

# Feminism

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Feminism, the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes. Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

Throughout most of Western history, women were confined to the domestic sphere, while public life was reserved for men. In medieval Europe, women were denied the right to own property, to study, or to participate in public life. At the end of the 19th century in France, they were still compelled to cover their heads in public, and, in parts of Germany, a husband still had the right to sell his wife. Even as late as the early 20th century, women could neither vote nor hold elective office in Europe and in most of the United States (where several territories and states granted women's suffrage long before the federal government did so). Women were prevented from conducting business without a male representative, be it father, brother, husband, legal agent, or even son. Married women could not exercise control over their own children without the permission of their husbands. Moreover, women had little or no access to education and were barred from most professions. In some parts of the world, such restrictions on women continue today. See also egalitarianism.

## The ancient world

There is scant evidence of early organized protest against such circumscribed status. In the 3rd century bce, Roman women filled the Capitoline Hill and blocked every entrance to the Forum when consul Marcus Porcius Cato resisted attempts to repeal laws limiting women's use of expensive goods. "If they are victorious now, what will they not attempt?" Cato cried. "As soon as they begin to be your equals, they will have become your superiors."

That rebellion proved exceptional, however. For most of recorded history, only isolated voices spoke out against the inferior status of women, presaging the arguments to come. In late 14th- and early 15th-century France, the first feminist philosopher, Christine de Pisan, challenged prevailing attitudes toward women with a bold call for female education. Her mantle was taken up later in the century by Laura Cereta, a 15th-century Venetian woman who published *Epistolae familiares* (1488; "Personal Letters"; Eng. trans. *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*), a volume of letters dealing with a panoply of women's complaints, from denial of education and marital oppression to the frivolity of women's attire.

The defense of women had become a literary subgenre by the end of the 16th century, when *Il merito delle donne* (1600; *The Worth of Women*), a feminist broadside by another Venetian author, Moderata Fonte, was published posthumously. Defenders of the status quo painted women as superficial and inherently immoral, while the emerging feminists produced long lists of women of courage and accomplishment and proclaimed that women would be the intellectual equals of men if they were given equal access to education.

The so-called "debate about women" did not reach England until the late 16th century, when pamphleteers and polemicists joined battle over the true nature of womanhood. After a series of satiric pieces mocking women was published, the first feminist pamphleteer in England, writing as Jane Anger, responded with *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women* (1589). This volley of opinion continued for more than a century, until another English author, Mary Astell, issued a more reasoned rejoinder in *A Serious*

Proposal to the Ladies (1694, 1697). The two-volume work suggested that women inclined neither toward marriage nor a religious vocation should set up secular convents where they might live, study, and teach.

## Influence of the Enlightenment

The feminist voices of the Renaissance never coalesced into a coherent philosophy or movement. This happened only with the Enlightenment, when women began to demand that the new reformist rhetoric about liberty, equality, and natural rights be applied to both sexes.

Initially, Enlightenment philosophers focused on the inequities of social class and caste to the exclusion of gender. Swiss-born French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, portrayed women as silly and frivolous creatures, born to be subordinate to men. In addition, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen, which defined French citizenship after the revolution of 1789, pointedly failed to address the legal status of women.

Female intellectuals of the Enlightenment were quick to point out this lack of inclusivity and the limited scope of reformist rhetoric. Olympe de Gouges, a noted playwright, published *Déclaration des droits de la femme et de la citoyenne* (1791; “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the [Female] Citizen”), declaring women to be not only man’s equal but his partner. The following year Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), the seminal English-language feminist work, was published in England. Challenging the notion that women exist only to please men, she proposed that women and men be given equal opportunities in education, work, and politics. Women, she wrote, are as naturally rational as men. If they are silly, it is only because society trains them to be irrelevant.

The Age of Enlightenment turned into an era of political ferment marked by revolutions in France, Germany, and Italy and the rise of abolitionism. In the United States, feminist activism took root when female abolitionists sought to apply the concepts of freedom and equality to their own social and political situations. Their work brought them in contact with female abolitionists in England who were reaching the same conclusions. By the mid-19th century, issues surrounding feminism had added to the tumult of social change, with ideas being exchanged across Europe and North America.

