

Chapter 24. Second-wave Feminism

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The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was the largest social movement in the history of the United States. Its impact has been felt in every home, school, and business, in every form of entertainment and sport, in all aspects of personal and public life. Like a river overflowing its banks and seeking a new course, it permanently altered the American landscape.

The “second-wave” US women's movement emerged in the late 1960s in two separate streams, with two distinct sets of roots. The first branch, which we call here the equal rights tendency, derived in part from women's activist networks during the New Deal and World War II. Although few women were raising gender issues at that time, some female leaders both in and outside the government were active in social justice and human welfare campaigns. Within the Communist Party, which was itself a large-scale social movement in the 1930s and 1940s, women were disproportionately active in struggles for better housing, day care, consumer rights, and union representation. At the time the Communist Party was the *only* political arena in which women were criticizing what was then called male chauvinism and calling for sex equality. Even at the nadir of McCarthyist repression in the 1950s, many of these progressive women remained active in union and local community campaigns.

Individual women had continued politically active within the two main parties, mainly the Democratic. In 1961 this network persuaded President Kennedy, as a payback for their active support in the very close election of 1960, to establish a Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. It was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, herself both a symbolic and a real continuity with first-wave feminism and the New Deal. Women's Bureau chief Esther Peterson served as vice-chair. Kennedy may have expected this commission, like so many others, to keep the women busy talking and out of his hair. But the commission began an ongoing process. Its report, issued in 1963, called for equal pay for *comparable work* (in other words, it understood that equal pay for equal work would not be adequate because jobs were so sex-segregated), childcare services, paid maternity leave, and many other measures still not achieved. Determined not to let its momentum stall or its message reach only small elite circles, the commission built a network among many existing women's organizations, made special efforts to include black women, and convinced Kennedy to establish two continuing federal committees. Most consequential, it

stimulated the creation of state women's commissions, created in every state by 1967. The network that formed through these commissions enabled the creation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966.

Modeled on the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), NOW focused particularly on equal rights for women, in the law and in employment. Although the creation of NOW is often attributed to Betty Friedan, whose bestseller *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) captured the experience of white, suburban, college-educated women, NOW included significant working-class and minority leadership. NOW's founders included black lawyer and minister Pauli Murray, labor union women like Dorothy Haener of the United Auto Workers (UAW) and Addie Wyatt of the Amalgamated Meat cutters, and Betty Friedan, who brought her Old Left and union experience. African American Aileen Hernandez was NOW's second president. NOW's first headquarters was provided by the UAW. Nevertheless, NOW, like other parts of the women's movement, was at first dominated by white middle-class women. After a successful internal affirmative action effort, black and Latina women made up one-third of NOW's national staff and leadership by the mid-1990s.

Primarily an organization representing adult professional women and a few male feminists, NOW did not at first attempt to build a mass movement. Thirty women had attended its founding conference, three hundred its second conference, but from the start NOW effectively created and used the impression that it could mobilize a mass power base – an impression which became reality. At the peak of the campaign for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), NOW had approximately 250,000 members in six hundred chapters in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. NOW concentrated heavily on employment issues, reflecting its close ties to the US Women's Bureau-Catherine East of the Women's Bureau and Mary Eastwood of the Justice Department were among NOW's twenty-eight founders. NOW litigated pioneering class-action lawsuits against sex discrimination in employment and campaigned to elect women to local and national political offices. Its members used their professional and political skills to exert pressure upwards to elected or appointed officials.

NOW's initial impetus was anger that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) was not enforcing the sex-discrimination provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and it got some immediate results: in 1967 President Johnson issued Executive Order 11375 prohibiting sex discrimination by federal contractors. In the same year, NOW forced the EEOC to rule that sex-segregated want ads were discriminatory (although newspapers ignored this ruling with impunity

for years). NOW's legal committee, composed of four high-powered Washington lawyers, three of them federal employees, brought suits against protective legislation which, in the name of protecting women's fragility, in fact kept them out of better jobs. (In arguing one case, the five-foot one-hundred-pound lawyer picked up the equipment which the company claimed was too heavy for women and carried it around with one hand as she argued to the jury.)

NOW's most extensive grassroots campaign was the struggle for an Equal Rights Amendment. Approved by Congress in 1972, this proposed twenty-seventh amendment was ratified only by thirty-five of the required thirty-eight states, thus failing despite endorsement by both major political parties and despite popular approval, which never fell below 54 percent. The "Stop-ERA" campaign was headed by Phyllis Schlafly and generously funded by conservative groups and corporations that stood to lose if the amendment were passed (such as the insurance industry, whose rates discriminated against women). It represented a growing and tightly organized anti-feminist backlash, which was able to wield power disproportionate to its public support.

