too were hoping to find others interested in organizing an independent movement. Allen recruited them to the meeting, thus adding Anne Koedt to NYRW. Like Sarachild, Koedt's work would prove essential to the formation of the new movement.

NYRW met weekly. For the first few months over twenty women often squeezed into members' apartments. Small, ever-changing locations made it difficult to publicize meetings or to recruit. Carol Hanisch, a founding member, worked for the SCEF, a left offshoot of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare that organized for civil rights and interracial unions. Hanisch prevailed upon SCEF to give NYRW

¹⁶ Pam Allen, letter to author, 21 December 2000.

meeting space in its New York office. With space the group could depend upon and publicize weekly meetings grew to 50 or 60 participants. After the protest of the Miss America Pageant in September 1968, the meetings swelled to over 100. Throughout its first year, NYRW met in the SCEF office which supplied telephones and office equipment including a highly prized mimeograph machine.

Women forming Gainesville Women's Liberation, the South's first women's liberation group, used conferences of the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), the Southern alternative to SDS, to raise feminist consciousness. Judith Brown led consciousness-raising sessions at SSOC conferences which inspired the start of women's liberation groups in Sarasota and St. Petersburg, Florida. After a session at a statewide SSOC conference in Florida, Brown wrote enthusiastically, "Hearteningly, ... from our little presentation at the SSOC thing...two new groups have formed...they want us to come immediately... After we gave our presentation, a young woman cornered us and said, 'OK how do I start a group'" (emphasis Brown).¹⁷

By 1968, the left had become a hotbed of women's liberation protest. Even social events began to feature women's liberation as a part of the program. Carol Hanisch

¹⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 10 February 1969, transcript in the

reported going to a picnic given by the *Guardian* because she had heard that a discussion of women's liberation was planned. The women, angry at the sexist behavior of male staff at the *Guardian* and the paper's inadequate coverage of the new movement, were talking about picketing the newspaper. At the picnic, as women became "turned on" about women's liberation, Hanisch recruited for NYRW.¹⁸

The angry women at the picnic women were right. Coverage of women's liberation in the left press was minimal and the staff was male chauvinist. *Guardian* editor Jack Smith had gone so far as writing to Donna Allen, an older, nationally respected activist and founder of Women's Strike for Peace, to tell her to stop sending letters to the editor because he had had enough of women's liberation. As for *New Left Notes*, the article on the women's workshop at the SDS conference in June 1967 included a cartoon of a childlike woman in a polka dot mini-dress holding a sign that read, "We want our Rights & We want them NOW!"¹⁹ The dress sported a huge bow and revealed fluffy, matching polka dot undies. The caricature--which looked like a Barbie doll--hardly resembled women in the New Left and amused them even less.

possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

¹⁸ Carol Hanisch, New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., n.d. [1968], transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

¹⁹ *New Left Notes* (Chicago), 10 July 1967, 4.

Women's Liberation in the Left Media

Such was the left press. So far, it was about all the women had. A woman might purchase *The Second Sex* at a bookstore and find inspiration, but only the most persistent would find her way to a women's liberation meeting as a result. Indeed, so hard was it for feminists to locate like-minded women that Ti-Grace Atkinson, founder of the important early group *The Feminists*, read *The Second Sex* and wrote in desperation to Simone de Beauvoir in France. Through Beauvoir, Atkinson, a *New Yorker*, was eventually recruited to one of the three new women's groups that had formed in the United States by 1967.

Despite the male chauvinism, the left press, was, for women's liberation founders in America, a way to debate positions, recruit, and spread the word of efforts to get the nascent movement off the ground. Coverage in *New Left Notes*, sparse and sexist as it was, helped link the women who organized the first national meeting of early women's liberation organizers in August 1968.

Before the August meeting the isolation of women's liberation founders was devastating. Like Ti-Grace Atkinson, Judith Brown was desperate. In 1967 and 1968 she and Jones had worked on "The Florida Paper" in secret. It had been a "hint" in the left press that led Brown out of isolation to the women with whom she would organize the first national meeting. Marilyn Webb had announced in *New Left Notes* that a

women's liberation journal would be produced in Baltimore, Maryland, by someone named Dee Ann Pappas. Brown read the announcement, found her old friend, met Marilyn Webb, and with Jones, helped to call the first national meeting. By bringing together early women's liberation theoreticians and organizers, the August meeting clarified that a new social movement of national proportion was forming. As city after city reported its activities, the isolation of local organizing was broken. In this context local work assumed the full measure of its significance--a movement for the liberation of women was in birth.

To reinforce and bring together even more founding organizers, the women at the Sandy Springs meeting planned a large national women's liberation conference for November. A plan jelled there as well for a South-wide women's liberation organizing project. As Carol Hanisch, the architect of the project, put it, "When I learned of all the ferment across the country, I decided the time is now."²⁰ Thus the "hint" in *New Left Notes* resulted in the meeting in Sandy Springs and far beyond Brown's hopes, jumpstarted the women's liberation movement.

Back in Gainesville after the meeting, Brown immediately organized Gainesville Women's Liberation. Before then, as she wrote to Jo Freeman whom she met at Sandy

²⁰ Carol Hanisch, New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 10 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

Springs, "I had hesitated to organize a female liberation group...When I worked on my part of our paper, I was operating in a total vacuum--merely writing what seemed logical to me in response to news clippings I had seen in left journals."²¹ Now, Brown said, "my consciousness goes sky high...after meeting people who share some of my views."²²

In 1965 when Hayden and King mailed "Sex and Caste" to their friends, the chances seemed "nil," as they said, that a movement against male domination could be formed. Three years later, "clippings" and "hints" in the left press, reached the hands of pioneering women, and served as the kindling that fueled its takeoff. Soon, funding from the left would support off shoots of that first meeting--the larger national conference in November and Hanisch's proposal for the southern organizing project.

In city after city, signals of feminist protest in the left press brought together the women's liberation movement's founding organizers. In Boston, an announcement in the alternative press placed by Roxanne Dunbar and Dana Densmore sought recruits for the first meeting of the group they hoped to organize. The Draft Resistance free school provided space for Dunbar's workshop on the SCUM Manifesto

²¹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 3 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

where she met feminist comrade Dana Densmore. The *Avatar*, then a popular local counterculture newspaper, provided the space for Dunbar and Densmore, strengthened by each other, to call for a women's liberation group: "ANNOUNCING: Formation of the FEMALE LIBERATION FRONT FOR HUMAN LIBERATION..."²³ The ad brought eight women to a meeting. Thus the alternative press was put to use by women's liberation founders to organize "Cell 16," the first women's liberation group in Boston and one of a half dozen in the nation.

The alternative media also publicized early women's liberation literature. In July 1968 the *Guardian* reviewed NYRW's groundbreaking journal *Notes from the First Year*. "Some thing new is happening now," Pandora, the pseudonymous *Guardian* reviewer noted provocatively, "A women's liberation movement is developing...and unlike previous efforts...this movement will not be denied."²⁴ "Want to know more?" Pandora went on. He/she described the first women's liberation newspaper, the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, then on its second issue, as "Equally fascinating."

The alternative media, despite the disadvantage of male chauvinism, gave early women's liberation organizers the indispensable advantage of circulation to numbers far

²² Ibid.

²³ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, 126.

²⁴ *Guardian* (New York), 20 July 1968, 17.

greater than they could yet reach themselves. "Sex and Caste" was published in the radical pacifist monthly magazine *Liberation* in 1966 bringing it to 10,000 readers.²⁵ King observed that its publication in *Liberation* "increased by a quantum leap the number of people circulating it."²⁶ Two years later, *Liberation* remained an important source of "Sex and Caste" for women's liberation founders. Although Firestone and Freeman had helped get the West Side Group going, Freeman had never read "Sex and Caste." When Firestone sent her the issue of *Liberation* that carried the paper Freeman thanked her because, as she said, "Its good to know people have been thinking about this thing for a least a year or so."²⁷

In July 1968 when the *Guardian* reviewed the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement and Notes from the First Year*, thirty thousand *Guardian* readers learned how to subscribe to the first women's liberation newspaper. The *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* then went out to a mailing list of under six hundred.²⁸ Several important

²⁵ Circulation figure from Buhle, Buhle, and Georgakas, *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 443.

²⁶ King, *Freedom Song*, 468.

²⁷ Jo Freeman, Chicago, to Shulamith Firestone, New York, 18 February 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

²⁸ Circulation figure for the *VWLM* in Jo Freeman, Chicago, to Pam Allen, San Francisco, 5 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman;

women's liberation journals had begun circulating that summer, but just as in the case of the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, an announcement or review in the left press greatly extended their reach.

In October 1968 when Pam Allen's evaluation of the progress of the new movement came out in the *Guardian*, its thirty thousand readers now discovered that a manifesto from Florida had called for an independent women's liberation movement, and a national debate was on over whether to organize it independently of the New Left.²⁹ *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* editor Jo Freeman wrote Allen, "The *Guardian* readership is a source we should reach. I'll...work with anyone from the *Guardian* in finding women...to write for them."³⁰ Judith Brown wrote Allen, "We xeroxed your *Guardian* article...it's going to be useful...in all our efforts to develop a national organizing theory and program and to see how we relate to other radical women's group[s] in the country."³¹

Alternative radio also helped spread word of the growing movement. On May 5, 1968, well known black activist

circulation figure for the *Guardian* in Buhle, Buhle, and Georgiakas, *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, 531,

²⁹ *Guardian* (New York), 5 October 1968, 11.

³⁰ Jo Freeman, Chicago, to Pam Allen, San Francisco, 5 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

³¹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Pam Allen, San Francisco, 18 October 1968, transcript in the possession of

Julius Lester, an advocate of women's liberation, interviewed Allen on his program "Conversation," on WBAI, the New York City affiliate of the progressive Pacifica Foundation. The station, previously owned by an eccentric millionaire, had been a gift to the Pacifica Foundation and was in the middle of the city's FM dial. It shared programs with Pacifica stations KPFA in the San Francisco Bay area and KPFK in Los Angeles, thus reaching hundreds of thousands if not millions of listeners.

Massive coverage in the establishment media of the protest of the Miss America Pageant on September 7, 1968-- from major television networks to local dailies via the wire services--brought the existence of the women's liberation movement to the attention of the nation. But no such attention had yet been given women's liberation when Lester interviewed Allen on "Conversation," that May. In the interview, Allen explained that the new movement was organizing all female groups to deal with male chauvinism on the left and in the larger society. Lester responded with immediate understanding: "I'm struck as you talk by the similarity in terms of...the attitudes which whites grow up with...towards blacks and the attitudes that men grew up with and have towards women."³² Later in the interview

author, Redstockings Archives.

³² Allen, Pam, and Julius Lester, Interview with Pam Allen by Julius Lester, Transcript of Interview, 5 May 1968, Box XA-2, Redstockings Archives, 3.

Lester predicted, "Everything that you are going to say is going to spark a response from men that is very similar to the response that whites had at first to black power."³³

Lester's views mirrored those of a number of early women's liberation organizers. The interview was transcribed and circulated as a pamphlet by the newly forming groups.

Before any other venue, Pacifica Radio brought the birth of the movement--and the fight for free, legal abortions, its most popular issue--to the largest audiences women's liberation had then reached. When the women's liberation group Redstockings disrupted a New York legislative hearing on abortion reform in February 1969, their path-breaking action was widely covered on television and in the national press. But WBAI helped lay the groundwork during the two months preceding the Redstockings' action by airing a series of five hour-long call-in shows on abortion.³⁴ Cindy Cisler, the architect of abortion repeal, the movement's early policy for wiping all abortion laws off the books, developed and presented the radio series. "We are structuring them all," Cisler wrote Freeman in Chicago in fall 1968, as she worked on the programs.³⁵ Urging Freeman

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* (Chicago), January 1969.

³⁵ Cindy Cisler, New York to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 23 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal files of Jo Freeman. Cindy was working on the

to get them broadcast in Chicago, Cisler noted that the University of Chicago station could use dubs of the tapes from WBAI because "they're the 'friends' of Pacifica in Chicago."³⁶ Indeed, the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* advertised tapes of the shows which WBAI made available.³⁷

Although the left did not find the issue very important or radical, it supported women's advocacy of free, legal abortions. Often, however, unlike promoting abortion, spreading word of women's liberation meant that the left publicized attacks on itself. In April 1967, *New Left Notes*, which was, after all, the newspaper of SDS, circulated to between fifty and one hundred thousand SDS members serious charges against the organization from one of its few high-ranking female staff members, SDS regional traveler Jane Adams.³⁸ Adams' article pointed out that, "As long as almost all the organizers and staff are male," SDS was treating women "like second class citizens" and would not be able to build the democratic society it purported to seek.³⁹

Criticism of male chauvinism in the New Left from women

program with an unnamed male friend from Parent's Aid, a group that made referrals for illegal abortions.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, January 1969, 3.

³⁸ SDS membership estimate in Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets*, 259.

in and around it escalated dramatically in 1967 and 1968. Most of it was ignored, suppressed or satirized by the left press. Occasionally, however, in a seemingly paradoxical attack on itself, the left published the women's increasingly sharp observations. At this point the left was the first among a very few institutions in the larger society that publicized charges of sexism against itself.

In November 1967 *New Left Notes* published, as an article, a letter headlined "To the Women of the Left" from the newly formed women's liberation group in Chicago. The letter urged the many thousands of female readers to organize for women's liberation independently of the left. This was needed, the Chicago group argued, because as women who "sought to apply the principles of justice, equality, mutual respect, and dignity which we learned from the movement to the lives we lived as part of the movement, [we came] up against a solid wall of male chauvinism."⁴⁰ Thus SDS not only criticized itself in its own newspaper, it invited female readers to work outside the organization.

The male chauvinism was severe, but the "wall" of male solidarity was not always "solid." Through *New Left Notes*, women were able to protest male chauvinist coverage of women's liberation in *Ramparts*, a popular monthly magazine of the New Left. In February 1968, *Ramparts* covered the

³⁹ *New Left Notes* (Chicago), 17 April 1967, 4.

⁴⁰ *New Left Notes* (Chicago), 13 November 1967, 2.

first public action of the new movement on its cover. There, the readers saw the headless torso of a woman in a sexy clinging black top with deep décolletage and the caption "woman power." The cover story featured glamorous photographs of women involved in the action and damned with great praise the formation of a "mini-skirt caucus."⁴¹

Breaking the solidarity of male chauvinism, *New Left Notes* published an attack on the article by Naomi Jaffe and Bernadine Dohrn. "The look is you...two tits and no head...", Jaffe and Dohrn fired back at the *Ramparts* article, accusing the magazine of making a "commodity out of politics." "As in the society at large," said Jaffe and Dohrn, women were "not free" in the New Left.⁴²

The most remarkable case of the left spreading word of women's liberation at its own expense, was the publication and national distribution of "The Florida Paper" by the SSOC and The New England Free Press. The attack of the "The Florida Paper" on male chauvinism on the left was unparalleled, and the left credentials of Jones and Brown, its authors, were impeccable. Moreover, Jones and Brown were married to men with equally outstanding activist credentials

⁴¹ Warren Hinkle and Marianne Hinkle, "A History of the Rise of the Unusual Movement for Woman Power in the United States, 1961-1968," *Ramparts*, February 1968, 22-43.

⁴² Naomi Jaffe and Bernardine Dohrn, "The Look is You," *New Left Notes*, 18 March 1968, 5.

and both husbands publicly supported women's liberation. "The Florida Paper" took on New Left hero Fidel Castro, various socialist countries where women had yet to achieve equality, and the New Left as a whole, including the exciting leaders of the recent week long "siege" of Columbia University. It attacked male New Left leaders at Columbia for trying to get the women to cook for the demonstrators and it attacked Fidel Castro for what amounted to the same thing. Castro, as Jones and Brown pointed out, had recently been quoted in the *Guardian* as asking the Cuban Women's Federation "Who will do the cooking for the children...for the man when he comes home."⁴³ Women who put up with this, said Jones and Brown, were no more serious about revolution than male chauvinist radicals.

"For a time at least," Brown said, "men are the enemy...and radical men hold the nearest battle position."⁴⁴ Brown called a radical male lover or co-worker the "most immediate oppressor...the foreman on the big plantation of maleville."⁴⁵ Jones wrote "There are...individual qualities to a particular relationship...but they are so overshadowed by the class nature of the relationship...as to be almost insignificant."⁴⁶ Despite these and other fearlessly anti-

⁴³ Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 363.

⁴⁴ Brown in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 397.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 411.

male observations, most of them aimed at men in the left, the SSOC and the New England Free Press, two well-established leftwing organizations, printed and distributed "The Florida Paper."

Jones and Brown had self-published the paper in June 1968. Although Naomi Weisstein and Marlene Dixon, also at their own expense, had printed and distributed three hundred copies, the paper had to be passed around because the supply was chronically short of the demand. Brown had not intended to distribute the paper through New Left "channels" because this would be, as Brown said a few months before it was finished, "self contradictory." Instead, she and Jones planned "to present our paper...to women themselves."⁴⁷

But Brown was enthusiastic about SSOC bringing out the paper. "SSOC [has] committed itself to the considerable expense of reproducing our paper, adding it to their mailing list, and sending it out on request to anybody" she wrote to Carol Hanisch shortly after SSOC offered to print and distribute the paper.⁴⁸ The New England Free Press also brought out "The Florida Paper," although without Jones and Brown's permission. By greatly underselling the earlier

⁴⁶ Jones, "Toward," 386.

⁴⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, n.d. April 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

⁴⁸ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 8 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

editions of the paper and advertising widely in the liberal and left press, New England Free Press made the paper more readily available than ever.

Jones and Brown's sister polemic was NYRW's *Notes from the First Year*. It advertised on its cover a price of "\$.50 to women, \$1.00 to men." *Notes* printed Anne Koedt's controversial "Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," named well-known leftwing intellectual Staughton Lynd "male chauvinist of the month," and highlighted as male chauvinist several quotations of Karl Marx. Moreover, *Notes*, while clearly anti-capitalist, identified male supremacy as the primary target of struggle for women. Like Jones and Brown, *Notes* editors in NYRW wished to remain independent of New Left publishers--so unlike the Jones and Brown, NYRW refused all such offers. In October 1968, Jones and Brown negotiated with SSOC and agreed to let the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) produce the paper in bulk for the first national women's liberation conference. But NYRW declined IPS's offer of bulk printing for the conference.⁴⁹

NYRW had no more money than the other early groups and *Notes* was at least as popular as "The Florida Paper." What NYRW had that other early groups did not, however, was the use of a mimeograph machine. This gave the group a distinctive advantage when it came to bulk printing. Now

⁴⁹ Jo Freeman, Chicago, to Laya Firestone, Washington, D.C. 18 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author,

SCEF agreed with few of the ideas the radical feminists were printing on its machine and SCEF leader Carl Braden decried some of those ideas as "reactionary."⁵⁰ Yet for the next year NYRW put the SCEF mimeograph machine to work printing *Notes*. While this meant NYRW had to do the work of printing and distributing the paper, it also meant that the group collected the money from selling *Notes* without the cost of printing. At a time when women's liberation was virtually penniless, the arrangement was definitely advantageous for NYRW. So it was that both papers, "The Florida Paper" and *Notes*, the most scathing critiques of male chauvinism on the left, were distributed by the left press and printed on the left's equipment.

After the protest of the Miss America Pageant in September 1968, the left press no longer provided the only visible sign of the new movement, nor was it women's liberation's only publisher. The mainstream press could not get enough of women's liberation. Reporters sneaked into meetings and stayed until they were discovered and forcibly ejected. Mainstream publishing houses, for a while at least, brought out books, anthologies, poetry, and novels written by women's liberation activists. And women's liberation

Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

⁵⁰ Carol Hanisch, Louisville, Ky., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], 23 August 1968 transcript in the possession of the author, Redstockings Archives.

groups, which were proliferating at an exponential rate, came out with journals and newspapers that spread the word about meetings, new literature, theoretical debate, and more.

This turn reflected the growth of the movement and its increasing independence from the New Left. Beyond that, however, it represented an important political shift. The debate among women's liberation pioneers was shifting away from reform of the left toward arguments for a mass movement with a radical feminist agenda. Women's liberation groups put out their own work and used the mainstream publishing houses and newspapers not only because it had become possible to do so, but because they increasingly sought a constituency outside the New Left. The building blocks laid on the left were almost in place. Women's liberation founders were beginning to build a mass grassroots movement of women. In fall 1968, however, still they sought the left's support for that purpose.

Financial Support on the Left

Planning a national conference of organizers from around the country, women at the Sandy Springs meeting knew that they required resources beyond the capacity of the new movement. Marilyn Webb was able to get a grant of \$1500 from the IPS and offices and stipends of \$25 a week for four women to put together the conference. In addition IPS

supplied a long distance telephone account, postage, copying, and printing. One of the conference planners noted that IPS had agreed to print an unlimited quantity of women's liberation literature for the conference. "There was no hassle on any of this," she said, "even though I expected there to be."⁵¹ Held over Thanksgiving at a camp in Lake Villa near Chicago, the conference drew together the movement's founding organizers for three days of debate and consciousness-raising. Thus the founding conference of the women's liberation movement was organized with seed money from the New Left.⁵²

That same fall the Gainesville-New York City "Life Group" that began working together at the earlier meeting in Sandy Springs, planned the southern organizing project envisioned by Carol Hanisch. Hanisch turned again to SCEF, this time for a wholly funded project including a salary for a full time organizer, subsistence, a car, gas, housing, food, travel expenses, and literature production. She was "hoping against hope that I could combine my desire to fight for my liberation as a woman and as a worker in the same political organization."⁵³ She called the project "Freedom

⁵¹ Laya Firestone, Washington, D.C., to Jo Freeman, Chicago, 11 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

⁵² IPS was not the only source of funding for the conference--but supplied the upfront costs to get it underway.

⁵³ Carol Hanisch, "Hard Knocks: Working for Women's Liberation in a Mixed (Male-Female) Movement Group," in

for Women."

The project and its funding built upon the foundation laid by "The Florida Paper" and the Sandy Springs meeting. As Hanisch said, "I never would have written that proposal if it had not been for 'Toward a Female Liberation Movement'...And then the Sandy Springs conference convinced me I wasn't off the track."⁵⁴ "The Florida Paper," in turn, rested on SDS advisor Ed Richer's Free University of Florida workshop on Beauvoir and statements of women's workshops at leftwing conferences published in *New Left Notes*. The Sandy Springs meeting had come about because Brown followed up on "hints" in *New Left Notes*. Thus the free universities, the SDS conferences, the left press, SCEF--were the institutional soil from which women's liberation drew nourishment--hard won and meager--for its earliest steps.

This trajectory followed a similar pattern in the first cities where women's liberation groups were formed. The West Side Group in Chicago, grew out of the women's workshop on "Sex and Caste" at the SDS Conference on the one hand and, on the other, the debate at the women's workshop at the NCNP. Moreover, West Side Group co-founder Heather Booth might not have attended the women's workshop without news of it and encouragement from Richard Flacks, the activist

Notes II, eds. Firestone and Koedt, 59, 60.

⁵⁴ Carol Hanisch, New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 31 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

professor in her freshman social science course. On the momentum of the SDS workshop, Booth returned to Chicago and began teaching women's classes at Staughton Lynd's "radical organizer's school." Then, into the mix, came Firestone and Freeman, who had teamed up at the NCNP conference to develop the women's liberation resolution.

With NYRW the incidents differed but the sources were the same. Firestone and Allen gathered key recruits for the group's first meeting at an SDS women's caucus. Kathie Sarachild found the meeting through an article in the *Guardian*, while Carol Hanisch was introduced to Firestone and thus to the group by leftwing journalist Bill Price, the author of the article. Meeting in SCEF's New York office fostered the growth of NYRW, and printing its theoretical journal on SCEF's mimeograph helped spread the word.

This pattern also held in the formation of the first groups in the South and the West. In Seattle the earliest groups evolved out of a women's course at the Free University of Seattle. The course was designed and taught by Clara Fraser and Gloria Martin, leaders of the Freedom Socialist Party, a group with old left roots that saw women as an important constituency.

The classes at free universities, workshops at New Left conferences, and articles in the left press, and the groups, organizers and early publications they helped to develop, together encompass the foundation of the new movement.

Between 1965 and 1968, these first groups and their publications and actions lit the fuses that fired the emerging movement. From the statements of the women's workshops at SDS conferences, which were mild calls for reform, to "The Florida Paper" and *Notes from the First Year* at the other end of the continuum, the first steps originated from or depended upon space on the left.

Perspectives on Support for Women's Liberation on the Left

When it comes to understanding the significance of the left's contribution to women's liberation, historical hindsight is distorted in particular ways by present circumstances. On the one hand, considerable improvements in equality for women today and pervasive public consciousness of sexism magnify male chauvinism on the left in the 1960s. Thus much of the treatment then of women by male movement colleagues appears disproportionately sexist by today's standards, whereas in those prefeminist years, bad as it was, it was often slightly better than average. On the other hand, the institutional support on the left for women's liberation appears insignificant compared with what we have come to expect today from the larger society--indeed have become so accustomed to as to barely notice.

How important, much less pivotal, can an opportunity to present a paper on some gender-related issue seem today when thousands of such papers are presented at hundreds of

conferences and have been for as long as most of us can remember? How important can a single recruit to a feminist organization appear, or a debate over discrimination against women, when there are dozens of such organizations, and debates over affirmative action routinely occur in legislatures, boardrooms, and courtrooms? As ubiquitous as women's broad public participation in society is now, just so invisible was women's absence from such activity in the mid-1960s. To paraphrase Shulamith Firestone in 1970, "Sex class" was "so deep as to be invisible."⁵⁵

Thus understanding the importance of institutional support on the left requires contextualization from several perspectives. First it must be seen that the mere existence of such support was as important to the emergence of the new movement as the existence of water might be considered if it was in short supply. Aside from a conference on the left, in 1965 there were few other venues in which sexism was debated, much less sexism within the very institution putting on the conference.⁵⁶

In contrast, today many journals publish repeated calls for papers on gender issues for conferences. Referring a student to a conference where such a paper will be presented

⁵⁵ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 11.

⁵⁶ National and state Commissions on the Status of Women, the League of Women Voters, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Berkshire Conference of female historians, the Daughters of Bilitis (a lesbian rights organization), are perhaps among the other exceptions of the period.

is barely needed, so widely known are the places they are advertised. But when Flacks suggested that Booth attend the SDS workshop, it was very likely the only such workshop in the nation. Moreover, in 1965, students in most college courses were not informed of the existence of feminist scholarship, much less encouraged to pursue it. Far more typical was the discouragement, in one form or another, of any scholarship for women beyond graduation with what was then commonly called an "Mrs. degree." In such a context, the act of referring Heather Booth to the workshop was as unusual as the existence of the workshop.

