

FEMINISM: A CHANGING REVOLUTION

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INTRODUCTION TO FEMINISM

Ms. magazine hit stands for the first time in 1972 with the headline, "Wonder Woman For President," stretched above an image of the comic book heroine. Thirty-seven years later, a cover depicting Barack Obama in a Superman-like pose and wearing a T-shirt that proclaimed, "This is What a Feminist Looks Like," struck a chord among Ms. readers. Some applauded the clever twist, hailing Obama's progressive political platforms. Others derided the magazine for defining a feminist as a man.

That reaction among the magazine's feminist readers demonstrated the inherent challenge of defining what feminism is precisely. Depending on the context, you can spin the term as a philosophy, social movement, history, badge of honor or an insult. While feminists have made radical strides toward gender equality and flung open many new doors for women, the movement and philosophy behind it have become culturally and politically polarizing. For instance, when conservative Alaska governor Sarah Palin told Katie Couric that she considers herself a feminist, shock waves rippled throughout the feminist community. As an outright opponent of abortion and sex education in schools, how could Gov. Palin possibly fit the feminist mold, some asked. But politics aside, a working mother of five running for vice president hardly seemed antifeminist.

At its core, feminism is the belief in equality. It seeks to eliminate the social, cultural and legal barriers between men and women. Its goal is to create a truly egalitarian society. Beyond that, the waters grow murkier. Feminist factions disagree sometimes on what constitutes equality -- whether it's sexual freedom, career advancement or something else. Some people who label themselves feminists perceive that battle for equality as over and done with; others still view society as rife with patriarchal restrictions. Recently, a debate has stirred over whether feminism has become outdated as term and should even be used at all.

So is feminism today a potent force for change? Or is it the "f-word," spit out like a bitter seed? By examining its unifying philosophies and causes, as well as the schisms within the movement, we can properly evaluate and answer those questions.



KATIE COURIC AND SARAH PALIN

DEFINING FEMINISM

Defining feminism succinctly is difficult because of its complexity. Here are a few famous explanations of what feminism is:

"I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat." -- Rebecca West, 20th-century British novelist and journalist

"A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men." -- Gloria Steinem, journalist and second-wave feminist leader

"Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression." -- Bell Hooks, black feminist author

"[The feminist agenda] is about a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians." -- Pat Robertson, Christian broadcaster

ORIGINS OF FEMINISM

The modern feminist movement began as a result of sweeping social, political and industrial changes in Europe and the United States. Many women from disparate backgrounds and social causes contributed to its development, but the movement has ideological roots in France.

In 1610, a French noblewoman started the first salon (a gathering for intellectual discussion or exchange of ideas) outside of the royal court. Although salon participation was reserved for members of the upper class, the cultural institution offered the first secular outlet for educated women to engage in such conversation with men.

At that time, women's value and role in society was framed as the *querelle des femmes*, or "question of women." The *querelle* addressed education, marriage and social mobility as it related to women, and scholars have referenced it as an example of the earliest feminist thought. Yet it wouldn't be until the Enlightenment and the Age of Reason in the 18th century that social progress began. With those new intellectual currents came the realization that social and cultural institutions are the product of human -- not divine -- efforts. This way of thinking meant that changes within those institutions, such as eliminating class and gender limitations, wouldn't be an affront to God.

The Revolutionary War in 1774 and the French Revolution in 1789 also advanced the concept of women's freedom. Both revolutionary themes focused on mankind's equality, although women's equality wasn't highlighted. Nevertheless, by mobilizing more women politically and establishing a consensus of freedom as a human right, those events laid the groundwork for early feminism.



SUFFRAGISTS MARCHING FOR THE WOMEN'S VOTE

FIRST WAVE FEMINISM- THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

In 1800, women had little control over their life. The average married female gave birth to seven children. Higher education was off-limits. Wealthier women could exercise limited authority in the domestic sphere but possessed no property rights or economic autonomy. Lower-class women toiled alongside men, but the same social and legal restrictions applied to this stratum of society as well.