Just as NOW arose from New Deal Democrats and the Old Left, so women's liberation, the other stream in the revival of feminism, arose from civil rights and the New Left. By the late 1960s, there was a sense of unity among radical campaigns for social justice, expressed in the way participants referred collectively to "the movement," singular. Reflecting the context of relative prosperity, its mood was optimistic, even at times Utopian; its members as often from the middle class as from the poor or working class, it was equally critical of commercialization and conformity as of poverty. Its implicit motto was to challenge received wisdoms and hierarchical authorities. It was quintessentially a movement of young people, and it was correspondingly impatient. In dress, in sexual behavior, in its favorite intoxicants, and above all in its beloved music, it distinguished itself sharply from grown-ups.

Within this movement, some women began to examine power relations in areas that the movement's male leaders had not considered relevant to radical politics. The women's self-examination uncovered a deep well of grievances about men's power over women inside this very movement. Women in civil rights, the New Left, and the anti-Vietnam War movement were on the whole less victimized, more respected, and less romanticized than they were in the mainstream culture or the counterculture. But despite women's passionate and disciplined work for social change, they remained typically far less visible and less powerful than the men who dominated the meetings and the press conferences. Women came into greater prominence wherever grassroots organizing went on, as in voter registration in the South and the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)

community projects in northern and mid western cities. Throughout the civil rights and student movements, women proved themselves typically the better organizers: of course some men excelled and some women did not, but on average women's greater ability to listen and to connect allowed them to reach across class and even race lines, to seek out potential activists, to persevere despite failure and lack of encouragement. Still, they experienced galling frustrations and humiliations. Everywhere and in every organization women were responsible for keeping records, producing leaflets, telephoning, cleaning offices, cooking, organizing social events, and catering to the egos of male leaders, while the men wrote manifestos, talked to the press, negotiated with officials, and made public speeches. This division of labor did not arise from misogyny or acrimony. It was "natural," or so it seemed to most women as well as men – until for some women it began to seem no longer natural at all.

The second branch of the women's movement, known as women's liberation, arose from a rebellion of these civil rights and New Left women. It developed a style, constituency, and politics different from those of NOW: these women were younger, mostly in their twenties, and less professional; they insisted on woman-only, autonomous groups; and they were radical in the sense of working for structural change and skeptical that conventional politics could achieve it. Women's liberation sought not just to redistribute wealth and power in the existing society, but to challenge the private as well as the public, the psychological as well as the economic, the cultural as well as the legal sources of male dominance. Emerging from male-dominated grassroots social justice movements, women's liberation groups formed in 1967 and 1968, and soon attracted women without previous activist experience.

This movement's most important organizational and theoretical contribution was consciousness raising (CR), a form of structured discussion in which women connected their personal experiences to larger structures of gender. Through CR women developed the understanding that many of their "personal" problems – insecurity about appearance and intelligence, exhaustion, physical and sexual abuse – were not individual failings but a result of discrimination. These discussion groups, usually small, sprung up throughout the country among women of all ages and social positions, and they were simultaneously supportive and transforming. Women formed these groups by the hundreds, then by the thousands. Mentions of the women's movement in the national press increased ten times in the ten months from May 1969 to March 1970.

The earliest forms of protest were agitprop: spreading the word through leaflets, pamphlets, letters to newspapers; pasting stickers onto sexist advertisements; verbally protesting being called "girl" or "baby" or "chick"; hollering at guys making vulgar proposals on the streets. Community

women's schools were a typical early project of women's liberation groups, offering courses ranging from auto mechanics to de Beauvoir, from Marxism to wicca, from karate to prepared childbirth. Housework was the subject of a great deal of analysis: feminists demanded recognition of housework as labor that could be shared by all members of a household. Soon action groups supplemented and in some cases, replaced CR groups. Women pressured employers to provide daycare centers, publicized job and school discrimination, opened women's centers and women's schools, agitated for women's studies courses at colleges. Feminist scholarship, once considered illegitimate or even an oxymoron, evolved into a rich and extensive range of intellectual work with conferences, journals, and prizes in virtually all humanities and social science fields. The clerical workers' union 9 to 5 emerged from a socialist feminist organizing campaign. The bestseller *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which had sold 4.5 million copies in many countries by 1995, emerged from one CR group's critique of sexist medical practices. Feminist skepticism about male-dominated medical practice led to a women's health movement whose victories included the acceptance of alternative childbirth practices involving the use of midwives, birth without anesthesia, and women's right to have partners as coaches in labor and delivery. Women's liberation also revolutionized the common understanding of rape and domestic violence, creating crisis hotlines and shelters, and forcing law enforcement agencies to stop blaming rape and battering victims.