But more than unusual, the act was formative. And here is the second historical angle from which institutional support on the left is best understood. These incidents--the student referred to the workshop, the reader of an article in the left press, the feminist introduced to a like-minded woman, the new recruit from an SDS meeting--were fundamentally important because in each case a prime mover of women's liberation was positioned to move. Booth was already prepared for women's liberation leadership by particular experiences in the civil rights movement. Participation in the workshop watered a shoot that was already breaking the soil. And teaching courses on women's liberation at the free school maintained the momentum from the workshop.

When Kathie Sarachild read Price's article and Judith

Brown saw Pappas's announcement in the left press, they too were ripe for women's liberation leadership. For these women, prepared by family traditions of feminism and transformed into freedom fighters by their work in the civil rights movement, the article and the announcement provided the stimulus they were seeking to take the next bold step. When Price introduced Carol Hanisch to Shulamith Firestone, he did so because he supported women's liberation, something both women were already talking about. In terms of moral credit, Price did nothing special. But historically his introduction was decisive for the growth of the new movement. Firestone, having helped found the first women's liberation group in the nation, was then organizing the second. Hanisch came into what was probably the group's second meeting and within the year came up with the protest of the Miss America Pageant, the demonstration that put the new movement on the map. Within months of that protest, she would write the germinal women's liberation paper, "The Personal is Political."

When recruiting at the SDS meeting brought Anne Koedt into NYRW, a nascent leader was positioned to come into her own. Within the year Koedt would write "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," a brief essay that made public the unspoken experiences of millions of women. In the essay she asserted that a vaginal orgasm was a physiological impossibility and that "frigidity has generally been defined by men as the

failure of women to have vaginal orgasms."⁵⁷ It is difficult to imagine the power of Koedt's assertion in today's milieu of vibrators, pop songs on the radio about women masturbating, and sex instructions on how to bring a woman to clitoral orgasm featured on magazine covers in supermarkets. But understanding the tremendous impact of new ideas that have become commonplace is the third angle from which institutional support on the left must be viewed in order to grasp its significance.

The significance of SCEF's mimeograph machine, for example, grows in proportion to the extent that the articles in *Notes from the First Year* are seen in historical context. When Koedt wrote her now classic article, the prevailing wisdom was that for a "true" woman, there was only one orgasm and that one was vaginal. But Koedt argued, "Women have...been defined sexually in terms of what pleases men; our own biology has not been properly analyzed. Instead we have been fed a myth of the liberated woman and her vaginal orgasm, an orgasm which in fact does not exist."⁵⁸ The article alerted many thousands of sexually active young women recently freed from fear of pregnancy by the pill, that what they secretly worried was a deep personal "hang-up" was a form of sexual exploitation. Koedt demanded "new guidelines which take into account mutual sexual

⁵⁷ Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Notes I*, ed. Firestone, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

enjoyment...new techniques."⁵⁹ These ideas stirred a controversy that radically changed the sexual landscape in America. In the new one they created, the ideas have become common place, thus obscuring the significance that the use of a free mimeograph machine made in hastening their spread.

Firestone's article in *Notes from the First Year* on the nineteenth-century woman's rights movement was one of the earliest to raise the demand for women's history. In 1968 little that was new had been had written on the nineteenth-century movement, and much of the older material was out of print. Women's studies and women's history did not exist in the schools, there was no women's history month, and among young women who knew of earlier struggles for women rights, few saw them as important or radical. Firestone disagreed, because, as she said, "To attack the Family, the Church, and the Law was no small thing in the Victorian Era."⁶⁰ Firestone's path breaking "The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: A New View" helped to create the demand for women's history that brought knowledge of the early movement into the mainstream consciousness. Indeed, we are so surrounded by the results that free use of a machine to duplicate an article on women's history appears unimpressive to say the least.

Understanding the role of institutional support of

⁵⁹ Ibid.

women's liberation in the context of 1965-1968, the gestation period of the new movement, shows that particular opportunities on the left helped lay the foundation for the new movement. Because of the power of the ideas the support helped to spread; because the women who first followed up even the smallest opportunities were women's liberation's prime movers; and because the left was virtually a sole provider when it came to sources of support such as space to meet and to publish, its support was pivotal in the rebirth of women's liberation.

⁶⁰ Firestone, "The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.," 1.

CHAPTER 8

THE OLD LEFT IN THE NEW

Hanisch, Brown, and Sarachild had reason to believe that SCEF would support a women's liberation movement independent of the left without attempting to dictate its policy. Hanisch thought that since SCEF supported self-determination for black people it would support women in similar efforts.¹ Additionally, SCEF alone among organizations on the left had a majority female staff. Seasoned female organizers ran projects with male and female constituents under dangerous conditions in Appalachia and the Deep South. Moreover, in the mid-1960s, SCEF's newspaper, *The Southern Patriot*, was the only leftwing paper anyone knew of and perhaps the only newspaper in America that on its masthead included opposition to discrimination against women, a point SCEF leader Carl Braden noted with pride. Braden early on had encouraged Hanisch and Sarachild to organize for women's liberation, as the two women reminded each other when Hanisch submitted her funding proposal to SCEF. Sarachild wrote to Hanisch, "Carl played an important role in raising our consciousness...when he encouraged us in our thinking that maybe the woman question

really could be the basis for a new mass movement in the country."² Then too, SCEF had given NYRW office space and the use of its mimeograph. Still, while their hopes were up, the women were far from confident.

Hanisch's proposal to SCEF was militant to say the least. It exhorted SCEF to "establish its own women's liberation program" or be "let (sic) on the sidelines with its mouth hanging open" because "a real and important struggle is beginning in this country."³ Hanisch threatened, "If SCEF does not see the need for this program, then I will have to leave SCEF."⁴ Using the example of Castro telling Cuban women to go home and cook, the proposal excoriated radical men. "Radical women are tired of fighting in a male-dominated movement," Hanisch said, "... changing the economic/political system is not automatically going to free us from the domination of men... if SCEF is to be what it purports to be it must include a program of women's liberation work."⁵

¹ Ibid.

² Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, to Carol Hanisch, Louisville, Ky., 15 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³ Carol Hanisch, New York, to SCEF Women, Louisville, Ky., "Proposal for a Women's Liberation Program," 10 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

The aim of the proposed project, as Hanisch said, was to build a mass movement of women that would be a "leading force in the 'economic/political revolution' while its primary goal is liberation of women from the domination of men."⁶ As organizer for the project, Hanisch proposed to travel the South "raising the consciousness of women" because "Women's consciousness must be built like black consciousness has been."⁷

SCEF took a middle ground. It agreed to fund the project for six months on an "exploratory" basis without accepting Hanisch's proposal.⁸ The proposal roiled four days of SCEF meetings. Braden said that he'd "been waiting for years for a woman to want to organize Southern women" but denounced the idea as "reactionary" if it did not organize women on "class issues."⁹ He voted against the project which passed by a majority vote of the staff with almost a third of the group abstaining.

Hanisch, shocked that Braden and others had questioned her dedication "to the greater struggle," saw the vote as an indication that SCEF mainly wanted to "get women involved in

⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hanisch, Louisville, Ky., to Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 23 August 1968.

⁹ Ibid.

other issues." ¹⁰ She was also surprised to find that Braden and a number of SCEF staff held a similar view of Black Power. Hanisch wrote to Sarachild, "Most people who profess to understand the black movement do not and they are similarly going to see us as the enemy for disrupting the class struggle."¹¹

Meanwhile in Gainesville, Florida, Brown wrote to Braden in support of the project, "We [women] are going to move. Even if every established movement group disowns us. We are going to move."¹² Relying on her credibility as a five-year front line civil rights organizer well known to SCEF, Brown praised SCEF for uncommon insight and endurance and praised Hanisch as well. "There are pitifully few Carol Hanisch's in this country...Now your Carol Hanisch informs you that a mass-based movement is about to get off the ground. She indicates her willingness to begin organizing...Is SCEF jumping to seize this opportunity? I trust it is," Brown wrote.¹³ She concluded that she expected SCEF's "total understanding and acceptance."

Brown's letter arrived after the vote on the project.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carl Braden, Louisville, Ky., 27 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

¹³ Ibid.

When she learned what had happened, she strongly encouraged Hanisch to accept SCEF's support and locate the project in Gainesville. Her rationale--even enthusiasm--for accepting what she clearly considered a compromise provides an insider's view of the state of the new movement in the summer of 1968.

"Use SCEF for our movement....," Brown urged, which "will begin breaking in the South in the next half year." SCEF might come around, Brown said, but more important than that was the vacuum the project would fill. "Our movement is not legitimate enough yet to find and provide funds for independent organizers...we may have to eat crow for a while." But, Brown argued, "You may be the only white woman in the country supported by an established group mandated to do something in this area; I know of nobody else... keep this tie."¹⁴ Brown proposed that the project "quickly establish a network of trained organizers for feminism" that would be ready when women's liberation "catches on" because, she said, "Women are ready--the gripes are high in many quarters."¹⁵

The project opened in Gainesville in January 1969, and Carol Hanisch began to spread the consciousness-raising

¹⁴ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 8 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

¹⁵ Ibid.

program to new groups forming around the South. During the project's short life, in one of many attempts to explain consciousness-raising to the SCEF staff, Hanisch wrote the article that became "The Personal is Political," which first coined the phrase and explained the concept. The application of this concept through consciousness-raising caused the rapid spread of the movement because it demonstrated that the so-called personal problems women blamed themselves for as individuals were political problems rooted in male domination. Hanisch's article concluded with the obvious: political problems needed political solutions. Consequently, rather than individual efforts, she proposed the collective strategy of a social movement.

The article "The Personal is Political" was an important result of the SCEF-based project. It was a part of the larger theory on which what Brown called the "NYC-Gainesville axis" collaborated to "deal with similar issues in our groups...and exchange ideas in order to build a theory."¹⁶ The concept was critical in overcoming the view, still prevalent on the left, that an independent women's liberation movement was not needed. SCEF pulled out of the "Freedom for Women" project after only three months, but SCEF's financial support had allowed Hanisch to focus

¹⁶ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 27 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

exclusively on women's liberation during what was probably its greatest period of theoretical and organizational growth.

The "Old" Left in the New Left

The influence of the "old" left, surviving in the New Left through particular people and institutions, made itself felt in this support of women's liberation. Just as a disproportionate number of women's liberation founders were "red diaper babies" who learned about women's liberation in their families, so it was that the influence of the old left was often there when the New Left supported women's liberation.¹⁷

The American left of the 1920s through the 1940s, here referred to as the "old" left, had a rich tradition and literature on the "woman question" or "women's emancipation." This was no doubt born of the classic works of Marxism's founders, Marx, Engels, Lenin, and others who called attention to the oppression of women, wrote in opposition to it, explained its origins in the private ownership of property, and argued that it would disappear with the advent of socialism.

In the mean time, the old left opposed "male

¹⁷ See Evans, *Personal Politics*, for a discussion among activists that favorably compares the "old" left with the New Left on issues to do with the woman question, 117-19.

chauvinism"--as they called it--in a number of ways. Male organizers might be criticized for "womanizing" or failing to see that female activists in their branch shared in public political leadership. Sometimes, of course, the old left made no opposition at all to male supremacy, but at best, as Communist Party activist Esther Cooper Jackson put it, referring to several of the men in her branch in Alabama, "They actually thought [that] to be a good Communist you struggled on the woman question."¹⁸

Until women's liberation protest surfaced in the mid-1960s, no such tradition and literature existed in the short life of the New Left, except occasionally where old left influences were felt. The SCEF had its share of New Left activists on staff by the 1960s but was actually an old left McCarthy era survivor. That it both gave support to women's liberation and then took it away was probably traceable to its old left views on the woman question.

Established in 1946 to fight segregation in the South, SCEF was led by Carl and Anne Braden when Carol Hanisch proposed the Freedom for Women project. The Bradens had previously worked for several left-led unions and in the Progressive Party. Carl was a red diaper baby whose father, a union organizer and ardent supporter of Eugene V. Debs, raised him as a socialist. SCEF had long been harassed by

¹⁸Esther Cooper Jackson quoted in Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*,

the House Committee on UnAmerican Activities (HUAC) and Carl Braden had been jailed for contempt of HUAC in 1961. The Bradens believed that women made outstanding radical organizers and, unlike SDS, which had almost no women on staff, the majority of SCEF's paid organizers were female. When Judith Brown wrote in support of the women's liberation proposal, Carl Braden responded "SCEF has had women's liberation as part of its program for 30 years."¹⁹ SCEF funded the proposal hoping to add a specifically female constituency to its base and bring more women into the radical fold. In this regard SCEF was far ahead of the New Left.

SCEF did not want feminist issues up front, however, except insofar as this might be necessary to attract women and to unburden them sufficiently to fight "more important struggles," as Anne Braden observed.²⁰ Indeed, at the meeting where the vote was taken to fund the project, Carl Braden asked angrily whether "everyone in the room" believed that "private ownership of the means of distribution and production" was at the root of the problem.²¹ When it was

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¹⁹ Carl Braden, Louisville, Ky., to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 29 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

²⁰ Carol Hanisch, Louisville, Ky., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 12 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

clear that Freedom for Women put women's liberation first, SCEF would no longer continue to fund the project. SCEF thus had the old left's wisdom on the importance of gaining women as a constituency and making what Anne Braden called a "specialized effort to do so."²² But SCEF had little understanding of the extent to which male supremacy stood in the way of even the organization's own limited goals for the southern women's liberation project.

In Seattle too, the old left was instrumental in early women's liberation organizing. Support came indirectly when the Free University of Seattle sponsored the first women's liberation courses. Mirium Rader, a red diaper baby whose father had been harassed by the authorities during the McCarthy period, had started the Free University. Gloria Martin and Clara Fraser, two women associated with the old left, were the lead developers and teachers of the women's liberation courses.

Martin had not been in a leftwing group for twenty-odd years when the Free University opened, but she was in the Young Communist League as a teenager and then in the Communist Party. Fraser, a twenty-two year veteran of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and a member of its National

²¹ Carol Hanisch, Louisville, Ky., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], 31 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

²² Anne Braden, Louisville, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Florida, 17 September 1968, transcript in the possession of

Committee, had recently broken from the SWP to found and lead a new national party, the Freedom Socialist Party. As a child in the 1930s Fraser was in the youth section of the Socialist Party. Her mother was a Russian social democrat and her father a Latvian anarchist. Fraser saw organizing women as a political priority. She hoped to bring women into the Freedom Socialists through the course at the Free University. Martin, who shared Fraser's priorities, joined the Freedom Socialists.²³

In October 1967, Fraser and Martin organized the women attending the women's liberation course at the Free University into Seattle Radical Women. Under the leadership of these old left founders in the Freedom Socialists, Seattle Radical Women challenged male chauvinism in the anti-war movement and organized women into leadership roles in various movement activities. In summer 1968, groups of women broke away from Radical Women to form the Women's Majority Union and Women's Liberation Seattle. The Women's Majority Union established itself as an independent group while Women's Liberation Seattle became a women's committee of both SDS and a left party, the Peace and Freedom Party. A year later Women's Liberation Seattle also became

author, Redstockings Archives.

²³ Barbara Winslow, interview by author, 1 June 2001, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

independent.²⁴

In December 1968, the Women's Majority Union published *Lilith*, the West Coast's pioneer women's liberation journal. This journal, the first to publish the work of the black women's liberation group, Poor Black Women, had a national circulation and spread to Europe as well. In a cover letter accompanying the first issue, Janet Hews, one of the leaders of the new group who had started out in Seattle Radical Women, said that their "free thinking" was being "somewhat stifled" by the "insistence on doctrinaire discipline and program formation" by a minority of the membership of Radical Women.²⁵ But political differences similar to the ones between SCEF and Carol Hanisch were at the bottom of the split.

Lilith stood for an independent movement for the liberation of women rather than seeing itself as another mass front for a Marxist party. It championed the cause of Valerie Solanas, celebrated the birth of "The Bitch," a woman whose "mind is growing muscles," and would tolerate "no collaboration in pain."²⁶ It raised consciousness about the contradictions that women lived with every day such as

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Janet Hews, Seattle, to "Sisters," 2 December 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

²⁶ Women's Majority Union, *Lilith* (Seattle), 2 December 1968, 15.

"Women are always playing hard to get" and "No man likes an easy woman."²⁷ Fraser opposed as "subjective" and "psychological" the political consideration of such "personal" matters and the consciousness-raising method that exposed them.²⁸

With her background in the old left, Fraser, like the Bradens and SCEF, saw women not as secretaries, sex objects, and cooks for the movement but as an important constituency of the left and high on its organizing agenda. In Seattle, the Freedom Socialist Party initiated the early challenges to male supremacy on the left and in the larger society that laid the foundation for women's liberation. But as the movement took off, the Party, like SCEF, was opposed to fighting the oppression of women in its own right.

Along with a significant number of women's liberation founders who were red diaper babies, and institutions such as SCEF and the Freedom Socialist Party that were at least initially supportive, the most helpful men in the start up of women's liberation were influenced by the old left. This was the case with Bill Price, who both personally and with his article in the *Guardian*, linked women in the founding core of NYRW. Jesse Lemisch, too, who consistently and publicly denounced male chauvinism in the New Left, had been

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Barbara Winslow, unpublished manuscript, 19 July 1999, in

a "red diaper baby." So had Richard Flacks, whose support for "Sex and Caste" brought Heather Booth to the first women's liberation workshop in SDS.

Flacks had grown up in a Communist Party family. "Oh yes I knew there was a woman question," Flacks reflected, "I was raised as a red diaper baby...and my wife was too."²⁹ In the 1950s, Flacks remembered that his family, fearing persecution, had thrown away leftwing books and hidden the *The Daily Worker*, the Party newspaper. Before his involvement with SDS in the 1960s, Flacks himself had been a member of the Labor Youth League, a Party youth group.

According to Flacks, his family did not observe gender roles. His mother had a career and led a public life, and the Flacks' children grew up fixing their own dinner. Flacks compared his family with others and remembered that even as a child he had been conscious that these aspects of his family life had to do with sexual equality. Equality for women was also part of life at Camp Wo-chi-ca, the experimental Communist summer camp Flacks attended. Camp Wo-chi-ca, founded in the late 1930s with the help of Paul Robeson, was dedicated to racial and sexual equality. This was particularly evident one summer when the twelve year old Flacks saw the lessons of sexual equality brought to life in a play produced at Camp Wo-chi-ca's theatrical performances.

the possession of author, 10.

²⁹ Richard Flacks, interview by author, 28 May 2001, New

One of the counselors taught the campers how to create theatre out of everyday camp doings. When a group of boys protested the camp's policy of sexually integrated ball teams, this became a summer-long debate. The argument was developed into a theatrical production in which the balls, bats, and gloves went on strike until the boys let the girls play. Years later, Flacks brought the anti-sexist values he had been raised with into his work in SDS. When women's liberation came along, he knew women had genuine grievances and supported it.

Jesse Lemisch too brought Communist family values against male chauvinism into SDS. An aggressive public campaigner against sexism in the New Left, Lemisch's understanding of and opposition to male chauvinism came, in part, from his mother, who, according to his wife Naomi Weisstein, he "totally respected and admired."³⁰ Weisstein, also a red diaper baby, called Lemisch's mother "an oil-burning communist, tough as a brick, and pretty good on 'male chauvinism.'"³¹ The couple and Lemisch's mother conferred about sexism as the woman question began to heat up the New Left.

Bill Price's pivotal article in the *Guardian* may have never been written if he had not understood that the

York, tape recording in the possession of author.

³⁰ Weisstein, letter to author, 20 May 2001.

³¹ Ibid.

phenomena he described at the NCNP was a problem of male chauvinism rather than simply a norm for male and female behavior. He knew that his insight was unusual. As he put it, "Another pattern appeared, too, visible most easily to older veterans of campaigns against male chauvinism. This was the minimal role played by young women."³² Price denounced the "pattern" and gave as an example of it women activists doing the clerical work at the conference yet having "no visible role on the convention floor."³³ Price, then in his 50s, had learned about male chauvinism in the old left. Like Carl Braden, Price had been called before HUAC and had refused to give names. The two were friends and mutual supporters.

Unlike most young people coming of age in the 1950s and 1960s, these men, like the women's liberation founders who were red diaper babies, needed no introduction to the concept of male chauvinism. When women did most of the housework and cooking, they knew that was politically reprehensible. When women did most of the clerical work in a political organization, they knew that was unfair. When male organizers seduced one new female recruit after another, they knew that was male chauvinist. They knew it was wrong that women had no voice in decision making. They knew it was

³² Price, "Behind the NCNP," 9.

³³ Ibid.

wrong that these things were not protested and they knew that for the most part neither their male nor female peers realized there was anything to protest.

Compared with most of the New Left who were not red diaper babies, had never heard of a "woman question," and did not think twice about the stereotypical sexual behavior all around them, these men were ahead of their time. And so it is not surprising that they were helpful and, because support was so limited, their support was pivotal.

CHAPTER 9

"SISTERHOOD IS POWERFUL," THE IDEA
TO MAKE THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

We saw that the ultimate success of our liberation movement, our own liberation, depended on our reaching the masses of women. Out of finding ways to achieve these goals...the ideas about consciousness-raising came.¹

In 1967 and 1968, at the beginning of the women's liberation movement, the idea that a mass-based, nationwide movement of women was the way to fight sexism was neither obvious nor well accepted. In fact, women's liberation founders hotly debated the idea. For a while, most of the founders opposed this idea, wanting instead to concentrate on ending male domination in the New Left. They wanted to reform the New Left so that as men's equals, they could take on the war in Vietnam and the corporations, fight for academic freedom, and support Black Power. As feminist consciousness grew, adding demands such as abortion and childcare to the New Left agenda became part of the reform. At the same time, a small but growing minority of founders pressed to organize immediately a mass women's liberation movement independent of the New Left.

¹ Kathie Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for Women's Liberation," 8.

Two ideas settled the debate in favor of a mass independent movement as women across the nation responded to the call for women's liberation with angry enthusiasm. In this chapter I will investigate the new idea of a movement for women's liberation, and in the next, I'll focus on the inception of consciousness-raising, the primary way the movement spread. Heather Booth observed that she had never known "anything as easy as organizing women's groups."² But as ready for revolt as American women were by 1968, the ideas that provoked their enthusiasm had been developing in the minds of some of the young organizers since the mid-1950s.

The first idea was simply to organize a movement. Expressed by its advocates with the slogan "Sisterhood Is Powerful," they focused on political solidarity, a union of women many millions strong to represent and to put power behind feminist demands. "Consciousness-raising," the second idea, was a program to develop women's awareness that they were members of an oppressed group ("female class consciousness," as its originators referred to it) so that they could be organized into such a movement.³

² Heather Booth quoted in Evans, *Personal Politics*, 211.

³ Kathie Sarachild, for example, calls women a class and uses the term "class consciousness" to refer to feminist consciousness in "A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," *Feminist Revolution*, 202.

Consciousness-raising was also a method of formulating theory for the movement by getting to the root of women's oppression through investigation and analysis of women's experiences. Consciousness-raising was usually practiced by groups of women responding to a seemingly personal question by recalling and sharing their experiences and then drawing conclusions from the pool of responses.

Consciousness-Raising was central to organizing the movement. Participants learned from analyzing the pool of responses that problems they had been trying to overcome as individuals were shared with many other women. Thus they were "sex-class" problems, as Shulamith Firestone called them.⁴ Once women saw this, they put more effort into working collectively to change social conditions, instead of relying primarily on individual strategies. Sisterhood Is Powerful was the collective strategy: it was the notion that a mass movement of women fighting specifically for women's liberation was needed to gain freedom and equality for women. Sisterhood Is Powerful and consciousness-raising have been revised many times since their original articulation and movement building use in the late 1960s. Perhaps it will clarify these ideas to say what, at that time, they did not mean. Sisterhood Is Powerful did not mean, as later versions have suggested, a sense of female community or female culture based on universal and essential "female" values.

Neither did it mean spiritual bonding among women, or non-hierarchical organizational or intellectual processes based on traditional, so-called "female," values.⁵ Sarachild, who coined the phrase *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, explained, "People don't seem to realize that solidarity means militant unity not this lovely dovey, Emily Post sisterhood."⁶ The idea was not to gloss over race and class-based divisions among women with appeals to behave in a sisterly manner. Rather, the point was to unify women in the face of their differences, not to deny the differences. Similarly, consciousness-raising was not then understood as an apolitical or therapeutic process that, as a later proponent described it, would "give individual women tools with which to go forward in their own lives."⁷ Indeed, it meant precisely the opposite, because it was conceived specifically to foster

⁴ Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 1.

⁵ In *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), 84, Allison M. Jaggar explains sisterhood as a route to self-affirmation. In *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 16, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explained that feminist sisterhood meant "bonding among female peers." For a critical discussion of these interpretations, see Ellen Willis, *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 152 and Brooke Williams, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings, 79.

⁶ Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, to Carol Hanisch, Gainesville, Fla., 8 February 1969, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁷ Shreve, *Women Together*, 14.

the understanding that collective action was needed.

Tracing Sisterhood Is Powerful and consciousness-raising to their sources shows how later versions of the concepts differed significantly from the original meanings. Both ideas embody the coming together of influences from the old left, Simone de Beauvoir, the New Left, and most importantly, from the civil rights and Black Power movements. There are clear trails of transmission, development, and application of these concepts which proved enormously effective. More than any other strategy, feminist consciousness-raising created a mass national women's liberation movement.

Sisterhood Is Powerful and consciousness-raising were carefully developed and strongly advocated by their adherents. The right ideas at the right historical moment, these concepts prevailed over others because they fit the conditions of the times. True, the power of a mass movement was needed to change women's situation. But more than simply organizing on the basis of that truth was required for a movement to materialize.

The ideas were effective because they capitalized on the conditions women faced. They illuminated the causes of women's day-to-day frustrations and deepest disappointments, and they promised to destroy these causes. From the trade unions to the upper echelons, in cities, suburbs, and beyond, feminist consciousness soared. Women easily grasped

the social nature of their predicament and were eager to work together for change. Older women started OWL, Older Women's Liberation. Black women started groups, as did young women in the high schools. Women's caucuses flourished in trade unions and professional organizations. Within and without the movements of the 1960s, from the Black Panther Party to the counterculture, from cosmopolitan elites to country radio fans, women across the nation began to fight male chauvinism passionately and collectively.

In the formative years of the movement, a number of views contended for influence in several important debates: Should there be a mass movement (vs. a lobby, a vanguard, a legalistic approach, a caucus of the left)? Should men be in the movement or were men women's oppressor? Was capitalism or male supremacy at the root of women's oppression? Were women complicit in their subordination? Should anti-hierarchical structures be established in a women's movement? Many of these questions were debated without resolution. Unity was not reached on the all-important cause of women's oppression, but the most fundamental question was clearly answered. Raising feminist consciousness did create a mass movement for women's liberation that affected every aspect of American life. Sisterhood was powerful!