Somewhat ironically, religion fueled some of the initial social advancements women made at the beginning of the 19th century. The Second Great Awakening, which started in 1790, emphasized emotional experience over creed, allowing women more leadership opportunities outside of the home. Abolition and temperance movements that shared Protestant undercurrents activated women as well. Angelina and Sarah Grimke became well-known abolitionists who defied social custom by publicly addressing the American Anti-Slavery Society. In response to the fierce criticism of their speech, Sarah Grimke penned "Letters on the Equality of the Sexes" in 1838. A year before, Oberlin College became the first higher-learning institution in the United States to admit women.

Around that time, the exclusion of women in many abolitionist organizations prompted Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott to rally together women -- and some men -- to denounce gender inequalities and demand women's right to vote. In 1848, they organized the Seneca Falls Convention, where they outlined women's grievances and their desire for suffrage. The press responded disdainfully to the convention, but the event laid the groundwork for the suffrage movement. Other prominent leaders, including Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth and Lucy Stone, joined the suffrage ranks as well.

Suffragists began to make headway in 1860 when New York passed the Married Women's Property Act. The bill legalized property ownership, joint child custody and wage retention for women. The use of the word "feminism" to describe the support for women's rights migrated from France to the United States by 1910. But not all suffragists would refer to themselves as such; many advocated solely for voting rights and not complete equality.

Forty years later, in 1920, Congress ratified the 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote.

SUFFRAGIST VS. SUFFRAGETTE

BRITISH

- British suffragists were called suffragettes.
- Led by the Women's Social and Political Union
- The women demonstrated in public, sometimes destroying property in the process

AMERICAN

- Calling an American suffragist a suffragette would be an insult.
- Viewed as less radical than the British

MEN AND FEMINISM

According to feminist theology, men have always enjoyed at least some form of gender-based privilege, whatever their class or race. Therefore, some people have questioned whether men can really be feminists. President Barack Obama has labeled himself as a feminist, and plenty of men ascribe to feminist principles of ending sexual discrimination and patriarchy. Most leading feminists welcome men's participation in the movement, but not all allow their male compatriots to call themselves feminists. Some groups -- including members of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism -- identify men as pro-feminist, instead.

BETWEEN FEMINIST WAVES

After the passage of the 19th Amendment, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, spearheaded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, was disbanded. The League of Women Voters and National Women's Party took its place. But three years after women won the vote, suffragist and feminist factions split over Alice Paul's introduction of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to Congress. The proposed amendment, which read, "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex," alienated some women who feared that its passage would undermine legal protection granted to women and children.

From that point in the early 1920s until the 1960s, feminism seemed to stall. But that didn't mean that subtle changes had stopped taking place. For instance, during World War II, more women than ever joined the workforce, assuming industrial and military jobs previously reserved for men. Higher education had become a more viable option as well, and the number of female college graduates was rising. Then, when the troops came home, American women's culture experienced a return to domesticity. Many women continued to work outside the home, but career options were restrictive with gender-specific job postings. Women had won the vote but not cultural independence.

That growing discontent surfaced in mainstream middle-class society with the publication of two influential books. As Mary Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Women" fueled activism by voicing her generation's sexual discrimination, so did Simone de Beauvoir's "Second Sex," published in 1949. De Beauvoir's book decried women's inferior status in society, reasoning that cultural distinctions between genders only served to reinforce patriarchy and the submission of women. In 1963, Betty Friedan published "The Feminine Mystique," which described the new generation of overly educated, under-employed women who gave up promising careers for the service of hearth and home.

The government took notice of women's discontent, as well. The Kennedy administration passed the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission the following year, benefitting women and blacks. Yet women earned barely half of men's salaries, and childcare institutions remained scarce. With the simmering Civil Rights movement gaining energy at the time, the cultural atmosphere in the United States was ready for revolution.

