

The 1960s Speak to the 1990s, 2000s, and Beyond: the Gainesville Women's Liberation Class

By Carol Giardina

Presentation on the Panel: Tools of Radical Feminist Analyzing, Organizing and Mobilizing: Consciousness-Raising & History for Activist Use by Redstockings and National Women's Liberation, **at** the conference A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the Late 1960s and the Early 1970s organized by the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University, March 27-29, 2014.

Redstockings Website: www.redstockings.org

National Women's Liberation Website: womensliberation.org

Good morning sisters and allies,

I'm Carol Giardina and I'm ready to fight and learn how to fight. We all better be. Are you ready?

I think I can safely say for all of us on this panel that the major premise of this panel and probably of this whole conference is that women's liberation hasn't been won yet. Although some important advances came out of the revolutionary moment of the 1960s and early 1970s, we're going backward on many of the important advances-especially abortion. Other advances that are needed we've barely begun to make progress on at all, at least in the United States.

How the movement can regain the radical and revolutionary

spirit and ideas, the audacity, the unity, and mass participation of the years in which we made the biggest and most collective breakthroughs for women-- how we can go on the offensive again and make some collective leaps for all women is what we on this panel have been collaborating on.

I'm going to tell you a little about one such project, a women's liberation class. Why a class?

Well, you see we no longer think that the revolution--in other words, FULL women's liberation-- is going to happen in one fell swoop of final perfection. "This time we are going all the way," the 1969 Redstockings Manifesto over-optimistically put this very common idea at the time and even today-- final perfection in one fell swoop. It was somewhat arrogant, too, in a youthful sort of way as Redstockings was implying that earlier generations of feminists hadn't even WANTED to go all the way, hadn't been committed to that, instead of what was far more likely, that they just hadn't been able to--because of the objective conditions of the time, perhaps with one of those conditions being that the Women's Liberation Movement didn't have enough experience yet to learn everything that was needed to get "*all the way*" to full freedom.

We've come to learn that our own experience in the Women's Liberation Movement, as well as the history of revolutions generally, show that although a revolution is a BIG change, a

great LEAP forward as opposed to a little step, none of the revolutions have yet gone "all the way" to full liberty and justice for all.

In each revolution at least some of the revolutionaries have tried consciously to learn from the earlier ones. In the French Revolution they tried to learn from the American revolution and the Bolshevik revolution tried to learn from the French.

So we in Redstockings have learned that we're not alone in this realization. This understanding that trial and error and learning is necessary-- is part of a long revolutionary tradition, a radical heritage.

People who call themselves radicals--as opposed to being called radical by others--know that the word radical comes from the Latin word for root, getting to the root of problems in understanding-- and solving problems at their root in action, in practice. But figuring out the root and testing in practice what you've figured out isn't easy. It takes time--sometimes many attempts and evaluating the attempts.

This process amounts to taking a scientific approach to the liberation struggle, to revolution, as many activists among oppressed people have come to realize. And part of being radical and scientific about achieving full liberation means recognizing that the struggle is a learning process, that more than one

revolution is going to be needed to go all the way to freedom, equality and justice.

I want to say that this learning process, when you experience it in exciting, positive times is so intellectually and emotionally exciting and interesting, it's like being in love--it's a passion. Even in hard painful times of disappointments and mistakes, once you realize that there is inevitably a need for learning, it becomes very absorbing and engaging--the most challenging thing there is to do.

I had the immeasurably good fortune of being recruited into the Women's Liberation Movement by my political teacher Judith Brown in the revolutionary moment of 1968. That same year I represented Gainesville Women's Liberation, the first women's liberation group in the South, at the Miss America Pageant Protest. (**Overhead- Read Sign--"girl revolutionaries" the NYT called us)

When I got back to Gainesville I got fired from my job because an article about me at the protest appeared in the local newspaper. I was banned from state and university jobs and was told I had a "permanent record" of what the authorities labeled "sabotage of the Miss America Pageant." Yeah, I'm proud of that..

I continue to organize for women's liberation. But I now know full well that it's not going to come easily and perfectly in one fell swoop--I now know that work and struggle are needed;

and lots of collective learning from our work and struggle is needed for that to happen.

In the early stages of realizing all this, I remembered that Gainesville Women's Liberation had given a women's liberation class in 1969 and I came up with the idea of doing this again.

Let me read from the flyer for the new class --and what virtually every flyer has said in the nearly 25 continuous years that we've been giving the new class--beginning in 1991 in Gainesville, FL where I was then living and working closely with Redstockings, helping its Archive for Action and the catalog for the Archive come into being.

Okay, the class flyer expresses some of the basic ideas of the class:

"This class is for women who want to understand basic truths about how we are held back on the job, in the classroom, in public life and in the home; how a feminist movement was organized to change this; what we can learn now to build the kind of movement that can put the male chauvinist establishment on the run again; and how each woman can contribute to this effort.

The class will teach the radical ideas and methods that sparked the rebirth of the feminist movement in the 1960s through a combination of lecture, discussion of readings,

consciousness-raising testifying, and then acting together on what we've learned.

You will learn about the heroic struggle women have waged individually and collectively for our survival and our freedom; the political causes of the unhappiness in our daily lives; women's progress owing to the feminist movement, and how to use this information to change conditions for women.

This class is not about personal liberation through improved self-esteem or an alternative women's culture, nor is about recalling a golden age of matriarchy. It is not about how feminism can save the planet, nor is it about achieving status in the present corrupt system through individual self-improvement or life-style changes.

The following will be covered:

- The origins of women's liberation and how these truths have been buried
- Consciousness-raising—get to the root of sexism—who benefits? Who pays?
- The fight for abortion rights as an example of how feminist gains have been won and lost
- Radical feminist theory—what is radical? What is a radical feminist analysis? What is male supremacy?
- Women, work and money—how organizing on new radical feminist theory on the social wage (ie. free public

childcare, parental leave, national health care) can be a springboard toward women's liberation."

In 1999, Redstockings began giving the class in New York City. There will be one in NYC this fall so when the sign up sheet comes your way indicate on it if you want us to contact you about it.

For primary reading material the class depends on the Redstockings Women's Liberation Archives for Action: whose purpose and motto are: History for Activist Use. (PASS AROUND CENGAGE PR FLYER) Kathie Sarachild explains that idea of "history for activist use" in a discussion of the 1st three volumes of Stanton, Anthony, and Gages' History of Women Suffrage: "Their view of history was not as past-as static; but of history as movement...as continuing struggle; a history of the present as well as the past-for the future. It is a history of the arguments and debates, not just to show progress but how it came about. Theirs wasa history to use—an arsenal for women, as they put it. It was a history by the activists, those who write history to change history."

The class culminates with planning and taking an action. This is because we've learned that you can't really understand history to the point of using it in a practical way until you try to change it. We learned this from our own experience but it was crystalized for us when Kathie Sarachild quoted Student Non-

violent Organizing Committee organizer Charlie Cobb in her article the Power of History in Feminist Revolution. In SNCC's first black history book, Cobb had said: "Call it maybe a freedom fighting history book. But before doing that, make a freedom fight."

Here are the flyers and press coverage of a few of the class actions: SHOW overheads*

- Condom flyer - 1995
- Action for the Morning After Pill over the counter - 1997
- Action demanding ob-gyn students be taught to perform abortions - 2001
- Class in NYC - 2005
- SW action in NYC - 2009