Certain aspects of consciousness-raising made it ideal for mass organizing: its portability, its simplicity, its reliance on the concrete experience of its participants, and

its propensity to make many women very angry, very quickly, and all at the same time. Moreover, the historical conditions which were decreasing women's economic dependence on men made consciousness-raising and Sisterhood Is Powerful the right ideas for the times. Before investigating the roots, transmission, and effectiveness of these ideas, however, we must understand them in the context of two of the critical debates of the early movement: the debate over whether or not to form an independent women's liberation movement and the debate over the cause of women's oppression.

The Debate Over an Independent Women's Liberation Movement

The debate over a mass-based independent movement for women's liberation was rich and complex. It had been evolving for about four years before the sisterhood position crystallized in 1968. The arguments for and against an independent movement ran along a continuum. In the middle, were women's liberation pioneers in the New Left and the civil rights movement who exposed sexism in these movements because they wanted to fight the issues of the day as the equals of male coworkers. And although the civil rights movement and the New Left were more egalitarian than the larger society, sexist discrimination was a barrier. Rather than form a mass independent movement for women's liberation, many of these founders wanted simply to apply

enough pressure from within to reform the movements in which they were already participating.

This position was first articulated in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) by Casey Hayden and Mary King in their "SNCC Position Paper," in 1964, and again in the "memo," "Sex and Caste," in 1965. In 1964 they had proposed that "the whole of the women in this movement...force the rest of the movement to stop the discrimination." In 1965 they wrote about a worldwide sexual-caste system from which the movement was not exempt. Thus women who wanted "to work full time on problems such as war, poverty, race," needed a "community of support" of like-minded women.⁸

Variations on this view, some more militant than others, circulated through the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the left press for the next three years. By 1967, women seeking reform of male chauvinism in the New Left were also demanding that abortion, child care, an analysis of women's oppression under capitalism, and other specifically feminist issues be added to the New Left agenda. Their position was based, in part, on the theory that the capitalist economic system was the basis of women's oppression, and therefore sexism was a proper target of the left.

⁸ Hayden and King, "SNCC Position Paper," 569; Hayden and King, "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo," 573.

Women opposing this view not only wanted to reform sexism in the New Left, civil rights, and Black Power Movements, they wanted to end male domination in the whole society. Although as radicals they opposed capitalism, they pointed out that women in socialist countries had not achieved freedom from male domination. Thus rather than fighting capitalism with the hope that when socialism was established male domination would end, they proposed to fight sexism directly and immediately.

Holders of this position, called radical feminism, did not consider the Marxists' derivation of male supremacy from private property an adequate explanation of women's subordination. Radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone began to explore the idea that capitalism was an offshoot of male supremacy. As Firestone put it, "Feminist issues [are] women's first priority...central to any larger revolutionary analysis ...Existing leftist analysis...is not radical enough...because this analysis does not relate the...economic class system to its origins in the sexual class system...the tapeworm that must be eliminated first by any true revolution" (emphasis Firestone).⁹ Following such leads, the early radical feminists put forth the concept and slogan Sisterhood Is Powerful to claim that a mass movement of women, independent of men and fighting specifically for women's liberation, was the way to win such freedom.

On the far end of the radical feminist side of the continuum were arguments for a feminist-led left and for various forms of separatism, including celibacy and female communes. On the other end, some women in traditional women's peace groups essentially functioning as women's auxiliaries of the left, argued against an independent women's liberation movement and even against taking up the fight for women's liberation. They held that peace should be given priority over equality for women. These groups included organizations such as the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Women Strike for Peace.

The debate evolved throughout 1967 and 1968. Women's liberation founders seeking to reform the New Left came increasingly to the position that along with the Vietnam War, issues such as abortion, childcare, and male chauvinism deserved not just inclusion but high priority on the New Left agenda. After two years of caucusing, holding workshops, and issuing demands, they began in 1967 to form independent anti-capitalist women's groups. These groups supported Black Power, took on the war in Vietnam and the business order, and fought for women's liberation. They often claimed that the war and Wall St. were feminist issues because, like male chauvinism, they helped to maintain the capitalist system, which, in the end, must be destroyed

⁹ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 72.

before women could achieve equality with men.

Meanwhile, founders seeking an independent women's liberation movement put more and more time into organizing one. Most of them continued to work on the same issues as their sisters in the anti-capitalist women's groups--but not as women qua women or in women's liberation groups. Founders on both sides of the debate frequently joined forces to confront the New Left about male chauvinism.

But even as more and more women formed groups independent of the New Left, they continued to struggle with the question: Are men the enemy? By mid-1968, the debate over women's liberation's relationship to the New Left was shifting in favor of an independent movement. Still, the central ideological question of where to aim such a movement remained. In September 1968 Pam Allen wrote to Judith Brown in Gainesville, "I have...seen a significant change in the attitude of many SDS women regarding the idea of an independent movement. They are no longer hostile."¹⁰ Allen was right. Even as its founders continued without resolution to debate the origins of women's oppression, an independent movement was in birth.

Both Allen and Brown wanted an independent movement. Yet Brown argued in "The Florida Paper," that for a time at least, men were the enemy, while Allen saw capitalism as the

¹⁰ Pam Allen, San Francisco, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 5 September 1968, transcript in the possession of

source of women's domination by men. In New York, although Allen and Shulamith Firestone worked together to organize the nation's second group, they too differed on this question, with Firestone leading those who named male supremacy as the new movement's primary target. In a number of cities, the first year of organizing produced at least two groups, often due to divisions within the original group, which saw themselves as part of and working toward a movement for women's liberation independent of the New Left. But at least one or more of the groups held that male supremacy was at the root of women's oppression while the other(s) held capitalism responsible.

In contrast, the two major black women's liberation organizations, Poor Black Women and the SNCC Women's Liberation Committee, said that racism, capitalism, and male supremacy all combined to keep black women down. Poor Black Women held that "capitalism is a male supremacist society" because "all power in a capitalistic society is in male hands" and that "class society enforces it [male domination]."¹¹ Unlike predominantly white groups, the black women's liberation groups did not subdivide around the issue of which system was more fundamentally oppressive.

author, Redstockings Archives.

¹¹ Patricia Robinson, "On the Position of Poor Black Women in This Country," in *The Black Woman*, ed. Cade, 196-197.

The Search for the Cause of Women's Oppression

Why did this debate remain unresolved among the predominately white groups? What was at stake? How did it affect the growth of the new movement? These questions were widely addressed in the early movement and have received considerable attention in the secondary literature.¹² Moreover, within feminist and socialist scholarship, the cause of women's oppression continues to provide a source of spirited investigation and analysis.¹³ The question is as old as it is current. In the nineteenth century and before, radicals and feminists such as Frederick Engels and Charlotte Perkins Gilman sought to get to the root of it.¹⁴

¹² Some of the early work containing elements of this debate include: Juliet Mitchell, *Women the Longest Revolution* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1966); Evelyn Reed, *Problems of Women's Liberation* (New York: Merit Publishers, 1969); Margaret Benston, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation," *Monthly Review* (September 1969); Redstockings West, "San Francisco Redstockings/Our Politics Begin with Our Feelings," in *Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women*, eds. Betty Roszak and Theodore Roszak (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1969) 285-90; Suzie Olah, "The Economic Function of the Oppression of Women," in *Notes II*, eds. Firestone and Koedt, 68-72; and Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*. The secondary literature portrays the debate as vicious and destructive. Alice Echols, for example, called it "corrosive" and titled the chapter in *Daring to be Bad*, that deals with it "The Great Divide: The Politico-Feminist Schism," 51-101.

¹³ See for example, Peggy Powell Dobbins, *From Kin to Class* (Berkeley: Signmaker Press, 1981); Ann Crittendon, *The Price of Motherhood* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001); and Kathie Sarachild, Jenny Brown, and Amy Coenen, eds., *Women's Liberation and National Health Care: Confronting the Myth of America* (New York: Redstockings, 2001).

A rarely acknowledged yet seemingly self-evident reason that the origins of women's oppression remained an unsettled question in the early years of the movement is that it is as difficult a question as it is important. Answers involve the interplay of worldwide systems of dominance and economics, and the relationship between the fundamentals of life--production and reproduction. As Frederick Engels put it, "The determining factor in history...the production and reproduction of immediate life...on the one side, the production of the means of existence...on the other side, the production of human beings themselves."¹⁵ The answer also involves ancient history, primitive cultures, kinship systems, and the conversion of hunter-gatherer societies to agricultural production. The question even drew women's liberation founders into the study of animal behavior, biology, and ethnology.¹⁶

The early movement saw ardent activists on both sides of the debate delving into anthropology and the classics of Marxism. Weekly and often nightly they took in data about women's oppression from consciousness-raising groups and raised public consciousness through bold and disruptive

¹⁴ Frederick Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884; New York: International Publishers, 1971); and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (New York: Harper, 1966).

¹⁵ Engels, *The Origin*, 5.

¹⁶ Lynn O'Connor, "The Monkey Paper," 1969, *Redstockings*

direct action. At the same time they studied history and anthropology with a passion that was surely unmatched in the academy. They were zealous because they believed that winning women's liberation depended on this understanding. As Shulamith Firestone observed, "Before we can act to change a situation...we must know how it has arisen and evolved."¹⁷

But there was no time to wait for understanding before taking action. Women were coming into the movement at a great rate. The troops were already in motion and there was no slowing them down. The urgency of developing a theory of women's oppression around which to unify was palpable. Along with argument and debate in meetings, and division and subdivision of groups, the question generated theory papers that were met with howls of excitement. Women scribbled notes in margins and rushed out their responses. The papers crisscrossed the country as women responded to them and passed them on to others.

Women's liberation founders who saw capitalism as the basis of women's oppression had the advantage of having a body of literature to turn to in Marxism. Yet most of them recognized the need, at the very least, to fill in the many large gaps left by Marxist theorists for whom the woman question was a low priority. They at least began, however,

Archives.

with an essential outline: with the move into agricultural production on a large enough scale to produce a surplus, came the desire on the part of men to pass on the surplus to natural heirs in the form of private property. Hence the switch from matriliney to patriliney and the advent of the monogamous family, which served, along with the sexual division of labor, to institutionalize the oppression of women. This, according to Engels, was "the world-historical defeat of the female sex," before which, in a so-called "golden age," women were not subjected to male domination.¹⁸ With the end of private property in a socialist system, the monogamous family would no longer be necessary, and women would no longer be subordinated.

All women's liberation founders opposed capitalism, but the radical feminists saw male supremacy as the root of women's oppression, and they found the Marxist explanation and its several derivatives unconvincing. Frequently, they countered by arguing that in nations where capitalism had been eliminated, male supremacy had not. "Male supremacy as an economic system is that one in which every individual man has greater access to scarce goods and resources than any individual woman," wrote the group Redstockings West in San Francisco.¹⁹ "Male supremacy has gone through distinct

¹⁷ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 2.

¹⁸ Engels, *The Origin*, 43, 50.

stages ...in most, such as slavery, feudalism, and capitalism, a few men have dominated other men in some aspects of their lives as well as all men totally dominating women."²⁰ In America, radical feminists said, parodying Lenin, capitalism was a high stage of male supremacy, while in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, a more advanced stage had been reached in which "the means of production and reproduction are owned by all men collectively."²¹ In these countries socialism was the highest stage of male supremacy.

This argument was made compelling by the obvious continuation of sexism in the socialist world. Beauvoir had given many examples of this, among them the staging of beauty pageants in the then Soviet Union. On the other hand, the situation of women in socialist countries was greatly improved compared with pre-socialist times (and with the West on some of these measures) due to free, public child care, universal paid maternity leave, the admission of women into previously male fields, universal suffrage, the passage of equal rights laws, and a host of other reforms. That the delegation of the National Liberation Front (NLF), the South Vietnamese Communists (Vietcong), at the Paris peace talks

¹⁹ Redstockings West, "San Francisco Redstockings/Our Politics," 286.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 287.

was led by a woman, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, did not go without notice by American women's liberationists.

The positions the founders took on the cause of women's oppression cannot be explained by looking at the roots of feminist influence in their lives. Founders who were red diaper babies and proud of it squared off on opposite sides of the debate. There were founders on opposite sides who had worked in the southern civil rights movement and now supported Black Power, claiming its lessons valuable for women's liberation. And there were founders who answered the question differently who had not worked in these movements. In March, 1968, for example, Marilyn Webb said she had learned from Black Power that an independent women's movement was needed: "As radical political people [we] have learned from the black movement...that the only way we can be a political force is to build our own movement...develop a power base if we are to be respected."²² At the same time, she declared vehemently in the first issue of *The Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, "Our enemy is not men, but an oppressive system that pits group against group."²³

That same month, holding that men were indeed the source of women's oppression, Shulamith Firestone also argued for an independent movement based on lessons from

²² Marilyn Webb, article in *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* (Chicago), March 1968, 4.

Black Power: "The Black Struggle taught us that without group consciousness, without the power that comes through its development, your opinion doesn't count."²⁴ Now neither Firestone nor Webb were red diaper babies, and unlike many founders, neither had gone South to work in the civil rights movement. Both were Black Power supporters and considered its lessons for women vital. Yet they differed over whether capitalism or male supremacy was the ultimate source of women's oppression. In case after case, the position founders took on this question was not readily explained by the sources of feminist influence in their lives.

The influence of Beauvoir was more prevalent among founders who saw male supremacy as the source of women's oppression. Yet Beauvoir's views on the question were complicated and changing. Beauvoir held that men were the enemy, that socialism was necessary yet insufficient for women's liberation, and, by 1972, that feminists must advance their agenda "at the same time as carrying on the class-war," as she put it.²⁵ As for Black Power, the Black Panther Party maintained that capitalism was at the bottom of racism. On the other hand, Pan Africanist black power

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, New York, to Naomi Weisstein, Chicago, n.d. March 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

²⁵ Simone de Beauvoir, *All Said and Done* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1974), 455.

advocates such as Kwame Toure (Stokely Carmichael), while socialist, brought white supremacy more closely into the mix and established their own organizations around this view. Thus neither the founders or their sources could agree upon the culpability of capitalism in racial or gender oppression.

Although pioneers could not agree upon a theory of women's oppression, those who proclaimed Sisterhood Is Powerful prevailed on the all-important goal of an independent movement. Founders who had started out on the other side of that debate came increasingly to agree that a new movement was needed. Moreover, lack of unity on the root cause of sexism did not prevent agreement when it came to intermediate causes or to targets for action. Indeed, debating in person, in letters, and position papers, the founders argued different positions on this profoundly difficult, old, and important question. At the same time, they organized the movement's founding groups, actions, and conferences together.

The first and second national women's liberation meetings exemplify this forward motion despite the unsettled debate over the cause of women's oppression. Few founders differed more intensely on the question than the four women responsible for the first national meeting in Sandy Springs, Maryland, in August 1968. That spring, as they planned the meeting, Judith Brown and Beverly Jones were finishing "The

Florida Paper," which, more powerfully than any other women's liberation manifesto, denounced men as the enemy of women. Indeed, the paper was written specifically in opposition to the notion that women could effectively fight male domination from within the New Left. Indeed, the paper condemned women who focused on reforming the New Left, accusing them of using women's liberation opportunistically.²⁶

Marilyn Webb and Dee Ann Pappas, with whom Brown and Jones organized the meeting, were among the women whose views the paper denounced. Although Webb and Pappas came to agree that an independent women's liberation movement was needed, Webb was an outspoken leader of the position that men were not women's enemy. "The Florida Paper" had named Webb as a leading proponent of wrong-headed, "immoral," views, and attacked the positions she had publicly taken.

Yet Brown and Webb were elated with their work together on the first national meeting. Shortly after a planning session, Brown wrote to Webb and Pappas, "We ought to emphasize that serious disagreements be settled through position papers which are well thought out and circulated widely, rather than...insist that the group reach consensus on issues that could make for artificial divides...Personally, that Sunday evening was a milestone.

²⁶ Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 367.

You're some beautiful people."²⁷ Webb responded: "God, I'm glad we all got together...people here wish you would return...though they didn't really all agree with your position, they were very glad you had one that could be argued and so am I...It forces everyone out of fuzzy headedness, the sin and tragedy of womanhood."²⁸ This was no mere attempt at diplomacy. The women's desire to start a movement was more important to them than their differences over the cause of women's oppression.

Of the twenty women who came together in Sandy Springs, most held that capitalism was the cause of women's oppression. On the second day of the meeting, the question was fiercely debated. "Who is the enemy? There is no way to get out of this situation without fighting men," declared Beverly Jones. "Which is your final enemy?" said another participant. And another responded, "The capitalist system." "My final enemy is man. You can't have female liberation in a capitalist society, and a socialist society doesn't guarantee it," said another.²⁹ Hours of intense discussion

²⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to "Marilyn, Dee Ann, and Bev," [respectively] Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Md., Hershey, Pa., n.d. [1968], transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

²⁸ Marilyn Webb, Washington, D.C., to "Judy, Bev, and Dee Ann," [respectively] Gainesville, Fla., Hershey, Pa., Baltimore, Md., 11 July 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

²⁹ Sandy Springs, Md., meeting transcript, 25.

did not bring about agreement or compromise. Nonetheless, on the third day of the meeting, their differences starkly before them, the founders plunged into planning a larger conference on the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention.

Concerned with insuring that the position on men, then very much a minority view, was included in planning for the upcoming fall conference, Brown wrote to newfound ally Carol Hanisch. Brown noted that Webb had made it clear that if radical feminists wanted a hand in the conference, "it will rest with us to propose topics ...Nobody will do it for us."³⁰

But Webb, who essentially controlled the stipends for conference planners, brought a representative of the radical feminist position on board to insure that the minority view was included in the conference agenda. On their part, radical feminists came up with a large donation that covered the cost of renting the conference facilities. But the conference itself, highly successful in spreading word of women's liberation across the nation, saw no resolution on the root cause of women's oppression.

Actions, too, reflected but were not inhibited by these differences. The two founding actions of the movement were

³⁰ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 27 August 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

undertaken and coordinated by founders on different sides of the causality question. These actions were the protest of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade's women's demonstration for peace in Washington, D.C., in January 1968, and the protest of the Miss America Pageant that September. Women who held that capitalism was the root of women's oppression protested the peace demonstration as insufficiently militant and lacking a radical analysis of the war in Vietnam. Radical feminists protested the appeal for peace on the grounds that it was based upon and reinforced the traditional stereotype of women as wives and mothers. In the Miss America Pageant protest, which, for the first time focussed the national media on the new movement, some founders used the opportunity to expose corporate exploitation of female beauty standards. Others emphasized men's culpability and women's resistance. At the demonstration, the symbols and messages of founders on opposing sides of the debate clearly reflected these differences.

But some early actions conducted by groups that differed on the root cause of women's oppression were barely distinguishable from each other. This was because they held the same view on the intermediate causes. WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), for example, saw capitalism as the root of women's oppression with sex roles and the family responsible for its continuation. They staged simultaneous guerilla theatre at bridal fairs in New

York and California because the fairs romanticized marriage in order to sell consumer products.

The Feminists, on the other hand, held the radical feminist position and limited the number of women who lived with men that could join the group. Like WITCH, however, they saw sex roles and the family as the fuel that kept the system going. In a guerilla action much like WITCH at the bridal fairs, the Feminists disrupted the New York City Marriage Bureau for perpetrating myths about marriage that they said constituted "fraud."³¹ Although WITCH and the Feminists had different theories about the cause of women's oppression, the public actions they took had much in common in message and style.

With the first movement conferences in 1968, founders collaborated despite deep ideological differences. Organizers on both sides of the debate also coordinated the first national actions: the protest of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade and the Miss America Protest. They worked together, but far from glossing over differences on the cause of women's oppression, they researched and broke new ground on this old and difficult question, and continued to vehemently argue their findings.

In Gainesville, Florida, organizers of the first and

³¹ The Feminists, "Women—Do You Know the Facts About Marriage," facsimile of the Feminists' leaflet passed out at the Marriage License Bureau, New York City, 23 September 1969, in Hole and Levine, *Rebirth*, 145.

second women's liberation groups were divided on the cause of women's liberation and even came to blows over it. Yet a few months after they had thrown punches at each other, the women in the two groups met together to develop and deliver a "Declaration of Continued Independence" to leaders of Gainesville's New Left. The Declaration stated,

Women's liberation has been used in recent Left meetings...as a political football ...We demand that SDS, YSA, and similar groups recognize that women's liberation is a totally separate movement of women whose goal is to aid our own oppression ...We are not a part of any existing male group or movement ...The fact that some of our members may also be members of those groups means nothing more than that some of our members are also members of these groups.³²

Refusing to be manipulated or played off against each other, the groups further stated, "We two groups, standing together, will not permit either of our groups to be singled out as 'the vanguard group' or 'the group with the most correct line.'" ³³Because they were coming together on the need for an independent movement, founders worked together to organize it despite lack of agreement on by what or by whom women were oppressed.

Although the movement they built was independent of the left, women's liberation was itself largely a left-wing movement. Tens of thousands of women coming into women's

³² Gainesville Women's Liberation, "Declaration of Continued Independence," in *Selected Documents for Gainesville Women's Liberation History and Organizing*, Document 4, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

liberation before 1970 "accepted," as Brown put it, "a radical placement of their oppression."³⁴ When "The Florida Paper" began circulating, Brown wrote to Hanisch, "We get requests everyday. I receive poignant letters from married women saying, 'this is the first letter I've written in a year, but I want to organize a group. Can you help me?'"³⁵ "In my own group," Brown wrote later in 1968 to Roxanne Dunbar in Boston, "I see middle class women beginning to call themselves revolutionaries."³⁶ "Let me report to you," she wrote that same year to Pam Allen in San Francisco, "that the first group (first white group) in Gainesville which is openly socialist, [which] openly calls itself revolutionary is the Women's Liberation Group."³⁷

Like Brown, Hanisch held the radical feminist position that men were the enemy. Also like Brown, she felt strongly that women's liberation organizing turned women against capitalism. So did Hanisch's co-worker on the staff of the SCEF, Margaret McSurely, then organizing against strip

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Hanisch, New York, 27 August 1968.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Roxanne Dunbar, Boston, 11 December 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Pam Allen, San Francisco, 18 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

mining in Appalachia. In December 1968 Hanisch wrote asking Brown's support for McSurely, whose house had just been bombed: "If the two sticks of dynamite had gone two feet higher, they and their year-old son would all be dead...They've been subpoenaed to appear before the McClellan committee."³⁸ Quoting the letter she had just gotten from McSurely, Hanisch shared McSurely's perception of the women's liberation organizing Brown and Hanisch were doing, "I see you guys working things out with new women all the time," McSurely had written, "and...they get turned on as anti-capitalists.'" ³⁹ McSurely's observation was also true of the few women's liberation founders who had not started out as radicals. Ti-Grace Atkinson was a registered Republican until 1967, when she began feminist organizing. By 1975 she could write to her feminist coworkers of the killing of the prisoners at Attica state prison, "We are Attica or we are nothing."⁴⁰ Atkinson reflected, "My feminism radicalized me on other issues, not vice versa" (emphasis Atkinson).⁴¹

³⁸ Carol Hanisch, New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 17 December 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ti-Grace Atkinson, Florynce Kennedy, Susan Sherman, Joan Hamilton, "The Crisis in Feminism," *Majority Report* (New York) 8 March 1975, 3.

⁴¹ Atkinson quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 168.

The WLM also provided radical political education to the female public. In 1969, for example, Laura X (Murra) and Berkeley Women's Liberation began a successful campaign to put International Women's Day, the socialist holiday that had originated in the United States, back into American history. Then celebrated in many parts of the world, International Women's Day had been dropped out of American culture. It started on March 8, 1908 when immigrant women in New York City protested for the vote and to end sweat shops and child labor. This inspired the Second International in 1910 to declare a day of celebration. To revive this celebration, the Berkeley women led a march through town dressed in turn-of-the century garb of the immigrant women. Laura X, a West Coast women's liberation pioneer, had researched the history of International Women's Day and then began campaigning to spread its popularity in the United States. By 1970, the story of International Women's Day had spread through the movement, and the day was widely celebrated in cities and towns across the country. This had begun for Laura X as the hope that women in the New Left might gain the respect of male comrades if the men knew the history of women's radical accomplishments. It turned into a leftwing education for American women as celebrations of International Women's Day continued to catch on.

Thus as the women's liberation movement took off between 1968 and 1970, its new participants who had not been

in the civil rights movement or the New Left were introduced to the history and current activities not only of the left in America but of the international left. Hundreds of thousands of women were exposed by their local women's liberation group to Marxism, to blacklisted left films such as *Salt of the Earth*, to reports of visits to Cuba with the Venceremos Brigade, and to the progress (and lack of progress) the American left and the socialist nations had made on the woman question. They also learned about revolutions in the Third World--especially those in Cuba, Vietnam, Algeria, and China, and they were exposed to Marxist analysis and to the classic Marxist texts then under debate as to their usefulness for women's liberation.

And while women's liberation founders did not put much stock in it at the time, the original goal many had held of reforming male chauvinism in the left and the black movement was haltingly, unevenly, and under great pressure, showing signs of beginning. In response to an onslaught of fierce, unified, feminist protest, the other movements of the 1960s were starting to contend with sexism. Male chauvinism became an issue and an accusation to be responded to, resolutions condemning it were passed, and rules against it were promulgated. Women's liberation was no longer hooted off the floor at conventions; it was taking its place--at least on paper--as a central aspect of the fight against capitalism.

By the winter of 1968 and throughout 1969, SDS debated

carefully crafted resolutions on women's liberation. One such resolution passed at the National Council meeting in December 1968. It held that the "oppression of women through male supremacy" was greater than the oppression of the working class.⁴² The Black Panther Party also developed a position against male chauvinism. In 1970, Bobby Seale, cofounder and then chair of the Black Panthers wrote, "Even in the Party there are relationships between male and female that have to be ironed out ...The Party is working very hard and fast to break down male chauvinism."⁴³ The Young Lords Party, a leftwing Latino organization, also took a position against male chauvinism that included explicit examples of "machismo," the oppression of Latina women by Latino men. The fifth plank in the Young Lords "13 Point Program and Platform" stated: "We Want Equality for Women. Down with Machismo and Male Chauvinism...women have been oppressed by both society and our men. The doctrine of machismo has been used by men to take out their frustrations ...Men must realize that sisters and brothers are equals."⁴⁴

Nonetheless women within these organizations continued

⁴² SDS resolution at a National Council meeting in Ann Arbor, Mich., 26-31 December 1968, quoted in Sale, *SDS*, 508.

⁴³ Bobby Seale, *Seize The Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton* (New York: Random House, 1970), 394.

⁴⁴ Young Lords Party, "13 Point Program and Platform," in *Palante Young Lords Party* (New York: Young Lords Party, 1971), 150.

to protest men's sexism. Women's liberation founders considered these reforms lip service at best. At worst, they considered them out-and-out hypocrisy-- using women's liberation as a "political football" as the Gainesville groups put it. Fueling this view were eruptions of male chauvinism at an SDS conference in June 1969 in Chicago, and at the United Front against Fascism conference, cosponsored by the Black Panther Party and SDS that July in Oakland. At the June conference, factions within SDS had faced off over male chauvinism when each side boasted its superior understanding of the woman question. At the Oakland conference against fascism a month later, women protested the delay of a panel on women's liberation. Their time slot was being usurped by the keynote speaker's lengthy presentation. To their surprise and fury, their disruption was quelled when some of them were physically ejected from the conference and others were pushed around.

