Week Five:
Second Wave Feminist Struggles for Social and Reproductive Rights

Monday, September 24
3. The Redstockings Manifesto, 2 pages

Wednesday, September 26
Gloria T. Hull and Barbara Smith, “Introduction: The Politics of Black Women’s Studies”, pages xvii-xxxii in *All of the Women are White, All of the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*, edited by Akasha (Gloria T.) Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith.

Friday, September 28: Discussion Groups
Michele Wallace, “A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood,” pages 5-12 in *All of the Women are White, All of the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*.

Readings for this Week

Available on WyoCourse as:

5. Michele Wallace, “A Black Feminist’s Search for Sisterhood,” pages 5-12 in *All of the Women are White, All of the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies*.

You may consult related sources online in open access format by consulting the “Additional Resources” section of this document.
Context and Relevance

Second wave feminism, which focused on attaining equal social, sexual, and reproductive rights for women, emerged from the victories of the first wave in attaining women’s suffrage as well as from the lull in activism that accompanied two world wars. This movement took place in tandem with the general social discontent and protest movements of the 1960s, including the Civil Rights movement, LGBT activism, and other forms of identity-based advocacy that occurred alongside anti-war demonstrations. This era also featured major changes to dominant cultural norms known as the sexual revolution following, among other developments, the Food and Drug Administration’s approval of the birth control pill in 1960. These cultural shifts paved the way for more recent contemporary political shifts, such as marriage equality. Women participated actively in all these revolutionary social movements yet, all too often, rather than being admitted to leadership roles they were relegated to tasks that might be dismissed as “the cooking and cleaning of the revolution.”

As in the first wave and in social movements more generally, second wave feminism took both liberal and radical forms. Language both reflects and constructs the world in which it is used, and these terms in particular have great power in our society. Mastering critical thinking and the ability to make an evidence-based argument requires that we have a clear understanding about how a given author, speaker, or reader understands and uses particular words. “Liberal” comes from the Latin *liber*, meaning “free” while “radical” comes from the Latin word for “root.” Closely examining the Latin root of these terms helps us to understand the significant differences between them. Liberal feminists believe strongly in individual autonomy and generally believe that gender equality is best ensured through alterations to existing socio-political structures, such as law, policy, and social norms. In other words, liberal feminists contend that such modifications will result in the achievement and construction of more egalitarian society that provides equal opportunities to individuals irrespective of gender. Work we read this week by Betty Friedan and the National Organization for Women takes a liberal feminist perspective. Radical feminists believe that much more dramatic socioeconomic changes are necessary to eliminate gender inequality because sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression are deeply embedded within dominant social structures. Readings this week by Gloria Hull, Barbara Smith, Michele Wallace, and the Redstockings are examples of radical feminism.

Betty Freidan is the author of both *The Feminine Mystique*, which we read a chapter from this week, and NOW’s Statement of Purpose, which we also read. In “The Problem That Has No Name,” she argues that the post-war discontent among women she describes stems from their lack of social power and associated limited opportunities for political influence and professional growth. “The feminine mystique,” she writes, “has succeeded in burying millions of women alive.” For Friedan and her peers, this social construction is little more than the continuation of the Victorian cult of domesticity that first wave feminists resisted in their efforts to obtain equal legal and political rights for women, who previously were relegated to the home. Friedan notes that the midcentury version of this cult of domesticity generated millions for corporations through sales of beauty products, kitchen and cleaning appliances, and discouraged even highly educated women from pursuing careers in order to pursue marriage and full-time childcare as primary goals.
NOW’s Statement of Purpose carefully notes the massive socioeconomic transformations that were occurring at the time that second wave feminism and how, despite these, the fact that women give birth to children is still used to justify their exclusion from “equal professional and economic participation.” The document presents NOW’s ideals followed by the percentages of women earning a living wage, obtaining an education, and being employed in respected, well-paid jobs. Here we also see expression of the second wave sentiment “the personal is political,” which recognizes that the restrictions, opportunities, and conditions individuals face are inseparable from the broader political and socioeconomic structures in which they live. NOW also notes the importance of partnerships to achieve gender equality, something we will discuss further next week when we read about coalition-building in social movements. The Redstockings Manifesto draws on Engels, whose work we read last week, and the idea of women as an oppressed class; in fact, the group chose the name because the color red reflects its political leanings and because “bluestockings” was a term that came to be used to disparage first wave feminist intellectuals.