In the first feminist article she dared sign with her own name, Louise Otto, a German, built on the work of Charles Fourier, a French social theorist, quoting his dictum that “by the position which women hold in a land, you can see whether the air of a state is thick with dirty fog or free and clear.” And after Parisian feminists began publishing a daily newspaper entitled *La Voix des femmes* (“The Voice of Women”) in 1848, Luise Dittmar, a German writer, followed suit one year later with her journal, *Soziale Reform*.

## The suffrage movement

These debates and discussions culminated in the first women’s rights convention, held in July 1848 in the small town of Seneca Falls, New York. It was a spur-of-the-moment idea that sprang up during a social gathering of Lucretia Mott, a Quaker preacher and veteran social activist, Martha Wright (Mott’s sister), Mary Ann McClintock, Jane Hunt, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the wife of an abolitionist and the only non-Quaker in the group. The convention was planned with five days’ notice, publicized only by a small unsigned advertisement in a local newspaper.

Stanton drew up the “Declaration of Sentiments” that guided the Seneca Falls Convention. Using the Declaration of Independence as her guide to proclaim that “all men and women [had been] created equal,” she drafted 11 resolutions, including the most radical demand—the right to the vote. With Frederick Douglass, a former slave, arguing eloquently on their behalf, all 11 resolutions passed, and Mott even won approval of a final declaration “for the overthrowing of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman equal participation with men in the various trades, professions and commerce.”

Yet by emphasizing education and political rights that were the privileges of the upper classes, the embryonic feminist movement had little connection with ordinary women cleaning houses in Liverpool or picking cotton in Georgia. The single nonwhite woman’s voice heard at this time—that of Sojourner Truth, a former slave—symbolized the distance between the ordinary and the elite. Her famous “Ain’t I a Woman” speech was delivered in 1851 before the Women’s Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, but Truth did not dedicate her life to women’s rights. Instead, she promoted abolitionism and a land-distribution program for other former slaves. In the speech, Truth remarked, “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain’t I a woman?”

Although Seneca Falls was followed by women’s rights conventions in other states, the interest spurred by those first moments of organizing quickly faded. Concern in the United States turned to the pending Civil War, while in Europe the reformism of the 1840s gave way to the repression of the late 1850s. When the feminist movement rebounded, it became focused on a single issue, women’s suffrage, a goal that would dominate international feminism for almost 70 years.

After the American Civil War, feminists assumed that women’s suffrage would be included in the Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which prohibited disfranchisement on the basis of race. Yet leading abolitionists refused to support such inclusion, which prompted Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, a temperance activist, to form the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. At first they based their demand for the vote on the Enlightenment principle of natural law, regularly invoking the concept of inalienable rights granted to all Americans by the Declaration of Independence. By 1900, however, the American passion for such principles as equality had been dampened by a flood of Eastern European immigrants and the growth of urban slums. Suffragist leaders, reflecting that shift in attitude, began appealing for the vote not on the principle of justice or on the common humanity of men and women but on racist and nativist grounds. As early as 1894, Carrie Chapman Catt declared that the votes of literate, American-born, middle-class women would balance the votes of foreigners: “[C]ut off the vote of the slums and give to woman...the ballot.”

This elitist inclination widened the divide between feminist organizers and the masses of American women who lived in those slums or spoke with foreign accents. As a result, working-class women—already more concerned with wages, hours, and protective legislation than with either the vote or issues such as women’s property rights—threw themselves into the trade union movement rather than the feminists’ ranks. Anthony, however, ceded no ground. In the 1890s she asked for labour’s support for women’s suffrage but insisted that she and her movement would do nothing about the demands made by working women until her own battle had been won. Similarly, when asked to support the fight against Jim Crow segregation on the nation’s railroads, she refused.

Radical feminists challenged the single-minded focus on suffrage as the sine qua non of women’s liberation. Emma Goldman, the nation’s leading anarchist, mocked the notion that the ballot could

secure equality for women, since it hardly accomplished that for the majority of American men. Women would gain their freedom, she said, only “by refusing the right to anyone over her body...by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler but deeper and richer.” Likewise, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in *Women and Economics* (1898), insisted that women would not be liberated until they were freed from the “domestic mythology” of home and family that kept them dependent on men.