SECOND WAVE FEMINISM

By the late 1960s, a new age of activism was ushered in by student activity surrounding the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights movement as well as older women's dissatisfaction with domestic restrictions and workplace discrimination. In contrast to first-wave feminism, the movement during the 1970s benefitted from the involvement of far more organizations, encompassing a broad spectrum of political beliefs and ideologies.

The National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966 represented one of the largest coalitions that sprang from the second wave. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) had failed to root out sexism in the workplace, instead focusing on racial discrimination. When the EEOC refused to ban gender-specific job advertisements, Betty Friedan and other leading feminists formed NOW. The organization, comprised of mostly older, white, middle-class women, focused on issues including reproductive freedom, gender equality in the workplace and the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment. More than any feminist group before, NOW looked to the law to institute gender reforms.

Groups such as the New York Radical Women (NYRW), Redstockings and Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH), aimed to eradicate sexism by revolutionizing the relationships between men and women in the boardroom and the bedroom. They practiced zap actions, or dramatic public demonstrations that attracted media attention. One such zap action, the 1968 Miss America pageant protest by NYRW, propelled the feminist movement into mainstream media. Within communities across the United States, women started organizing on a smaller scale. The Redstockings first encouraged groups of women to gather for consciousness-raising discussions, which involved sharing their personal experiences in the feminist struggle.

Issues of rape, domestic violence, abortion and access to childcare came to the forefront of the feminist platforms. Through consciousness-raising, women could identify common struggles and receive support while feminism grew into a mass movement. From this form of engagement, the slogan "the personal is political" aptly summed up the goals of second-wave feminism. What were once private issues were now in the public realm

In 1968, the first national women's liberation conference took place in Chicago, and in the 1970s, feminist activists began to witness the fruits of their labors in earnest. In 1972, Washington, D.C., established the first rape crisis hotline, and the Supreme Court legalized abortion via Roe v. Wade in 1973. Two years later, the United States facilitated the first global forum on women's issues. But as the movement spread, it also exposed fractures within feminist ideologies.



SECOND WAVE FEMINISTS MARCH DURING THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION PARADE IN 1970

PERSPECTIVES WITHIN FEMINISM

The goals of civil rights and women's rights share many of the same overarching themes of freedom, equality and social justice. During first-wave feminism, freed slave Sojourner Truth spoke out for emancipation as well as universal suffrage. Second-wave feminists also borrowed consciousness-raising tactics from the Civil Rights movement.

But the two movements didn't always take advantage of their commonalities. The reactions of some prominent first-wave feminists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to legislation allowing black men to vote reveals dark undercurrents of racism in early feminist movements. Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" has been criticized since its publication for its failure to address the plight of minority and working-class women who didn't have ready access to higher education or the choice to stay at home.

Unlike white feminists, black women fought a twofold battle against racism and sexism. Black feminism grew out of second-wave feminism's failure to address that unique struggle. Black feminist writer Bell Hooks dismissed the idea of a common oppression among women that united them across races and classes. Rather, Hooks wrote, leading white feminists in the 1970s only reinstated classist white supremacy by not acknowledging the experience of being a black woman.

Indeed, some feminist organizations at that time came across barriers to integrating white and black members. Gloria Steinem and other white feminists strived unsuccessfully to coordinate a racially diverse board of the Women's Action Alliance in 1971. Some black feminists felt marginalized in certain groups and banded together. In 1973, as a result, the National Black Feminist Organization was founded.

Lesbian feminists encountered prejudice within the movement as well. Homosexuality remained a cultural taboo, and even some liberal-leaning feminists sought to distance themselves from it. The National Organization of Women (NOW) refused to include homosexuality as part of its platforms, and Betty Friedan allegedly referred to it as the "lavender menace." In response to that alienation, some lesbian feminists formed separatist organizations that aimed to create an entirely new culture, devoid of male influence.