Yet amidst the weight of male chauvinism, signs of change continued to emerge. In 1972 the Black Panther Party, the only male led group to do so, supported the presidential campaign of Shirley Chisholm, an outspoken black feminist. This was at a time when Chisholm was subjected to insult in black political circles for being a "captive of the woman's movement" and a "matriarch."⁴⁵ And in Berkeley's premiere

⁴⁵ Shirley Chisholm quoted in Barbara Giddings, *When and*

commune, the "Red Family Collective," male movement "heavies," such as Tom Hayden, not only talked about women's liberation, but actually did child care. "He delivered with child care," said West Coast women's liberation organizer Ann Weills.⁴⁶ Weills also said that when Hayden broke commune rules and failed to defer to female leadership, he was charged with "committing acts of male chauvinism" and the charges were among those leading to his expulsion. Another example was shown when angry throngs of Berkeley women went to the home of a New Left co-worker whose particularly egregious acts of male chauvinism had been revealed in a consciousness-raising session. The women confronted him and threatened physical attack. According to Weills, Berkeley Women's Liberation had become "so powerful" that it "scared the men" into improving their behavior.⁴⁷

As women's consciousness rose, so did their standard for what constituted egalitarian behavior. On the overlapping boundaries between the women's liberation movement, the New Left and the black liberation movement, women's righteous anger at sexism was a force to be reckoned with. The left was reforming—but women's rising

Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America (New York: Bantam Books, 1984), 339. According to Giddings, the Black Panthers were the only major male-led organization that supported Chisholm's campaign.

⁴⁶ Ann Weills, interview by author, 15 June 2001, tape recording in the possession of the author.

consciousness far and away outstripped the changes.

Although sometimes it appeared so, it was not simply how angry women's liberation founders became at men--or how serious the next sexist incident was--that caused them to organize a new movement. Something else, something irresistibly compelling, was going on. Founders were calling for women's liberation and women, new women, came forward at a rate far greater than existing groups could accommodate. Unlike the men, whose reluctance to forego the privileges of their sex made them slow learners at best, the responsiveness of women, their eagerness to work for women's liberation, was unstoppable, electric. The spirit of early women's liberation was a freedom flame. It was so powerful. Two ideas capitalized on and combined with women's increasing economic independence from men and the undercurrent of women's pent up readiness for change: Sisterhood Is Powerful and consciousness-raising.

Sisterhood is Powerful

You must resist collectively...what ever it is,
the most important thing is to collectively
resist.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Naomi Weisstein quoting her mother Mary Menk Weisstein in Weisstein, letter to author, 1 March 2001.

Sisterhood Is Powerful was the idea that since women are an oppressed sex, problems rooted in sexism are best fought in a social movement. This view drew on the sources that influenced women's liberation founders to undertake the organization of a new movement. For most founders, lessons from civil rights and Black Power were the most important sources of the idea that to gain equality with men, women would need a powerful sisterhood, that is, unity in an independent movement.

In November 1967, from Chicago, the first women's liberation group called upon women in the New Left to create this movement.⁴⁹ Two months later in Washington, D.C., the call was made public with Kathie Sarachild's slogan "Sisterhood Is Powerful" on a leaflet at the first action of the new movement, the protest of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade's peace action. As five thousand women petitioned Congress against the war, Sarachild explained the ideas in the leaflet in a speech at the action. Describing women in their present condition as "powerless and ineffective over the issues of war and peace, as well as over our own lives," she called for a women's liberation movement. "We must see that we can only solve our problem together, that we cannot

⁴⁹ The West Side Group wrote an article that was published on 13 November 1967 in *New Left Notes*, "To the Women of the Left." "Realizing that this is a social problem of national significance not at all confined to our struggle...within the movement," they said, "...it is incumbent on us...to organize a movement for women's liberation."

solve it individually," Sarachild said.⁵⁰ Only with a feminist power base, she explained, would women gain enough political strength to influence issues of war and peace.

Sarachild's understanding of power relationships drew upon her participation in the civil rights movement. Before then she had already known that women's problems had political roots. But it was in Mississippi that she began to think about approaching women's problems in a mass movement. There, she gained a strategic understanding that for powerless black people only a mass movement could begin to face the power of the white establishment. Drawing a parallel, she saw that women, herself included, might confront male power in the same manner, and in fact could do it only that way.

If a social movement could concentrate enough power to democratize the situation between men and women, then this was the proposition many hundreds of thousands of women were going to have understand and embrace. Sarachild came to believe that like the everyday black people with whom she lived and worked in Mississippi, everyday women would be up to the challenge.

Judith Brown also learned this lesson in the civil rights movement, in the CORE Voter Education Project in North Florida. Brown's first civil rights arrest was in 1963

⁵⁰ Kathie Sarachild, "Funeral Oration," 21.

as part of a protest to integrate a movie theatre. On the anniversary of the project, she returned with CORE coworkers to one of the theatres that had been the site of mass arrests, one at which they had been met the year before by an armed white crowd. This time their small integrated group bought tickets and watched a movie without incident. Thus Brown learned the effectiveness of militant people power, the mobilization of "large numbers of people to take very militant action."⁵¹

Along with the effectiveness of people power, Brown, like Sarachild, gained confidence from the rural black people with whom she organized. She came to believe that women too would mobilize for militant mass action. For Brown, the lesson came this way: "I compared the subservient behavior of black people with that of women."⁵² Living for years in the South before the civil rights movement, Brown, without knowing what to make of it, had seen black people dissemble around whites. In the movement, she said, "seeing black people from the inside, strong, open, debating me, telling me I was wrong, teaching me, it was easy to think that women too were really this way."⁵³ Brown began to think

⁵¹ Judith Brown, interview by author, 9 April 1990, Gainesville, Fla., video recording, tape 3, Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

of how much she hated wearing make up and pretending to be dumb around men, began, as she said, to "immediately transfer" to women what she learned about blacks' alleged cheerful acceptance of their lot. "It was a tactic for survival," Brown said, "a strong thing not a meek, weak thing."⁵⁴

This understanding readied women's liberation founders like Brown and Sarachild for action because it provided a deep respect and admiration for their constituency, and the belief that women would organize. Not just the women in the New Left, or college educated women, or professional women-- there were not enough of them anyway. It gave confidence that most women, the very women who were needed to make people power effective because of their numbers, would unify and fight. Knowing that women were not satisfied, although they might appear to be, provided a basis for mass organizing. Brown, Sarachild, and others called this view the "Pro-Woman Line." Brown said it was the "basic radical idea of feminist groups."⁵⁵

Thus the civil rights movement provided two important roots for the concept Sisterhood Is Powerful. The first was that people power, organized into a mass movement, could counteract, even overrule, the power of the Establishment.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Judith Brown, "Editorial," in *The Radical Therapist* (Minot, North Dakota), August 1970, 2.

Secondly, one could organize subordinated people because they were not at all accepting of their lot, although they often tried to appear that way. These lessons for Sisterhood Is Powerful were not unique to Sarachild, Brown, and other women's liberation founders. These lessons, broadly realized, were among the reasons women's liberation organizing spread so quickly. Fully 70% of the women who had volunteered in Mississippi Freedom Summer participated in the Women's Liberation Movement.⁵⁶ They too had been primed by the essential lesson of people power and were ready for Sisterhood is Powerful, its application to the woman question.

The concept Sisterhood Is Powerful was also fueled by Black Power which provided the lesson and example, and thus legitimized organizing for one's self and one's group. Judith Brown caught the connection as she described local black power leader Jack Dawkins's understanding "perfectly" that with women's liberation, Brown wanted "to fight for my own self, my own sex."⁵⁷ If black people were fighting white supremacy, then women, looking to fight their own oppressor, ought to fight male supremacy. Out of this most basic analogy came the identification of one's self-interest not

⁵⁶ Olson, *Freedom's Daughters*, 354.

⁵⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 8 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

only a "born-into" constituency, but with the whole of that constituency, and thus even the worst off among that constituency.

From the civil rights movement came the understanding that women must unify for power because there was strength in sheer numbers. But from Black Power came the additional lesson that unity, or Sisterhood, was also needed, so that, as Sarachild said, men could not "play women off against each other."⁵⁸ The Redstockings Manifesto defined the "best interests of women as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited woman."⁵⁹ Redstockings explained that this was a practical, not a moral, matter because the lot of the poorest, most exploited woman "is the threat that men use against all of us to keep us in line."⁶⁰ Thus self-interest was linked inexorably with the self-determination of one's constituency and with the lowest among one's constituency. This was high-octane people power, exponential people power.

So for women, the logic of Black Power legitimized organizing in their own group's interests. Here was some relief, an antidote to arguments that women's liberation should take second place to anti-Vietnam War work, support for draft resisters, and such causes. Women's liberation

⁵⁸ Sarachild, "Funeral Oration," 21.

⁵⁹ Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto," 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

founders asked themselves how much more important, urgent, these other issues might be than the grievances of the often well educated, middle-class women complaining about sex and housework or protesting a beauty pageant. Women, so long loved for selflessness and despised for selfishness, found the legitimizing function of Black Power heartening. Black Power also extended to women, permission to seek self-determination for one's group, although it was not a class based constituency. This armed the women's liberation founders when facing opposition from some elements of the left.

Women's liberation identified itself with Black Power not only in its own publications, but also proudly, publicly, in the mainstream press. In January, 1968, Shulamith Firestone told *Newsday* that women's liberation was to the new women's movement what the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, by then widely identified with Black Power, was to the black movement. The same article noted that NOW described itself as an NAACP for women.⁶¹

Some women's liberation pioneers gained the lesson of people power and even legitimacy for women's liberation from their work in the New Left. Dee Ann Pappas and Marilyn Webb, for example, had learned about people power from organizing

⁶¹ Delores Alexander, "Outlook '68--Women's Rights, Militants Uniting in a New Group," *Newsday* (New York), 4 January 1968.

in the anti-Vietnam war movement. And Webb, along with other founders, attributed to the women of Vietnam the strength of her conviction that American women too needed a movement of their own. In the first issue of the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, Webb said, "We have learned from the black movement here and the women of Vietnam that the only way we can be a political force is to build our own movement."⁶² Because of their leadership in the anti-war movement, a number of American women's liberation founders were able to meet and talk about women's liberation with women from the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and the National Liberation Front (Vietcong). They learned about the organization of the Women's Union for Liberation. The second issue of the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* carried an interview with Mrs. Than Van Pham, a member of the executive committee of the Vietnamese Women's Union. According to Mrs. Pham, men had been learning to see women in a new way since the revolution in Vietnam in 1945. Now, she said, a "husband is willing to help his wife when she tells him she has to go to meeting or to a class."⁶³

The American women saw first-hand the political strength of their Vietnamese sisters. Vivian Rothstein, a

⁶² Marilyn Webb, article in *Voice*, March 1968, 4.

⁶³ "Women of Vietnam," *Voice*, June 1968, 10.

member of the West Side Group, was invited to Vietnam because the Vietnamese, not the American peace activists, insisted that women be included in the American delegation. In Vietnam, Rothstein saw women asked to speak first in meetings and their political work acknowledged and praised by male cadre.

Black women used the status of women in revolutionary Vietnam to combat nationalist arguments against a women's liberation movement. Some black nationalists held that black women should take secondary roles because matriarchy in the black community had emasculated black men. In the widely anthologized "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation As a Revolutionary Force," Mary Ann Weathers of Boston's Cell 16 made a case for Black Women's Liberation, using the example of the new freedoms of the Vietnamese women. "If you notice," Weathers said, "a woman is leading the 'Peace Talks' in Paris for the NLF. What is wrong with Black Women? Why can't we rightfully claim our place?"⁶⁴

Soon the example of the Vietnamese women's movement became widespread in America. In the South, women in the New Left from eleven southern states learned about the organizations of Vietnamese women at a women's conference in Atlanta called by SSOC. "There is much that can be learned

⁶⁴ Mary Ann Weathers, "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force," in *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Tanner, 304.

from them [Vietnamese women]," wrote long-time southern organizer Anne Braden in the *Southern Patriot*, the SCEF newspaper.⁶⁵ Beyond the left press, the mainstream press was a major purveyor of the example of Vietnamese women.

The *New York Times*, for example, opened a November 4, 1968, article with the quotation, "Because they boil with hatred, women struggle hard." The quote, from a founding document of the women's organization of the NLF or Vietcong, shared the center of the page with a photograph of Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh leading the NLF delegation at the Paris peace talks. The caption read, "The Vietcong have always recognized the political potential of women."⁶⁶ Interestingly, the caption, not placed in quotes, was repeated in the article itself where it appeared to represent, approvingly, the point of view of the *Times*. In its profile of the political life of Mrs. Binh, the article specifically noted that she had gotten her start in a radical women's organization.

The previous year, 1967, in the same month the first women's liberation groups in the nation formed, the *Times*, carried a large, striking photograph in the center of the front page. Looking even bigger in the photograph than he

⁶⁵ Ann Braden, "Southern Women Talk Freedom," in *The Southern Patriot* (Louisville, Ky.), 1 March 1969, 3.

⁶⁶ "Vietcong Spokesman, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh," *New York Times*, 4 November 1968, 7.

probably was, stood captured U.S. Air Force pilot, Lieut. Gerald Venanzi. Behind him with a large gun pointed at his back, stood a very small Vietnamese guerilla, smiling, her braided hair falling on her shoulders, which resolutely braced the gun.⁶⁷ The radical women in Vietnam had organized separately from the men. And radical women in Vietnam obviously could do much that American women could not. American women, as Firestone pointed out with chagrin, did not even have draft cards to burn. Now it was clear that the revolutionary Vietnamese women had not organized separately for strictly feminist goals, although feminist goals were certainly an important part of their program. The mixture of socialist and feminist goals, however, made their example all the more attractive to founders such as Webb and others who wanted a separate movement of women but sought to aim it against the war and the business order as well as against male domination.

Naomi Weisstein attributed her knowledge of the necessity for collective struggle to her upbringing on the left. "Most of us red diaper tykes learned early," she reflected, "you must resist collectively."⁶⁸ This was a lesson her mother taught her. While she was not always consciously "trying to live like a communist," she applied

⁶⁷ "A Captured American, Hanoi Says," *New York Times*, 9 October 1967, 1.

this lesson throughout her life.⁶⁹ Even when she sometimes blamed herself for what were actually social problems, as in the case of sexist treatment from men, Weisstein believed that she had a "parallel level of consciousness" on which she knew that "...the most important thing to do is to collectively resist."⁷⁰

Weisstein, like most founders who were red diaper babies, said that her family background taught her to understand male chauvinism as a political phenomenon. But Weisstein had also learned the importance of collective struggle against sexism, giving her a jumpstart on the need for an independent movement. This was reflected in proto-feminist organizing in her pre-movement days as a graduate student in the early 1960s. Organizing female graduate students into what they called "a syndicate," the women shared references on the male graduate students, blacklisted the worst, and told them so, and cruised together in groups. Weisstein was, as she said, putting up "a collective struggle against the barriers to our finding satisfying, loving relationships with men."⁷¹ The syndicate was not a movement, it could not get to the root of the lopsided

⁶⁸ Weisstein, letter to author, 1 March 2001.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Weisstein in Kesselman, with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," in 34.

sexual balance of power, but through it, Weisstein applied the principal of confronting male domination with a collective approach. She was the only red diaper founder to organize a pre-movement female syndicate, but a disproportionately high number of women's liberation founders shared her left background. Sarachild said her father, based on union work, had repeatedly told her that "in union there is strength." Thus a number of founders were predisposed to the concept of a collective approach to social activism.

As for the effectiveness of the strategy of Sisterhood Is Powerful, founders held that the movement's power not only would draw on great numbers of women, but on the cross-class and multi-racial nature of women's oppression. In early 1968 Firestone and Koedt wrote: "What is much more exciting...is that if you could appeal to women in general you would be appealing to 51% of the population ...Moreover a 51 percent that is spread evenly through all classes ...By reaching this first...class...you could crack the system right down the middle."⁷² In 1969, the Redstockings Manifesto put it this way, "We repudiate all economic, racial, educational, or status privileges that divide us

⁷² Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, New York, to Naomi Weisstein, Chicago, 1 March 1968, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

from other women."⁷³ Repudiation of privilege in order to build sisterhood was not a moral matter but a strategic one: a battle plan meant to maximize the power of the movement by uncovering and then overcoming divisions among women. In a debate with SCEF's Anne Braden as to whether the new women's liberation movement would be anti-capitalist and anti-racist, Hanisch wrote, "We can show in personal terms how women's liberation not only means destruction of the capitalist system, but a strong attack on racism ...The movement...will make a majority of the population want...to give up their privileges to get their liberation (emphasis Hanisch)."⁷⁴ But how would this idea play out on a daily basis?

To build solidarity, Brown and Sarachild began to discuss a movement code requiring that women incur no personal gain at another woman's expense. If she had enough money to afford a housekeeper, a woman would insist her husband share the housework instead of exploiting a less privileged woman. If a sister was in jail, no other woman should go out with her boyfriend. "If we are going to work in a mass movement," Sarachild wrote to Brown, "we're going to have to give up such personal outs, our racial and

⁷³ Redstockings, "Redstockings Manifesto," 8.

⁷⁴ Carol Hanisch, New York, to Anne Braden, Louisville, Ky., 17 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

economic privileges."⁷⁵

Although such a code might strengthen unity, it would not build a movement. Neither would the belief in the necessity for a movement or the potential of movement power. As Weisstein said, one might know that social failings required collective resistance. But most women, while dissatisfied with many aspects of their lives, understood the sources of this dissatisfaction as personal failings requiring personal solutions rather than as the result of sexism. Firestone said what was needed was "group consciousness [and]...the power that comes through its development ...First we must develop that power and that means reaching women as a class, all the women that we can."⁷⁶ Understanding Sisterhood Is Powerful--the slogan--was not enough.

As Sarachild said, "We saw that...our own liberation depended on our reaching the masses of women ...Out of finding ways to achieve these goals...the ideas about consciousness-raising came."⁷⁷ Consciousness-raising would teach many thousands of women that their individual problems

⁷⁵ Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 18 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁷⁶ Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt, New York, to Naomi Weisstein, Chicago, 1 March 1968, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

⁷⁷ Sarachild, "The Civil Rights Movement: Lessons for

with men were political problems not personal ones. This understanding filled women with angry energy and released them from some of the time they had heretofore spent on personal self-improvement into a battle for a collective solution--the women's liberation movement.

Women's Liberation," 8.

CHAPTER 10

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING, THE IDEA THAT BUILT THE MOVEMENT

In the Old Left they used to say that the workers don't know they're oppressed so we have to raise their consciousness...Would everybody please give me an example from their own life on how they experienced oppression as a woman?¹

Consciousness-raising was a method of creating a female equivalent of the Marxist concept of working class consciousness.² As it was developed in late 1967 by NYRW, Consciousness-raising owed the old left for the concept of class consciousness and the civil rights and Black Power movements for black consciousness. Anne Forer, a red diaper baby, made clear the old left connection when she proposed the idea of recounting women's experiences soon after she joined the group. Forer understood that workers were oppressed as a group, but she said that she had just begun thinking about women that way. After asking the women in the group to speak in turn, giving their experiences, she began to do this herself. She spoke about feeling that she never

¹ Anne Forer quoted in Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 20.

² Lynn O'Connor of Redstockings West, in San Francisco, put it this way: "consciousness-raising...refers to a long and logical process that leads to a synthesis of the personal consciousness to which psychoanalysts have given their attention, and the political or class consciousness of the Marxists," Lynn O'Connor, "Defining Reality," *Tooth and*

measured up to all the ways women were supposed to be attractive. She gave examples of how she had played dumb, faked niceness, gone on diets, and used the latest make up. The women in the group recognized their own struggles. Forer had raised everyone's female consciousness. The group was impressed with the idea of asking and answering questions. And most important, they were surprised and elated by all that they had learned. If they could learn so much this way, other women surely would too. They decided to ask, also, who benefited from women's continued investment in individual solutions? They planned to take actions that would raise consciousness so that they could begin building a movement.

Sarachild was in the meeting where Forer had asked women for an "example from their own life." "Kathie was sitting behind me," Forer said, "and the words rang in her mind. From then on she made it an institution and called it consciousness-raising."³ Shulamith Firestone, also in the meeting, saw Sarachild as "the originator of the concept of 'consciousness-raising.'"⁴ Indeed, from then on Sarachild led in developing the method into a program for the new movement, and at the first national women's liberation conference, in November 1968, she presented it as "A Program

Nail, 1 October 1969, Redstockings Archives.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ Shulamith Firestone, introductory notes to "A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," in *Notes II*, ed. Firestone and Koedt, 78, Redstockings Archives.

for Feminist Consciousness-Raising."⁵

Sarachild said that the program was "planned on the assumption that a mass liberation movement will develop as more and more women begin to perceive their situation correctly...Therefore our primary task right now is to awaken 'class' consciousness...on a mass scale."⁶ Toward that end, the program outlined various aspects of consciousness-raising. These included giving testimony-- "recalling and sharing our bitter experiences" by going around the room answering questions on particular topics, questioning the testimony--"cross examination"--and looking for a common root for different feelings and experiences.⁷

The program was comprehensive. It explained forms of false reasoning such as believing one had "power behind the throne" or failing to reveal problems with a man because of loyalty. The program proposed training consciousness-raising organizers who would dare to speak out and expose apparently personal experiences in order to organize new groups. The plan was for each woman in the "bitch session cell group" to train as such an organizer.⁸

⁵ Kathie Sarachild, "A Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings (New York: Random House, 1978), 202-203.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Finally, the program called for developing radical feminist theory through consciousness-raising:

understanding oppression wherever it exists in our lives--our oppression as black people, workers, tenants, consumers, children,...as well as our oppression as women... analyzing whatever privileges we may have--the white skin privilege, the education and citizenship of a big power (imperialist) nation privilege, and seeing how these help to perpetuate our oppression as women, workers."⁹

Thus the Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising would get to the bottom of divisions among women and other oppressed groups, and at the same time, would produce reasons to confront the divisions and resolve them.

Moreover, the program challenged women to "take off the rose colored glasses" and "face the awful truth." It emphasized the important assumption that women themselves were the experts on their own behavior, motives, and feelings. It recognized the "survival reasons" that women sometimes resisted consciousness-raising.¹⁰ Sarachild and the team that proposed the program argued for holding all existing theory to the test of women's experience. Developing theory and raising consciousness in the manner explained in the program almost always produced intense, deep, and lasting emotions of relief and anger, accompanied by the excitement of understanding one's life in a new way.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

As the Women's Majority Union, a women's liberation group in Seattle described it, a participant felt as if " my mind is growing muscles."¹¹

Feminist consciousness felt astounding because in the mid-1960s sexism was simply unknown to most women as a social reality. Women struggled for happiness, security, interesting work, and satisfying love relationships, never factoring in the power imbalance between the sexes as a reason that these goals were difficult to attain. Thus women considered their difficulties the result of personal inadequacies. They endlessly sought individual remedies that, as Anne Forer's moving testimony revealed, never seemed to solve the problems, and worse, often left one feeling more of a loser than before.

To listen to ten or fifteen women telling the ways in which each worked toward a goal, and to see that even the seemingly successful and beautiful, the seemingly happily married, felt they had failed, brought home a message. The faults an individual woman saw in herself were not the problem. Instead, something bigger, something systemic was stacked against her. Suddenly a participant in a consciousness-raising group felt years of self-blame fall away. Women stopped thinking they were not intelligent enough, not attractive enough, not trying hard enough, or had not yet found the right strategy. They stopped thinking

¹¹ *Lilith* (Seattle), December 1968, 7.

that just "trying a little harder" was the answer. Writer and activist Vivian Gornick called the dawning of feminist consciousness "using the steady examination of my own experience, ...squeezing the slave out of oneself drop by drop."¹²

The female version of the Horatio Alger myth was being vanquished. In the same moment of female class conscious insight, women felt freedom from self blame and realized a vast sometimes overwhelming fury at whatever or whoever was discovered as the beneficiary of one's previously low consciousness. Anselma Dell'Olio, an early member of NYRW, described her discovery of feminist consciousness this way:

...the ecstasy of...relief from a tension between who I was, and who I was supposed to be. Ever since I could remember, I...overflowed with high spirits I was always trying to stifle...One leg was tied to a post and the other was trying to run like hell. Feminism allowed me to make the leap from rumbling volcano...to rebel with a cause. It was like teaching an illiterate to read.

¹³

And Judith Brown described the anger: "I am recognizing the machinery of our oppression in such detail that I really feel as if I am having to begin all over in my relationships with men. I am so furious at all men for what I am only

¹² Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 258.

¹³ Anselma Dell'Olio, "Home Before Sundown," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, eds. DuPlessis and Snitow, 150.

beginning to see as the depth of our oppression."¹⁴

Finally, along with insight, relief, fury, and excitement, this new group consciousness often brought with it a generalized love for women. The love was born of a new appreciation for oneself and one's sex as fighters rather than failures, survivors rather than victims. Suddenly women participating in consciousness-raising groups were proud to be women: women were strong, not weak; smart, not dumb; angry, not cheerfully accepting of their lot; "messed over, not messed up" as Carol Hanisch put it.¹⁵

Men were more surprised by all of this than women were. A male newspaper reporter caught it pretty well, "How could we guess that Lady Clairol gloss covered up the mind of a revolutionary?"¹⁶ Women joined the movement in droves and, along with demonstrations and meetings, they sometimes ganged up and physically attacked men known for particularly severe male chauvinist behavior, or they demonstrated en masse at a fired sister's employer, enduring arrest to win back her job. Feminist consciousness produced a kind of

¹⁴ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 16 October 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

¹⁵ Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," in *Feminist Revolution*, 204. Of course some women did not take to consciousness-raising. Women passed in and out of groups constantly and easily as there were, unlike NOW, no formal memberships or dues in the women's liberation branch of the movement.

¹⁶ Bill Hager, *Gainesville Sun* (Fla.), 5 January 1969, 4.

solidarity that shocked many women too. Forer described the change: "Up to that point my big problem with women was that I saw them as competition. I walked into that meeting and saw something different. Women were seeing their interests as one. It was the most wonderful thing that ever, ever happened."¹⁷ NYRW had not conducted Consciousness-Raising before then. But what Forer saw there were women who had come, just a few years before millions of others would, to see their interests as one.

For many of the women in NYRW, the idea of raising female class-consciousness had been jump started in the civil rights movement, where they had learned variations of the consciousness-raising method and witnessed its power. Pam Allen, cofounder of NYRW, reflected, "I was a freedom school teacher in '64 and I certainly was steeped in the idea of using people's own experiences...concrete examples of racism like streets in the white neighborhood being paved and streets in the black not being paved, although everybody paid taxes. This being an example of unfair, discriminatory treatment, not inferiority."¹⁸ Sarachild said, "We were applying to women and to ourselves as women's liberation organizers the practice a number of us had learned as organizers in the civil rights movement in the South in the

¹⁷ Anne Forer quoted in Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 21.