Gloria Hull, Barbara Smith, and Michele Wallace are prominent African-American feminists whose work featured in the influential collection All of the Women are White, All of the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies. The authors quote William Faulkner’s racist characterization of African American women and argue that it exemplifies the racist and sexist beliefs that continue to oppress African American women intellectuals and exclude them from university settings, specifically through the inseparability of sexism and racism. This is evident, the authors argue, in the dismissal of research and creative work carried out by women, and particularly women of color, as “unscientific,” lacking rigor, or otherwise unfounded and amateurish. In so doing, the authors raise profound questions regarding who gets to speak, where they are heard, and whose voices are valued as authoritative, and where they receive an audience. Hull and Smith likewise observe that middle class white women dominated the second wave feminist movement, raising the question of how some voices come to be the loudest even in movements designed to advance equality.

They published the book in 1982, just as courses and degrees in Gender & Women’s Studies first began to appear on college campuses across the United States, and reflect on what is gained—and what is lost—when activist movements become institutionalized in large organizational settings such as universities. Hull and Smith argue that such institutionalization diluted the activist intentions of the second wave feminist movement. Similar criticism is often leveled at social movements that succeed because convincing the general public of the merits of an activist cause almost inevitably involves sacrificing some of the initial ideals that shape social movements in order to gain widespread acceptance. In other words, the authors argue that many women of color felt left out by the gains of the second wave feminist movement. It is in this context that the authors describe Black women’s/feminist studies as necessarily focused on the issues that impact ordinary African American women and the importance of equal inclusion of those with firsthand experience related to issues of feminist concern, such as violence against women, manifest in “the real world,” particularly since universities are often disparaged as detached ivory towers with little connection to the everyday realities of people’s lives and struggles. Black feminists were the first to systematically critique the political systems, social structures, and sociocultural norms that work in tandem to sustain oppression, rather than viewing them in isolation from one another; this is a phenomenon that third wave feminist
Kimberlé Crenshaw later referred to as intersectionality, which we will read about and discuss in detail in Week 7.

Michele Wallace’s chapter uses first person narrative to discuss her own experiences with many of the issues identified in Hull and Smith’s chapter. She opens her chapter with a personal story that she connects to her own experiences of facing sexism as an African American woman involved in the Civil Rights movement in which, she notes, “I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies.” Wallace offers numerous examples of how internalized forms of oppression such as sexism and racism, harm individuals and the communities of which they are a part, and how she and many of her peers felt alienated and excluded by feminism. She also offers a thorough and, at times, dismaying account of the disintegration of the Black feminist groups she tried to organize that emphasizes the obstacles that deter or prohibit women from creating spaces to freely discuss ideas in a respectful and mutually uplifting manner. We will continue to explore these issues next week as we engage with second wave feminist cultural critique and coalitions.

**Reading Questions**

1. One common criticism of feminism in all its forms is that it is irrelevant to people’s lives, and popular culture has historically engaged with this sentiment, sometimes in very clever ways. Country and western musician Loretta Lynn wrote and sang the popular song "One’s on the Way" about the everyday life of a woman in Topeka, Kansas during the second wave feminist era. After listening to the song or reading its lyrics online, ask yourself what sentiments Lynn expresses about the relevance of second wave feminism to her life as a rural woman, particularly as she sings, “the girls in New York City, they all march for women’s lib[eration]”? What would the authors we read this week, in turn, say to the woman in the song? What challenges or barriers do rural women in particular face to identifying as feminists and how is this similar to or different from the challenges identified by Michele Wallace?

2. The National Organization for Women and the Redstockings both formed in the mid-late 1960s as feminist groups seeking to advance women’s rights and gender equality. Imagine that representatives of these two groups in a community meeting hall where they have gathered to discuss the best ways to advance the central goals of second wave feminism. What would they say to one another, and on what points would they agree? What would they disagree about?