Although black women in civil rights inspired women's liberation in many ways, and although women's liberationists were committed to fighting racism, nevertheless women's liberation was overwhelmingly white. Awareness of this problem did not make it solvable. Good intentions were not enough. Women of color rarely joined, in some cases because they had not been invited and in some cases because they were offended by the whiteness of the agenda as well as the membership. Most white women simply did not see the whiteness of their outlook. Most early CR tended to produce generalizations and even theories about women's oppression which were actually particular to privileged, white, college-educated women. These included antagonism toward the family, which was a traditional refuge from racism for people of color, and idealization of paid work as liberatory, which ignored the fact that poverty and discrimination drove so many women of color into low-paying, monotonous, even dangerous jobs.

But women of color were not latecomers to feminism; rather, they often developed autonomous women's groups from autonomous roots. Within a variety of civil rights organizations – Puerto Rican, Chicano/a, Asian American, and Native American as well as African American – women formed caucuses and persuaded their organizations to include sex oppression and inequality among their concerns. For example, by 1972

women in the Young Lords Party, a militant Puerto Rican group, managed to get the organization to adopt a strongly feminist position paper which condemned *machismo*, violence against women, the belief that women should stay in the home; it also condemned the coercive sterilization program imposed on Puerto Rican women and demanded legal abortion.

After several years the movement grew and in growing, divided into different theoretical/political tendencies. The women's liberation side further developed its critique of liberal feminism – that seeking equality for women within the existing social and political system was inadequate, that the whole system should become more democratic and participatory. Women's liberation was critical of electoral politics and the lack of choice between the two major parties, and sought social change through changing consciousness. They used media-grabbing theatrical stunts and guerrilla theater, as well as picketing and demonstrations, to provoke changes in consciousness. These provocative actions did not often result in lasting structural change. The younger women's liberation activists lacked the patience of the older NOW insiders, who were prepared for a slower pace of change.

Division also arose within women's liberation. Those committed to a broad New Left agenda typically called themselves socialist feminists (to be distinguished from Marxist feminists, who remained convinced that Marxist theory could explain women's oppression and were not committed to an autonomous women's movement). Socialist feminists weighed issues of race and class equally with those of gender and tried to develop an integrated, holistic theory of the society. Radical feminists, by contrast, prioritized sexual oppression, although they by no means ignored other forms of domination. The radical/socialist opposition is often overstated, but small theoretical differences seemed important at the time. Separatists, often but not exclusively lesbians, attempted to create self-sustaining female communities and to withdraw their energies as much as possible from contact with men. In the late 1970s, some women became cultural feminists, celebrating women's specialness and difference from men and retreating from direct challenges to sexist institutions; they believed, rather, that change could come about through building exemplary female communities.

But the clarity and discreteness of these tendencies should not be exaggerated; there was cross-fertilization, none was sealed off from others, the borderlines and definitions shifted, and there were heated debates *within* tendencies. Most members of women's liberation – especially outside big cities – did not identify with any of these tendencies and considered themselves simply feminists, unmodified.

Feminists of different racial/ethnic groups established independent organizations from the beginning, and within those organizations created somewhat different feminisms. Black feminism was soon joined by Latina feminisms, Asian American feminism, Native American feminism. Feminists of color emphasized the problems with universalizing assumptions about women and with identifying gender as a category autonomous from race and class. Theoretical differences between these feminisms have sometimes been overstated, however, and feminists of color were not more unanimous than white feminists – there were, for example, black liberal feminists, black socialist feminists, black radical feminists, black cultural feminists. But virtually all feminists of color experienced racism within the women's movement. The majority of feminists, white women of middle-class backgrounds, were often oblivious to the lives of women from minority and working-class families.

Critiques of racism from feminists of color precipitated creative expansion of feminist thought and the feminist agenda. For example, many African American feminists have explored Alice Walker's 1983 concept of womanism. Walker originally intended the term to refer to audacious and courageous behavior and commitment to the survival and wholeness of the entire African American people, male and female. Gradually the term was being used by many feminists of color to call attention to differences among women, the multiple axes of women's oppression and strength, and the multiple identities that are united in every individual woman. African American feminism helped generate a spectacular flowering of black women's writing and the recovery of earlier black female artists. Chicana feminism gave rise to an exquisite development of Mexican and Mexican American mural painting. Women of color tended to link issues of race, reproductive rights, and economic injustice, thereby contributing to the feminist project.

The development of lesbian theory and politics was inseparable from the feminist movement. Feminists did not invent lesbianism, but women's liberation did open up protected space and opportunity for exploring a new dimension of relationships with women. Coming out is not always a process of leaping from one identity to another; in fact, the supportive women's movement context made it possible for women to try out new sexual and emotional options and to resist being straitjacketed into a fixed category. Lesbian feminists, and later also bisexual and transgender feminists, contributed much to heterosexual feminists by challenging conventional heterosexual norms, such as conceiving of “the” sex act as missionary position intercourse.