SOME BLACK FEMINISTS FELT MARGINALIZED BY THE WOMEN'S LIBERATION MOVEMENT

THIRD WAVE FEMINISM

If second-wave feminism started with the 1968 Miss America pageant protest, the third wave began with the 1991 Clarence Thomas Supreme Court confirmation hearings. The proceedings attracted widespread national attention when Anita Hill alleged sexual harassment by Thomas and witnesses corroborated her claims. Thomas' eventual confirmation enraged and re-energized feminists across the country; in 1992, a record number of women won national political office. Rebecca Walker's essay, "Becoming the Third Wave," published in the January 1992 edition of Ms. magazine, voiced this feminist revival.

While second-wave feminism operated through coalition building and mass activism, third-wave feminism emphasized individualism. The early '90s concept of power feminism urged women to embrace their sexuality and reclaim femininity in a positive light. Developed from works including Camille Paglia's "Sexual Personae," which posited that men's obsession with female sexuality rendered them the weaker sex, power feminism contrasted the second-wave perspective of women as victims of patriarchy.

In addition, third-wave feminism tackled body image, transgender sexuality and sweatshop labor along with reproductive freedom and workplace equality. Meanwhile, due in part to a conservative backlash, the stereotype of feminism as militant man-hatred had solidified in the cultural mindset. The label became burdened with a litany of political and social agendas that alienated more conservative females who otherwise believe in gender equality. Furthermore, polls have shown that younger generations of women shy away from labels in general -- especially feminist ones.

In 2005, Lisa Jervis, editor of Bitch magazine, wrote that third-wave feminism had reached the end of its usefulness because it conjures cultural associations rather than core values that many people share, whether self-described feminists or not. That same year, The New York Times reported that more Ivy League females planned to become at-home mothers after graduation. Then, in 2008, the National Center for Health Statistics announced the first decline in the age of women having children in nearly 40 years

By the same token, today's generation of women obviously hasn't rejected the benefits won by past feminists -- they attend college and enter the workforce in larger numbers than their predecessors. Whatever women choose, the most salient aspect is having the freedom to decide. After all, the core of feminism is equality, not proscription. Sure, all the road blocks haven't disappeared, but thanks to countless women's -- and men's -- efforts, the path is far easier to tread.



THIRD WAVE FEMINISTS ATTEND THE MARCH FOR WOMEN'S LIVES IN 2004

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT- MARINA NEMAT

**ROLE OF
WOMEN IN
IRAN**

TRADITIONAL ATTITUDES TOWARD SEGREGATION OF THE SEXES

With the notable exception of the Westernized and secularized upper and middle classes, Iranian society before the Revolution practiced public segregation of the sexes. Women generally practiced use of the *chador* (or veil) when in public or when males not related to them were in the house. In the traditional view, an ideal society was one in which women were confined to the home, where they performed the various domestic tasks associated with managing a household and rearing children. Men worked in the public sphere, that is, in the fields, factories, bazaars, and offices. Deviations from this ideal, especially in the case of women, tended to reflect adversely upon the reputation of the family. The strength of these traditional attitudes was reflected in the public education system, which maintained separate schools for boys and girls from the elementary through the secondary levels.

The traditional attitudes on the segregation of women clashed sharply with the views and customs of the secularized upper and middle classes, especially those in Tehran. Mixed gatherings, both public and private, were the norm. During the Pahlavi era the government was the main promoter of change in traditional attitudes toward sexual segregation. It sought to discourage veiling of women at official functions and encouraged mixed participation in a variety of public gatherings. The result was to bring the government into social conflict with the Shia clergy, who sought to defend traditional values.

