

The Women's Liberation Movement and COINTELPRO

Many thanks to Kathy Scarbrough for creating this curriculum, and to film participant Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, for sparking its creation.

Introduction: The movement for women's rights and equality has been a long fought battle that spans centuries. Most recently its roots are in the founding of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in 1966, the Black Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)— which became the Black Women's Alliance around 1968 (and later took the name Third World Women's Alliance)—the founding of Women's Liberation (WL) groups around the U.S. beginning in 1967: Chicago's Westside group; New York Radical Women; Cell 16 in Boston; Berkeley's WL, Gainesville WL in 1968.

While NOW focused on litigation to gain equal treatment for women and changing discriminatory laws, the Women's Liberation groups set about understanding and challenging the oppression of women in every area of their lives, including such personal issues as unwanted pregnancy, division of labor within the household, beauty standards. Women's Liberationists were among those who believed that full freedom for women could not be achieved under a capitalist economic system.

1. Small Group Discussion:

- What is male privilege and white privilege?
- How are these privileges overlooked and accepted as just the way it is?
- Does equality for all challenge our economic system? How?

Have groups reconvene and report back on their findings.

2. Research and Presentations. Have the students do some research to learn more about some of the Women's Liberation Movement groups, individuals, and actions of the 1960s and 1970s. Decide how the students will present their findings to the class—oral presentation, poster, or other method. Show them the resources you've assembled, including suggested archived articles, and encourage them to seek out other sources.

Women's Liberation groups formed in almost every city, small and large, throughout the country in the late 60s. Women challenged their role in the home, workplace, schools, houses of worship. College students organized against restrictive dormitory rules, dress codes, and demanded that women be put back in the history books. High School students and even younger children organized against dress codes for girl's sports. Was there a group in your local area? What issues did they raise? Is there someone in your local area who could be invited to speak to your class?

3. Discussion. Lead a discussion of tactics used by the FBI to disrupt political groups, including Women's Liberation. Describe the COINTELPRO program and the range of movements targeted using the resources provided. Follow up with discussion questions, such as these:

- Did citizens have to break the law to merit surveillance?
- Our First Amendment protects speech. Do you think people that who believe we need a revolution in the U.S. to bring "liberty and justice to all" should be put under surveillance?
- Is maintaining such a large number of citizens under surveillance a good use of tax payer's money?

Discuss your reaction to finding out that the FBI might have been watching your activities:

- Some women found out they were being watched by filing a FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) request and receiving pages of heavily blacked-out material about their activities.
- One woman found out the FBI was snooping on her when her parents reported a call from the FBI asking them if they knew that their daughter was planning to participate in a demonstration at the Pentagon.
- One woman found out about FBI surveillance when her brother was interviewing for a job at the federal General Accounting Office and was questioned about the influence his sister had over his views.
- One woman found that a student in her class had a CIA identification card when a book bag was left in her class and she went through it trying to find out who it belonged to.
- One woman found out about FBI surveillance when agents questioned people at her workplace about her and spread misinformation about her activities.

Women's Liberation Research Suggestions:

Concepts, Methods, Actions, Events:

The Personal is Political by Carol Hanisch

www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html

A Program for Consciousness Raising by Kathie Sarachild

available from www.redstockings.org, also published in Feminist Revolution by Redstockings and in many anthologies. see also: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/fem/sarachild.html>

Short article discussing the history and importance of consciousness raising:

http://www.ontheissuesmagazine.com/2010spring/2010spring_Hanisch.php

Abortion Law Repeal (sort of): A Warning to Women by Lucinda Cisler

[http://fair-use.org/lucinda-cisler/abortion-law-repeal-\(sort-of\)](http://fair-use.org/lucinda-cisler/abortion-law-repeal-(sort-of))

Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female by Frances Beal

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/196.html>

The Politics of Housework by Pat Mainardi

<http://www3.niu.edu/~td0raf1/history261/nov1902.htm>

An Argument for Black Women's Liberation as a Revolutionary Force by Mary Ann Weathers

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/fun-games2/argument.html>

Why I Want a Wife by Judy Syfers

<http://www.cwluherstory.org/why-i-want-a-wife.html>

The Woman Identified Woman by Radicalesbians

<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/womid/>

Desegregation of Newspaper Want Ads

<http://www.now.org/history/timeline.html>

The Miss America Protest, 1968

The Sit -In at the *Ladies Home Journal*, 1968

Jane: Chicago area underground abortion referral service

Redstockings' Speak-Out on Abortion, 1969

Disruption of NYS Hearings on Abortion Law Reform, 1969

NY Abortion Law Reform, 1970

Supreme Court decision Roe vs. Wade, 1973 (federal liberalization of abortion laws)

Women's Strike for Equality, August 26, 1970

Shirley Chisholm's campaign for President of the United States, 1972

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (best known for its effects on scholastic sports for women)

Histories:

Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left
by Sara Evans, Knopf, NY 1979

Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975
by Alice Echols, University of Minnesota Press, 1989

The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America
by Ruth Rosen, Penguin Books, 2000

Freedom for Women: Forging the Women's Liberation Movement 1953–1970
by Carol Giardina, University Press of Florida, 2010

An Oppressed Majority Demands Its Rights, *Life Magazine*, Dec 12, 1969, p66.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=yFAEAAAAMBAJ&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false>

Collections of Original Material produced by Women's Liberation:

Radical Feminism, A Documentary Reader
Barbara A. Crow, Ed., New York University Press, 2000.

Feminist Revolution (discusses disruptive practices that activists experienced)
by Redstockings, Random House, 1978

Archives:

Chicago Women's Liberation Union Herstory Project
<http://www.cwluherstory.com/>

Duke University, Special Collections Library, Documents from the Women's Liberation Movement
<http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/>

Additional Resources on COINTELPRO

This Freedom Archives site includes many other resources related to the FBI's COINTELPRO program. http://www.freedomarchives.org/Cointel_Resources.html

"The Church Committee Hearings" Hearings before the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), 6:98-103, 360-66, 540-85.

http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/FBI/Church_Committee_Report.html

Ruth Rosen's book, *The World Split Open* (listed above) reproduces some of the Church Committee testimony about infiltration of the Women's Liberation Movement. Parts can be read online at amazon.com—<http://www.amazon.com/World-Split-Open-Movement-Changed/dp/0140097198>

Roberta Salper, U.S. Government Surveillance and the Women's Movement 1968–1973: A Case Study <http://www.feministstudies.org/issues/vol-30-39/34-3.html> (\$10.00 for pdf of this article)

Paul Wolf was a major contributor to the resources on COINTELPRO found on the Freedom Archives web page and has more information on his own web site regarding the New Left and Women's Liberation. <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/COINTELPRO/newleft.htm#womenslib>