Lesbians sometimes created separate feminist groups, but gay-straight discord has been exaggerated. Although some NOW leaders feared that openly lesbian members would discredit the respectability of the

movement, soon the NOW majority came to back gay rights unequivocally, notably helping to litigate on behalf of lesbian mothers' custody rights. As lesbians became more open and vocal, they identified and protested the heterosexual assumptions of many straight feminists, but they were also discriminated against by sexism in the male-dominated gay movement. For the most part, lesbians continued to be active in women's liberation and frequently made important contributions to feminist theory. Lesbians also often participated in and even led campaigns of primary concern to heterosexual women, such as reproductive rights.

Although the majority of feminists were secular, religious feminists played a significant role in the movement. In American Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism, women struggled for a feminist theology and for changes in hierarchies and practices, against heavy odds. Womanist theology called for an androgynous view of God and Jesus, gender-neutral language in liturgy, and ceremonies that addressed women's unique experiences. Religious feminists agitated for the inclusion of women as ministers, priests, and rabbis. In fact, spiritual feminists reinvented a number of unorthodox beliefs and practices, such as witchcraft, which women tried to rescue from stigma and to turn into practices that put women in charge.

At the beginning of the movement, feminists tended to create multi-issue organizations, which in turn might create committees to focus on single issues, such as day care, rape, or running a women's center. By the mid-1970s feminist politics was occurring primarily in single-issue organizations focused on, for example, reproductive rights, employment discrimination, health, domestic violence, women's studies. An expanded reproductive rights campaign asserted women's rights to bear children in safe and healthy circumstances as well as to choose not to give birth, so the movement saw day care and child welfare as equal in importance to birth control. The Reproductive Rights National Network (known as R2N2) succeeded in restricting the then widespread practice of coercive sterilization. It investigated and documented thousands of cases of forced sterilization, especially of people of color; of welfare recipients threatened with cutoffs of stipends unless they submitted to sterilization; and of women asked to sign sterilization consent forms while in labor, either in pain or partly anesthetized. In 1974, responding to women's movement pressure, the US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare issued guidelines that required informed consent and prohibited sterilization of women under twenty-one. Although it took over a decade to bring most hospitals into compliance with these guidelines, the R2N2 campaign eventually reduced sterilization abuse significantly.

Whereas reproductive rights tended to create unity among feminists, another issue – pornography – illustrated vividly how deep feminist divisions could be. In 1976 West Coast feminists organized Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) to protest advertising and entertainment imagery featuring abuse of women and suggesting that women liked it. One of WAVAW's first targets was a Rolling Stone record cover and billboard, "I'm Black and Blue from the Rolling Stones and I Like It," showing an ecstatic woman bound and beaten. WAVAW used direct action-demonstrations, a mass letter-writing campaign, painting new slogans on top of ads-and forced Warner/Elektra/Atlantic Records to eliminate this image and to agree not to use other such images. As the anti-violence campaign spread it mutated, targeting porn in general instead of violence and arguing that even nonviolent porn was itself abusive of women. A new organization, Women Against Pornography (WAP), called for state intervention in the form of zoning and censorship laws, rather than direct action and consciousness raising. As a result of these positions, WAP leaders found natural allies among conservatives who were anti-feminist on most issues. Another sector of feminists opposed this strategy and organized the Feminists Against Censorship Taskforce (FACT). By the early 1980s, the disagreements were so hot and hardened that they became known as the "porn wars."

Contrary to the stereotype that the women's movement focused exclusively on sexual issues, feminists in many parts of the country generated a great deal of activism focused on economic, bread-and-butter problems of employed women. Women's wages, which were about 59 percent of men's when women's liberation emerged, were actually losing ground in the 1950s. By 1993 women's wages reached 77 percent of men's, and among unionized workers, women have gained even more equity, earning 84 percent of men's wages on average. Unfortunately, some of women's gains are more apparent than real, resulting from the fact that men's real wages (i.e., wages expressed in terms of actual buying power) have been declining.

