Seven Ways Women's Rights were tied to the Civil Rights Movement

In a way, women's rights are Civil rights. Sometimes, the Civil Rights Movement and feminism went hand in hand. Other times, women were forced to take the back seat. Men did not see women as equal, nor did black men see black women as equal. Sometimes, women had an advantage in the Civil Rights Movement because a woman acting out was not seen to be as threatening as a black man acting out. "Almost as soon as slavery came to the colonies it was established that black women could be more outspoken than their husbands and brothers and fathers. The sharp-tongued Charleston market women of the eighteenth century and the sassy "mammy" of the plantation South were only two of the models for black women who could, under certain circumstances, give white people a piece of their mind. The liberties were greater for older women than younger, and for large, maternal-looking women than pretty girls. But there was no model for a black male being permitted to put white people in their place."[1] Other times, they were at a double disadvantage for being black but also mistreated by black men.

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[1] Collins, Gail. "19 The Sixties, The Pendulum Swings Back with a Vengeance." Essay. In *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*, 430. New York, NY: HarperCollins e-books, 2009.

1. The Bus Boycott.

   Women were at the heart of the Montgomery bus boycotts. It was not only Rosa Parks, who refused to give up her seat, but also Aurelia Shines, Claudette Colvin Susie Mc Donald, and Mary Louise Smith who did the same butt were not well suited to be the test case, be it timing or perceived character. It was primarily women who rode the buses. It took the dedication of women to keep walking and their skills to organize support like carpools. “Aurelia, Claudette, Susie, and Mary Louise represent the tireless commitment of lesser-known or otherwise nameless makers of the movement.”[2]



[2] Berry, Daina Ramey, and Kali N. Gross. “CHAPTER NINE AURELIA’S LAWSUIT AGAINST JIM CROW, 1950–1970.” Essay. In *A Black Women’s History of the United States*, 168. Boston: Beacon Press, 2020.

[3] “Montgomery Bus Boycott: Media.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed February 27, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/event/Montgomery-bus-boycott/images-videos.

2. The March on Washington

   In March 1963, the March on Washington was where Martin Luther King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. Despite Rosa Parks, Pauli Murry, and Daisy Bates being present, none were given a speaking turn. No woman was on the official program. Yet women worked tirelessly behind the scenes to mobilize and organize the march. Women who were a fundamental part of the movement were introduced with other notable women like dancer Josephine Baker and actress Lena Horne in a way that diminished their importance.

   “Nowadays, women wouldn’t stand for being kept so much in the background, but back then women’s rights hadn’t become a popular cause yet,” Rosa Parks said later in life. [4]



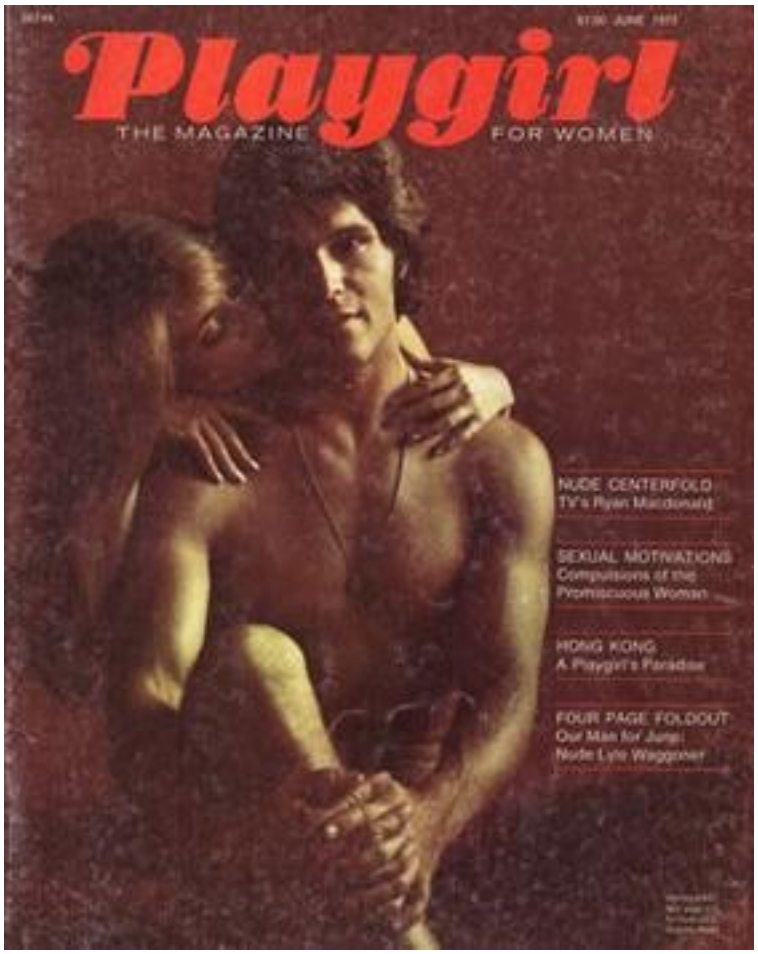
[5]

[4] Collins, Gail. “19 The Sixties, The Pendulum Swings Back with a Vengeance.” Essay. In *America’s Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*, 429. New York, NY: HarperCollins e-books, 2009.

