

This paper on "New York City, the Press Capitol" was presented) as part of "A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s," a conference organized by the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University, March 27-29, 2014

Dylan was correct in 1970s in NYC the times they were a changing. The early 70s was the beginning of the rich growing richer and the working class growing poorer, and nowhere was this more pronounced than in NYC. NYC was the largest city and 9% of blacks in the US lived here, more than any city. In NYC better off Black and Hispanics were leaving the city for the suburbs, so Afro American and Latin communities were no longer integrated by class.

NYC had an anti war movement, a welfare rights, civil rights and Black Nationalist movement and was home to the first poverty programs. The Harlem race riot in 1964 began a series of race riots in other cities. The Mayor at the time was John Lindsay a liberal Republican, who felt it was governments' responsibility

to change conditions. He didn't blame the victims for rioting, looting or demonstrating.

It was in this atmosphere in 1967 that the first Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) group New York Radical Women, (NYRW) eventually met at the SCEF, Southern Conference Educational Fund office. Most of the founders had graduated college although there were half a dozen who hadn't gone to college and many others were veterans of the civil rights movement. The group was largely white and middle or upper middle class. Although several of the women were poorer, and hadn't attended college and they broke off to form a class workshop and later joined the Feminists. Perhaps because NYC is so large there was never a central city umbrella group as there was in other cities.

After a year or so many groups sprouted from NYRW, like weeds and after several years or so dissolved like ice. NYC has always been the home of sectarianism; perhaps because there is such a plethora of people one doesn't need to compromise; one can

just start another group. Shulie Firestone herself started 3 different groups before 1970.

NYC is a crossroads so that more than half of the women in the first group, NYRW came from other parts of the US. Some of the women who came to NYC were visionaries and impatient to make change happen.

NYC is different because it is the media capital, which means more of our actions were covered by the national press. Life magazine even covered a Red Stockings consciousness raising meeting. The press coverage skewed the portrayal of the movement. The media also covered NYC actions because we insisted on female reporters. Often the media was detrimental because it created stars, instead of women who represented the group and had worked on actions. For example Robin Morgan had just begun attending meeting of NYRW, but she had been a child TV star the press recognized, and they interviewed her, rather than those who had done the hard work of organizing the

Miss America contest. Unfortunately, she gave them false information.

The NYC WLM was Radical Feminist and we blamed men, not only society for male domination. NYC pioneered consciousness raising and it was the theory, foundation and method of NYRW and the later Red Stockings. Our CR questioned and analyzed to arrive at our theory or action. Other cities disliked this delving, judgmental CR. NYC dubbed Chicago the politicos because they were still connected to the new left and their politics centered on left anti war issues. In NYC's first action traditional womanhood was buried, and NYRW said goodbye to all that supporting and pleasing of men. The press was anti left and perhaps liked the idea of a brand new movement not part of the new left. Maybe this is why in almost every book, especially those written by men, the women's liberation is seen as a separate movement, sometimes the one that destroyed the left.

There are other reasons too. Chicago and Boston were socialist feminist and therefore tinged with a left brush. NYC was radical feminist and its actions' were daring, sexy and breathtakingly radical: like a total repeal of all abortion laws, an abortion and a prostitution speak-out, occupying Wall St with WITCH to hex the stock market, and pioneering the myth of a vaginal orgasm, a Marriage contract, the Politics of Housework and asking for NO More Miss Americas'. NYRW focus was not on child care, welfare, taking over a building for a women's center, and anti war activities. Of course we set up child care centers, took over an abandoned building for child care and a women's center and were anti war and remained socialists, but the press didn't report that, and this wasn't the major thrust of the NYC movement. Some Chicago actions and I'm sure others were daring and novel like Jane, creating beautiful posters and having a fabulous feminist rock group, but the press had all eyes on NYC.

Publishers and magazines were in NYC, and NYkers could more easily make connections with them. Kate Millett, Robin Morgan, Vivian Gornick, Shulie Firestone, all from NYC were therefore among the first to publish books about the WLM.

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