¹⁸ Pam Allen, letter to author, 27 June 2002.

early 1960's."¹⁹ Testifying (as the method was called in the civil rights movement), helped to produce unity. A SNCC field organizer in a tough campaign in Albany, Georgia described the process this way: "Our only hope was unity. This had been the real reason for the mass meeting--to weld the community into one bond of reason and emotion. The force to do this was generated by accounts of the released students who individually described the physical situation and mental state of each, in jail."²⁰ Founders like Sarachild, Allen, and Judith Brown had participated in many such mass meetings.

As they met and corresponded, these founders taught consciousness-raising to others. In January 1968, when Pam Allen and Dee Ann Pappas met at the protest of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade demonstration, Pappas said that Allen taught her a variant of recounting experiences that Allen was using in Sudsofloppen, her group in San Francisco. Based on this, Pappas organized a consciousness-raising group in Baltimore.²¹ Founders in Gainesville and New York had formed

¹⁹ Kathie Sarachild, "Consciousness-Raising: A Radical Weapon," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings, 145.

²⁰ Charles Sherrod, "Albany, Georgia," in James Forman, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries* (Seattle: Open Hand, 1985), 247.

²¹ Allen did not call what she was doing "consciousness-raising." She called it "the small group process" to create "Free Space." The development of consciousness-raising was much argued over. Although the essential element of sharing experiences was a part of Allen's method, there were

a "Life Group" of consciousness-raising organizers who developed a number of the program elements together. Judith Brown had learned the method from Kathie Sarachild and Carol Hanisch the previous August at the first national meeting and two weeks later used it to organize the women's liberation group in Gainesville, Florida. Thus having emanated from New York City, consciousness-raising organizing was underway in Baltimore, San Francisco, Gainesville, and several other cities when Sarachild put on the program at the November 1968 national conference.

The basis for Brown's strong, immediate reaction to consciousness-raising stemmed from her participation in mass meetings in the civil rights movement. There, Patricia Stephens Due, the young black CORE Field Secretary insisted that like black participants, Brown speak from personal experience about why she was there. This was difficult at first, because as Brown said, "This exercise that Pat put me through was entirely unfamiliar to me...I took to consciousness-raising as legitimate because of what I slowly learned in this manner."²² Brown also remembered her surprise at the forthright speaking style of Due's family,

conceptual differences, described by Allen in her book "free space: a perspective on the small group in women's liberation" (New York: Times Change Press, 1970). Dee Ann Pappas, interview by author, 19 September 2000, New York, tape recording in the possession of author.

²² Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, n.d., transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

who, without embarrassment, shared problems that to Brown seemed at first to be personal and private. The lack of embarrassment with which they recounted these experiences suggested to Brown that the family attributed responsibility for the problems to racism rather than to personal failure. This was just what Brown wanted consciousness-raising to do for women.

Some founders had already been thinking about the woman question because of the influence of Beauvoir and their upbringing on the left. Now their experience of testifying and speaking out in the civil rights movement helped pave the way for feminist consciousness-raising. For other founders, Beauvoir provided the major and sole source of consciousness-raising. Reading *The Second Sex* was like participating in a world-historical consciousness-raising group. Women from the beginning of time and from many nations testified about the depth and variety of their experiences with male supremacy. At the same time, the world's men testified to their love of the benefits of domination over women. From a French woman's misfortune in marriage to the misfortune of a single woman in America, to Chinese foot binding, to the double day of women in socialist countries, from cradle to grave, in the world and in literature, Beauvoir detailed, interpreted, and condemned the oppression of women and their domination by men.

After reading *The Second Sex*, many women found it hard

to see disappointments in relationships with men in anything but a world historical context. Chronicler of American social movements Lawrence Lader observed that *The Second Sex* had been "quickly absorbed into the thinking of the average woman...in remote corners of the country."²³ After Sarachild read *The Second Sex* she saw how male supremacy affected everything in her life. She felt as if her eyes were being opened and her consciousness "seared."²⁴ Thus along with raising the consciousness of the founders, the widespread popularity of *The Second Sex*, from its publication in America in 1953 until its ninth U.S. printing in 1965, contributed to the readiness of American women for a women's liberation movement.

Like the influence of Beauvoir, some founders' upbringing on the left helped make consciousness-raising and its importance easier to understand. In particular, exposure to the concept of class-consciousness clarified the need for women to develop group consciousness if they were to understand that they must unify for change. A worker without class-consciousness, after all, was vulnerable to the Horatio Alger myths of capitalism. A woman with low female consciousness was no better off. Such a woman, as Mary King

²³ Lawrence Lader, *Power on the Left* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1979), 294.

²⁴ Sarachild, statement at the Simone de Beauvoir Memorial Speakout, tape recording in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

put it, would, without understanding why her life was as it was, "float like flotsam on a sea of male bias."²⁵

Anne Forer considered raising consciousness "a regular expression from Marxism: 'I think I need to have my consciousness-raised.'"²⁶ She had lifelong familiarity with the concept as fuel for union organizing and for proletarian revolution. When Kathie Sarachild told Nancy Hawley, her old friend from high school, about consciousness-raising, Hawley caught on quickly. Hawley was a red diaper baby whose mother had been active in the Communist Party. Hawley soon organized the first consciousness-raising group in Boston. Later she used consciousness-raising to create the Boston Women's Health Collective, which brought out the now classic *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. This book, filled with women's testimony on health care, with its large cover photograph of marching women holding high a "Women Unite" poster, rallied a movement to reform women's treatment in the health care system.²⁷ The upbringing on the left of pioneer organizers such as Hawley quickened their appreciation of the need for women to become conscious that they must unify.

²⁵ King, *Freedom Song*, 76.

²⁶ Forer quoted in Margaret Rivka Polatnick, "Strategies for Women's Liberation: A Study of a Black and a White Group of the 1960s" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, 1985), 127.

²⁷ Boston Women's Health Course Collective, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Course by and for Women* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1971).

But opposition to capitalism as the source of women's oppression did not predispose founders of this persuasion to consciousness-raising. Indeed, most members of the West Side Group saw capitalism as the root of women's oppression and they had reservations about consciousness-raising. "Almost despite ourselves," early member Amy Kesselman reflected, the women testified excitedly but reluctantly about what many regarded as their personal lives.²⁸ "After we kicked around capitalist disaccumulation for a while, we zoomed back and talked about monogamy...about cosmetics," said Naomi Weisstein.²⁹ When "ideas about the politics of personal life welled up uncontrollably," Kesselman said, the women felt guilty about not "being on the streets" taking action against the system.³⁰

The women's liberation group in New Orleans also saw capitalism as the root of women's oppression. They feared that unlike raising class consciousness, raising women's consciousness was just "therapy." But they allowed "therapy type sessions" because, as one member said, "many women have very serious personal problems that they feel they have to straighten out first before they can engage in anything

²⁸ Amy Kesselman in Kesselman with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 40.

²⁹ Naomi Weisstein in Kesselman with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 40.

³⁰ Kesselman in Kesselman with Booth, Rothstein, and Weisstein, "Our Gang of Four," 40.

outside of themselves."³¹ From Gainesville, where the consciousness-raising method was being spread across the South, Judith Brown wrote to the New Orleans group, "We do not believe there are such things as 'personal problems' for oppressed people." Using the example of a male worker, Brown argued: "When he feels subjectively his objective oppression by capitalism, [he] is feeling a political problem. To call his problem 'personal' is to ignore the power relationship in which he suffers daily. . .we call such problems 'political,' in the sense that they reflect the effects of oppressor power on the oppressed and they are a consequence of that imbalanced power relationship" (emphasis Brown).³²

Brown believed that the New Orleans group feared disapproval from the left, much of which, at least white men in the United States, did see consciousness-raising as therapy. Thus to get her point across, she used the example of a male worker. To show that consciousness-raising was espoused by revolutionaries in other nations, she included in her letter SDS leader Greg Calvert's description of Guatemalan guerrillas organizing a new village:

They do not talk about the 'anti-imperialist struggle'...they gather together the people one by

³¹ Dottie Zellner quoted in Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to "Women's Liberation Group, New Orleans," c/o SCEF, Louisville, Ky., 9 June 1969, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³² Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Women's Liberation Group, New Orleans, c/o SCEF, Louisville, Ky., 9 June 1969.

one. Then the guerrillas rise and talk...about their own lives...how the things they've striven for...were frustrated by the society in which they lived...The guerrillas encourage the villagers to talk about their lives...people who thought that their deepest problems were their individual problems discover that their longings are all the same...out of the discovery of their common humanity comes the decision that men must unite together...to destroy their common oppression.³³

The method used by the Guatemalan organizers appeared to transform the consciousness of the villagers much as consciousness-raising did with American women. The method had been used in the same way in the Chinese revolution, where it was described as "Speak Pains to Recall Pains." There, cadre had posed questions about landlords and tenants such as "who needs who." The peasants came together in village meetings to answer the questions based on their experiences and talk over their conclusions. This was described in detail in *Fanshen*, a book about the Chinese Revolution Sarachild had helped to spread through women's liberation.³⁴

Sarachild saw consciousness-raising by the Chinese Communists, in the Women's Liberation Movement, and in the Black Movement as very similar. Thus she, Carol Hanisch, and Irene Peslikis put the Chinese slogan "Speak Pains to Recall Pains" on a wall poster with "Bitch Sisters Bitch" and "Tell

³³ Greg Calvert quoted in Redstockings, ed., *Feminist Revolution*, 184.

³⁴ William Hinton, *Fanshen: A Documentary of Revolution in a Chinese Village* (New York: Vintage Books, 1968).

it like it is." They brought it to meetings of NYRW and hung it on the wall. Later, Redstockings put up the poster. Colette Price, a member of NYRW who read *Fanshen* said of the method of learning about the economic relationship between landlords and peasants, "We were asking many of the same questions about the relations between men and women. *Fanshen* encouraged me with its startling indication that what we were on to with consciousness-raising was truly a universal, radical, mass revolutionary process."³⁵ The Chinese and Guatemalan radicals were clearly not conducting therapy sessions. But when American women applied the same process to discussions of housework or sex, portions of the left called this therapy.

Carol Hanisch's classic radical feminist essay, "The Personal is Political," was originally written as a letter to the women of SCEF to dispel the notion that consciousness-raising was therapy." These analytical sessions," Hanisch wrote, "are a form of political action." She explained:

I do not go because I...want to talk about my 'personal problems.' In fact I would rather not. As a movement woman, I've been pressured to be strong, selfless ...not admit I have any real problems that I can't find a personal solution to. One of the first things we discover...is that personal problems are political problems. There

³⁵ Colette Price, "The Cultural Revolution, the Women's Liberation Movement and the Spirit of the '60s," speech given at a Symposium *China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution: Its Goals, Achievements, and Significance*," Hunter College, 23 April 1987, 3, Redstockings Archives.

are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution."³⁶

When she wrote "The Personal is Political," Hanisch had just opened SCEF's "Freedom for Women" project in Gainesville. Despite the reservations of many in SCEF that consciousness-raising was therapy, Hanisch was working with Judith Brown and others in Gainesville Women's Liberation to spread consciousness-raising throughout the South.

Brown had seen immediately the potential of this approach to unify women. When she organized Gainesville Women's Liberation, she wrote to Sarachild for help: "Kathie, would you please send me a list of topics you people have discussed? Also I would like a model phrasing of questions."³⁷ Sarachild responded by sending NYRW's questions and the questions she had written for the group she'd visited in Berkeley with a caveat that she found Berkeley's style "too formal."³⁸

Within six months of its first meeting, Gainesville Women's Liberation helped organize consciousness-raising groups in Miami, Sarasota, and St. Petersburg. The Gainesville women wrote to these groups sharing questions,

³⁶ Hanisch, "The Personal is Political," 204.

³⁷ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, 1 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³⁸ Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek], New York, to Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., 3 September 1968, transcript in the

and they demonstrated consciousness-raising at SSOC conferences in Atlanta and Tallahassee. Brown wrote to Hanisch, "It would be well to get to a few women quickly with the 'New York' approach. One of our members--previously on the staff of Vietnam Summer--and a hard line feminist, just moved to Miami and she's starting a group there."³⁹ Brown meant consciousness-raising when she referred to the "New York approach."

Hanisch opened the Freedom for Women project in Gainesville. Then she and Sarachild visited the group which was developing in Miami and Hanisch reported to SCEF on its use of consciousness-raising:

Someone suggested we go around the room with the question 'Do you think your mother was messed up?' We began to see that our mothers were just giving us one side of the contradiction ...[their] mothers had encouraged them not to have sex before marriage...they had chosen the other side of the alternative--having sex without marriage. The common root of both alternatives is that men leave you if you sleep with them and leave you if you don't.⁴⁰

Brown wrote to Sarachild about the effectiveness of the material Sarachild sent her and spoke of plans to use it with the new groups. "Those minutes you sent are priceless;

possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

³⁹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Carol Hanisch, New York, 18 September 1968, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴⁰ Carol Hanisch, "Freedom for Women, Report #7 Miami," to SCEF, Louisville, Ky., 13 March 1969, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

the N.C. stronghold and the Sarasota group want them immediately," she said.⁴¹ Similarly, Hanisch reported helping the emerging group in Sarasota use consciousness-raising: "When we arrived we told them how we used the method of a question which everybody answered and they decided to try it. The meeting turned out to be the best one they ever held."⁴²

The spread of consciousness-raising from Gainesville exemplifies its dissemination from a number of other cities. From New York, for example, it spread to Boston via Sarachild on a visit to Nancy Hawley; to Gainesville via Sarachild and Hanisch to Brown at the Sandy Springs meeting; to Baltimore via Pam Allen to Dee Ann Pappas at the Jeanette Rankin Brigade protest; to San Francisco via Pam Allen when she moved there; and to Berkeley via NYRW's Jenny Gardner. Consciousness-Raising also spread nationally, after demonstration and distribution of the program at women's liberation's first national conference.

In the months preceding the Lake Villa conference, Gainesville Women's Liberation and NYRW had been working together on consciousness-raising strategies. Early drafts

⁴¹ Judith Brown, Gainesville, Fla., to Kathie Sarachild [Amatniek] 10 February 1969, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

⁴² Carol Hanisch, Gainesville, Fla., "Freedom for Women, Report #6 Sarasota," to SCEF, Louisville, Ky., 3 March 1969, transcript in the possession of author, Redstockings Archives.

and revisions of Sarachild's "Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising" had flown in letters between New York and Gainesville. At the conference, the "Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising" was demonstrated in a workshop, hotly debated in plenary sessions, and disseminated in written form to over two hundred women from thirty-seven states and Canada. These women formed the nucleus of the organizers of the movement in 1968. From the conference the program was carried back to groups across the nation.

Thus consciousness-raising was put together by specific women out of particular traditions, and purposefully disseminated along routes that before 1970, are traceable. Like the need for a women's liberation movement embodied in the concept Sisterhood Is Powerful, consciousness-raising, the movement's central organizing strategy, was first advocated by only a minority of founders. But then, also like Sisterhood Is Powerful, the method took root even among many of those who had first opposed it.

Before long, consciousness-raising groups were multiplying far faster than the originators and early advocates of the program could keep track of. Consciousness-raising radiated across the country. Founders organized with the method, and women in the groups they had organized taught it to their friends, who then organized more consciousness-raising groups. Along with face-to-face

organizing, Sarachild's written program and articles about consciousness-raising by other founders were popularized in the many mass-market women's liberation anthologies which began to come out in 1970. Pam Allen's essay, "free space: a perspective on the small group," was anthologized and made popular a variation of consciousness-raising.⁴³ Calling it "the rap," black women's groups used another variation of consciousness-raising, which was described in 1970 in an article in Toni Cade's widely read anthology, *The Black Woman*.⁴⁴ Poor Black Women, the black women's liberation group in Mt. Vernon and New Rochelle, New York, emphasized raising women's consciousness using a method of telling and analyzing experiences with men as a way to accomplish this goal.⁴⁵

By 1970, every major city had at least one consciousness-raising group. Many cities and towns had several, as organizers tried to limit the number of women in each group. Lawrence Lader called consciousness-raising "the most powerful force of the movement."⁴⁶ In 1971, the *New York*

⁴³ The essay was also published separately as a small book, Pam Allen, *Free Space: A Perspective on the Small Group in Women's Liberation* (New York: Times Change Press, 1970).

⁴⁴ Adele Jones and Group, "Ebony Minds, Black Voices," in *The Black Woman*, ed. Cade, 180-88.

⁴⁵ Patricia Robinson, "The Revolt of Poor Black Women," in *Lessons from the Damned: Class Struggle in the Black Community* (New York: Times Change Press, 1973), 17.

⁴⁶ Lader, *Power on the Left*, 295.

Times in conjunction with CBS News, brought out *The Rebirth of Feminism*, a mass market history of the new movement. This publication called consciousness-raising the "the most widespread organizational unit of the movement."⁴⁷

Between 1972 and 1975 consciousness-raising crossed over from radical women's liberation into the liberal branch of the movement. It began to spread through NOW in 1973 when Ivy Bottini, an early New York City chapter president, demonstrated it to the Los Angeles NOW chapter, the second largest chapter in the nation. There, Harriet Perl and Gay Abarbanell, two Los Angeles members, wrote about its effectiveness with "trying to get women to see how they were oppressed." In 1975 the two put together the pamphlet, "Guidelines for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," which NOW later officially adopted. In 1976, under Perl's leadership, NOW convened a national "Taskforce on Consciousness-Raising."⁴⁸

In 1972 a new women's magazine, *Ms.*, funded with one million dollars from Warner Communications, began publication. *Ms.* both publicized and deradicalized

⁴⁷ Hole and Levine, *Rebirth*, 126.

⁴⁸ National Organization for Women, *NOW Guidelines for Feminist Consciousness-Raising* (Washington, D.C.: National Organization for Women, 1982). Alexandra Leader details the spread of consciousness-raising in NOW and compares its use by NOW and the radical feminists in an unpublished paper, "Consciousness-Raising in the Women's Liberation Movement and the National Organization for Women: Theory and Practice" (Undergraduate honors thesis, University of

consciousness-raising. The magazine advertised the "Ms. Guide to Consciousness-Raising," a version that promoted a new identity and individual self-improvement, unlike that of women's liberation and NOW which promoted female class consciousness for collective protest against sexism. By then, however, consciousness-raising had already spread the collective approach throughout the nation; the mass grassroots movement was well established by 1970.⁴⁹ That year the "Women's Strike for Equality" on August 26, the anniversary of the suffrage amendment, saw agitation by women in 42 states, and in New York City, 50,000 women marched down 5th Avenue.⁵⁰ It was the largest ever feminist protest.

Consciousness-raising thus became an effective force for social change because it taught women to see their everyday problems as socially produced and to seek collective solutions in a social movement. As women answered consciousness-raising questions, they themselves identified the agents of sexism. At the same time, the participants produced a theory of women's oppression--the Personal is

Florida, 1994), Collection of the Judith Brown Endowment.

⁴⁹ British sociologist David Bouchier has estimated that by 1969 there were some 500 women's liberation groups in America, in "every city and most towns." David Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge: The Movement for Women's Liberation in Britain and the United States* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 55.

⁵⁰ Estimate of the number of marchers in New York from Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open*, xxii.

Political--to explain what they had learned. The everyday issues testified about in meetings produced a spate of vastly popular and widely anthologized consciousness-raising theory papers, papers like Pat Mainardi's "The Politics of Housework" and Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm."⁵¹ These papers were as accessible in style and language as the testimony which generated them.

Consciousness-raising spread, too, because any woman could take part in it--and even lead it. The method itself contained the message of its underlying concept: that women themselves were the best experts on women. Although consciousness-raising groups developed leaders, a group did not depend on special expertise to get underway. No teacher or "facilitator" was required. Unlike a book or a course, consciousness-raising was free, and there was no outside reading. There was no paperwork at all. It required no license or permit and no public space. Most consciousness-raising was done in participants' homes in groups no larger than ten or fifteen. A woman needed only to come up with a question and to invite a few friends and neighbors over for an evening meeting. Invariably, existing groups gave rise to more groups as enthusiastic participants moved and started new groups, or groups grew too large for participants'

⁵¹ Pat Mainardi, "The Politics of Housework," in *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, ed. Morgan, 447-54; Anne Koedt, "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," in *Voices from Women's Liberation*, ed. Tanner, 157-65.

living rooms. The infinite portability of consciousness-raising, along with its exponential way of expanding, brought ever-increasing numbers of women into the women's liberation movement. It literally made sisterhood powerful.

Sisterhood Is Powerful and consciousness-raising thus capitalized on all that the founders learned from their families, the influence of Beauvoir, the old and new left, and from the civil rights and Black Power movements. The truth of the power of a collective approach to the limitations sexism imposed upon women was demonstrated by a ready constituency. From 1963 to 1970 women made history speed up for their sex; change came at a pace that made just about everyone's head spin.

Why did it come so fast? What made women mobilize so readily? Actually, the question more typically asked is, why did women wait so long? Women's reentry into the paid labor force had returned to its previous wartime level by 1950. In the late 1950s, *The Second Sex* had already gone through several American editions. By 1957, progressive black writer Lorraine Hansberry was growing impatient. She had read *The Second Sex* in 1953, the year it came out in America and was thrilled by it. "Four years have passed...since *The Second Sex*. It is four years since [the] revolutionary treatment of the 'woman question' exploded upon the consciousness of...American book

readers," Hansberry said, "Four years and one waits."⁵²

During the long wait from the early 1950s to the mid-1960s, significant underlying changes were occurring that were helping to erode women's economic dependency on men.

Thus when female consciousness began rising, changes that made increased independence possible were well underway. As William Chafe has pointed out, these changing demographic and employment trends coincided with, were "working for, not against," demands such as legal abortion, public child care, shared housework, respect, equal pay--the changes the new movement sought (emphasis Chafe).⁵³ And so the ideas of consciousness-raising and Sisterhood Is Powerful found favorable social conditions and a receptive constituency in which to successfully stir feminist consciousness and a women's liberation movement.

⁵² Lorraine Hansberry, "Simone de Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*: An American commentary," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, ed. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, 128-29. New York: The New Press, 1995.

⁵³ William Chafe, *The Paradox of Change*, 201.

CHAPTER 11

THE MOVEMENT GOES NATION-WIDE AND INTERNATIONAL, 1968-1970

It was just a few women meeting in a room... Someone said this movement could go nation-wide and international.¹

In 1970 four out of five Americans knew there was a women's liberation movement.² The base of the movement was already in place when the founding national conference convened at Lake Villa, Illinois, in November 1968. Over the next two years, Anne Forer's awed observation became a reality--women's liberation took off--nationwide and international. By 1970, the mass grass-roots movement was powerful, popular, radical. Lawmakers rushed to catch up with women's liberation. At the least, male laggards of all sorts could expect to be disrupted by direct action, sued in class action lawsuits, or find their male chauvinist ways detailed in the morning papers or a popular book or pamphlet.

Corporate offices across the country were picketed, stormed, and sat-in by throngs of women, as was the stock market, and much else as well from the U.S. Senate to the

¹ Anne Forer quoted in Polatnick, "Strategies," 128.

² Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 397.

Whitney Museum opening in New York City. Angry women's liberation "truth squads" confronted men on male chauvinist behavior and photographs of grimacing women breaking boards in all-female karate classes appeared in the news.

Litigation and formal complaints and charges filed for sex discrimination were ubiquitous. NOW, for example, filed a "blanket" complaint against 1300 major corporations.³ Women also filed charges against the entire state system of colleges and universities in Florida, California, and New York. Just about every major news magazine was charged with sex discrimination by its female employees. Stewardesses sued the airlines, women brought charges against their unions, and female officers sued the armed forces. A number of states and even the federal government were sued. Among the several suits against states were class actions by thousands of female plaintiffs who had been denied abortions. All this happened between 1968 and 1970.

Small wonder then, that these two years saw women's liberation continuously in the news, with headlines in local papers, the front page of the *New York Times*, the covers of news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek*, and prime time on the national broadcast media. Mainstream publishers too sought to capitalize on the spread of the new movement. In 1970 one publishing house after another brought out mass market

³ Ibid, 419.

books, anthologies and theoretical work, written, for the most part, by the activists and founders themselves. Founders continued to write for the movement, only now, with a mass movement, their work reached mass audiences.

Indeed, the founders continued to build the movement. In 1970, Marilyn Webb and Kathie Sarachild led collectives working on women's liberation newspapers. Heather Booth established Jane, a underground feminist service that gave thousands of illegal abortions to women who found the organization through informal referral networks. Naomi Weisstein operated a national women's liberation speakers' bureau and trained women to agitate for the cause. Both Weisstein and Booth also established a coordinating body for the many groups they had helped to organize in Chicago. Shulamith Firestone was writing *The Dialectic of Sex*, while she continued to organize in New York City--founding Redstockings in February 1969 with Ellen Willis, and New York Radical Feminists with Anne Koedt and Cellestine Ware that fall. She also edited the first two theoretical journals of radical feminism, *Notes from the First Year*, and with Ann Koedt, *Notes from the Second Year*. Sarachild continued to organize in New York as well, Pam Allen was organizing in San Francisco, there were eight groups and a feminist karate class in Gainesville, and Brown too was working on a women's liberation newspaper. Roxanne Dunbar, after discussions with Patricia Robinson, had set up the

Southern Female Rights Union in New Orleans to organize poor women. Poor Black Women was putting together *The Revolt of Poor Black Women*, a book based on its experiences. The SNCC Women's Liberation Committee, with Frances Beal in the lead, had evolved into the Third World Women's Alliance and was bringing out a newspaper, *Triple Jeopardy*.

By 1970, it was strikingly clear that the argument for Sisterhood Is Powerful, once a minority position, had prevailed. The mass base of women's liberation was expanding rapidly, and participants coming into the new movement from outside of the New Left soon exceeded those coming from within. As one journalist observed, "The WLM is growing so rapidly that even its most cheerful proselytizers are surprised, spreading...into a political territory where anti-Vietnam petitions have rarely been seen."⁴ Nonetheless, women's liberation continued much of the New Left's best work--better than the New Left--especially spreading radical ideas. Roxanne Dunbar noticed this in Cell 16, her women's liberation group in Boston, just as Judith Brown had in Gainesville, and Margaret McSurely in SCEF. "Most of the women who joined our group," Dunbar said, "immediately

⁴ Gloria Steinem, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation," *New York Magazine*, 7 April 1969, 10. Steinem, in 1969, was a celebrity journalist with a regular column, *The City Politic*, in *New York Magazine*. She covered women's liberation sympathetically and by summer of 1970 had begun an active role in the movement. *Ms.* was launched in 1972.

adopted anti-imperialist and anti-racist perspectives."⁵ The new movement pushed ahead to reform academia as well, demanding, and on many campuses, winning, day care centers, birth control, lifting of curfews and dress codes, and the beginnings of a revamped curriculum that included women's history in general courses and offered women's studies courses as well.