Mainstream feminist leaders such as Stanton succeeded in marginalizing more extreme demands such as Goldman’s and Gilman’s, but they failed to secure the vote for women. It was not until a different kind of radical, Alice Paul, reignited the women’s suffrage movement in the United States by copying English activists. Like the Americans, British suffragists, led by the National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies, had initially approached their struggle politely, with ladylike lobbying. But in 1903 a dissident faction led by Emmeline Pankhurst began a series of boycotts, bombings, and pickets. Their tactics ignited the nation, and in 1918 the British Parliament extended the vote to women householders, householders’ wives, and female university graduates over the age of 30.

Following the British lead, Paul’s forces, the “shock troops” of the American suffrage crusade, organized mass demonstrations, parades, and confrontations with the police. In 1920 American feminism claimed its first major triumph with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution.

## The post-suffrage era

Once the crucial goal of suffrage had been achieved, the feminist movement virtually collapsed in both Europe and the United States. Lacking an ideology beyond the achievement of the vote, feminism fractured into a dozen splinter groups: the Women’s Joint Congressional Committee, a lobbying group, fought for legislation to promote education and maternal and infant health care; the League of Women Voters organized voter registration and education drives; and the Women’s Trade Union League launched a campaign for protective labour legislation for women.

Each of these groups offered some civic contribution, but none was specifically feminist in nature. Filling the vacuum, the National Woman’s Party, led by Paul, proposed a new initiative meant to remove discrimination from American laws and move women closer to equality through an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that would ban any government-sanctioned discrimination based on sex. Infighting began because many feminists were not looking for strict equality; they were fighting for laws that would directly benefit women. Paul, however, argued that protective legislation—such as laws mandating maximum eight-hour shifts for female factory workers—actually closed the door of opportunity on women by imposing costly rules on employers, who would then be inclined to hire fewer women.

Questions abounded. Could women be freed from discrimination without damaging the welfare and protective apparatus so many needed? What was the goal of the feminist movement—to create full equality, or to respond to the needs of women? And if the price of equality was the absence of protection, how many women really wanted equality? The debate was not limited to the United States. Some proponents of women’s rights, such as Aletta Jacobs of the Netherlands or Beatrice Webb of England, agreed with Paul’s demand for equality and opposed protective legislation for women. Women members of trade unions, however, defended the need for laws that would help them.

This philosophical dispute was confined to relatively rarefied circles. Throughout the United States, as across Europe, Americans believed that women had achieved their liberation. Women were voting, although in small numbers and almost exactly like their male counterparts. Even Suzanne LaFollette, a radical feminist, concluded in 1926 that women's struggle "is very largely won." Before any flaws in that pronouncement could be probed, the nation—and the world—plunged into the Great Depression. Next, World War II largely obliterated feminist activism on any continent. The war did open employment opportunities for women—from working in factories ("Rosie the Riveter" became an American icon) to playing professional baseball—but these doors of opportunity were largely closed after the war, when women routinely lost their jobs to men discharged from military service. This turn of events angered many women, but few were willing to mount any organized protest.

In the United States the difficulties of the preceding 15 years were followed by a new culture of domesticity. Women began marrying younger and having more children than they had in the 1920s. Such television programs as *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie and Harriet* reflected what many observers called an idyllic suburban life. By 1960 the percentage of employed female professionals was down compared with figures for 1930.

## The second wave of feminism

The women's movement of the 1960s and '70s, the so-called "second wave" of feminism, represented a seemingly abrupt break with the tranquil suburban life pictured in American popular culture. Yet the roots of the new rebellion were buried in the frustrations of college-educated mothers whose discontent impelled their daughters in a new direction. If first-wave feminists were inspired by the abolition movement, their great-granddaughters were swept into feminism by the civil rights movement, the attendant discussion of principles such as equality and justice, and the revolutionary ferment caused by protests against the Vietnam War.

