

Avengers is for women who want to be activists, want to take responsibility for making things happen, want to do the shit work, have their minds blown, change their opinions, share organizing skills, and work in community. You don't have to spray paint billboards (although it's really fun)! You have to be willing to act-out publicly. We want to *empower* lesbians as leaders!

WHY NO ABSTRACT THEORETICAL DISCUSSION?

How many of us have sat in meetings arguing political theory to the point of mental and physical exhaustion, to the point where we run screaming to the nearest dance floor for release from the frustrations?! To keep our work pro-active and fulfilling and successful, we focus our political discussions on the creations and purpose of an *action*. We agree to disagree on political ideology—it is too easy to create false polarities. We also encourage women to *take responsibility* for their own suggestions—be willing to make them happen. Instead of saying “someone should . . .” try saying “I will . . .” or “Who will do this with me?” In our meetings, if you disagree with a proposal on the floor, instead of tearing it apart, propose another way of realizing the goal. The Avengers is a place where ideas are realized, where lesbians can have an impact. A crucial part of that is learning how to *propose alternatives* instead of just offering critiques. Be willing to put your body where your brain is—matter over mind!

Notes

- 1 The Lesbian Avengers, accessed Feb. 15, 2017, www.lesbianavengers.com.
- 2 These examples come from “Shaping Lesbian Avenger Actions.” Lesbian Avengers, accessed Feb. 15, 2017, www.lesbianavengers.com.
- 3 Ibid.

74

The Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law
Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional)

Chiapas, Mexico
January 1, 1994



EZLN Women’s Revolutionary Laws poster (2007). Art by Melanie Cervantes and Jesus Barraza.

Copyright © 2018, New York University Press. All rights reserved.

A mostly indigenous, rural group in southern Mexico, the revolutionary Zapatistas combine Mayan beliefs with elements from South American leftist movements. They mobilized at first against NAFTA, and broadened these concerns about indigenous rights, globalization, and neoliberalism to advocate for greater democracy, equality, and control over their land. At the time, “most families in the Chiapas region lived in dire poverty. And for women, an already difficult situation was often made worse because of gender discriminatory cultural practices, beliefs, and behaviors. The culture in Chiapas dictated a subordinate and oppressive position in the family for women—who were often the victims of unpunished spousal abuse and rape—and a macho role for men.”¹ After early military forays, the Zapatistas committed themselves to nonviolence.

Changes in the lives of indigenous Mayan women are advocated in the Women’s Revolutionary Law, which was passed by consensus within the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN) in 1993. Anonymous suggestions collected from Zapatista, Tojobal, Chol, Tzotzil, and Tzeltal women by Comandante Ramona, Major Ana María, and EZLN activist Susana formed the foundation of the ten sections listed in the document. Reactions to it were varied, and it had to be defended as part of the struggle. “Both Comandanta Ramona and Comandanta Susana spent over four months travelling throughout those then-Zapatista communities. They visited each and every community dialoguing with the Zapatistas collectively through community assemblies, as is the custom of the people of the region. Once accepted in each Zapatista community and village, it was proposed that the Law be included in the EZLN publication, *El Despertador Mexicano, Organo Informativo del EZLN*.”² The centrality of women’s rights to the Zapatista agenda was remarkable at the time, and is a commitment the group continues to honor and wrestle with in its daily practices, where obstacles to equality remain.

Given the commitments of the Zapatistas to human rights and democracy, and the important role that women have played in the Zapatista movement, it has been fertile territory for the struggle for gender equality. The list of laws³ contain basic and revolutionary rights, some that apply to all and some drawn to address the specific wrongs women have experienced. The freedom and autonomy women have in the law is combined with their right to participate in their cherished community. Women hold positions of authority in their communities’ commissions and among EZLN insurgents. The Women’s Revolutionary Law has become a symbol of women’s equality. It has been said that the EZLN spurred indigenous women to organize, but that Zapatista women have gone on to become important advocates for indigenous women’s rights.⁴

Zapatista Women’s Revolutionary Law

In their just fight for the liberation of our people, the EZLN incorporates women in the revolutionary struggle regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, requiring only that they meet the demands of the exploited people and that they commit to the laws and regulations of the revolution. As well as taking account of the situation of the woman worker in Mexico, the revolution incorporates their just demands of equality and justice in the following Women’s Revolutionary Law.

First—Women, regardless of their race, creed, color or political affiliation, have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle in any way that their desire and capacity determine.

Second—Women have the right to work and receive a just salary.

Third—Women have the right to decide the number of children they have and care for.

Fourth—Women have the right to participate in the matters of the community and have charge if they are free and democratically elected.

Fifth—Women and their children have the right to Primary Attention in their health and nutrition.

Sixth—Women have the right to education.

Seventh—Women have the right to choose their partner and are not obliged to enter into marriage.

Eighth—Women have the right to be free of violence from both relatives and strangers. Rape and attempted rape will be severely punished.

Ninth—Women will be able to occupy positions of leadership in the organization and hold military ranks in the revolutionary armed forces.

Tenth—Women will have all the rights and obligations which the revolutionary laws and regulations give.

Notes

- 1 Devon Hansen and Laura Ryan, "Teaching Women in the Zapatista Movement: Gender, Health, and Resistance," in *World History Connected* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), worldhistoryconnected.press.illinois.edu.
- 2 Sylvia Marcos, "The Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Law as It Is Lived Today," July 22, 2014. [openDemocracy](http://openDemocracy.net), www.opendemocracy.net.
- 3 EZLN, "Zapatista Women's Revolutionary Laws." *El Despertador Mexicano*, Jan. 1, 1994. Schools for Chiapas, www.schoolsforchiapas.org.
- 4 R. Hernandez Castillo, "Zapatismo and the Emergence of Indigenous Feminism." *NACLA Report on the Americas* 35.6 (May/June 2002).