Consciousness-raising, like *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, was strong fuel for the movement's growth. In September 1968 a consciousness-raising session sparked the protest of the Miss America Beauty Pageant, propelling women's liberation into the national spotlight and setting off an incredible media blitz that over the next two years brought women's liberation into every home in America with a radio or television.⁶ Consciousness-raising organizers developed a highly effective form of action called the "zap." A "zap" was conducted with the singular goal of raising public consciousness as opposed to winning a demand. Like the

⁵ Dunbar-Ortiz, *Outlaw Woman*, 177.

⁶ Jo Freeman first used the term "blitz" to refer to the unusual media attention focused on the movement. And blitz it was as reporters repeatedly snuck into everything from neighborhood consciousness-raising groups to national conferences only to be discovered and sometimes physically ejected.

method that produced it, the zap action was infinitely portable--requiring little more than courage and a local consciousness-raising group.

"Zapping" the Miss America Beauty Pageant

Confident that zap actions would tap women's potential for revolt, Firestone wrote to Weisstein, "If you are worried about their complacency...they have very strong beefs which will come out very soon with actions designed to stir an already dormant consciousness."⁷ Six months later the zap of the pageant proved Firestone right. The Miss America Protest brought women into the movement in droves--including Ellen Willis, with whom Firestone would go on to found Redstockings. And characteristically, the zap of the Pageant was replicated across the nation as countless women, fed-up with expensive, uncomfortable, and unachievable beauty standards, made hometown and campus beauty pageants popular targets of women's liberation.

The idea for the Miss America Pageant protest had come to Carol Hanisch as she drove away from the national meeting in Sandy Springs. Now sure that a movement was in the making she was ready to show the world that women's liberation was on its way. She told Kathie Sarachild about the idea and Sarachild carried it to the next meeting of their group,

⁷ Shulamith Firestone, New York, to Naomi Weisstein, Chicago, n.d. March 1968, Personal Files of Jo Freeman.

NWRW. The group conducted consciousness-raising sessions to see how members had been affected by the Pageant. The sessions evoked a compelling consensus to protest the Pageant.

The Miss America Pageant then set the standard for American women, including black women, who, since its inception in 1921, had never been contestants.⁸ Thus the Pageant perpetuated the ideal of whiteness as a model for women. Black women were among the protesters in the zap action which charged that among its other insults to women, the Pageant was racist. Black women also participated in what its sponsors called a "positive protest," a Miss Black America contest held on the same day, four blocks away from the white Pageant.

On September 7, 1968, over one hundred women marched up the boardwalk in Atlantic City, New Jersey, chanting and waving picket signs. Their marching feet on the wooden boardwalk, which was some distance off the ground below, made a loud, rhythmic, insistent sound. Led by Florynce Kennedy, the intrepid black activist attorney--in a drum

⁸ Saundra Williams, crowned Miss Black America in a black counter pageant, also in Atlantic City on the same day as the traditional pageant said, "There has never been a black girl in the pageant," Saundra Williams quoted in Judy Klemesrud, "Along With Miss America, There's Now Miss Black America," *NYT*, 9 September 1968, 54.

major's hat and a white suit--the women ranged from young mothers with baby strollers to grandmothers. They came from Florida, New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C., and Michigan. Some were chained to a giant, red, white, and blue Miss America puppet. Others paraded a live sheep. The sheep was crowned Miss America as men on the sidelines jeered, "Go back to Russia" and "Mothers of Mao," and commented lewdly on the women's appearance.⁹ Even as some men jeered, however, other bystanders came up asking for literature. Singing and exclaiming, the demonstrators threw "instruments of female torture" such as high heels and girdles, into a "Freedom Trashcan." Although no fires were set in the Trashcan, the media branded the women as "bra-burners," which became a pejorative term for women's liberationists.¹⁰

A group of protesters posing as convention goers had a block of seats in the balcony of the convention hall. When Miss America approached the microphone to speak, four women, including Hanisch and Sarachild, unfurled a large banner with the words "Women's Liberation" over the balcony. The women shouted, "Freedom for Women," and "No More Miss America." They tied the banner to the balcony, shouted until the police were upon them, and then ran for it.

⁹ Carol Hanisch has given an account of the day in "Two Letters from the Women's Liberation Movement," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, eds. DuPlessis and Snitow, 198.

Reflecting on the action years later, Hanisch said "I don't believe we totally understood the depth of the Miss America Protest...We were...challenging...the uniform of women's inferior class status...Beneath this 'appearance thing' is male prerogative and control. It's not only about sexual attractiveness versus comfort; it's about power" (emphasis Hanisch). Hanisch called the accoutrements the women had thrown into the "Freedom Trash Can," the "uniform of the oppressed sex class in the West."¹¹

The zap action at the Pageant cut deep into the everyday routines, hopes, and fears of most women. First of all, the regulation of women's appearance was widespread and restrictive. In most of the country, from kindergarten through graduate school, dress codes outlawed pants, no matter what the weather. Most jobs for women required a skirt, blouse, and hose and heels, not to mention bras and girdles. Putting on lipstick was like brushing one's teeth--you just did it. Most women also powdered their noses automatically. These were just the requirements, some official, some not, but always backed up by the threat of punishments ranging from losing one's job, getting restricted to the dormitory for the weekend, or being ostracized as a loser.

Worse than regulation, however, was the no-win,

¹⁰ Ibid.

intensely competitive, and almost impossible to drop out of beauty rat race--expensive, time consuming, humiliating, and mysterious, with ever changing rules. Women who refused to participate were still judged by these rules. Most women participated twenty-four hours, seven days a week. It was a question of keeping one's job, keeping one's husband, having a social life, getting love. A woman's weight and shape, although actually highly individual, was manipulated and squeezed toward a standard model through boned, wired, rubberized girdles and bras, and tight hose. And walking on high heels not only deformed, weakened, and hurt feet and legs, but made balance, speed, and grace something one had to work at. Along with these prescriptions, black women faced the onerous burden of straightening their hair or enduring, at best "quiet disapproval."¹² Small wonder that most women never felt as if they were getting it quite right.

Making this all the more difficult, new styles and new cosmetics were constantly publicized. The latest look was hard to keep abreast of, considering that it encompassed a woman's whole body, from feet to face, and nails to hair.

¹¹ Ibid., 200, 201.

¹² Before natural hair was popularized by Black Power, SNCC worker Gwen Robinson, who wore an Afro, recalled being summoned to the dean's office at Spelman College and told her hair was a "disgrace." For a discussion of white beauty standards by black women see Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry*, 172-176, passim.

"Hair style," as Miss America protester Florika Rometier quipped, chained to the enormous red, white, and blue Miss America puppet, is "a woman's foreign policy." Miss America communicated the rules-- showing millions of women the uniform of their subordinate position. The pageant's message was, if you want to get along, get ahead, or get love, here is what you should look like.

Remarkably, much of the media sympathized with the protesters. This no doubt resulted, at least in part, from the policy publicized before the demonstration: the protesters would speak only with female reporters. Shana Alexander, writing for *Life* magazine, said the protest had not gone far enough. The *New York Times*, whose female reporter had ridden to Atlantic City with the demonstrators on a bus rented by the protesters, headlined the protest, saying that a "women's liberation movement" was at work.¹³ *The Daily News*, going out to over 3 million, noted: "Some women who think the whole idea of such contests is degrading to femininity took their case to the people...gals say they're not anti-beauty, just anti-beauty contests."¹⁴ News of the protest went out over the wire services and was picked up from coast to coast and around the globe. As the movement surfaced in England in 1969 and 1970, what one observer called a "rerun" of the pageant protest occurred in

¹³ Ibid., 200.

London when one hundred women disrupted the "Miss World" beauty contest.¹⁵

Major broadcasters covered the protest live on television. In the weeks that followed, demonstrators were interviewed on news shows and talk shows. Representing NYRW, Rosalyn Baxandall appeared on the nationally syndicated David Susskind Show, a popular talk show. "Every day in a woman's life is a walking Miss America contest," Baxandall told Susskind, and gave NYRW's address.¹⁶

As Firestone predicted, the Miss America Protest elicited the "strong beefs" in women's "dormant" consciousness. NYRW was overwhelmed with letters from women all across the country saying "I've been waiting all my life for something like this to come along."¹⁷ The women wanted to join women's liberation and their letters were full of "strong beefs." Attendance at weekly meetings of NYRW jumped to over one hundred women. New groups started. And the new movement accelerated. Soon Redstockings, a group formed out of NYRW, designed a new form of consciousness-raising action--the Speak Out. With it, they would bring women's private struggles with unwanted pregnancies to the nation's attention and swell the ranks of fighters for legal

¹⁴ *Daily News* (New York), 8 September 1968.

¹⁵ Bouchier, *The Feminist Challenge*, 105.

¹⁶ Baxandall quoted in Hanisch, "Two Letters," 198.

abortion.

The First National Conference

Meanwhile, the growth of the new movement was evident in its first national conference in November 1968. The conference proved to the most dubious organizers that a mass base had now been established outside of the New Left. To convene this historic conference, Marilyn Webb had obtained funding to bring together representatives of Chicago's West Side Group and NYRW. In the months preceding the conference, these women worked together on conference preparations. The conference was held at a YWCA camp in Lake Villa, Illinois, near Chicago, over Thanksgiving weekend. Approximately 200 women attended, most representing groups in thirty-seven states and Canada.¹⁸

The conference showed the number of women's liberation groups that had formed throughout the country and that "the movement was indeed national."¹⁹ The most significant aspect of the conference, said one, was the "discovery that women all over the country had begun to organize."²⁰ Dana Densmore, representing Cell 16 in Boston, found the conference "exhilarating" despite sharp disagreement with

¹⁷ Ibid., 200.

¹⁸ Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 131.

¹⁹ Ibid., 130.

the predominant views there. Densmore said too many women were holding onto the belief that male chauvinism could be educated away. But, she said, "The general impression was one of tremendous richness. Women came from all around the country."²¹ Jo Freeman recalled that at the conference, "the growing diversity of the movement became apparent as well as its exponential growth."²²

For Freeman, however, the gathering was significant because it prompted as well as reflected movement growth." "Disagreements [were] sharp," Freeman said, "... but the women returned to their cities turned on by the idea of women's liberation, to organize more and more groups (emphasis Freeman)."²³ A New York-Gainesville contingent including Kathie Sarachild and Judith Brown demonstrated consciousness-raising, distributed the "Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising," and argued in the plenary sessions for its use for mass organizing and theory building. Carol Hanisch, also a part of the team, called the arguments over consciousness-raising "heavy, hard debate."²⁴

Indeed, like the earlier meeting at Sandy Springs, the

²⁰ Ibid., 133.

²¹ Dana Densmore, "A Year of Living Dangerously: 1968," in *The Feminist Memoir Project*, eds. DuPlessis and Snitow, 82.

²² Freeman, *The Politics of Women's Liberation*, 107.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Hanisch quoted in Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 53.

conference was roiled by debate over the origins of women's oppression, the target of women's liberation, and the need for independence from the New Left. Despite the unresolved arguments, Webb continued to hope that the emerging movement would see capitalism rather than male supremacy as the target, and would somehow be affiliated with the New Left. Because of what she had seen at the conference, she believed that "the potential of a mass movement was so great" that the debate among the founders would be resolved and the New Left won over as well.²⁵ The conference had revealed the growth of the movement, demonstrating the power of sisterhood and providing organizing momentum for women of different ideological persuasions.

A number of women in the Gainesville and New York contingents who held Webb's view were inspired by the conference to form new groups to advance their position. At the same time, the conference promoted the Chicago women's continuing shift toward independence. Amy Kesselman, a founding West Sider active in the civil rights movement and the New Left since high school said the conference was "enormously stimulating" because it "pushed my thinking deeper about issues of personal life, and it convinced me of the importance and the viability of an autonomous women's

²⁵ Webb quoted in Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 53.

movement."²⁶

Thus Webb's optimism was well founded--and not only because of the movement's growth. The conference at Lake Villa had depended on the collaboration of the women from Chicago and NYRW. And it had been funded by the pooling of support from Webb's connections at the Institute for Policy Studies with a large contribution radical feminist Roxanne Dunbar raised in Boston. In less than three months, the struggle for free, legal abortion took off, containing the same winning elements that fueled the movement so far and continuing the momentum of the conference.

The Campaign for Abortion Law Repeal

The abortion campaign combined the power of sisterhood and consciousness-raising and attracted women from both sides of the unresolved debate over the cause of women's oppression. Lucinda Cisler, who led the campaign in New York--and for a time the nation--called abortion "a great point of unity."²⁷ In 1969 and 1970, the campaign for free abortion "on demand" also brought countless women with no association with the New Left into new movement. Roe v. Wade, itself born of consciousness-raising, was filed in

²⁶ Kesselman in Kesselman et. al., "Our Gang of Four," 41.

²⁷ Lucinda Cisler, "On Abortion and Abortion Law: Abortion Law Repeal (Sort Of): A Warning to Women," in *Notes II*, eds. Firestone and Koedt, 89.

1970; and three years later resulted in national victory.

"Now let's hear from the real experts—the women," Sarachild shouted, rising from her seat (emphasis Sarachild).²⁸ Soon Ellen Willis was shouting too. The women were disrupting a New York legislative hearing on abortion reform. It was February 13, 1969, and Redstockings, the new group Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis had just organized, was taking its first public action.

The problem, as Redstockings saw it, was that the experts the legislators had called to testify at the hearing were fourteen men and a nun. Indeed, Sarachild had leapt to her feet shouting just as one of the male experts made the point that a woman should be permitted an abortion after her fourth child. As Willis put it, Redstockings was "interested in exposing the concept of expertise, as opposed to letting people make decisions about their lives."²⁹ Redstockings was also demanding repeal.

The legislators, unsuccessful at quieting the Redstockings, adjourned the hearing to a private room. But the locked-out women staged a sit-in in the hall. As television cameras hovered, Irene Peslikis testified about the illegal abortion she had at age seventeen. Another woman

²⁸ Kathie Sarachild quoted in Edith Evans Asbury, "Women Break Up Abortion Hearing," *New York Times* 14 February 1969, 42.

²⁹ Ellen Willis quoted in Margie Stamberg, "The New

testified that at seventeen she had given up a baby for adoption because she could not get an abortion. The testimonies were broadcast by CBS news that night at 6:00 and 11:00 P.M. The next day the New York papers ran stories headlined "Gals Squeal for Repeal" and "Abortion Law Protestors Disrupt Panel"³⁰ The *New York Times* quoted Sarachild arguing for repeal of all abortion laws.³¹ Later, Willis wrote a story about the action for *The New Yorker's* "Talk of the Town." The radical papers also covered the action.

Although it was the most widely publicized action so far, this was not the first time most of the women had demonstrated for repeal of laws outlawing abortion. For women, abortion was more than simply another issue. Legalizing abortion meant a qualitative leap toward women's freedom. It was, as Firestone said in a speech at an abortion rally in New York in March 1968, "as important as their own self determination."³² An illegal abortion entailed, literally, risking one's life. And the alternatives often required major life changes undesirable

Feminism," *Guardian*, 19 April 1969, 11.

³⁰ "Gals Squeal for Repeal," *Daily News*, 14 February 1969; "Abortion Law Protesters Disrupt Panel," *New York Post*, 14 February 1969.

³¹ Sarachild, quoted in Asbury, "Women Break Up Abortion Hearing," 42.

³² Firestone, "Abortion Rally Speech," in *Notes I*, ed.

enough to force countless thousands of women into taking that risk.

Women's liberation brought these women, called by Lucinda Cisler the "grass-roots force" of the vast constituency of women facing the problem, into the fight for legal abortion.³³ Before then, a small group of abortion reformers, mostly liberal male doctors, lawyers, and clergy, sought relief for various subgroups of women they identified as deserving. The reforms included proposals for highly specific groups--such those who could prove that they were rape or incest victims; women medically certified as unable to live through a birth; women certifiably too unstable mentally to endure motherhood; women who had already born particular numbers of children; women who would bear defective children, and so on. Such small subsets were difficult to rally support for. Besides, for the most part, mass support was not the reformers preferred way of seeking change. They feared alienating decision makers. Rather, they appealed, for pity or other altruistic concern from lawmakers or medical boards.³⁴

Firestone, 24.

³³ Cisler, "On Abortion," 90.

³⁴ Lawrence Lader provides a comprehensive look at the abortion reform movement in *Abortion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966) and *Abortion II: Making the Revolution* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); the best short discussion of the earlier movement and women's liberation is Cisler's "On Abortion," 89-93.

The women's liberation strategy for repeal of all abortion laws was just the opposite. First of all, rather than educating the lawmakers, women's liberation sought to raise the consciousness of women that unwanted pregnancy was a political rather than a personal problem. Secondly, rather than proposing a law encompassing a particular set of conditions, repeal meant that no laws beyond routine regulation of outpatient procedures would govern abortion. Hospitalization would not be required. Doctors would not be required, no time or age limits would be imposed, and no permissions would be required. Repeal advocates illustrated this by holding up a blank sheet of paper.

The consciousness-raising approach was based on self-interest rather than altruism. And it came from experiential knowledge, not medical or religious expertise. "Let's not kid ourselves," Firestone said to the women at the 1968 rally, "it is not a distant Aunt who faced this problem. We ourselves do. And if...any of you women...have avoided it...you know you are the exception and not the rule."³⁵

The abortion repeal strategy went hand-in-hand with consciousness-raising on pregnancy or sex--both frequent topics of groups. These sessions effectively pulled together what most women already knew and Firestone had said at the rally: "Think of your female friends...those of them who

³⁵ Firestone, "Abortion Rally Speech," 24.

have had the problem outnumber those who haven't."³⁶

Firestone was right. Fear of unwanted pregnancy was ubiquitous. Few sexually active women had not experienced it and fewer still were those who did not know others who had. Since the consequences were either having a baby or risking death to avoid it, this was very serious business for very large numbers of women.

In consciousness-raising sessions, women listened to each other's stories. There were those who had had to quit school, others who had been deserted by boyfriends who wanted no responsibility, some who had given up babies for adoption or put them into foster care. Still others had struggled to scrape up money for an abortion only to suffer through nightmarish, painful experiences with blindfolds, dirty instruments, and untrained abortionists. Others spoke of marrying men they did not want to marry. Hearing so many different experiences, women in consciousness-raising groups reinforced their conviction that no reform governing a particular subset of conditions could have solved most of their problems. Most, after all, had not been incest victims. Nor did they already have four children or mental instability. Nor were they likely to die in pregnancy. Thus, for the radical feminists, only repeal, no law, was the answer. Repeal was not only the practical solution, it was,

³⁶ Ibid.

as Cisler said, based on the principle of "justice: woman's right to abortion (emphasis Cisler)." ³⁷

Consciousness-raising was increasing women's understanding of the problem of abortion, and emboldening them, and Redstockings was ready to go public. Seeing the popularity of their attempt to testify publicly, and frustrated that they had been stopped, Redstockings came up with a new form of consciousness-raising action--"the Speak Out." They would hold their own public hearing and women, the "real experts," would be the ones giving the testimony. Redstockings called their speak-out "Abortion: Tell It Like It Is," after the popular civil rights slogan. The following month, on March 21, 1969, at Washington Square Methodist Church in Greenwich Village, before an audience of three hundred, twelve women dared to speak out. Some told about their illegal abortions. There was a woman who had sought certification as mentally unstable and was offered an abortion in exchange for sterilization. Another had given up her baby.

Sometimes the audience chimed in sympathetically. Other times men called out angrily, "lesbians." ³⁸ Ellen Willis said a black man in the audience told her that the

³⁷ Cisler, "On Abortion," 89.

³⁸ Ellen Willis, "Up from Radicalism: A Feminist Journal," in *US*, ed., Richard Goldstein (New York: Bantam Books, 1969), 118-19.

"supercharged" tension was like a black confrontation with whites. "We're hoping the idea will catch on," Willis said, "and become the equivalent, for the women's movement, of the Vietnam teach-ins."³⁹ Irene Peslikis, who had recruited the other speakers and was the first woman to testify, said the Speak Out "showed the power of consciousness-raising, how theory comes from deep inside a person's life, and how it leads directly to action."⁴⁰ After the Speak Out, the abortion campaign was pure consciousness-raising in action. As one commentator put it, speak-outs made the "'unspeakable,' speakable and thus cleared the way for public dialogue about women's rights to abortion."⁴¹

The story of the Redstockings' Speak Out spread far and wide and the idea did catch on. Gloria Steinem, not yet active in the movement, was in the Speak Out audience. She listened, recalled her own secret abortion, and covered the Speak Out sympathetically for *New York Magazine*.⁴² Also present was Susan Brownmiller, a women's liberation activist who had previously testified about her illegal abortion in a consciousness-raising session in NYRW. Brownmiller wrote "Everywoman's Abortions: The Oppressor Is Man," a front page

³⁹ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁰ Irene Peslikis quoted in Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 108.

⁴¹ Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 97.

story for the *Village Voice*.⁴³ In Chicago, the *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* carried Brownmiller's story to activists throughout women's liberation and speak-outs spread around the country.⁴⁴ On the West Coast, women's liberation groups in Washington operating within the New Left and the old left, led a statewide referendum on abortion to victory.⁴⁵ They had heard about abortion speak outs, and so had women in an independent women's liberation group in Austin, Texas.

In spring 1969, a consciousness-raising group in Austin, Texas, was just getting started. By fall, the group was making referrals for illegal abortions and decided to hold a speak-out. Among the early members of Austin Women's Liberation was a young attorney named Sarah Weddington. Several years earlier, Weddington had crossed the border to Piedras Negras, a small town in Mexico where she had had an illegal abortion. She was not among the five women to

⁴² Steinem, "After Black Power," 10.

⁴³ Susan Brownmiller, "Everywoman's Abortions: The Oppressor Is Man," *Village Voice* (New York), 27 March 1969, 1.

⁴⁴ Susan Brownmiller, "Everywoman's Abortions: The Oppressor Is Man," *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement* (Chicago), April 1969.

⁴⁵ This important campaign, rarely mentioned in the literature, will be a part of activist-scholar Barbara Winslow's upcoming book about Women's Liberation in Washington State.

testify at the speak-out.⁴⁶ She was not yet ready to speak out, but she was ready to try to make abortion legal. Weddington found a co-counsel, Linda Coffee, and a pregnant plaintiff seeking an abortion, Norma McCorvey, who became "Jane Roe." In March 1970, the women filed Roe v. Wade. In May a three judge federal court ruled in favor of the plaintiff, the State of Texas appealed, and the suit was on its way to the Supreme Court.⁴⁷

In the weeks after Roe was filed, the New York State legislature passed a law permitting abortions through the second trimester. While the new law was not repeal, it was the most liberal abortion law in the nation and, until the passage of Roe, made New York the nation's abortion mill. The Cook bill, signed into law on April 11, 1970 by then Governor Nelson Rockefeller, had no residency requirements, abortions did not have to be done in hospitals, and there were no consent provisions. Governor Rockefeller and several legislators warned that anything less liberal would have seriously heightened the chances for repeal of all laws. For over a year, the legislature had been under continuous protest for repeal. Adding to the pressure was Abramowicz v. Lefkowitz, a class action lawsuit on behalf of hundreds of plaintiffs who had unsuccessfully sought abortions. The

⁴⁶ Brownmiller, *In Our Time*, 119.

⁴⁷ Sarah Weddington, *A Question of Choice* (New York: Penguin, 1993).

protest in New York had national ramifications. Three years later, the Supreme Court would use the New York law as its model in the Roe ruling.

Thus Roe v. Wade, the ruling that legalized most abortions in the United States, tracks to consciousness-raising from beginning to end. On the one hand, Austin Women's Liberation, the Austin consciousness-raising group, was the impetus for Weddington to bring the suit. On the other, the Supreme Court's ruling modeled the liberal New York law which had passed under pressure to stave off repeal, and after an onslaught of protest by women for whom consciousness-raising had made the "unspeakable speakable." The next five years would see women's liberation in France, England, Italy, and a host of other nations use consciousness-raising in winning campaigns in which women, including Simone de Beauvoir, went public with their experience of illegal abortion to gain the legalization of abortion.

The immense popularity of the abortion campaign, like the mobilization against beauty standards, rested on the universality of these issues for women. If the former represented casting off the "uniform" of second class citizenship, the right to abortion meant self determination for women. Both of these struggles arose directly out of the retelling of women's day-to-day experience of sexism.

Consciousness-raising spread the understanding that these experiences were indeed encounters with sexism--political rather than personal problems. Once raised and understood politically, these popular issues swelled the ranks of the movement with women new to any kind of political activism. The right to free, legal abortion also attracted black women's liberation organizers such as Patricia Robinson and Frances Beal, and other women in the Black Power movement from the Black Panther Party to the Republic of New Africa. Founders with opposing views on women's liberation's relationship with the left and the origins of women's oppression understood the centrality of these issues. Those who wanted to fight for women's liberation through the New Left and those who did not, had little choice but to continue to lead the clearly independent and burgeoning movement they had created. Otherwise, others were now coming around who would.

The power of sisterhood was catching the attention of mainstream politicians and political parties. It also interested establishment leaders in government and the corporate world. These included the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, as women's liberation founders were beginning to suspect and the Senate's Church Committee investigations would later

confirm.⁴⁸

The Movement is Established

In 1970 the mass nature of the movement and its gathering strength were everywhere evident. Women's liberation had spread widely across the country. In 1970 *The Mushroom Effect*, a directory of women's liberation groups in thirty-four states, showed hundreds of groups in rural areas and towns.⁴⁹ Along with well known groups in New York and Chicago, the directory listed groups and contacts in small towns in states such as West Virginia, North Dakota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Iowa, and Kansas. It also gave women's liberation contacts and group addresses in Argentina, Australia, England, France, Holland, and Canada. That same year, women's liberation activist Robin Morgan reported groups in Sweden, Germany, Mexico, Tanzania and Japan.⁵⁰ In the summer of 1970, Jo Freeman visited groups in Norway and Denmark. She reported that in Denmark the whole movement had

⁴⁸ In 1975, the Church Committee of the United States Senate investigated and exposed the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation for overstepping their authority. The transcripts of the Committee hearings revealed that the spy agencies had used informants to gather information on the activities of the women's liberation movement and NOW.

⁴⁹ Jane Martelli, *The Mushroom Effect: A Directory of Women's Liberation* (Albany, Cal.: Mushroom Effect, 1970).

⁵⁰ Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful*, xxv.

named itself Redstockings, after the New York group.⁵¹

Although the movement was widespread, the informal organization of women's liberation made numbers of participants difficult to determine precisely. The women's liberation movement, unlike NOW which had chartered chapters, members, dues, and formal structure, had none of these. In 1970, there were three thousand NOW members in about thirty chapters around the nation, with most of the members in New York.⁵² That same year radical feminist Robin Morgan counted over two hundred consciousness-raising groups in New York City.⁵³ Most groups did not have more than fifteen regular members, which based on Morgan's count, suggests that there may have been three thousand women actively participating in the women's liberation branch of the movement in New York City alone.