Much of the wage decline results from the weakening of labor unions, a decline that would be worse if the women's movement had not reenergized organizing. Unions had shown relatively little interest in organizing clerical and service workers until the civil rights and women's movements pushed them, from both within and without unions. The women's movement initiated organizing projects among clerical workers, bank tellers, janitors, healthcare workers, waitresses, stewardesses, communication workers, and other groups. The movement was particularly successful with clerical workers, because so much of the feminist constituency was employed in that sector. In New York there was WOW (Women Office Workers), in Chicago WE (Women Employed), and in the Bay Area Union WAGE (Women's Alliance to Gain Equality). Today

the best-known union of clerical workers is 9 to 5, which grew out of Boston's socialist feminist women's union, Bread and Roses. Using the slogan "Raises not Roses," 9 to 5 published an "office workers' bill of rights," demanding equal pay and promotion opportunities, detailed job descriptions, maternity benefits, overtime pay, and the right to refuse to do personal errands for the employer. The phrase "9 to 5" and the idea behind it gained such prominence that clerical workers' rebellion was featured in a Hollywood hit movie starring Jane Fonda, Dolly Parton, and Lili Tomlin. Its success rested on retaining its independent identity as a women's movement organization even after it joined the AFL-CIO. Like clerical workers, flight attendants became particularly critical of the discriminatory and exploitive aspects of their jobs, which required appearance and weight checks, excluded women of color, fired employees who reached thirty or got married, and advertised stewardesses' looks in ways that invited sexual harassment. Their victories are evident on airplanes today, where there are flight attendants of both sexes and all sizes and appearances; less visibly, they have also won better health benefits, wages, and schedules.

In 1974, 3,200 women from fifty-eight different unions met in Chicago to found the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW). For a brief time CLUW had chapters in many cities, trained women for union leadership, and pressured unions to include women in apprenticeship programs, to make childcare a priority, to fight sexual harassment, to support abortion rights and the ERA. CLUW was largely responsible for transforming the labor movement's family policy from one which had stubbornly assumed the family wage – i.e., that male workers single-handedly supported wives and children – to an approach that recognized women's employment as the norm. In 1986, CLUW promulgated a family bill of rights, arguing that workers and their families should be entitled to jobs and economic security, healthcare, child and elder care, family leave, services for the elderly, education, equal opportunity, pay equity, shelter, and a work and home environment safe from health hazards.

In fact, sexual issues, sometimes labeled as exclusively of interest to middle-class women, have been a central and enduring concern of working women. Whenever women have been employed or active outside their homes, they have been vulnerable to unwelcome sexual advances; working women have been protesting such treatment for centuries, as far back as the 1840s, when the Lowell mill "girls" objected to harassment by foremen. But the range of behaviors included in this category – from whistles to "compliments" on women's figures, to indecent exposure and grabbing women, to demanding sex in return for favors – would previously have been considered harmless boys-will-be-boys play, flirtation, or even flattery. There had been little progress before the second-wave women's movement, and working women had little recourse

against sexual aggression by co-workers and bosses except to seek other work. In popular literature, sexual harassment was treated as a joke. The actress who “succeeds” by means of the casting couch, the “Fly Me” airline stewardess, and other stereotypes permeated American/male humor.

In 1970, women's liberation advocates in several locales conducted “Ogle-Ins,” turning the tables on the guys by directing whistles, animal noises, and evaluations of sexual organs against obnoxious men, even grabbing crotches. Los Angeles feminists were provoked into action by an official Chamber of Commerce “Girl-watching Week.” Activists carried tape measures, shouted “too small” and “Hey, fella, can you type, file and make coffee?” In May 1975, Working Women United in Ithaca, New York, held the first Speak-out on Sexual Harassment. At this extraordinary public event women who had never dared complain before – waitresses, administrators, clerks, factory workers, an assistant professor, a filmmaker – told of receiving threats, obscenities, propositions to barter sex for jobs. Civil rights and feminist activist Eleanor Holmes Norton, then New York City's Commissioner on Human Rights, included testimony on sexual harassment in public hearings she was conducting on sex discrimination in employment, and it was because of her doing so that the national press first reported on the issue. Among the first sexual harassment cases to reach the federal courts were those brought by African American women. The consciousness raised in such campaigns made possible Anita Hill's dramatic protest in US Senate hearings in 1991 and the nationwide support she received from women of all groups. It made it possible as well for women in the armed forces to speak out against sexual harassment today.

One of the movement's most ambitious campaigns was in pursuit of pay equity, once known as “comparable worth.” By the late 1970s, feminists were aware that the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 had failed to equalize male and female wages. It became clear that, because the labor force was so “sexegated,” and female jobs were so consistently undervalued, a new strategy was needed. The comparable worth strategy called for equal wages for work of comparable expertise, even when the jobs were different. For example, truck drivers earned much more than registered nurses, whose training and responsibility were so much greater. Most job evaluation studies showed wage gaps of 20 to 30 percent between women and men, affecting 99 percent of women workers.

The comparable worth strategy was initially urged during World War II, when the War Labor Board reported that war-industry managers set wages not by the market but by automatically, possibly even unthinkingly, inflating the value of men's over women's jobs. In the 1970s, the women's movement reopened a challenge to this discrimination

through litigation, collective bargaining, and state legislation. This pressure was used in 1979 by Eleanor Holmes Norton, then head of the EEOC, to call for using job evaluations to remedy women's low wages. Unfortunately her successor, Clarence Thomas, opposed even the consideration of comparable worth claims. Although some substantial victories were won in state and union battles – for example, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) won wage increases averaging 32 percent and back pay retroactive to 1979 for Washington state employees, 35,000 of whom shared a \$482 million settlement – the comparable worth campaign slowed at the end of the century.