3. This week we read five texts that present a variety of second wave feminist perspectives using writing styles that range from personal narratives, such as those by Michele Wallace and Betty Friedan, to organizational statements by NOW and the Redstockings. As you reflect on these different writing styles, consider which you find most effective and why. How do these different forms of writing impact the reader in unique ways, and how might you mobilize these different styles of written communication in your own work?

4. NOW’s Statement of Purpose observes that men are also victims of restrictive gender roles. What are some contemporary examples of how dominant cultural expectations for
men are harmful to individual men and the society of which they are a part? Do these harms differ from those to which women are exposed and, if so, why?

5. Michele Wallace describes multiple and intersecting forms of exclusion and discrimination that shaped her world and ends by noting that “being on the bottom, we would have to do what no one else has done: we would have to fight the world.” What are some of the battles Wallace describes needing to fight?

Additional Resources

1. Website of the National Organization for Women: https://now.org

2. A review of Barbara Smith’s work, including a new biography of her life and work in the New York State Legislature titled Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around, is available at: https://barbarasmithaintgonna.com

3. Information about the Combahee River Collective, of which Barbara Smith was a founding member (and whose statement we will read next week): https://combaheerivercollective.weebly.com

Second wave feminist struggles for social and reproductive rights

Week Five

Second wave feminist goals

- Social and workplace rights
- Sexual and reproductive rights
- Gender equality and freedom from double standards
- Emerged from lull in activism post-WWII
- Part of social discontent in 1960s alongside civil rights movements and identity-based activism
- The “cooking and cleaning of the revolution”
Second wave feminism took both liberal and radical forms

Ideological splits are common in social movements

Language reflects and constructs the world in which it is used

Critical thinkers and readers give thought to how a given author, speaker, or reader uses/construes words

Importance of etymology

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From Latin *liber*, meaning “free”

Strong belief in individual autonomy

Gender equality can be achieved by altering existing socio-political structures such as law, policy, social norms

Betty Friedan

National Organization for Women
radical feminism

- From Latin *radic*, meaning “root” or “base”
- Dramatic socioeconomic changes are necessary to eliminate gender inequality
- Sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression are deeply embedded in dominant social structures
- Gloria Hull, Barbara Smith, Michele Wallace
- The Redstockings

The problem that has no name (1963)

- Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique*
- Connotations of mystique
- Post-WWII discontent among women stems from lack of social power & limited opportunities for political influence and professional growth
“the feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of women alive”

- Continuation of the Victorian cult of domesticity
- Dialed back first wave feminist gains
- Midcentury version generated millions for corporations
- Raised standards for beauty, cleanliness, education, with lowered socioeconomic expectations
- Highly educated women encouraged to pursue full-time childcare and home-making as primary goals

NOW Statement of Purpose (1966)

- “The personal is political”: inseparability of the restrictions, opportunities, and conditions facing individuals from broader political and socioeconomic structures
- Acknowledges widespread socioeconomic transformations followed by remaining challenges
- Liberal feminism: importance of partnerships to achieve gender equality
The Redstockings Manifesto

- Draws on Engels and the idea of women as an oppressed class
- Chose its name to reflect political leanings and acknowledge first wave bluestockings legacy
- Radical feminism: socioeconomic and political systems require major restructuring

but some of us are brave (1982)

- Connects structural sexism and racism with exclusion of women, especially women of color, from knowledge production
- Gatekeeping of “unscientific” discourse
- Raises questions about:
  - who gets to speak
  - where they are heard
  - whose voices are authoritative
  - where they receive an audience
second wave institutionalization of GWST

- GWST courses/majors began to appear on college campuses in late 1970s/early 1980s
- Activists reflected on gains & losses of such institutional support
- Convincing general public involves sacrificing ideals
- Example of social movements targeting violence against women

Black feminist thought

- First to systematically critique political systems, social structures, and sociocultural norms that simultaneously sustain oppression
- Emphasized importance of including real world experience due to ivory tower isolation
- Laid foundations for critical race theory's engagement with race as a historical social construction used to oppress
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