[5] Get to know the 6 forgotten women of the original March on Washington. Accessed February 28, 2024. https://www.cosmopolitan.com/politics/a33822164/women-march-on-washington/.

3. Hairy Legged Bunnies

When the Civil Rights Bill was debated, Representative Howard Smith of Virginia added women jokingly, thinking it would hinder the bill or be removed. The bill passed protecting women in the workplace (on paper, at least), but it took a long time to be taken seriously or for persecution to occur. It was considered a distraction from the real problem of race discrimination in the workplace. It is an excellent example of how the civil rights movement swept women's rights forward with it. Jokes were passed around about male Playboy bunnies—the irony when Douglas Lambert Created Playgirl a decade later.[6]



[6] "Playgirl." Wikipedia, February 21, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Playgirl.

4. Rape as a Weapon

Sexual violence is a significant problem for women throughout history. But in a culture where the kind of brutal rape combined with physical torture was rare for white women when and seen as something that was from a different age, we still saw these cases used as a kind of weapon to scare black women in the Civil Rights Movement. Even more infuriatingly, it took a long time for it to be punished. In a landmark case for the 1959 rape of Betty Jean Owens, we finally saw justice for a black woman. [7]



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[7] Berry, Daina Ramey, and Kali N. Gross. "CHAPTER NINE AURELIA'S LAWSUIT AGAINST JIM CROW, 1950–1970." Essay. In *A Black Women's History of the United States*, 175. Boston: Beacon Press, 2020.

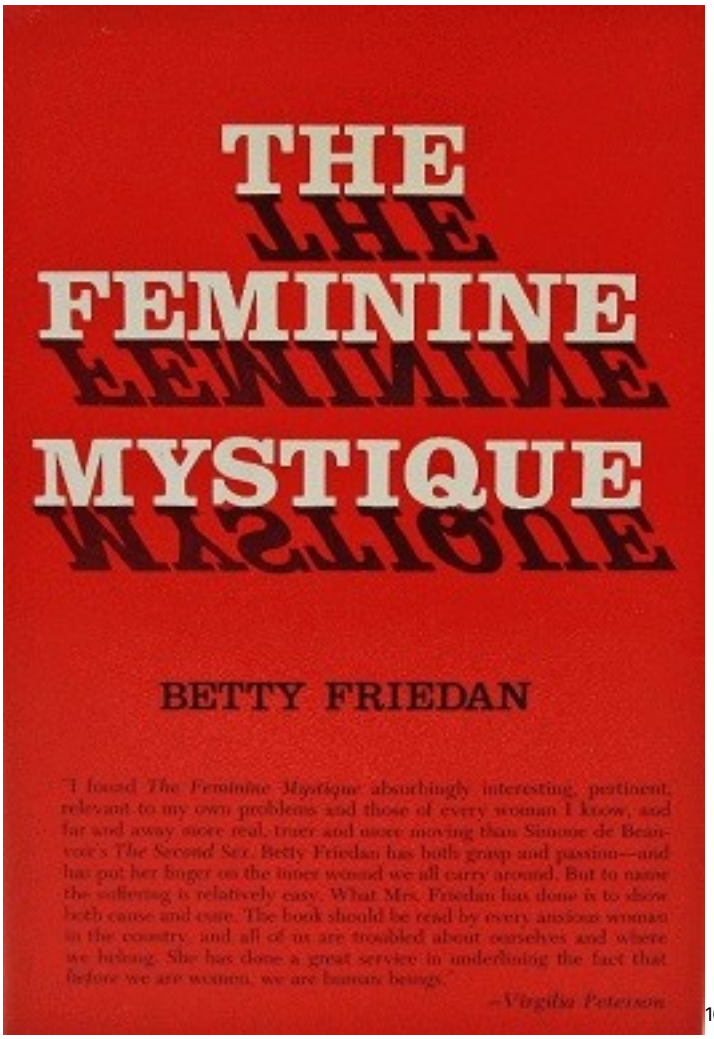
[8] "Betty Jean Owens' Case Changed America after Her Brutal Rape." FYI. Accessed February 27, 2024. https://vocal.media/fyi/betty-jean-owens-case-changed-america-after-her-brutal-rape.