IMPACT OF WESTERN IDEAS ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Among the ideas imported into Iran from the West was the notion that women should participate in the public sphere. The Pahlavi government encouraged women to get as much education as possible and to participate in the labor force at all levels. After 1936, when Reza Shah banned the *chador*, veiling came to be perceived among the minority of elite and secular middle-class women as a symbol of oppression. Before the Revolution, Iranian society was already polarized between the traditionally minded majority and a minority of involved women who were dedicated to improving the status of women. As early as 1932, Iranian women held a meeting of the Oriental Feminine Congress in Tehran at which they called for the right of women to vote, compulsory education for both boys and girls, equal salaries for men and women, and an end to polygyny. In 1963 women were given the right to vote and to hold public office.

FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN THE WORK FORCE

Prior to the Revolution, three patterns of work existed among women. Among the upper classes, women either worked as professionals or undertook voluntary projects of various kinds. Whereas secular middle-class women aspired to emulate such women, traditional middle-class women worked outside the home only from dire necessity. Lower class women frequently worked outside the home, especially in major cities, because their incomes were needed to support their households.

Women were active participants in the Revolution that toppled the shah. Most activists were professional women of the secular middle classes, from among whom political antagonists to the regime had long been recruited. Like their male counterparts, such women had nationalist aspirations and felt that the shah's regime was a puppet of the United States. Some women also participated in the guerrilla groups, especially the Mojahedin and the Fadayan. More significant, however, were the large numbers of lower class women in the cities who participated in street demonstrations during the latter half of 1978 and early 1979. They responded to the call of Khomeini that it was necessary for all Muslims to demonstrate their opposition to tyranny.

Following the Revolution, the status of women changed. The main social group to inherit political power--the traditional middle class--valued most highly the traditional role of women in a segregated society. Accordingly, laws were enacted to restrict the role of women in public life; these laws affected primarily women of the secularized middle and upper classes. *Hejab*, or properly modest attire for women, became a major issue. Although it was not mandated that women who had never worn a *chador* would have to wear this garment, it was required that whenever women appeared in public they had to have their hair and skin covered, except for the face and hands. The law has been controversial among secularized women, although for the majority of women, who had worn the *chador* even before the Revolution, the law probably has had only negligible impact.



WOMEN WEARING A CHADOR

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT- BODIA MARCHARIA

**ROLE OF
WOMEN IN
CONGO**

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is the 3rd largest country in Africa with an area of 2345,000 Km and a population estimated at 80 millions of inhabitants of which 52% are women. Since June 30th 1960, on the country's accession to political independence, the governance of the country is unilaterally organized by males at all levels.

The “gender” dimension was not integrated equitably in the management of the country, several needs and specific priorities of the female majority population are not understood by the leading class. Hence, the obligation to correct policies and program formulated by the DRC Government for sustainable development.

THE POSITION OF WOMEN

The position of women in South Kivu is characterised in economic terms by the ‘feminisation of poverty’, exacerbated by the lack of any policies or mechanisms for women’s advancement, and in socio-cultural terms by the persistence of customs, practices and legislation that discriminate against women. These factors make women vulnerable in a situation of armed conflict. Not only do they make gender-based violence more likely, but, in the eyes of the abusers at least, they even legitimise it.

THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY

When the war broke out in the DRC it was against a background in which the local population, and especially women had already been made vulnerable by the dysfunctional state structures and the lack of viable economic and social infrastructures caused by 30 years under the dictatorial regime of President Mobutu. For decades the salaries of civil servants and employees of state enterprises had often gone unpaid, and so local people had been obliged to take on responsibility, as far as they were able, for certain tasks that properly belonged to the state, such as the building of schools, payment of teachers' salaries, maintenance of roads and provision of medical services.

Against this background of generalised impoverishment, the burden of finding survival strategies has increasingly fallen on women, while the lack of economic and social development has meant the impoverishment of the female population, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Women are the main driving force behind the subsistence economy of South Kivu, which, essentially, is based on farming and livestock. Some 80% of the province's population are engaged in agriculture, and 70% of these people are women. Women are also active in the informal sector, particularly in petty trade, sewing, dyeing, pottery and basketry. They are found as well on the fringes of the mining industry, where they are employed as exploited and underpaid labourers.