Although women's liberationists had little faith in making social change through the electoral process, the equal rights segment of the movement devoted substantial time, energy, and resources to get more women into government. Myriad local, state, and national women's groups promoted female candidates and male candidates who favored a feminist agenda; they tried to defeat anti-feminist politicians; they raised funds, lobbied, and established think tanks; they constructed women's caucuses in Congress and the state legislatures. Women are hardly disinterested in politics. Since 1964 the number of female voters has exceeded the number of male voters in every presidential election. The sex difference in voter turnout rates is greatest among African Americans but holds true for Hispanics and whites as well.

Still, the obstacles are formidable. Perhaps the biggest is the increasing dependence of candidates on expensive media campaigns and therefore on corporate wealth. By and large women have less access to this kind of money, not only because of direct sexism but also because they tend to be more progressive (whether they are Democrats or Republicans) and because they often prioritize different concerns, such as peace, the environment, education, health, housing, and welfare. (Of all public officials, African American women were the most liberal and the most likely to belong to feminist organizations.) The women's movement encouraged women to run for office but could not free women candidates from the sexism of the public gaze. Women in politics have to tread a razor-thin line between appearing too tough or not tough enough, too feminine or not feminine enough, too family-centered or not devoted enough to family. In January 2001, a record 10 percent of the state governors, 13 percent of US Senators, and 13.56 percent of Representatives in the

US House were female. If the proportion of women continued to grow at the current rate, it would take three hundred years to achieve parity. Women have done somewhat better on state and local levels, where huge war chests are not as essential. Twenty-two percent of state legislators

are women, but even here it would take fifty years to achieve equality with men. Women's representation in government puts the United States approximately on a par with Iraq. But women's voting power has encouraged some male politicians to adopt "women's issues."

As the movement grew to encompass so many facets of life – home, workplace, love, sex, health, school – emphasis on single-issue campaigns seemed the most expedient way to change sexist practice because it facilitated making broad coalitions. However, single-issue politics tended to deemphasize theory. This approach reduced divisions and had the advantage of making coalitions easier, but it ceded feminist theory construction to academics often divorced from activism. The coalitions and compromises necessitated by single-issue politics made the movement less radical and more practical. Single-issue politics also, of course, lessened the movement's coherence as activists became specialized and sometimes professionalized. But stable organizations with paid staff meant that feminist lobbying could become more continuous, that expertise and contacts could be passed down, that women could be trained and could earn their livings in the political realm.

A coherent mass women's movement began to weaken by the end of the 1970s. Some of this decline was inevitable, because mass social movements never have a long life – they require such intensity of participation that they produce burnout. Moreover, in a movement largely driven by youth, the natural aging process pulls activists into professions, family life, or simply into a more stable and quieter lifestyle. And it was difficult for feminism to thrive outside the context of other progressive social movements, some of which also declined precipitously in the mid-1970s. As a new generation of women emerged into adulthood, they quite naturally took for granted many of the gains made by the previous generation and no longer thought they needed a women's movement. The women's liberation stream, moreover, was temperamentally and ideologically opposed to structure, centralization, and hierarchy and as a result did not develop enduring organizations.

Above all, second-wave feminism underestimated the backlash that its very successes provoked. Always concentrating on what remained to be achieved instead of what had already been accomplished, most of its activists did not grasp how radical and deeply disturbing to many people were the social and personal changes it was initiating. Still, although anti-feminist conservatives found a fertile field in which to win followers, their primary strength came from extraordinary levels of funding and unified organization, which allowed them to saturate the public with their messages. They did not convert many feminists to conservatism, but they moved the mainstream far to the right and forced the women's movement onto the defensive until at least the end of the century.

The most protracted anti-feminist campaign has been against abortion. Its first major victory was discursive: redefining the anti-abortion cause as “right to life” and focusing on the “unborn” helped mobilize massive evangelical Protestant and Catholic support among people who would not have been comfortable directly challenging women's freedom to choose. Since then it has won many other victories: limiting *Roe v. Wade* through state legislation and judicial decisions which restrict abortion in many ways; prohibiting the use of public funds for abortion both in the United States and in US aid programs abroad; terrorizing clinics and even murdering doctors, which has radically reduced the availability of abortion; preventing medical schools from teaching abortion techniques; keeping RU486 (a non-surgical method of abortion) off the market. Perhaps its biggest victory has been to prevent the women's movement from moving forward on its agenda into other issues.