Women's concerns were on Pres. John F. Kennedy's agenda even before this public discussion began. In 1961 he created the President's Commission on the Status of Women and appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to lead it. Its report, issued in 1963, firmly supported the nuclear family and preparing women for motherhood. But it also documented a national pattern of employment discrimination, unequal pay, legal inequality, and meagre support services for working women that needed to be corrected through legislative guarantees of equal pay for equal work, equal job opportunities, and expanded child-care services. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 offered the first guarantee, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended to bar employers from discriminating on the basis of sex.

Some deemed these measures insufficient in a country where classified advertisements still segregated job openings by sex, where state laws restricted women's access to contraception, and where incidences of rape and domestic violence remained undisclosed. In the late 1960s, then, the notion of a women's rights movement took root at the same time as the civil rights movement, and women of all ages and circumstances were swept up in debates about gender, discrimination, and the nature of equality.

## Dissension and debate

Mainstream groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) launched a campaign for legal equity, while ad hoc groups staged sit-ins and marches for any number of reasons—from assailing college curricula that lacked female authors to promoting the use of the word Ms. as a neutral form of

address—that is, one that did not refer to marital status. Health collectives and rape crisis centres were established. Children’s books were rewritten to obviate sexual stereotypes. Women’s studies departments were founded at colleges and universities. Protective labour laws were overturned. Employers found to have discriminated against female workers were required to compensate with back pay. Excluded from male-dominated occupations for decades, women began finding jobs as pilots, construction workers, soldiers, bankers, and bus drivers.

Unlike the first wave, second-wave feminism provoked extensive theoretical discussion about the origins of women’s oppression, the nature of gender, and the role of the family. Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics* made the best-seller list in 1970, and in it she broadened the term politics to include all “power-structured relationships” and posited that the personal was actually political. Shulamith Firestone, a founder of the New York Radical Feminists, published *The Dialectic of Sex* in the same year, insisting that love disadvantaged women by creating intimate shackles between them and the men they loved—men who were also their oppressors. One year later, Germaine Greer, an Australian living in London, published *The Female Eunuch*, in which she argued that the sexual repression of women cuts them off from the creative energy they need to be independent and self-fulfilled.

Any attempt to create a coherent, all-encompassing feminist ideology was doomed. While most could agree on the questions that needed to be asked about the origins of gender distinctions, the nature of power, or the roots of sexual violence, the answers to those questions were bogged down by ideological hairsplitting, name-calling, and mutual recrimination. Even the term liberation could mean different things to different people.

Feminism became a river of competing eddies and currents. “Anarcho-feminists,” who found a larger audience in Europe than in the United States, resurrected Emma Goldman and said that women could not be liberated without dismantling such institutions as the family, private property, and state power. Individualist feminists, calling on libertarian principles of minimal government, broke with most other feminists over the issue of turning to government for solutions to women’s problems. “Amazon feminists” celebrated the mythical female heroine and advocated liberation through physical strength. And separatist feminists, including many lesbian feminists, preached that women could not possibly liberate themselves without at least a period of separation from men.

Ultimately, three major streams of thought surfaced. The first was liberal, or mainstream, feminism, which focused its energy on concrete and pragmatic change at an institutional and governmental level. Its goal was to integrate women more thoroughly into the power structure and to give women equal access to positions men had traditionally dominated. While aiming for strict equality (to be evidenced by such measures as an equal number of women and men in positions of power, or an equal amount of money spent on male and female student athletes), these liberal feminist groups nonetheless supported the modern equivalent of protective legislation such as special workplace benefits for mothers.

In contrast to the pragmatic approach taken by liberal feminism, radical feminism aimed to reshape society and restructure its institutions, which they saw as inherently patriarchal. Providing the core theory for modern feminism, radicals argued that women’s subservient role in society was too closely woven into the social fabric to be unraveled without a revolutionary revamping of society itself. They strove to supplant hierarchical and traditional power relationships they saw as reflecting a male bias, and they sought to develop nonhierarchical and antiauthoritarian approaches to politics and organization.