5. Black Housewife?

   The book The Feminine Mystique addressed the dissatisfaction of housewives and their need to be and do more. It did not appeal to black women and working women then. “I could not imagine any women of color, particularly black women, who had ever thought that she was going just to be housewives. Because there was so much discrimination against Black people that no family could survive if black women did not also work outside the house.” Aileen Hernandez, Commissioner for the EEOC.[9] The struggles of black women and white women were often far apart.

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[9] *FEMINIST: STORIES FROM WOMEN’S LIBERATION*. USA: Women Make Movies, 2013. https://www.wmm.com/catalog/film/feminist-stories-from-womens-liberation/.



[10]

[10] "The Feminine Mystique." Wikipedia, January 10, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Feminine_Mystique.

6. Women of SNCC

Many black leaders got their first opportunities through SNCC. The first memo Casey Haden and Mary King authored they did anonymously, “Casey and I were afraid of ridicule.” Mary. SNCC offered an opportunity to do things differently and to have new leadership and ideas. The media took note when white people protesting on black people’s behalf got arrested in the South.[11] Ella Baker, Ruby Doris Smith Robison, Fannie Lou Hammer, Gwendolyn Zohara Simmons, Unita Black, and Diane Nash became notable SNCC members, making a difference in the civil rights movement. Unita Black went on to be the first female black Mayor in Mississippi.[12]



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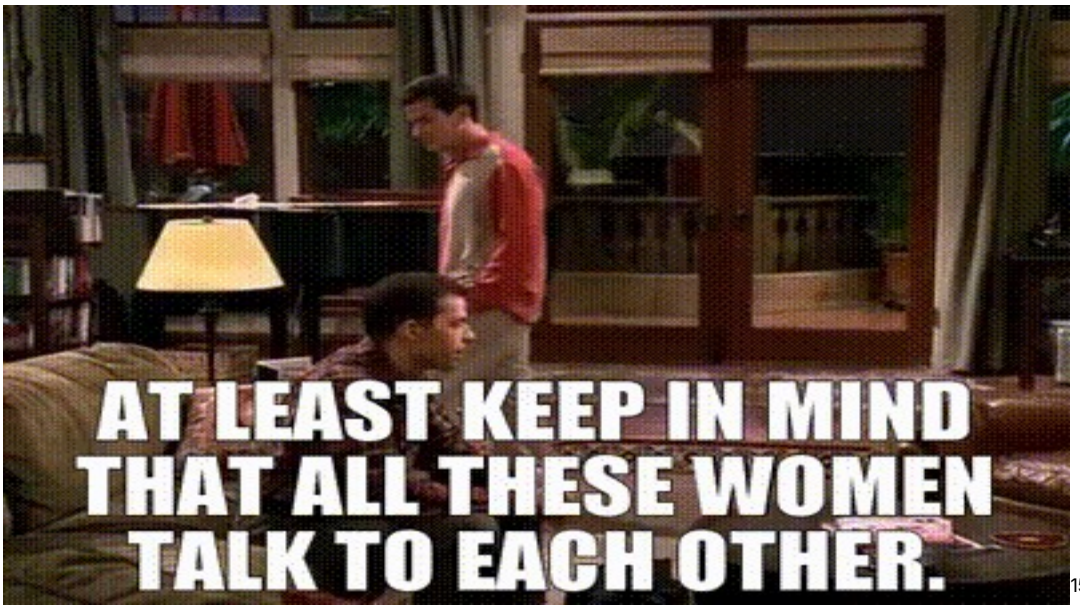
[11] *FEMINIST: STORIES FROM WOMEN’S LIBERATION*. USA: Women Make Movies, 2013. https://www.wmm.com/catalog/film/feminist-stories-from-womens-liberation/.

[12] Berry, Daina Ramey, and Kali N. Gross. “CHAPTER NINE AURELIA’S LAWSUIT AGAINST JIM CROW, 1950–1970.” Essay. In *A Black Women’s History of the United States*, 170. Boston: Beacon Press, 2020.

[13] “Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.” Wikipedia, February 21, 2024. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Student_Nonviolent_Coordinating_Committee.

7. Talking

Consciousness-raising was a way to find out the truth about the state of womanhood by getting women together to talk about their experiences. It was a way to break through taboos and find the real issues facing women. It seems strange now, but people were not aware social problems existed because no one talked about them. “Although I will say that’s another concept that came from the civil rights movement. Because those of us who were in the Civil Rights Movement saw how powerful it was when the SNCC organizers would go into churches, and they would stand up and talk about their experiences.” Kathie Sarachild[14]



[15]

[14] *FEMINIST: STORIES FROM WOMEN’S LIBERATION*. USA: Women Make Movies, 2013. https://www.wmm.com/catalog/film/feminist-stories-from-womens-liberation/.

[15] “At Least Keep in Mind That All These Women Talk to Each Other.” Yarn. Accessed February 27, 2024. https://trailers.getyarn.io/yarn-clip/36136fb3-f035-4a80-8bda-74b6eea571bb/gif.