



GETTING TO KNOW WAVES OF FEMINISM

Research and Development Division

OUR TOPICS

What Does Wave of Feminism Mean?

- 1st Wave of Feminism
- 2nd Wave of Feminism
- 3rd Wave of Feminism
- 4th Wave of Feminism



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Tremendous amounts of talent are
being lost to our society just
because that talent wears a skirt.

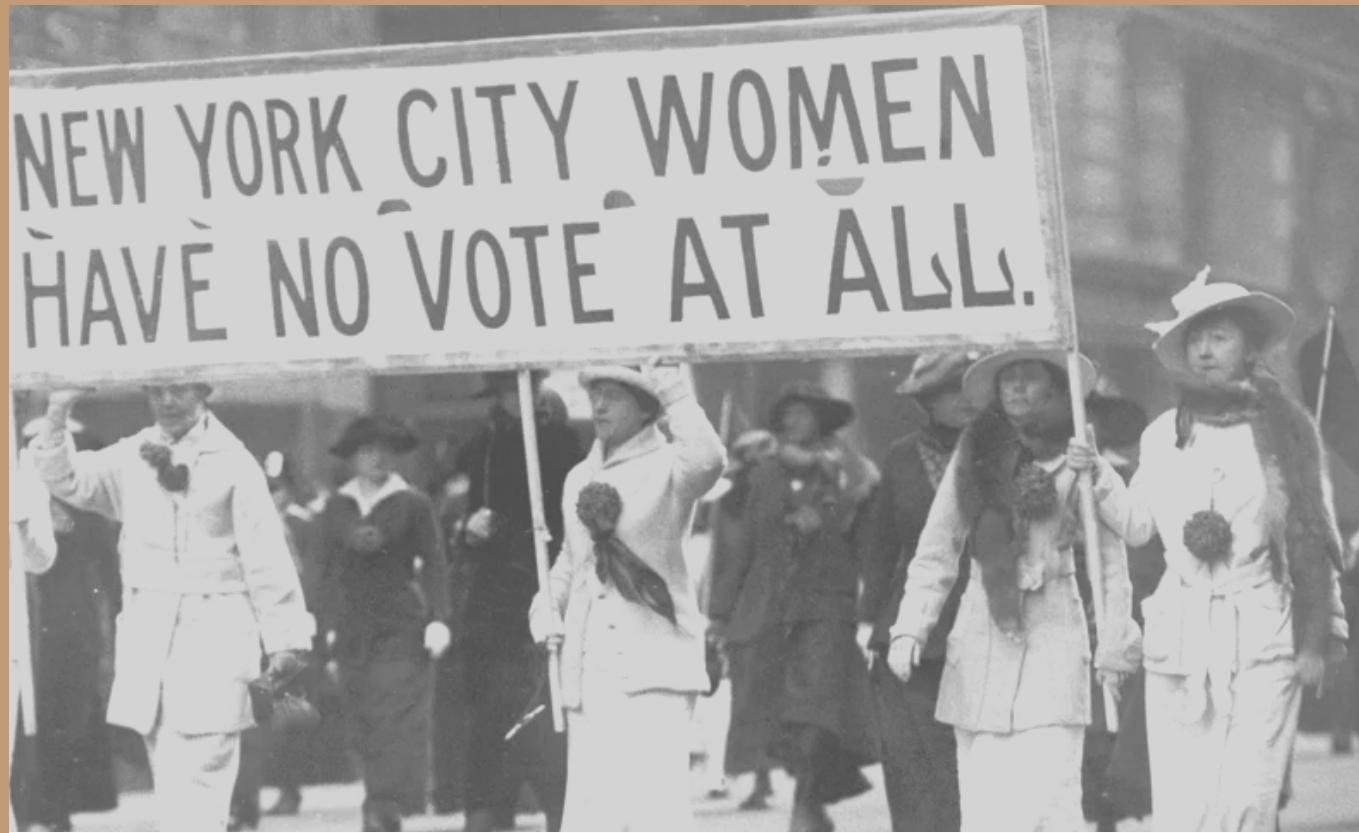
Shirley Chisholm

WHAT DOES WAVE MEAN IN FEMINISM?

HOW DOES IT START?

People began talking about feminism as a series of waves in 1968 when a New York Times article by Martha Weinman Lear ran under the headline “The Second Feminist Wave.”

The wave metaphor caught on: It became a useful way of linking the women’s movement of the ’60s and ’70s to the women’s movement of the suffragettes and to suggest that the women’s libbers weren’t a bizarre historical aberration, as their detractors sneered, but a new chapter in a grand history of women fighting together for their rights. Over time, the wave metaphor became a way to describe and distinguish between different eras and generations of feminism.



THE FIRST WAVE: 1848 TO 1920

The first wave basically begins with the Seneca Falls convention of 1848. At the convention, abolitionists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott boldly proclaimed in their now-famous Declaration of Sentiments that “We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal.” There, almost 200 women met in a church in upstate New York to discuss “the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women.”

Attendees discussed their grievances and passed a list of 12 resolutions calling for specific equal rights – including, after much debate, the right to vote. Many attendees thought voting rights for women were beyond the pale, but were swayed when Frederick Douglass argued that he could not accept the right to vote as a Black man if women could not also claim that right. When the resolution passed, the women’s suffrage movement began in earnest, and dominated much of feminism for several decades.

THE MILESTONE

70 years of marching, lecturing, and protesting

Slowly, suffragettes began to claim some successes: In 1893, New Zealand became the first sovereign state giving women the right to vote, followed by Australia in 1902 and Finland in 1906. In a limited victory, the United Kingdom granted suffrage to women over 30 in 1918.

FINALLY!