Finally, cultural or “difference” feminism, the last of the three currents, rejected the notion that men and women are intrinsically the same and advocated celebrating the qualities they associated with women, such as their greater concern for affective relationships and their nurturing preoccupation with others. Inherent in its message was a critique of mainstream feminism’s attempt to enter traditionally male spheres. This was seen as denigrating women’s natural inclinations by attempting to make women more like men.

## The race factor

Like first-wave feminism, the second wave was largely defined and led by educated middle-class white women who built the movement primarily around their own concerns. This created an ambivalent, if not contentious, relationship with women of other classes and races. The campaign against employment and wage discrimination helped bridge the gap between the movement and white labour union women. But the relationship of feminism to African American women always posed greater challenges. White feminists defined gender as the principal source of their exclusion from full participation in American life; Black women were forced to confront the interplay between racism and sexism and to figure out how to make Black men think about gender issues while making white women think about racial issues. Such issues were addressed by Black feminists including Michele Wallace, Mary Ann Weathers, bell hooks, Alice Walker, and Bettina Aptheker.

The call by white feminists for unity and solidarity was based on their assumption that women constituted a gender-based class or caste that was unified by common oppression. Many Black women had difficulty seeing white women as their feminist sisters; in the eyes of many African Americans, after all, white women were as much the oppressor as white men. “How relevant are the truths, the experiences, the findings of White women to Black women?” asked Toni Cade Bambara in *The Black Woman: An Anthology* (1970). “I don’t know that our priorities are the same, that our concerns and methods are the same.” As far back as Sojourner Truth, Black feminists had seen white feminists as incapable of understanding their concerns.

Yet some Black women, especially middle-class Black women, also insisted that it was fundamentally different to be Black and female than to be Black and male. During the first conference of the National Black Feminist Organization, held in New York City in 1973, Black women activists acknowledged that many of the goals central to the mainstream feminist movement—day care, abortion, maternity leave, violence—were critical to African American women as well. On specific issues, then, African American feminists and white feminists built an effective working relationship.

## The globalization of feminism

By the end of the 20th century, European and American feminists had begun to interact with the nascent feminist movements of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As this happened, women in developed countries, especially intellectuals, were horrified to discover that women in some countries were required to wear veils in public or to endure forced marriage, female infanticide, widow burning, or female genital cutting (FGC). Many Western feminists soon perceived themselves as saviours of Third World women, little realizing that their perceptions of and solutions to social problems were often at odds with the real lives and concerns of women in these regions. In many parts of Africa, for example, the status of women had begun to erode significantly only with the arrival of European colonialism. In those regions, then, the notion that patriarchy was the chief problem—rather than European imperialism—seemed absurd.

The conflicts between women in developed and developing nations played out most vividly at international conferences. After the 1980 World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, in Copenhagen, women from less-developed nations complained that the veil and FGC had been chosen as conference priorities without consulting the women most concerned. It seemed that their counterparts in the West were not listening to them. During the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, in Cairo, women from the Third World protested outside because they believed the agenda had been hijacked by Europeans and Americans. The protesters had expected to talk about ways that underdevelopment was holding women back. Instead, conference organizers chose to focus on contraception and abortion. “[Third World women] noted that they could not very well worry about other matters when their children were dying from thirst, hunger or war,” wrote Azizah al-Hibri, a law professor and scholar of Muslim women’s rights. “The conference instead centred around reducing the number of Third World babies in order to preserve the earth’s resources, despite (or is it ‘because of’) the fact that the First World consumes much of these resources.” In Beijing, at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, Third World women again criticized the priority American and European women put on reproductive rights language and issues of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and their disinterest in the platform proposal that was most important to less-developed nations—that of restructuring international debt.

Still, the close of the 20th century saw women around the world advancing their interests, although often in fits and starts. Feminism was derailed in countries such as Afghanistan, where the staunchly reactionary and antifeminist Taliban banned even the education of girls. Elsewhere, however, feminism achieved significant gains for women, as seen in the eradication of FGC in many African countries or government efforts to end widow burning in India. More generally, and especially in the West, feminism had influenced every aspect of contemporary life, communication, and debate, from the heightened concern over sexist language to the rise of academic fields such as women’s studies and ecofeminism. Sports, divorce laws, sexual mores, organized religion—all had been affected, in many parts of the world, by feminism.