Right to life was part of a larger new religious Right, which has been able to change political discourse through its focus on “family values.” The particularly vehement condemnation of single motherhood allowed a coded attack on poor women, particularly poor women of color and welfare mothers; on lesbians; on career women; and on sexual permissiveness, typically characterized as women's promiscuity. Liberal television and Hollywood have received particularly strong denunciation, as for example in vice-presidential candidate Dan Quayle's 1992 attack on the popular comedian Murphy Brown when she chose to have a child on her own. The historic repeal of Aid to Families with Dependent Children in 1996, making the United States the only economically developed nation to provide no guarantee of help to poor children and their caretakers, was made possible by the vilification of poor single mothers and the racist underpinnings of that portrayal.

The anti-feminist backlash depended on vast funding from right-wing corporate fortunes, fervent support from religious fundamentalists, and considerable media attention. The intensity of the reaction is a measure of how threatened conservatives were by popular backing for women's liberation and the rapid changes it brought about. Even with their billions of dollars, hundreds of lobbyists and public relations men, and whole foundations and magazines dishing out anti-feminist misinformation, compared to the puny amounts of money and volunteer labor available to women's liberation, the striking fact is that public opinion has not shifted much. Although the term “feminist” has been discredited among some groups, polls show overwhelming support for feminist positions on key issues.

Although second-wave feminism arose in a context of anti-imperialist consciousness and conflicts, and although many early US feminists supported anti-colonial struggles (in Vietnam, Cuba, southern Africa, and

Ireland, for example), most US feminists remained insular and parochial in their understanding and their agenda. First-wave feminists built links primarily with European feminists, but today's women's movement connections are fully global. Facilitating the new global feminism was the United Nations declaration of 1975–85 as a “decade for women.” Conferences in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995) adopted platforms of action, which then allowed feminist leaders from around the world to use them to pressure their own states and the private sector to advance women's rights. They focused attention, for example, on the impact of war, military occupations, civil wars, poverty, and environmental damage on women and children, and on the importance of education and citizenship to women's welfare.

These conferences, combined with increasing access to the Internet, allowed women from all over the world to create formal and informal networks bringing together those concerned with similar issues. These networks are the characteristic organizational form of transnational feminism. Third world grassroots women's activism, coordinated by networks, has fought against dowry deaths in India, genital mutilation in Africa and the Middle East, rape and “ethnic cleansing” in war zones, forced prostitution in East and Southeast Asia, and austerity programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund which forced governments to cut back on health, education, and welfare. As always, much local women's activism assumed a maternalist form, both because children are often women's highest priority and because speaking as mothers gives legitimacy to women's politics. In Argentina, women challenged the dictator through “Las Madres de Plaza de Mayo,” mothers protesting the disappearance (in reality, kidnapping, torture, and murder) of their children. In Ireland, the peace campaign led by Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, who won the 1976 Nobel prize, rested on maternalist rhetoric. In Russia, virtually the only protest against the Chechen war came from the organized mothers of soldiers. In Israel, Women in Black jumpstarted the peace movement.

Development of local feminist leadership enabled these grassroots movements to exert significant leverage on international organizations. Women's demands have been recognized, although often only grudgingly, by official governmental organizations. Each of the UN-sponsored conferences included an official government meeting as well as a forum for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The powerful American philanthropic foundations, such as Ford and Rockefeller, have funded many woman-empowering projects in the third world. Examples include support of women's education, from basic literacy to women's studies programs in universities, in eastern Europe and the third world; vocational training to enable women to develop some level of economic independence; skills improvement and consciousness raising for midwives

and other healthcare workers who deliver services to women; and basic public health measures, from water purification to vaccination to AIDS education.

A major accomplishment of global feminism has been in redefining the concept of human rights so as to include rights specific to women. Crimes such as rape, battering, genital mutilation, denial of education and citizenship, and sexual slavery are now being discussed as violations of human rights. The recent war crimes tribunal in the Hague, considering the atrocities of the Balkan wars, recognized rape for the first time as a war crime – a victory for women of great historical importance. As a result, the US Immigration and Naturalization Service has been forced to consider applications for political asylum that rest on violence and abuse of women. Yet feminists had not hitherto made human rights a political issue within the United States, despite the fact that this country's violations are notorious, including the disproportionate arrest and imprisonment of people of color, the high infant mortality and illness rates among the poor, capital punishment, trying children as adults, depriving the poor of healthcare, corrupt elections, and the repeal of welfare.

