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Gloria Who? To a Generation of Women She Was Martin Luther King, Jr.



[Victoria Pynchon](#), Contributor



This coming Monday, [HBO will broadcast a documentary about an activist](#) without whom a couple of generations of women wouldn't have entered professional and business schools, joined the military, apprenticed in the skilled trades, held political office, served as clergy or worked in police and fire stations throughout the country.

That woman is [Gloria Steinem](#), the Martin Luther King, Jr. of the Second Wave Women's Movement.

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't just Steinem who led the fight for equal opportunity and comparable pay. [Gloria Feldt](#), former CEO and leadership consultant was in the battle too, testifying before Congress about and managing a [nationwide non-profit](#) that supported women's reproductive freedom. Providing women with the means to plan their families is likely a greater contribution to the

liberation of women than all the legislating, all of the writing, all of the marching, all of the speech-making and all the consciousness-raising that got us from the kitchen to meaningful roles and adequate compensation in the workplace.

Germaine Greer wrote one of the books that launched the movement too ([The Female Eunuch](#)) even though she spoke primarily to and on behalf of white middle class women. Robin Morgan who anthologized feminist writers in the ground-breaking book [Sisterhood is Powerful](#) was there too and, unbeknownst to me at the time, helping to fund the first [Federal Feminist Credit Union](#) sponsored by the San Diego Center for Women's Studies and Services for which I worked in my early twenties.

The radical feminists such as Shulamith Firestone also contributed to my own early feminist education as did left-wing philosopher Simone de Beauvoir ([The Second Sex](#)) and the literary academic Kate Millet ([Sexual Politics](#) - a paperback I never did return to the CWSS library - sorry ladies!).

Consciousness Raising and the Unholy Mess of Organizing

Now they teach these texts in college classrooms. At the time, women read and discussed them in consciousness raising groups in living rooms all over the country. We were trying to understand why we'd been relegated to the kitchen, the elementary school room, the nursing ward, and the typing pool. We were baking cakes with keys to the prison door inside, liberating one another one woman, one girl, one living room at a time.

The movement was, of course, an unholy mess. The radical feminists accused the [National Organization for Women](#) of being as damnably bourgeois as the GOP, seeking simply to cut women into the "white man's pie." The radicals believed themselves to be aligned with people of color and with the third world. People of color didn't often return the favor and understandably so. The Third World was oblivious. Like the counter-culture itself, the movement took place in first world countries and was spearheaded by college-educated women.

The radicals, like many people in the left at the time, truly believed in the possibility of a revolution by oppressed and marginalized people throughout the world. But we could barely hold our own grassroots organizations together let alone take over the world. Lesbians fought with straight women and communards fought with suburban housewives. The radicals disdained all mainstream institutions and the moderates ridiculed both the left and the right, trying to shoe-horn women's rights into whatever political party would promote them.

We continue to feel these divisions among women to this day. All the hard choices we women share – career, family, political involvement – have become mere talking points to damn the opposition and praise ourselves. We have seen the enemy and it is us.

Gloria Steinem was my Martin Luther King, Jr.

I say Steinem was the Martin Luther King, Jr. of an entire generation not because she was the most important leader of the movement but because she spoke directly and eloquently to more women than anyone else through the pages of [Ms. Magazine](#).

Steinem was thoughtful, outspoken and honest - *earnest* - in a way I'd never heard a political figure be before. Here, for instance, she talks about assertive women being called "bitches." And she allows as how it's painful. Painful then and painful now. But no reason to stop organizing.

RetroBites: Gloria Steinem: Feminist (1971)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uu8INQWP5yY&feature=player_embedded

Click!

One of her earliest writers in Ms. Magazine launched the word "click" to stand for the moment when each individual woman recognized that something was not quite right with the way they were being portrayed in popular culture or the manner in which they were being excluded from the opportunities then primarily available to white men.

I've told my own personal story too many times already in the pages of *ForbesWoman*. Today I simply want to show you again (for surely you've seen these before) the advertising that no

woman I knew considered demeaning until women like Steinem said, “hey look at that over there! Is that really ok with you? Does it affect the way you feel about yourself? And does it stop you from picking up that LSAT study guide and applying to law school?”

As Steinem famously said, “the truth shall set you free. But first it will piss you off.”

So I ask young women to imagine the following advertisements as something they simply thought was their due. And then think again if you want to call feminism a “joke.”



Anita Hill, the Two Glorias, Shelby Knox and Jamia Wilson

Before I give you the rest of this small collection of nostalgic 1960's advertising, I want to tell you about something exciting. This year is the 20th anniversary of the historic [Anita Hill-Clarence Thomas hearings](#). For the past 19 years, S. Carolina women have been honoring Professor Hill's contribution to women's right to be free of sexual harassment in the workplace with an annual [I Believe Anita Party](#). This year, for the 20th Anniversary, Professor Hill will be for the first time attending that party (on October 20) and the following day she will keynote the annual [S. Carolina Women Lawyers Association Conference](#).

I keynoted this conference last year after which I brain-stormed a panel with the SCWLA that I'll be leading on the [intersection of sexual harassment and implicit gender bias](#) with the two Glorias ([Steinem](#) and [Feldt](#)); [Shelby Knox](#) whose high school sex education activism was the subject of the award-winning documentary, [The Education of Shelby Knox](#) and [Jamia Wilson](#), staff member of the [Women's Media Center](#) in New York City – a non-profit formed by Steinem and [Jane Fonda](#) to raise women's voices in the media.

You can see all four of those dynamite panelists in this video narrated by Gloria Feldt. All four women who will be speaking on a panel I'll be moderating at the South Carolina Women Lawyers and Leadership Summit.

Define Your Own Terms - One of 9 Ways from No Excuses by Gloria Feldt

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltNq1pB7bN8&feature=player_embedded

Really???? Really! And No One Complained



A Little More about Shelby Knox from Marie Claire Magazine:

Shelby Knox Rocks the Feminist Movement

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIk1eUk3m1o&feature=player_embedded

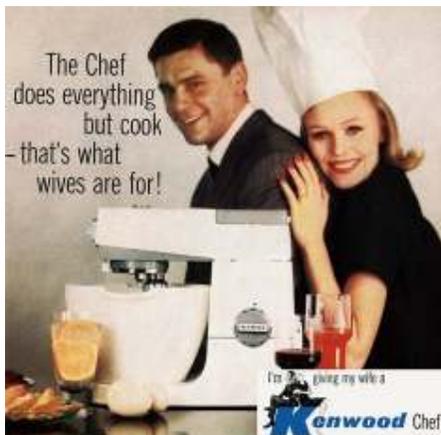
Yes, Disrespect Makes Me Hot



Jamia Wilson Speaking at a New York City Rally:

Jamia Wilson, Women's Media Center

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3jGcTlkoTzg&feature=player_embedded



What Wives are For

You don't see these images of women anymore. Recent ad campaigns that demeaned women were quickly shouted down and just as quickly removed from circulation by the tin-eared executive who approved them. Feminism is not a joke. It is and was a human liberation movement no "funnier" nor less important than the successive civil rights movements that began with desegregation and end with the right of same gender people not only to love one another, but to marry and raise children together.

Come hear the women who said "click" as well as those who are taking the message to new generations of women, white and black, gay and straight and transgender, Christian and Jew and Muslim.