Yet questions remained: How would Western feminism deal with the dissension of women who believed the movement had gone too far and grown too radical? How uniform and successful could feminism be at the global level? Could the problems confronting women in the mountains of Pakistan or the deserts of the Middle East be addressed in isolation, or must such issues be pursued through international forums? Given the unique economic, political, and cultural situations that obtained across the globe, the answers to these questions looked quite different in Nairobi than in New York.

## The third wave of feminism

The third wave of feminism emerged in the mid-1990s. It was led by so-called Generation Xers who, born in the 1960s and ’70s in the developed world, came of age in a media-saturated and culturally and economically diverse milieu. Although they benefitted significantly from the legal rights and protections that had been obtained by first- and second-wave feminists, they also critiqued the positions and what they felt was unfinished work of second-wave feminism.



## Foundations

The third wave was made possible by the greater economic and professional power and status achieved by women of the second wave, the massive expansion in opportunities for the dissemination of ideas created by the information revolution of the late 20th century, and the coming of age of Generation X scholars and activists.

Some early adherents of the new approach were literally daughters of the second wave. Third Wave Direct Action Corporation (organized in 1992) became in 1997 the Third Wave Foundation, dedicated to supporting “groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice”; both were founded by (among others) Rebecca Walker, the daughter of the novelist and second-waver Alice Walker. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, authors of *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000), were both born in 1970 and raised by second wavers who had belonged to organized feminist groups, questioned the sexual division of labour in their households, and raised their daughters to be self-aware, empowered, articulate, high-achieving women.

These women and others like them grew up with the expectation of achievement and examples of female success as well as an awareness of the barriers presented by sexism, racism, and classism. They chose to battle such obstacles by inverting sexist, racist, and classist symbols, fighting patriarchy with irony, answering violence with stories of survival, and combating continued exclusion with grassroots activism and radical democracy. Rather than becoming part of the “machine,” third wavers began both sabotaging and rebuilding the machine itself.

Influenced by the postmodernist movement in the academy, third-wave feminists sought to question, reclaim, and redefine the ideas, words, and media that have transmitted ideas about womanhood, gender, beauty, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity, among other things. There was a decided shift in perceptions of gender, with the notion that there are some characteristics that are strictly male and others that are strictly female giving way to the concept of a gender continuum. From this perspective each person is seen as possessing, expressing, and suppressing the full range of traits that had previously been associated with one gender or the other. For third-wave feminists, therefore, “sexual liberation,” a major goal of second-wave feminism, was expanded to mean a process of first becoming conscious of the ways one’s gender identity and sexuality have been shaped by society and then intentionally constructing (and becoming free to express) one’s authentic gender identity.

## Manifestations

Third wavers inherited a foothold of institutional power created by second wavers, including women’s studies programs at universities, long-standing feminist organizations, and well-established publishing outlets such as *Ms.* magazine and several academic journals. These outlets became a less important part of the culture of the third wave than they had been for the second wave.

In expressing their concerns, third-wave feminists actively subverted, co-opted, and played on seemingly sexist images and symbols. This was evident in the double entendre and irony of the language commonly adopted by people in their self-presentations. Slang used derogatorily in most earlier contexts became proud and defiant labels. The spirit and intent of the third wave shone through the raw honesty, humour, and horror of Eve Ensler’s play (and later book) *The Vagina Monologues*, an exploration of women’s feelings about sexuality that included vagina-centred topics as diverse as orgasm, birth, and rape; the righteous anger of punk rock’s riot grrrls movement; and the playfulness, seriousness, and

subversion of the Guerrilla Girls, a group of women artists who donned gorilla masks in an effort to expose female stereotypes and fight discrimination against female artists.