One event in the summer of 1970 showed that well beyond these estimates, there were tens of thousands of supporters capable of mobilization. Betty Friedan, NOW founder and president, believed that women "were ready to move in far greater numbers than even we realized."⁵⁴ She called upon

⁵¹ Freeman, "On the Origins," 194.

⁵² Miriam Schneir, *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1994), 130.

⁵³ Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, xxv.

⁵⁴ Friedan, *It Changed My Life*, 191.

women to conduct a twenty-four hour general strike "on the unfinished business of women's equality," on August 26, 1970, the fiftieth anniversary of women winning the vote.⁵⁵ The "Women's Strike for Equality," as it was called, was consciously organized as a coalition of NOW and women's liberation. The coalition demands were twenty-four hour public childcare, abortion on demand, and equal opportunity in employment and education. NOW purposely sought the involvement of the younger radical women. Friedan said NOW "needed the emotional verve and style of the young radicals. I admired that verve and style in the Miss America protest."⁵⁶ To the *New York Times* Friedan said of the "women's lib people" that "they're the way the troops we need come up."⁵⁷

Friedan got more troops on August 26th than she had anticipated. "There were more women than anyone had ever seen....we...couldn't believe it," she said as 50,000 marched down Fifth Avenue from Central Park in New York City.⁵⁸ From the Third World Women's Alliance to a contingent from the Museum of Modern Art to suffragists from

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 187.

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 15 March 1970, 129.

⁵⁸ Friedan, *It Changed My Life*, 201. There are varying figures on the number of marchers, see also Lader, *Power on the Left*, 299.

the first wave, the diversity of the marchers was evident. Stretched across Fifth Avenue was a huge strike banner that read "Women of the World Unite," echoing the title of an article by Carol Hanisch and Elizabeth Sutherland in *Notes from the First Year*. The young radical feminists had been an integral part of the organizing, in New York, around the nation, and in Europe.

Far beyond the reach of the thirty extant NOW chapters, tens of thousands of women demonstrated and rallied in over ninety cities and small towns in forty-two states.⁵⁹ The strike was heralded as the "largest protest for women's equality in U.S. history."⁶⁰ National publicity in the weeks before the strike had been intense. Friedan and others believed the threat of the approaching strike and the powerful coalition that put it on was the reason the House passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The ERA, which had not received the attention of the full House since its introduction in 1923, passed by a vote of three hundred and fifty-two to fifteen on August 10, sixteen days before strike day.⁶¹

In Norway, Jo Freeman, who had been visiting women's

⁵⁹ Toni Carabillo, Judith Meuli, and June Bundy Csida, *Feminist Chronicles: 1953-1993* (Los Angeles: Women's Graphics, 1993), 57.

⁶⁰ Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 420.

⁶¹ Friedan, *It Changed My Life*, 210.

liberation groups abroad over the summer, organized a press conference to announce the strike and Norwegian women turned out in solidarity. In Holland, Dutch women's liberation, called the Dolle Minas, marched on the U.S. Embassy to show their support and women in Paris marched on the Arc de Triomphe launching women's liberation in France.⁶² In her speech to the New York Strike marchers Friedan proclaimed, "We learned...the power of our solidarity, the power of our sisterhood." "Sisterhood is Powerful," she continued, "... August 26th made that power visible to the world."⁶³

Women's liberation in 1970 was widespread geographically, it mobilized massive numbers of women, and it had moved deeply into the culture attracting adherents across race and class lines. Black women in the civil rights movement had helped to start the women's liberation movement by teaching white founders, among other useful tools, a level of militancy with men that the white women at last dared risk. In 1970, although black women were among the leaders of both women's liberation and NOW, they more frequently fought male chauvinism together with other black women than in predominantly white groups.⁶⁴ From black women's liberation groups and from caucuses within black

⁶² Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America Since 1960* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 116.

⁶³ Friedan, *It Changed My Life*, 203, 207.

power groups, black women opposed male chauvinism in the black freedom movement and in the larger society.

The SNCC Black Women's Liberation Committee, begun in 1968 was first chaired by SNCC activist Gwen Patton, former student body president of Tuskegee and in 1970, chair of the National Black Student Organization. Eleanor Holmes Norton who had been with SNCC in Mississippi in 1963, and would establish the Women's Rights Project at the American Civil Liberties Union a few years later, was the Committee's legal adviser. In 1970, under the leadership of Frances Beal, the Committee evolved into the Black Women's Alliance, and then into the Third World Women's Alliance. In 1980 it underwent a final evolution into the Alliance Against Women's Oppression, signaling that its racial composition had become secondary to political purpose. But in 1970, the Third World Women's Alliance was a broad based organization including women of many ethnic groups, that targeted racism, sexism, and imperialism. It published *Triple Jeopardy*, a women's liberation newspaper for women of color.

In 1969 as coordinator of the New York branch of the Black Women's Liberation Committee, Beal wrote the important essay, "Double Jeopardy: to Be Black and Female," which argued that capitalism was the cause of the oppression of women, as well as the source of racism. The Black Women's Liberation Committee and its later incarnations were in

favor of birth control and abortion. Beal held that sterilization of women in the black community and the Third World was genocide. At the same time, noting that in New York City, seventy-nine percent of childbearing-deaths from illegal abortion were among black and Hispanic women, she advocated reproductive rights for all women.⁶⁵ The right to abortion was also supported by the female vice president of the nationalist Republic of New Africa, Dara Abubakari. In 1970 Abubakari argued that black women must be free to make their own decisions about bearing children. "Men shouldn't tell us. Nobody should tell us," Abubakari said.⁶⁶

The SNCC Women's Liberation Committee also challenged the stereotype of the emasculating black matriarch that in 1965 was authoritatively asserted in the Moynihan Report.⁶⁷ Gwen Patton condemned the Moynihan, calling on black men and women to discard "Victorian-capitalist philosophy," and praising white women's liberation as revolutionary for

⁶⁵ Frances M. Beal, "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female," in *The Black Woman*, ed. Cade, 97.

⁶⁶ Abubakari, Dara, "The Black Woman is Liberated in Her Own Mind," in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), 587.

⁶⁷ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1965), also known as the "Moynihan Report."

taking it on.⁶⁸ Patton said the Moynihan Report divided black men and women because it held that a black matriarchy was responsible for the emasculation of black men. The Moynihan Report, Patton said, "invisibly became the guideline under the guise of Black Power." Indeed, some nationalist groups, most notably Ron Karenga's US, argued that loyalty to African tradition demanded that black women occupy a secondary position in the family as well as in political organizations.

The Moynihan Report brought black women under increased pressure to become more submissive. Beal challenged this in "Double Jeopardy," pointing out that Black Power had given the black man political consciousness, but "When it comes to women, he seems to take his guidelines from the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal*. Certain black men maintain...that black women...even contributed to their emasculation."⁶⁹ Black radical feminist Celestine Ware held that when black men rejected black women in favor of white women, they did so because white women acted submissive. "As all women achieve self-determination, white women will cease to be preferred," Ware said.⁷⁰ Ware cofounded New York Radical Feminists with

⁶⁸ Gwen Patton, "Black People and the Victorian Ethos," in *The Black Woman*, ed. Cade, 146, 144.

⁶⁹ Beal, "Double Jeopardy," 92.

⁷⁰ Celestine Ware, *Woman Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation* (New York: Tower Publications, 1970), 15.

Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt in 1969. In 1970 her book, *Woman Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation*, was the first history of the women's liberation movement.

In 1970, a black women's liberation group in Los Angeles, "Women Against Repression," represented by Margaret Wright claimed, "In black women's liberation we don't want to be equal with men...equal means sameness...men are chauvinistic." Wright bluntly protested the view that black women had emasculated black men. "They have never been emasculated. Emasculated men don't revolt. And if they were so emasculated, these blondes wouldn't be running after them."⁷¹

Throughout 1969 and 1970, black women formed groups in high schools, colleges, and in their neighborhoods. In 1969, a black women's study group in New York organized by Jean Carey Bond and Patricia Peery argued that black men had "swallowed...hook, line, and sinker" the assumptions of black matriarchy and male emasculation of "Moynihan and his gang" which were intended to "divide and rule."⁷² Poor Black Women, the black women's liberation organization organized by Patricia Robinson, opposed the myth of the emasculating black matriarch as a male chauvinist tactic. Poor Black

⁷¹ Margaret Wright, "I want the Right to Be Black and Me," *Black Women in White America*, ed. Lerner, 608.

⁷² Jean Carey Bond and Patricia Peery, "Is the Black Male Castrated?," in *The Black Woman*, ed. Cade, 117.

Women also supported reproductive rights. From within the Black Panther Party, Kathleen Cleaver spoke out against male chauvinism within the Party and the larger society, as did Angela Davis who was organizing with the Communist Party.

But radical black women were not alone in their opposition to male domination. In 1970, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) adopted a women's rights platform at its annual convention. And the National Council of Negro Women established a "Woman Power Project." That same year Aileen Hernandez followed Betty Friedan as NOW's second president. But NOW already counted a number of black women among its founders and early board members including Anna Arnold Hedgeman, who had insisted that women be included on the platform at the 1963 March on Washington, veteran civil rights activists Pauli Murray and Shirley Chisholm, trade union leader Addie L. Wyatt, and civil rights attorney Florynce Kennedy. SNCC's Fannie Lou Hamer and SCLC's Septima Clark were also NOW members. Indeed, polls in the 1970s and 1980s showed that a majority of black women supported women's liberation. Moreover, in both decades, black women supported women's liberation in considerably higher percentages than white women.⁷³

⁷³ A poll in 1972 showed that 67% of black women compared with 35% of white women approved of the work of women's liberation groups, Davis, *Moving the Mountain*, 363; see

Union women, too, wanted women's liberation. Several unions including the Hotel, Restaurant Employees and Bartenders Union and the International Chemical Workers Union were sued by female members who sought higher paying jobs traditionally reserved for men. Their unions had sided with the employers when the women sought relief through Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).⁷⁴ The unions, along with states, and employers, justified keeping women out of these jobs on the basis of protective labor laws mandated by the Supreme Court in Mueller v. Oregon in 1908. For decades, the AFL-CIO and liberal labor supporters such as Eleanor Roosevelt had opposed the ERA, fearing, justifiably, that it would be used to overrule hard won protective legislation and subject women to heavy work and long hours. Nonetheless, the rush of complaints from blue collar union women right after the EEOC was established showed the women's desire for the better paying jobs that they were being denied.

In 1970 union women began holding statewide conferences to discuss sex discrimination in the AFL-CIO. In March, in

Rosen, *The World Split Open*, 337, for 1989 Gallop Poll results showing that 85% of black women favored a strong women's movement compared with 64% of white women.

⁷⁴ These suits are discussed in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, *Second Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1968), 45, and Barbara Allen Babcock, Ann E. Freedman, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and Susan C. Ross, *Sex Discrimination and the Law: Causes and Remedies* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 361.

Wisconsin, the first of these conferences endorsed the ERA and took a position against state protective legislation. In April, the United Auto Workers (UAW), under unrelenting pressure from its Women's Department, became the first major national union to endorse the ERA. In the next three years one after another of the unions followed suit, until in 1973 the AFL-CIO reversed its position and supported the ERA.

Poor women who were not in unions also fought for their rights. In 1970, the lawsuit brought by Ida Phillips, a waitress in Orlando, Florida, brought feminists across the nation into a successful coalition with civil rights and labor to defeat G. Harrold Carswell, then President Nixon's nominee to the Supreme Court. Phillips earned six dollars a day plus tips as a waitress. In response to an advertisement, she applied for a job on an assembly line that started at two dollars and twenty-five cents an hour. The mother of seven children, Phillips was denied the job as a trainee on the aircraft assembly line at Martin Marietta Corporation on the grounds that she had a pre-school aged child. Fathers of such children, on the other hand, were hired as trainees. Judge Carswell upheld the company's decision and refused to let Phillips' case proceed.

In the end, however, Carswell lost his bid for the high court and Phillips won her case, including back wages. "It wasn't just for myself," Phillips told the national media, "but for other women in the same shoes...This is my way of

letting people know I'm more than just a dumb little waitress."⁷⁵ There were then over four million women in America in Phillips' "shoes;" working mothers with children under six constituted about forty percent of employed mothers.

In the professions and in academia women formed caucuses in their professional associations to challenge male domination. In May 1969, Judith Brown, then employed in psychiatric research, formed the first women's caucus at the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The caucus consisted of female psychiatrists and the wives of male psychiatrists. The caucus resolution was not endorsed by the APA's board, but thanks to a sympathetic male psychiatrist it was read into the minutes of the meeting. The resolution stated that the "psychiatric imperialism of women must end," and called upon the APA to "cease helping to maintain the unequal distribution of necessary labor" between men and women, to support the women's liberation movement, and "to begin listening to women as the real experts on the problems of women."⁷⁶ In September 1969 women organized caucuses in the American Sociological Association, the American Political Science Association, and the American Psychological

⁷⁵ Ida Phillips quoted in *New York Post*, 30 January 1971.

⁷⁶ Resolution of the Women's Caucus of the Radical Caucus of the American Psychiatric Association, May 1969, in the possession of author, Collection of the Judith Brown

Association. That December, the largest academic society, the Modern Languages Association, set up a commission on the status of women in the field. By April 1970, professional women across a variety of fields established a Professional Women's Caucus to agitate for women's liberation. That same spring the American Association of University Professors set up a watch dog group to monitor university policies on women.

Women Studies and specialized courses on women were underway in the universities. In 1969 major universities such as Cornell and New York University began offering courses on women for credit. San Diego State University in California established its renowned multi-course program in 1970. By the year's end women's studies courses were offered at over 100 colleges and universities.

The churches were also under attack from within for male supremacy. In July 1969 the National Coalition of American Nuns sought equality for women in the Catholic Church. In December 1969 the women's caucus in the National Council of Churches sought reform of America's churches, calling them "male dominated and male-oriented."⁷⁷ Female Baptists reported to the American Baptist Convention in 1970 that the church used women as "tokens" and demanded

Endowment.

⁷⁷ Hole and Levine, *Rebirth of Feminism*, 413.

reform.⁷⁸ Demands for the ordination of women spread across the non secular community.

Nineteen seventy also saw protests by women in the arts, sports, and the military. Thus the impact of women's liberation was felt deep within fields and enclaves generally characterized by internal loyalty and a lack of public protest from within. As women's liberation protest increased, the mainstream media aggressively spread the word, responding to heightened public interest as well as pressure from women within its own ranks.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 422.

CHAPTER 12

"BOOKS ABOUT THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION
MOVEMENT CAN ONLY BE WRITTEN BY MOVEMENT WOMEN"

Everybody's talking about the women's Liberation movement. Overnight it seems to have grown into a national issue.¹

The depth and popularity of the new movement in 1970 was apparent in the mass media, whose aggressive, provocative coverage both reflected and promoted the spread of women's liberation throughout the year. Three forces collided in an explosion of news about the movement. First, there was a surfeit of newsworthy activity to cover. As *Glamour* magazine editorialized, "women's liberation has surfaced (and if you haven't heard of the movement, it is certainly not the fault of the media, which have seized upon the colorful goings on with delight.)"² Second, the public wanted to know more about these "goings on." As *Life* magazine noted, "Women's liberation is the liveliest conversational topic in the land."³ The rapid growth of the movement was itself a source of astonishment and interest. *Life* observed, "Awareness of the movement for women's liberation has burst upon most Americans with jarring .

¹ *Essence*, July 1970, 47.

² *Glamour*, September 1969, 44.

suddenness." ⁴ Ida Lewis, the editor-in-chief at *Essence* a slick, mainstream fashion magazine aimed at black women, said in the July 1970 issue, "Everybody's talking about the women's liberation movement. Overnight it seems to have grown into a national issue, surprising even the most determined feminists."⁵

The third force that created the explosion of news on women's liberation was the female employees of the corporate media. As women's liberation mushroomed, women working in most major media outlets brought pressure on their employers. These women were inspired by the movement and fed-up with consignment to the research department while the men went out on interesting assignments and wrote the breaking stories. The women, like their sisters in other fields, took legal action, filing charges of sex discrimination against their employers, including the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*. The women's charges were news stories in themselves. At *Newsweek*, for example, forty-six female employees and their attorney called a press conference at the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) headquarters to announce their suit. At NBC, female staff would eventually win two million dollars in back pay. Even

³ *Life*, 4 September 1970, 16b.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵ *Essence*, July 1970, 47.

in the hinterlands local press carried the news of the protest. In a feature article on women's liberation, for example, the *Florida Times Union* in Jacksonville, a town hardly known for feminist protest, observed that one of the *Newsweek* complainants had accused the press of an "unspoken gentleman's agreement" that limited women to the role of researcher.⁶ Distancing itself from *Newsweek's* apparently sexist practices, the Jacksonville paper called discrimination against women in the media "hierarchic oppression."⁷ Women in the media wanted to write the news, and they took legal action to win the opportunity to do so. At the same time, women's liberation was a top story. Now, the movement strategy of refusing to talk with male reporters initiated by NYRW at the protest of the Miss America Pageant, intensified the pressure on the media. If they wanted an inside scoop on women's liberation, they would have to send a woman to get it. And they did just that. Said *Newsweek*: "Most of the feminists won't even talk to male journalists...For this week's coverage, *Newsweek* sought out Helen Dudar, a topflight journalist who is also a woman."⁸ In a six article series on women's liberation, the *Florida Times Union* used a male and female reporter with

⁶ Pamela Howard, "We Want to Be Free," *Florida Times Union*, 3 May 1970, G-1.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Women's Lib: The War on Sexism," *Newsweek*, 23 March 1970,

alternating bylines. The paper explained, "The reason is several militant ladies would grant interviews only if their views were reported under a woman's byline."⁹ *Time*, too, had been forced to assign a female journalist, contributing editor Ruth Brine, to cover the movement. Brine said that *Time* had at first assigned a young male reporter, Peter. "But the women wouldn't talk with Peter, so the editors gave the piece to me."¹⁰

Who were the women who reported on the new movement? Some, like former *Newsweek* employee and then free-lancer, Susan Brownmiller, were women's liberation activists. When Brownmiller's article appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, the paper introduced it saying, "A member of the Women's Liberation Movement explains what it's all about."¹¹ Others, like Shana Alexander who had written in *Life* that the Miss America protest did not go far enough, although not yet activists, had been feminist before the resurgence of the movement. But the largest number of female journalists covering the movement were converted to women's liberation as they gathered material for their stories. These women often explained their own learning process as part of the story, replacing the journalistic convention of

71.

⁹ Howard, "We Want to Be Free," G-1.

¹⁰ Ruth Brine, *The Atlantic*, 225, no. 3 (1970): 106.

¹¹ *New York Times Magazine*, 15 March 1970, 27.

"objectivity," with a fresh and convincing personal approach.

Helen Dudar who researched and wrote *Newsweek's* cover story on the movement was one of the journalists converted by her assignment. Speaking of the "gravely infectious" hostility toward men that came with consciousness-raising, Dudar wrote, "I came to this story with a smug certainty of my ability to keep a respectable distance between me and any subject I reported on. The complacency shriveled and died...I found myself offering a string of fearful obscenities to a stunned male colleague who had 'only made' a casual remark along the lines of 'just-like-a-woman.'"¹²

In her article Dudar revealed that she had realized in the course of interviewing women in the movement that she had been rejecting women's liberation because she secretly enjoyed feeling superior in her position as a token successful woman in the media. "Superiority is precisely what I had felt and enjoyed," Dudar said. This was, she continued, "an important discovery. One of the rare and real rewards of reporting is learning about oneself."¹³ Now, Dudar said, although her discovery was giving her "mental stress," she felt a "sense of pride and kinship with all those women who have been asking all the hard questions. I

¹² Helen Dudar, "Women's Lib," *Newsweek*, 23 March 1970, 73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 78.

thank them and so, I think, will a lot of other women."¹⁴

Dudar had changed her mind about the movement as a whole and the founders in particular. "On paper," she said of the women's liberation organizers she interviewed and whose photographs dotted the article, "most of them have sounded cold, remote, surly, tough, and sometimes a bit daft. On encounter, they usually turned out to be friendly, helpful and attractive. Meeting the more eccentric theoreticians, I found myself remembering that today's fanatics are sometimes tomorrow's prophets...The total impact has been a quality of uncorrupted tenderness...of unsentimentalized 'sisterhood' threaded throughout the movement."¹⁵ Dudar's conversion experience was repeated in story after story.

In the *Florida Times Union*, for example, Pamela Howard, the female journalist whose byline alternated with that of a male colleague, reported: "Getting into Women's Liberation means finding out a lot about yourself." "Despite my own attempts to remain objective," Howard said, "I was soon...defending it [the movement] to friends. Later on I realized I was hooked."¹⁶ Howard realized this, she said, when she expressed concern for a newlywed neighbor instead of congratulating her. Howard also found herself surprised

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 76.

at men's reaction when she told them she was writing about women's liberation. "Its incredible to realize how few men are aware of some ways in which women feel oppressed," Howard said.¹⁷

In February 1970, *Mademoiselle*, the popular magazine for young women, featured a cover story on women's liberation for its thirty-fifth anniversary issue. One of the lead articles, "Women's Liberation Loves You" by associate editor Amy Gross, began with Gross's first impression of the movement as "sick" and "paranoid."¹⁸ Gross, too, however, had changed her mind as she interviewed the founders. At the close of an interview with Naomi Weisstein, she had found herself agreeing that, as Weisstein said, "Only with equal power can people act with dignity and humaneness."¹⁹ "That's why," Gross said, "I like women's lib more all the time...because...it says out loud what we've all learned not to say even silently." She advised readers to "Listen to what's being said...women's liberation is worth it."²⁰

From *Newsweek* to the *Florida Times Union*, from *Mademoiselle* to the sophisticated writers at New York's

¹⁶ Howard, "We Want to Be Free," G-16.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Amy Gross, "Women's Liberation Loves You," *Mademoiselle*, February 1970, 232.

¹⁹ Ibid., 288.

Village Voice, female journalists assigned to cover the movement were adding their voices to the call for women's liberation. Vivian Gornick was not involved in women's liberation before she wrote "The Next Great Moment in History Is Theirs" for the *Village Voice*. But she described her interviews with the founders as an epiphany in which she understood the vision of and need for women's liberation. She concluded her article, "They are gathering fire and I do believe the next great moment in history is theirs. God knows, for my unborn daughter's sake, I hope so."²¹ Gornick would soon edit an anthology of the movement's founding papers for a major publishing house. According to Gloria Steinem, the first step in her feminist career was as a journalist who engaged with women's liberation while getting a story. The month after she attended the Redstockings abortion speak out, she wrote her first story on the movement, a sympathetic account in her column in *New York* magazine.²²

With so many female reporters newly converted to women's liberation and others already activists or feminist sympathizers, much of the news sounded more like the movement itself than like journalism. Many reporters openly dropped the pretense of objectivity, endorsed the movement,

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Vivian Gornick, "The Next Great Moment in History is Theirs," *Village Voice*, 27 November 1969, 54.

and explained and recommended consciousness-raising. This was the mainstream media, and yet the titles and headlines were agitational: "We Want to Be Free," "Sisterhood Is Powerful," "On the march for what they still haven't got: Women Arise," "The Next Great Moment in History is Theirs," "Women in Revolt."²³

The story in *Life*, "Women Arise," was accompanied by a large photograph of young, attractive black and white women marching down Fifth Avenue on the Women's Strike March. The photograph was captioned, "The largest and most enthusiastic parade in the country."²⁴ The article declared, "There were few who saw or heard them who doubted the iron resolve of the new feminists, or the justice of their cause."²⁵ *Life* called it "nothing short of appalling that great inequities continue to exist in 1970" given "the simple validity of many of their demands."²⁶ As evidence, the article supplied statistics demonstrating wage inequalities and women's unequal representation in the professions and in politics, noting that "Margaret Chase Smith of Maine is the only

²² Steinem, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation," 8-10.

²³ Pamela Howard, *Florida Times Union* (May 3, 1970); Susan Brownmiller, *New York Times* (March 15, 1970); *Life* (September 4, 1970, Vol. 69, No. 10); Vivian Gornick, *Village Voice* (November 27, 1969); Helen Dudar, *Newsweek* (March 23, 1970).

²⁴ "Women Arise," *Life*, 4 September 1970, 16-B.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

female voice in our highest legislative body."²⁷

"We Want to Be Free," the six part series in the *Florida Times Union* also legitimized the movement by documenting discrimination against women. The story offered statistics showing disparities in men's and women's wages and unequal opportunities for women in the professions. It described advertisements that insulted women. And it discussed the limitations of women's role within the family. "So why not a woman in the White House? Why not a man in the home at the sink--at least half the time," questioned journalist Pamela Howard.²⁸ In the *New York Times Magazine*, in an article entitled "Sisterhood Is Powerful," Susan Brownmiller proclaimed: "It is the aim of the movement to turn men around...If sisterhood were powerful, what a different world it would be. Women...have never subjugated another group; we have never marched off to wars of conquest in the name of the fatherland...We want to be neither oppressor nor oppressed. The women's revolution is the final revolution of them all" (emphasis Brownmiller).²⁹

Brownmiller and a number of other journalists explained and promoted consciousness-raising in their articles. Brownmiller provided some of the questions that her group had used, such as, "If you've thought of having a baby, do

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Howard, "We Want to Be Free," G-1.

you want a girl or a boy?" and "What happens to your relationship when your man earns more money than you, and what happens when you earn more money than him?"³⁰ Reviewing a sampling of answers the women had given, Brownmiller said the results showed the "humiliations that each of them had suffered privately" but also that these "turned out to be universal agonies." "Consciousness-raising," she said, "in which a woman's personal experience at the hands of men was analyzed as a political phenomenon, soon became a keystone of the women's movement" (emphasis Brownmiller).³¹

Mademoiselle took a different approach to consciousness-raising in a quiz called "Are you ready for liberation?"³² Characterizing possible scores on the quiz, *Mademoiselle* said of those in one range, "You need further consciousness-raising. Get four or five other girls together. Start a group."³³ In *Newsweek's*, Helen Dudar noted, "In consciousness-raising sessions...women learn how similar are their lives and problems. They also learn to like other women."³⁴

The articles used the founders as sources and the

²⁹ Brownmiller, "Sisterhood is Powerful," 140.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Gross, "Women's Liberation Loves You," 106.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Dudar, "Women's Lib," 76.

articles were largely sympathetic. Occasionally an officially recognized expert who was not a movement organizer, such as Margaret Mead, was asked to comment on women's liberation. For the most part, however, the journalists read and quoted from founding movement documents, and interviewed and extensively quoted founding women's liberation organizers. The articles carried their photographs. This was no easy accomplishment because groups frequently refused to designate spokespersons and representatives on the grounds that the movement was democratic and thus leaderless. Only after she had promised not to single out particular women or describe their appearance, did Jo Freeman, Naomi Weisstein, and Heather Booth agree to let *Mademoiselle's* associate editor Amy Gross interview them.

