

WOMEN ON THE MARCH: ACTIVISM OF THE SIXTIES



UNH students from Students for a Democratic Society chapter participate in a Washington rally in the late 60's



The student strike involved many students all across campus. Sit-ins and marches, discussions and confrontations were part of student life during this time.

The national civil rights movement during the 1960s had profound effects on the whole country and changed the lives of many women and men. For both black and white women, there was the dawning awareness that women lacked leadership positions. Activist women were relegated to secretarial and clerical positions within the movement. Decision-making was in the hands of the men and the only way women's voices were heard was usually through a relationship with a prominent male leader. Access to power was relational, sexual, and had racial connotations. When the power relationship ended, so did any influence. Eventually the women separated and formed their own organizations. Passion and concern for the civil rights of others contributed to the development of the second mostly white feminist movement.

At the University of New Hampshire, the national civil rights movement created similar initiatives. A movement for giving voice to many unheard segments of the campus community resulted in new organizations that included students, faculty and the administration.

Women students who were part of the the local chapters of SDS (initiated in 1966) and the Student Political Union, SPU (formed in 1968) reflected on their experiences. Like their national counterparts, they began to recognize differences in the rhetoric of universal equality and their own treatment within these more radical organizations. No longer content to be relegated to the background and to not have their concerns addressed, a number of women on campus formed their own organizations in 1969. Although they represented a minority of women, at one time there were as many as five different organizations, each with a slightly different focus and with different ways of promoting women's issues:

- ✿ Feminist Liberation Front
- ✿ Women's Caucus
- ✿ Feminist Liberation
- ✿ Women's Liberation Front
- ✿ Women's Liberation Committee

These organizations educated the campus community about women's issues and their roles in society. They proposed ways to change the stereotypes held about women and to



Women campus activists formed different groups to challenge stereotypes about women and their roles. These groups created discussion sessions in dormitories about abortion, birth control, abolishing women's curfews, women's health, and the feminization of poverty. Women wrote articles in the newspaper, created plays, and sponsored various programs about women's issues.

disappeared. Influenced by their opposition to the Vietnam war, the recent shootings of college students at Kent State and the lengthy struggle with the administration over the Chicago three's appearance on campus, protests exploded into a student strike in May of 1970. There were sit-ins, teach-ins, marches and building occupation. Feminist student issues were represented in a small way by one issue of a newly created news sheet, *Strike Daily*.



Created in 1962, the Whittemore School of Business and Economics was an important resource during the student strike in 1970. Dean Jan Cleo met students at the door, inviting them into the building to have a cup of coffee. He offered the building as Strike Central for discussion, photocopying and training. Faculty, community members and students facilitated conversations about the issues, resolving conflict constructively there and in other places on campus.



Black activist Dick Gregory speaks at UNH in 1968, the year Martin Luther King Jr. was killed. "Black folks do not hate white folks...we hate the whole white racist system and institutions that are choking us to death... and you whites are responsible for the system..."



create equality at the University.

A women's coalition conducted a sit-in protesting the lack of coverage in the student newspaper, *The New Hampshire*. On March 20, 1970, there was an edition written by women students devoted solely to women's issues.

Women in the student body, who had been represented by the Association of Women Students until 1950, and now as the Women's Rules Committee of the Student Senate pursued an initial agenda in the mid-1960s to change women's discriminatory social rules. By the 1970s the nightly curfews and being subjected to "bed-checks," not being able to consume alcohol (for men it was permitted), and no visiting hours for women and men were gradually removed. Within several years the restrictions of the past decades



These women, age 22 to 40, with their college beanies on and with their 20 children in tow marched into President John Mc Connell's office and demanded that "the University help them go to college". They were the first non-traditional students organization at UNH, known as Disadvantaged Women for Higher Education (DWHE). Later another group of non-traditional students met to discuss their issues, in time becoming officially the Non-Traditional Student Organization, that is present today with a lounge and office in the MUB.