The war has had a devastating effect on women's economic and social activities. The already meagre resources and revenue of grassroots women's organisations, as well as their means of production, have been destroyed or looted. In addition to the volatile security situation, women also face basic structural problems that exacerbate their impoverishment. First of all, it is difficult for them to have access to land because of over-exploitation and over- population of fertile lands, and because of patriarchal traditions; on top of this, the economic infrastructure that would have enabled them to carry on productive activity has been destroyed, or did not exist anyway. Moreover, the heavy taxes imposed during the period of administration by the Rassemblement Démocratique Congolaise (RCD), especially on economic activities, have helped to erode women's incomes in particular.

The war has produced a large number of widows and displaced women who have become heads of household without their having had any preparation for this role. They live below the poverty line and depend largely on food aid (when it is available) for their survival. There are high rates of HIV/AIDS, partly owing to the widespread incidence of rape committed against women by forces fighting on the ground.

War and poverty have also forced many women and girls into prostitution as a means of survival, and this makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence. This has been described as 'survival sex' and creates conditions "... in which abusive sexual relations are more widely accepted and where many men, both civilians and combatants, regard sex as a service that is easy to obtain by means of coercion". At the same time, domestic violence has increased, as a result of tension caused by the upsurge of unemployment among men, as well as fear and uncertainty regarding the country's political future. It should be noted that increase in levels of domestic violence in time of war is a widespread phenomenon, which has been corroborated by research carried out, notably in the former Yugoslavia, where incidents of sexual violence of unprecedented cruelty took place during the bloody conflict that ravaged that country.

CUSTOMS, PRACTICES AND LEGISLATION THAT DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN

Certain customs, practices and laws constitute an obstacle to women in getting access to property, education, modern technology and information. Women suffer from illiteracy or a poor education because in many families boys still get preference over girls when it comes to schooling. Moreover, a large number of girls from the most disadvantaged communities drop out of school because of marriage or early pregnancy. It is difficult for women to obtain access to means of production such as land, property or credit. Certain aspects of Congolese legislation still discriminate against women. For example, a married woman must obtain her husband's permission before undertaking certain initiatives such as opening a bank account or asking for credit. Traditionally, women cannot inherit from their fathers or from their husbands. In the rural areas, women produce and manage 75% of food production, process their produce for family consumption, and sell 60% of their output at the local market, yet often they get nothing back from the proceeds, which tend to go directly into the pocket of their husbands.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Congo has been deemed the most dangerous place on earth to be a woman.

Thousands of sexual assaults are reported per year in this country and only a handful of rapists are brought to justice. The large-scale epidemic of rape as a weapon of war in Congo has spiraled out of control. Dr. Denis Mukwege at Panzi Hospital - a Women in War Zones partner, has shared stories with international media outlets of women being sadistically raped, foreign objects forcibly shoved into them, and of violence so severe and animal that it leaves the women with destroyed reproductive and digestive systems and fistula - an abnormal opening in the genital area, caused by obstetric problems and sexual violence.

RAPE- A WEAPON OF WAR

Rape is a weapon of the cruelest kind. It physically and psychologically cripples the women who suffer through it and similarly it destroys the family lives and egos of the men in this very male-centric culture.

Here are just some of the negative effects in Congo of raping its greatest untapped resource:

1. The physical damage it causes to women 2. The rampant spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually-transmitted diseases and infections 3. Economic downfall. Rape survivors become even less worthwhile in society and in the small job-market. They also have even fewer opportunities to access education and training that would guarantee economic independence than the average woman. 4. Breakdown of family life. Families are torn apart when matriarchs, daughters and nieces are murdered and/or raped beyond repair. 5. The slow but steady breakdown of society. A society that condones violence against women is doomed. The sheer brutality and prevalence of sexual violence in Congo is just one of many signs of deeper-rooted issues besides just wanton violence.



THE SURVIVORS



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