Much to Gross's surprise, she found herself increasingly attracted to the idea that men held too much power in relationships and even to the idea that capitalism was an enemy of women. Gross wrote of her "disquiet" with calls for an end to capitalism, but then said she saw the logic in that yet could not accept the "men-as-the-enemy" position. But, she admitted, "It would probably be more honest for me, all of us, to express the hostility we do have for men."³⁵ She was learning to do that now, she said, giving several personal examples. Moreover, she was

impressed with Freeman, Weisstein, and Booth. "Women's lib women are different...", said Gross, "something about their eyes, an openness, a barriers-down acceptance--usually, when women meet each other for the first time, there's a wary ranking of each other from behind their eyes. Maybe the difference is...living what they preach--friendship and respect among women, sisterhood."³⁶

Essence featured an interview with Eleanor Holmes Norton about women's liberation and black liberation in its July 1970 issue. *Essence* editor-in-chief Ida Lewis interviewed Norton who was then the legal advisor to SNCC's Black Women's Liberation Committee, head of the Women's Project at the ACLU, and attorney for the women who had just filed charges of sex discrimination at *Newsweek*. Norton had been a civil rights activist since her work with SNCC and CORE in the early 1960s, and was a longtime feminist as well. Norton came directly to the point, "Unless black women find that they have been treated with total equality they had better find the women's liberation movement relevant." Lewis agreed immediately, "The fact is that black women have not been treated equally."³⁷ After rejecting the position of some black nationalists that black women should take a back seat, Norton exclaimed, "How many women decision makers can

³⁵ Gross, "Women's Liberation Loves You," 286..

³⁶ Ibid., 287.

³⁷ Lewis, in *Essence*, 47.

you name? How many women do you know who earn fairly decent salaries? How many women are involved in the important professions? Why should it be that way...Why is it they are channeled...Lets face it, a woman's role in America in the 1970s is almost as confined to motherhood as it was in 1900."³⁸

Newsweek's Helen Dudar interviewed Roxanne Dunbar and Ti-Grace Atkinson, among other movement organizers. Dudar called Dunbar and Atkinson "leading feminist theoreticians," and quoted extensively their views on men and marriage.³⁹ Quoting further from a Boston women's liberation journal that recommended karate, Dudar explained as if it were her own view, Atkinson's radical feminist position that women are a class. "Probably," Dudar said, "the original oppressed class of human history."⁴⁰ She had learned from Dunbar and Atkinson that karate, rape, and women-as-a-class were all related. If women were a class, then rape was a political act, and karate an appropriate political solution. Dudar, like Gross in *Mademoiselle* and Lewis in *Essence*, portrayed herself as becoming feminist as a result of interviewing the founders. Dudar concluded her article by suggesting that "a

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Dudar, "Women's Lib," 73.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 74.

lot of other women" would soon be feeling the same way.⁴¹

The mainstream media further validated women's liberation by projecting the positive connection that the founders had established between the new movement and the first wave of women's rights activists. Indeed, a feature article in the September 4, 1970 *Life* wove the new movement into a discussion of its predecessor. *Life* even put on its cover the 1920 cover of *Life* that celebrated the suffrage victory. After that victory, however, said the September 1970 article, "the women of America discovered that they had won only a battle, not a war." The new movement, *Life* made clear, was continuing the unfinished struggle of the first wave.⁴²

This treatment of the connection between women's liberation and the first wave was pathbreaking. In the prefeminist 1960s, the first wave had almost completely disappeared from the historical record.⁴³ Now the media adopted the new movement's position toward the first wave and established a positive historical connection between the two movements. Two years earlier, in 1968, Shulamith Firestone in *Notes from the First Year* and Jones and Brown

⁴¹ Ibid., 77.

⁴² *Life*, 4 September 1970.

⁴³ Exceptions include the work of Eileen Krador, Gerda Lerner, Elinor Rice Hays, Eleanor Flexner, Yuri Suhl, and others.

in "The Florida Paper" sought to reclaim the women's rights movement from its then ignominious status. In "The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: A New View," Firestone said, "What does the word 'feminism' bring to mind? A granite faced spinster obsessed with the vote? ...Chances are whatever image you have, it is a negative one... a young woman intellectual...will be ashamed to identify in any way with the early women's movement."⁴⁴ Noting that even the few historians interested in the 19th century movement complained of inadequate access to documents, Firestone argued that the reason the movement had been erased from history was because of its radicalism, its "dynamite revolutionary potential."⁴⁵

"The Florida Paper" also upheld the contemporary importance of the first wave. Jones opened her section of the paper with a quotation from the *History of Women Suffrage*, the six volume set of documents put together by the activists themselves. Brown opened with the quotation from Abigail Adams' now well known letter to her husband on women's determination to "foment a rebellion." Women's history was one of the demands of paper. "Women must learn their own history," Jones insisted, "because they have a history to be proud of...What defense is there for a people so ignorant they will believe anything said about their

⁴⁴ Firestone, "The Women's Rights Movement," 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

past? To keep us from our history is to keep us from each other."⁴⁶ Jones passionately condemned the erasure of women's history and praised the first wave: "To keep us from our history is to deny to us the group pride from which individual pride is born. To deny to us the possibility of revolt...That's why there is no black or female history in high school texts. ...Courageous women brought us out of total bondage to our present improved position. We must not forsake them but learn from them and allow them to join the cause once more. The market is ripe for feminist literature, historic and otherwise."⁴⁷

Like Jones, Brown, and Firestone, Marilyn Webb and the planners she brought together to convene the first national conference of the new movement sought to bring the first wave into the cause once more. They deliberately planned the movement's rebirth conference in 1968 as a commemoration of the one hundred and twentieth anniversary of the 1848 convention at Seneca Falls that formally began the first wave. Similarly, Betty Friedan called the Women's Strike for Equality for August 26, 1970, the fiftieth anniversary of the suffrage victory, to emphasize the unfinished business of women's equality.

The media presented the founders views. *Life* positioned

⁴⁶ Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 391.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 390.

in a corner of a huge two page suffrage banner, a photograph of a "group of women's liberationists" gathered at Seneca Falls on August 26, 1970, for the Women's Strike day protests. "Seneca Falls is still a symbolic rallying point," said the article, observing that the women had "gathered there to look back--and ahead."⁴⁸ *Life* followed the photograph with a feature story on the 19th century movement that culminated with the suffrage victory.

Paula Howard, in the *Florida Times Union*, found that making the connection between the two movements was a winning tactic in arguments against those who dismissed the new movement. "I...say the new feminists of today are asking to be treated as subjects rather than objects," Howard said, "in the same way Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were looking for recognition as citizens, and human beings, when they sought the right to vote."⁴⁹ Thus Howard used the first wave to legitimize and explain the current struggle.

The media helped bring the women's liberation movement to the attention of the public. To be sure, there was anti-feminist coverage, distortion, and plagiarism. When a journalist liked a phrase or an idea, lines of text from founding documents found their way into the mainstream media

⁴⁸ *Life*, 4 September 1970.

⁴⁹ Howard, "We Want to Be Free," G-1.

without attribution to their sources.⁵⁰ Still, the media's unusual advocacy of the founding ideas and organizers and the sheer quantity of coverage helped to spread the movement. As the media said repeatedly, it was responding to public demand for information about the movement's "colorful goings on." But the extent of the coverage reflected as much as it aroused the interest of the public.

By 1970, as polls indicated, most Americans already knew that a women's liberation movement was in their midst. They knew about the movement because a neighbor, a family member, or a coworker was in a consciousness-raising group. They knew because an acquaintance had used a movement abortion referral network or joined a demonstration for legalized abortion or protested a local beauty pageant. They knew because female coworkers were whispering about sex discrimination or because women were calling the biggest sexist around the office a "male chauvinist pig." In 1970 women's liberation was, as *Life* magazine said, the "liveliest conversational topic in the land."

"The Market is Ripe for Feminist Literature"

Mainstream, mass market publishing houses joined the

⁵⁰ See for example Steinem's article in *New York Magazine* (7 April 1969, 8) which attributes "The Florida Paper's signature phrase, "you don't get radicalized fighting other people's battles," to unknown "black militants" and uses but fails to attribute its definition of radicalism, "engaging with basic truth."

newspapers and magazines seeking to capitalize on the movement's growing popularity. Nineteen-seventy saw eleven mass market books published on women's liberation with more under contract. Publishers had gotten the message that, as Jones presciently observed two years earlier in "The Florida Paper," the "market is ripe for feminist literature." Movement activists were the first editors and writers of these mass market books.

In 1969, Leslie Tanner, soon-to-be editor of *Voices from Women's Liberation*, one of five anthologies of movement documents and position papers that came out in 1970, was starting a consciousness-raising group on the Lower East Side. She and her co-organizers had been reading founding women's liberation position papers and manifestos. Tanner said, "We avidly read and circulated everything we could get our hands on. There was never enough to go around within our own growing group, and nowhere near enough to pass along to other women who expressed an interest in Women's Liberation."⁵¹ So Tanner got the idea for a mass market anthology and began gathering movement papers. Sookie Stambler, activist-editor of *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future*, another of the 1970 anthologies, said that it was the "movement of sisters who finally enlightened publishers on the great need for books about the women's

⁵¹ Tanner in Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation*, 13.

liberation movement."⁵²

The publishers were eager to meet that "great need" because they wanted to sell books. Few of the founders, however, had published work for mainstream publishing houses. Unlike Betty Friedan, women's liberation founders were not women that publishers would seek out based on name recognition or fame.⁵³ But their position papers and manifestos had established a track record of readership. These papers, circulated hand-to-hand, had helped to start a new social movement that was already making big changes. The founders' track record of readership was the movement itself. Tanner said that for her anthology she gathered the "papers that...had opened up our heads to new ideas, to a totally new way of thinking. Why not make a book of the 'voices from Women's Liberation?'"⁵⁴ Stambler was thinking along the same lines. Of the "great need for books about the women's liberation movement," she said, "These of course, can only be written by movement women."⁵⁵ And so, as opposed to secondary sources, the publishers turned to the founding organizers.

Eight of the eleven books that came out in 1970 were

⁵² Sookie Stambler, ed., *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future* (New York: Ace Books, 1970), n.p.

⁵³ Ellen Willis was a rock critic for the *New Yorker*, Judith Brown had publications in psychiatric journals.

⁵⁴ Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation*, 13.

written or edited by activists. The anthologies were collections of founding movement papers. Another two were by pro-women's liberation journalists who extensively interviewed and quoted the founders, even publishing pages of interview transcripts. Only one of the 1970 publications had not relied upon movement founders and documents, *I. B.I.T.C.H.*, a highly sensationalistic condemnation of "the establishment" and the "men who run it." This book was advertised as coming from the "fem lib underground," but appeared to have been written by an angry lone eagle.⁵⁶

Two of the books were by black feminists, Celestine Ware's *Women Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation*, and Toni Cade's anthology, *The Black Woman*. *Women Power*, the first history of the new movement, featured an analysis of black women's relationship to the predominantly white movement. *The Black Woman* focused exclusively on black women's liberation. The book grew out of editor Toni Cade's "impatience," as she put it, that writing about women's liberation was not meeting the growing demand of black women dealing simultaneously with three liberation struggles: "white people, whiteness, or racism; men, maleness, or chauvinism; America or imperialism...."⁵⁷ "Throughout the country in recent years," Cade said, "Black women have been

⁵⁵ Stambler, ed., *Women's Liberation*, n.p.

⁵⁶ Caroline Hennessey, *I. B.I.T.C.H.* (New York: Lancer Books, 1970).

forming work-study groups, discussion clubs, ...women's workshops on the campuses, women's caucuses within existing organizations...They have formed alliances on a Third World Women plank."⁵⁸ These women, said Cade, were not "duped by the prevailing notions of 'woman' but...have maintained a critical stance."⁵⁹ *The Black Woman* was for them.

Questioning whether black women could look to white women as experts on women's liberation, Cade said, "It is rather obvious we do not... we are turning to each other."⁶⁰ Thus Cade's anthology featured black women writing on the groups they organized and the issues they confronted.

Like Cade's anthology, the four by white editors carried the founding articles of the first black women's liberation group, *Poor Black Women*.⁶¹ Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* published Frances Beal's "Double Jeopardy." Some of the anthologies also included Mary Ann Weathers' "An Argument for Black Women's Liberation As a

⁵⁷ Cade in Cade, ed., *The Black Woman*, 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, 10.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶¹ The papers by *Poor Black Women* were published in whole or in part in Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation*; Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful*; Stambler, ed., *Women's Liberation: Blueprint for the Future*, and Roszak and Roszak, eds., *Masculine/Feminine*. The papers had been published first in *Lilith*, the Seattle women's liberation journal.

Revolutionary Force."⁶² Weathers, a black member of Cell 16, the predominantly white Boston group organized by Dunbar and Densmore, spoke primarily to black women in her article. She urged them not to fall for the idea that black women should take a second place in the family and the movement so as not to emasculate black men.

Most of the work in these anthologies had appeared more than once in the dozens of women's liberation newspapers and several theoretical journals that now circulated around the country. Three of the anthologies included part or all of "The Florida Paper," two carried the "Program for Feminist Consciousness Raising," and all three included work by Dunbar, Weisstein, Pappas, Densmore, Sarachild, and Firestone. Many also included the Redstockings Manifesto. Virtually all of the material, as Tanner said, had been passed from hand-to-hand and sold or shared around at women's liberation meetings when it first ran off the mimeograph machines as the pamphlet literature of the movement.

The mass market publications on women's liberation began appearing in summer 1970 and continued throughout the year. The appearance of the first, Kate Millet's founding

⁶² Weathers' article appeared in Stambler, ed., *Women's Liberation*, and Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation*. It had been published first in *No More Fun and Games* (February 1969), the journal of Cell 16, the group Roxanne Dunbar and Dana Densmore organized in Boston.

work of feminist literary criticism, *Sexual Politics*, from Doubleday, was a news item in itself. The book was twice reviewed in the *New York Times* and the August 31, 1970 cover of *Time* was a portrait of Millet captioned "Kate Millett of Women's Lib." Millet was an organizer of Columbia (University) Women's Liberation, an activist in NOW, and a participant in a number of women's liberation groups in New York. Now she toured the country and Europe as a feminist celebrity. Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex: the Case for Feminist Revolution* and Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful*, the first of the anthologies, came out that October. *The Dialectic* argued that women were the first oppressed class, and made, as the subtitle proclaimed, "The Case for Feminist Revolution." This was the theory whose vehement debate had fueled the rise of the movement. Like *Sexual Politics*, both were widely reviewed and soon became women's liberation classics.

The increasing power and phenomenal growth of the movement convinced mainstream publishing house William Morrow & Co. that Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex*, a theoretical book about the "organization of culture" and "organization of nature," would find a profitable audience. After all, had not Redstockings, the group that Firestone cofounded, initiated the public speak out campaign that led the way to legalized abortion in New York that spring? And had not mainstream journalist Helen Dudar, only a few months

before *The Dialectic* reached the bookstores, raised these very issues and even endorsed the radical feminist claim that "women are...probably the original oppressed class of human history..." in *Newsweek* magazine?

Sisterhood is Powerful, the first anthology, set the tone for those to come, and for the two journalistic accounts of the movement as well. The collection, named for the concept that helped give birth to the movement, was both of and for the movement, containing many of its founding documents introduced by a call to action. Women's liberation activist Robin Morgan, the editor, introduced the volume stating: "This book is an action."⁶³ As she put the book together, Morgan said, "I became, somewhere along the way, a 'feminist,' committed to a Women's Revolution."⁶⁴ Morgan's conversion was not unlike Dudar's at *Newsweek*.

Although Morgan's path to the "Women's Revolution" began in the New Left as opposed to the mainstream, like Dudar, Morgan admitted that she too had enjoyed being "conveniently on top," and had "nurtured a secret contempt for other women who weren't as strong, free, and respected (by men) as I thought I was."⁶⁵ "Especially threatening," said Morgan, "were the women who admitted that they were simply unable to cope with the miserable situation we were

⁶³ Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful*, xiii.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, xiv.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

all in, and needed...a whole movement to change that." Reading the material sent in for the book, she said, turned her into one of those women. Before, she had done "Lady Bountiful actions about other people's oppression." But now she had learned that "it isn't until you begin to fight in your own cause that you...become really committed to winning..." and thus, "...a genuine ally of other people struggling for their freedom."⁶⁶

Morgan's consciousness-raising experiences were like those recounted by Dudar at *Newsweek*, Pamela Howard at the *Florida Times Union*, Amy Gross at *Mademoiselle* and countless other women attracted to the movement. She had become very angry, "something like a five-thousand-year-buried anger." She had snapped at her husband over a "well meant" sexist joke and became insulted by sexist advertisements and song lyrics she had not noticed before. "Everything seems to barrage your aching brain," Morgan said.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, she hoped "desperately" that the articles in the book would similarly affect the women who read them.

Morgan saw her book as an organizing strategy to recruit women to the movement. Toward that end, she included in the anthology a comprehensive list of "Women's Liberation Movement Contacts." The contacts included national

⁶⁶ Ibid.

organizations and also listed by state and city the names and addresses of women's liberation groups. Abortion referral services, called "counseling information," including names, telephone numbers, and information on how to use the services. Later that year, Tanner's anthology, Joan Robins' *Handbook of Women's Liberation*, and Julie Ellis' *Revolt of the Second Sex* would also provide addresses and movement contacts.⁶⁸ Ellis provided abortion contacts as well. Joan Robins and Celestine Ware gave addresses for ordering movement literature. All eleven of the 1970 mass market publications forthrightly recruited for women's liberation.

As a way of recruiting, *Sisterhood is Powerful* and *Voices from Women's Liberation* published Sarachild's "Program for Feminist Consciousness-Raising." The editors endorsed consciousness-raising from first hand experience. Sookie Stambler, recommended in her introduction that women join consciousness-raising groups. She explained that in doing so they would participate in the "very process from which feminist ideologies are born," and "begin to see that...personal problems are actually political problems."⁶⁹ The ideas in the book, Stambler said, were the "results of a long process of consciousness-raising." Stambler included

⁶⁷ Ibid., xxxvi.

⁶⁸ Julie Ellis, *Revolt of the Second Sex* (New York: Lancer Books, 1971)

"Consciousness-Raising," an article that detailed the organization of a consciousness-raising group and included questions and members responses. June Arnold, the author-organizer said in the group her consciousness had been raised from fighting for women's liberation for her daughters to a higher level of "working to liberate ourselves" which is "where the energy of the movement is coming from."⁷⁰

The *Handbook of Women's Liberation* was introduced by Judith Brown who provided a history of consciousness-raising. She included the use of consciousness-raising to come up with the Miss America Pageant Protest, the mistaken view that consciousness-raising was personal therapy, and the theoretical gains produced by consciousness-raising. So far, Brown said, activists using consciousness-raising, had defined male supremacy and identified economic barriers to women's liberation. Consciousness-raising had also generated the Pro-Woman Line, a way of interpreting female survival techniques such as "playing dumb" as necessary armaments under conditions that forced women to dissemble. Brown also said that a limitation of consciousness-raising was its inadequate support for "work on the strategic question, How

⁶⁹ Stambler, ed., *Women's Liberation*, 11.

⁷⁰ June Arnold, "Consciousness-Raising," in *Women's Liberation*, ed. Stambler, 155.

will we change things."⁷¹ The *Handbook* also published transcripts of actual consciousness-raising sessions and sample questions various groups had used.

Cellestine Ware's *Woman Power* defined consciousness-raising as a "close examination of the individual lives of group members to determine how society must be changed to eliminate the oppression to which all women can testify."⁷² Ware evaluated the uses and abuses of consciousness-raising by founding movement groups. She highlighted her own group New York Radical Feminists which she said used the method to "create an understanding of the nature of politics."⁷³

Julie Ellis's description of a Redstockings consciousness-raising session gave sample questions and some responses, and she quoted extensively from an interview with Redstocking Irene Peslikis who explained how to answer the questions. Like providing addresses of women's liberation groups, the detailed manner in which most of the publications explained consciousness-raising was intended, as their editors and authors said, to encourage readers to join or start groups.

The mass market publications of 1970 also sought to reach and expand the movement inspired market for literature

⁷¹ Brown, "Introduction," in *Handbook of Women's Liberation*, ed. Joan Robins, 10. North Hollywood, Calif.: NOW Library Press, 1970.

⁷² Ware, *Woman Power*, 109.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 112.

on the first wave. Thus publishing houses publicized the founders' rediscovery of the nineteenth century movement for women's rights. Like their counterparts in the media, activist editors followed the founders' advice to allow the first wave to "join the cause once more" as Beverly Jones had put it.⁷⁴ Most took the position that the "early Women's Movement was radical," first argued by Firestone in 1968 in "The Women's Rights Movement in the U.S.: A New View," and elaborated in 1970 in *The Dialectic of Sex*.

Leslie Tanner's anthology included Firestone's article on the women's rights movement, introduced the anthology with the "amazingly relevant for today" introduction to the six volume *History of Woman Suffrage*, and devoted the first half the book to the historic documents of the first wave. Tanner had discovered how little she and most other women knew about their predecessors. She agreed with Firestone and Beverly Jones that "deliberately women had been left out of our history books. Strong, courageous, brilliant women!" "I became angry," she said, "I felt cheated."⁷⁵ Thus Tanner included a wide range of early papers, among them Abigail Adams now well-known letter to Mercy Otis Warren, excerpted essays of Frances Wright and Mary Wollstonecraft, work by the Grimke sisters, Ernestine Rose, two transcribed speeches

⁷⁴ Jones in Jones and Brown, "Toward," 391.

⁷⁵ Tanner in Tanner, ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation*, 13.

of Sojourner Truth, and of course, Stanton and Anthony.

In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone called the erasure of the first wave and substitution in its place of the stereotype of the grim suffragist, "The Fifty-Year Ridicule."⁷⁶ She explained the substitution as a continuing part of the backlash against the first wave and a bulwark against it reappearing. Only the "prodding of today's Women's Liberation Movement," as Tanner said, would bring the work of the first movement "to its rightful place" in America history.⁷⁷ In particular, Tanner was referring to the long out of print six volume *History of Woman Suffrage* which, at the "prodding" of the movement, had just been reissued by Arno Press and the *New York Times*.

Ware, Robins, and Ellis also discussed the relevance of the first wave. Like Firestone, Ware saw the two movements as "Different Phases Same Movement."⁷⁸ Ware compared and found similar the enemies of the two movements as well as some of their mistakes, including the failure to pay more attention to organizing black and working class women. Julie Ellis began her discussion of earlier struggles for women's rights with the rediscovery of Anne Hutchinson and concluded with the suffrage victory. Ellis made eye-opening international comparisons with nations such as

⁷⁶ Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 27.

⁷⁷ Tanner in Tanner ed., *Voices from Women's Liberation*, 14.

Finland, New Zealand, the Soviet Union, Canada, Poland, India, and others where woman suffrage had been won earlier than in the U.S. Robins drew parallels between the emergence of the woman's rights movement from the abolitionists and the birth the women's liberation in the civil rights movement. She counseled against the "Fifty Year Ridicule" and gave "credit" to the first women's rights movement for reforms including women's right to an education, the vote, women as public speakers, and the right to one's own wages.⁷⁹

Thus the spate of mass market publications of 1970 revealed the considerable influence and spread of the women's liberation movement by that year. And like their counterparts in the mass media, activist and movement inspired editors helped to increase the spread and influence of the movement by making widely accessible the ideas that had caused its rebirth and growth.

The mass publication of contact information for groups and the explanations of consciousness-raising also brought to women who liked what they read, the capability of joining and organizing the movement. Moreover, like the news coverage, the publications were sparky and engaging. They were full of movement songs, symbols, poetry, chants from demonstrations, and photographs of women in action, from

⁷⁸ Ware, *Woman Power*, 165.

⁷⁹ Robins, *Handbook of Women's Liberation*, 245.

karate classes to consciousness-raising sessions to marches and guerilla theater.

Such was the public demand that the publishing explosion continued into 1971. Shana Alexander, whose *Life* magazine editorial on the protest of the Miss America Pageant said the protesters had not gone far enough, wanted to bring out a state-by-state guide to women's legal rights. "It was early 1971," Alexander said, "feminism looked like a good bet to base a book on, even a book of statistical research."⁸⁰ Alexander was right, and she got her contract. Nineteen seventy-one saw three more anthologies of founding movement papers, another history of the new movement, and the feminist best seller, Australian Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*.⁸¹ Like their predecessors, these books published contacts for women's liberation groups and addresses for ordering movement literature. Two of the anthologies were edited by women's liberation activists and one by a newly converted writer. The history book featured activists from the first wave as well as the contemporary movement.⁸²

⁸⁰ Shana Alexander, *Talking Woman* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1976), 116.

⁸¹ Germaine Greer, *The Female Eunuch* (New York: Bantam Books, 1971).

⁸² The history was Hole, Judith, and Ellen Levine's *Rebirth of Feminism*. The anthologies were: Gornick, Vivian, and Barbara K. Moran, eds., *Women in Sexist Society: Studies in Power and Powerlessness* (New York: Basic Books, 1971);

The publication of Greer's *The Female Eunuch* was news in itself just as Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* had been the previous year. *The Female Eunuch* got rave reviews, and Greer took a widely publicized American tour including a week of television appearances and a photograph on the cover of *Life*. Greer declared women the "only true proletariat" and argued that if they would withdraw their labor from the capitalist system, the goals of "liberty and communism" could be reached.⁸³

When *The Female Eunuch* came out in England in 1970, it brought the founding debates and many pages of excerpts from the founding documents of the American women's liberation movement to whatever sectors of the British public where not already aware of them. Greer highlighted Jones and Brown's debate with Marilyn Webb over the need for an independent movement. Siding with Jones and Brown, Greer reprinted in full "The Florida Paper's" nine point program and observed that this program had "since become more or less basic in the young women's liberation groups."⁸⁴

The Female Eunuch had seven printings in the U.S. in 1971, a Book-of-the-Month Club edition, and several

Babcox, Deborah, and Madeline Belkin, eds., *Liberation NOW* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), and Joanne Cooke, Charlotte Bunch-Weeks, and Robin Morgin, eds., *The New Women: An Anthology of Women's Liberation* (Greenwich, Conn.: A Fawcett Premier Book, 1971).

⁸³ Greer, *The Female Eunuch*, 13.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 323.

magazines serialized it. "Suddenly everyone is interested in the subject of women," Greer said. But she was even more surprised that "even in the hinterlands," as she put it, referring to her American book tour, the "most radical ideas are gladly entertained."⁸⁵ Greer was referring to views that were widely held in the women's liberation movement: that women were a class, and that regardless of which had come first, capitalism and male supremacy must both be ended. The prediction that had so impressed Anne Forer was coming true: from "just a handful of women in a room" a movement that was radical and feminist had "gone nationwide and international."

⁸⁵ Ibid., 2.

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