In 1920, United States Congress passed the **19th Amendment** granting women the right to vote. (In theory, it granted the right to women of all races, but in practice, **it remained difficult for black women to vote**)

What happened next?

Individual groups continued to work – for reproductive freedom, for equality in education and employment, for voting rights for black women – the movement as a whole began to splinter. It no longer had a unified goal with strong cultural momentum behind it, and it would not find another until the second wave began to take off in the 1960s.



ONE IS NOT BORN A WOMAN, BUT BECOMES ONE.
(SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR)

THE SECOND WAVE: 1963 TO THE 1980S

The second wave of feminism begins with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, which came out in 1963. *The Feminine Mystique* rails against "the problem that has no name": the systemic sexism that taught women that their place was in the home and that if they were unhappy as housewives, it was only because they were broken and perverse.

And once those 3 million readers realized that they were angry, feminism once again had cultural momentum behind it. It had a unifying goal, too: not just political equality, which the first-wavers had fought for, but social equality.

The Milestone

- "THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL"

They would go on to argue that problems that seemed to be individual and petty — about sex, and relationships, and access to abortions, and domestic labor — were in fact systemic and political, and fundamental to the fight for women's equality.

- ACHIEVEMENTS

So the movement won some major legislative and legal victories: The Equal Pay Act of 1963 theoretically outlawed the gender pay gap; a series of landmark Supreme Court cases through the '60s and '70s gave women the right to use birth control; Title IX gave women the right to educational equality; and in 1973, Roe v. Wade guaranteed women reproductive freedom.

- THE RUINS

In the 1980s, the comfortable conservatism of the Reagan era managed to successfully position second-wave feminists as humorless, hairy-legged shrews who cared only about petty bullshit like bras instead of real problems, probably to distract themselves from the loneliness of their lives, since no man would ever want a (shudder) feminist.

- HOW IT AFFECTS NOW

That image of feminists as angry and man-hating and lonely would become canonical as the second wave began to lose its momentum, and it continues to haunt the way we talk about feminism today. It would also become foundational to the way the third wave would position itself as it emerged.

THE THIRD WAVE

1991(?) to ????

It is almost impossible to talk with any clarity about the third wave because few people agree on exactly what the third wave is, when it started, or if it's still going on.

But generally, the beginning of the third wave is pegged to two things: the Anita Hill case in 1991, and the emergence of the riot grrrl groups in the music scene of the early 1990s.

In 1991, Anita Hill testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee that Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas had sexually harassed her at work. Thomas made his way to the Supreme Court anyway, but Hill's testimony sparked an avalanche of sexual harassment complaints, in much the same way that last fall's Harvey Weinstein accusations were followed by a litany of sexual misconduct accusations against other powerful men.

ACHIEVEMENT

And Congress's decision to send Thomas to the Supreme Court despite Hill's testimony led to a national conversation about the overrepresentation of men in national leadership roles. The following year, 1992, would be dubbed “the Year of the Woman” after 24 women won seats in the House of Representatives and three more won seats in the Senate.

Early third-wave activism tended to involve fighting against workplace sexual harassment and working to increase the number of women in positions of power.

MUSIC SCENE



Aesthetically, the third wave is deeply influenced by the rise of the riot grrrls, the girl groups who stomped their Doc Martens onto the music scene in the 1990s. Third-wavers liked being girls. They embraced the word; they wanted to make it empowering, even threatening – hence grrrl.

In part, the third-wave embrace of girliness was a response to the anti-feminist backlash of the 1980s, the one that said the second-wavers were shrill, hairy, and unfeminine and that no man would ever want them. And in part, it was born out of a belief that the rejection of girliness was in itself misogynistic: girliness, third-wavers argued, was not inherently less valuable than masculinity or androgyny.

And it was rooted in a growing belief that effective feminism had to recognize both the dangers and the pleasures of the patriarchal structures that create the beauty standard and that it was pointless to punish and censure individual women for doing things that brought them pleasure.

The Fourth Wave: Present Day



Some people think we're still in the third wave of feminism since the fourth wave isn't so much of a shift as the continued growth of the movement. However, with the MeToo movement and a resurgence of attacks on women's rights, many believe we're living in a new wave.

While a lot of media coverage of #MeToo describes it as a movement dominated by third-wave feminism, it actually seems to be centered in a movement that lacks the characteristic diffusion of the third wave. It feels different.

“**Maybe the fourth wave is online,**” said feminist Jessica Valenti in 2009, and that’s come to be one of the major ideas of fourth-wave feminism. Online is where activists meet and plan their activism, and it’s where feminist discourse and debate takes place. Sometimes fourth-wave activism can even take place on the internet (the “#MeToo” tweets), and sometimes it takes place on the streets (the Women’s March), but it’s conceived and propagated online.



WHAT ARE THE CAMPAIGNS?

Currently, the fourth-wavers are driving the movement behind #MeToo and Time's Up, but in previous years they were responsible for the cultural impact of projects like Emma Sulkowicz's Mattress Performance (Carry That Weight), in which a rape victim at Columbia University committed to carrying their mattress around campus until the university expelled their rapist.

The trending hashtag #YesAllWomen after the UC Santa Barbara shooting was a fourth-wave campaign, and so was the trending hashtag #StandWithWendy when Wendy Davis filibustered a Texas abortion law. Arguably, the SlutWalks that began in 2011 – in protest of the idea that the way to prevent rape is for women to “stop dressing like sluts” – are fourth-wave campaigns.



THANK YOU FOR
STICKING UNTIL HERE!
HOPE IT'S HELPFUL.

I do not wish women to have power over men; but over themselves. -Mary Wollstonecraft

REFERENCES



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