The third wave was much more inclusive of women and girls of colour than the first or second waves had been. In reaction and opposition to stereotypical images of women as passive, weak, virginal, and faithful, or alternatively as domineering, demanding, slutty, and emasculating, the third wave redefined women and girls as assertive, powerful, and in control of their own sexuality. In popular culture this redefinition gave rise to icons of powerful women that included the singers Madonna, Queen Latifah, and Mary J. Blige, among others, and the women depicted in television series such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Sex and the City* (1998–2004), and *Girlfriends* (2000–08). Media programming for children increasingly depicted smart, independent girls and women in lead roles, including Disney heroines such as *Mulan* (1998) and *Helen Parr and her daughter, Violet* (*The Incredibles*, 2004), and television characters such as *Dora* (*Dora the Explorer*, 2000–14, 2019), *Carly and Sam* (*iCarly*, 2007–12), and *Sesame Street*'s first female lead, *Abby Cadabby*, who debuted in 2006. The sassy self-expression of "Girl Power" merchandise also proved popular.

The increasing ease of publishing on the Internet meant that e-zines (electronic magazines) and blogs became ubiquitous. Many serious independent writers, not to mention organizations, found that the Internet offered a forum for the exchange of information and the publication of essays and videos that made their point to a potentially huge audience. The Internet radically democratized the content of the feminist movement with respect to participants, aesthetics, and issues.

## Controversies

Predictably, third wavers faced critics. Even as the third wave found its voice, some writers were declaring themselves postfeminist and arguing that the movement had lived beyond its usefulness. Meanwhile, established feminists of the earlier generation argued that the issues had not really changed and that the younger women were not adding anything of substance. By about 2000, some writers from inside and outside the movement rushed to declare that the wave had broken. In addition, questions of sexualized behaviour raised debate on whether such things as revealing clothing, designer-label stiletto heels, and amateur pole dancing represented true sexual liberation and gender equality or old oppressions in disguise.

As with any other social or political movement, fissures and disagreements were present in each wave of feminism. The third wave, to an extent almost unimaginable to the members of the first and second waves before it, was plural and multifaceted, comprising people of many gender, ethnic, and class identities, experiences, and interests. As such, its greatest strength, multivocality, was attacked by some as its greatest weakness. Third wavers countered this criticism by stating that the creation of a unified agenda or philosophy—or at least, one that was unified beyond the very general statements offered by groups such as the Third Wave Foundation noted above ("groups and individuals working towards gender, racial, economic, and social justice")—was a goal that was not only unrealistic but undesirable.

Although debated by some, many claim that a fourth wave of feminism began about 2012, with a focus on sexual harassment, body shaming, and rape culture, among other issues. A key component was the use of social media to highlight and address these concerns. The new wave arose amid a number of high-profile incidents. In December 2012 a young woman was brutally gang-raped in India and subsequently died, sparking local protests and international outrage. That was followed two years later by the Gamergate campaign, a manifestation of the so-called "men's rights movement" that had its origins on

the Web site 4chan. GamerGate ostensibly sought to promote ethics in video-game journalism, but it was in reality a harassment campaign against “social justice warriors.” The latter were often women who objected to female stereotypes in video games and were subsequently inundated with death threats and rape threats.

Against this background came Donald Trump’s defeat of Hillary Clinton in the U.S. presidential election in 2016. Trump had made a number of inflammatory remarks about women, and the day after the election a grandmother went on Facebook to propose a march on Washington, D.C. The suggestion quickly gained traction and became a call for social change, especially in regard to gender equality. Known as the Women’s March, it grew to include demonstrations across the United States and around the world. The protests took place on January 21, 2017, the day after Trump’s inauguration, and as many as 4.6 million people attended the various events in the United States, making the Women’s March perhaps the largest single-day demonstration in that country’s history.

Arguably even more significant was the Me Too movement, which was launched in 2006 in the United States to assist survivors of sexual violence, especially females of colour. The campaign gained widespread attention beginning in 2017, after it was revealed that film mogul Harvey Weinstein had for years sexually harassed and assaulted women in the industry with impunity. Victims of sexual harassment or assault around the world—and of all ethnicities—began sharing their experiences on social media, using the hashtag #MeToo. The movement grew over the coming months to bring condemnation to dozens of powerful men in politics, business, entertainment, and the news media.