



*The Lavender
Menace*

First Wave Feminism

- ❖ What was first wave feminism?
 - Main goal of legal rights, especially women's suffrage (the right to vote)
 - 19th to early 20th century
 - 19th Amendment (no voting discrimination on basis of sex) passed by Congress in 1919 and adopted in 1920
 - Some suffragettes lived with other women in "Boston Marriages," which allowed them the freedom to pursue social work while having a partner that dealt with domestic duties
- ❖ Who benefitted from first wave feminism?
 - Mostly white women
 - Black people/women were often barred from exercising their right to vote through poll taxes, literacy tests, violence/intimidation, etc.
 - Some suffragettes opposed the passing of the 15th Amendment (that granted suffrage to Black men) in 1870 before white women's suffrage
 - Some national women's rights groups did not allow Black members to join or did not include Black issues in their work so Black women created their own suffrage groups
 - Native American people/women were granted citizenship/the right to vote in 1924 but often prevented from exercising it
 - Asian American suffrage not achieved until 1952



Ida B. Wells
(Image Credit: NWHM)



Elizabeth Cady Stanton
(Image Credit: NPR)

Second Wave Feminism

- ❖ What inspired Second Wave Feminism? What were its goals?
 - Cultural, economic, legal advancement for women
 - 1960s and 1970s
 - Success of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which described the suburban wife's boredom with her unfulfilling life of housework and child-rearing (predominately middle-class, white women's sentiment)
 - National Organization for Women (NOW) founded in 1966 to lobby for women's rights, including reproductive rights and work protections
 - Later, more radical organizations fought for "women's liberation" instead of "women's rights"
- ❖ What else was going on in the United States?
 - Civil Rights Movement
 - Gay Liberation Movement
 - Vietnam War Protests
 - United Farm Workers' Movement



Gloria Steinem
(Image Credit: AP)

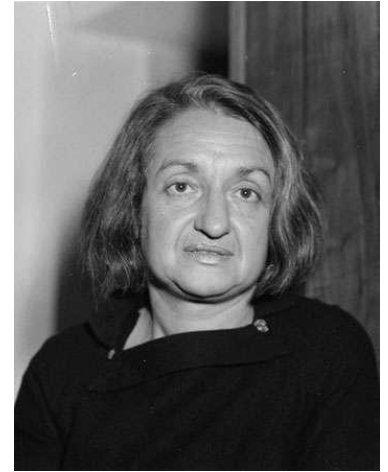


Civil Rights Protest
Image Credit: History Channel

Betty's Blunder

- ❖ In 1969, Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique* and first president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), labelled lesbians a “lavender menace” to the women’s movement, arguing they encouraged a misguided view of all feminists as lesbians and “man-haters.”

- ❖ In 1970, activist Susan Brownmiller deemed lesbians a “lavender herring,” suggesting that lesbians posed no threat but were, in fact, irrelevant to the women’s movement.



(Image Credit: Smithsonian)



(Image Credit: The Cut)

Reclaiming the Narrative

- ❖ After Friedan's and Brownmiller's comments, lesbians involved in gay rights and women's rights groups began to organize independently
 - Lesbians felt their unique experiences went unheard and unacknowledged in both circles
 - As activist Karla Jay wrote, "Most heterosexual feminists were no better at hearing us than gay men were."
- ❖ On May 1, 1970, at Second Congress to Unite Women in New York, as the conference was about to start, the lights suddenly flicked off and attendees heard running and giggling. When the lights came back on, a group of about 20 women stood on the stage, wearing shirts that read "Lavender Menace."



Image Credit: Affinity Magazine

Reclaiming the Narrative (cont.)

- ❖ These women invited the audience to join them in a discussion around lesbian grievances, and more women in the audience revealed Lavender Menace shirts under their clothing and walked up to the stage.
- ❖ To the members' surprise, many of the attendees expressed enthusiasm about participating in the surprise forum.
- ❖ Black and working-class women's consciousness-raising groups joined the Lavender Menace (a predominately white and middle class group) in their action to bring issues of racism and classism into the dialogue.
- ❖ Lavender Menace members passed out copies of their manifesto, "The Woman-Identified Woman," which promoted lesbian feminism- lesbianism as a political practice in the vein of the Second Wave Feminist mantra, "The personal is political."



Image Credit: NY Times

The Exclusivity Error

- ❖ The women who had participated in the Lavender Menace “zap” (or political disruption) went on to rebrand themselves the “Radicalesbians.”
- ❖ The Radicalesbians refused to associate with straight men, gay men, straight women, and even bisexual women- any individual with ties to patriarchy or heterosexuality.
- ❖ Their advocacy of lesbian separatism (e.g. living in lesbian-only communities) even isolated other lesbians: for example, Black lesbian groups like the Combahee River Collective, which wrote in 1977, “Although we are feminists and Lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that white women who are separatists demand” (3). For the CRC, race was a more powerful commonality than sexual orientation in their activism.



Image Credit: CRC

A Lesbian Legacy

- ❖ The Lavender Menace Zap brought lesbian issues into the dialogue for mainstream feminists groups and had a lasting impact.
- ❖ Activist Karla Jay asserts the zap, “remains for activists, for historians, and for those of us who participated in it the single most important action organized by lesbians who wanted the women’s movement to acknowledge our presence and needs.”
- ❖ Lesbians also fought for a voice in the Gay Liberation Movement, where male voices often dominated.



Image Credit: Gender, Race, and Class

Discussion Questions

- ❖ Who has historically been excluded from women's movements and why?
- ❖ Who remains excluded today?
 - Example: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's statement that "Trans women are trans women" (interview found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP1C7VXUfZQ>) and the debate over the inclusion of trans women in contemporary feminism)
 - Example: Janet Mock's struggle to include support for sex workers in the Women's March statement (article found [here](#))
- ❖ How can a movement strive for true inclusivity? What does that look like?



Women's March 2017
Image Credit: Rolling Stone

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