Starting in the 1980s, global feminisms have so proliferated that they have begun to influence the American movement and to expand American feminist consciousness to include the majority of the world's women who are poor, hungry, often illiterate, denied equal rights, and frequently the victims of violence, either military or domestic. American feminists today are less likely to think of their own experiences as universal. The globalization of feminism has helped American feminists recognize the diversity of their own country. Moreover, US feminist organizations are increasingly focused on an international agenda. For example, the Women's Economic Development Organization (WEDO) is based in New York, but its leadership group comes from all over the world and its agenda is oriented outside the United States.

American feminist scholarship has also been transformed by the new global awareness. From postcolonial studies to social indicator surveys, from film studies to evaluations of small loan programs, researchers in all fields increasingly focus their studies through international and comparative lenses. Many scholars are collaborating with other feminist scholars across national lines, and there are now books examining many specific topics – for example, prisons, reproductive rights, sex work, law, war, violence, democratization and civil society – with chapters on different parts of the world.

While thousands of women remained active in single-issue and international campaigns throughout the 1980s and 1990s, young women

belonged to what some have called a post feminist generation, that is, they took for granted and benefited from the achievements of feminism, but did not consider themselves part of an ongoing social movement. As Judith Stacey defined it, post feminism involved the “simultaneous incorporation, revision and depoliticization of many of the central goals of second-wave feminism” (1987: 7). However, by the 1990s an increasing number of younger women were identifying themselves as part of a third wave of feminism.

The phrase “third wave” first appeared in the mid-1980s but took off after 1992. In that year one hundred young feminists met in New York and using the name Third Wave, organized an activist network. Their first action was Freedom Ride 1992, a bus tour to register voters in poor communities of color. However, the main arena for third-wave feminism has been cultural.

Reclaiming the anger of early women's liberation, a prominent identity of the third wave is Riot Girls, “girls who wish their gender started with a growl!... and... women who are too pissed off, unhappy, tough, geeky, or brainy to do and think what they' re told.” Riot Girls and other zap action and affinity groups model themselves on ACT-UP, a militant, theatrical AIDS activist group. They sometimes irritate older feminists because they seem to be reinventing the wheel and rendering second-wave feminism invisible. Yet in many ways the third wave speaks in a voice remarkably similar to that of the early second wave, showing a commitment to collective action, often writing anonymously or signing with pseudonyms; the use of hyperbole, autobiographical accounts, rough and purposely non slick design; anger at the way mass commercial culture uses women's bodies; appropriation and redefinition of negative epithets for women (bitch, cunt) to assert “girl power” – a kind of “linguistic jujitsu” (Delaney 1999: 9). They differ in their acute awareness of racial and sexual difference, in their strongly prosexual attitudes, their comfort with the term girl (rejecting the more dignified “woman” for which the second wave fought so hard), and their use of the body as a theater, even a weapon. The third wave's major forms of dissemination are the Internet and zines – do-it-yourself publications, typically xeroxed or posted on the Web. At this point it is too early to tell whether the third wave will become an influential social movement.

It is difficult to appraise the accomplishments of the women's movement because so much was changed, and so much of it was personal and cultural in addition to institutional and economic. A 1986 Gallup poll reported that one of every two white women, and two of every three women of color, identified themselves as feminists. In 1972 a *New York Times* reporter studied Hope, Indiana, and found that “Women's Lib is Either a Joke or a Bore” (or so claimed the headline), and that no woman

expressed interest in the women's movement. By the end of the 1980s, the town had numerous feminist books and a librarian reported that high school students consulted women's history monographs for school essays; the library displayed a battered women's poster from Columbus, Ohio; and a local women's reading club had devoted a year to books about prominent women.

In fact, few areas of life were untouched by feminism. As regards health, for example, many physicians and hospitals have made major improvements in the treatment of women; at the turn of the twenty-first century about 50 percent of medical students are women; women successfully fought their exclusion from medical research; diseases affecting women, such as breast cancer, now receive better funding thanks to women's efforts. Feminists insisted that violence against women, previously a well-kept secret, become a public political issue; made rape, incest, battering, and sexual harassment understood as crimes; and got public funding for shelters for battered women. Due to feminist pressure, changes in education have been substantial: curricula and textbooks have been rewritten to promote equal opportunity for girls, and students in the universities have access to women's studies programs and feminist instructors. Title IX, passed in 1972 to mandate equal access to college programs, has worked a virtual revolution in sports. To cite but two examples, consider the many women's records broken in track and field, and the professional women's basketball leagues created in 1997. In supporting families, feminists organized daycare centers, developed standards and curricula for early childhood education, demanded daycare funding from government and private employers, and fought for the rights of mothers and for a decent welfare system.

Feminists also struggled for new options for women in employment. They won greater access to traditionally male occupations, from construction to professions to business. They entered and changed the unions, and have been successful at organizing previously nonunion workers such as secretaries, waitresses, hospital workers, and flight attendants. Affirmative action, typically discussed as a measure to help people of color, has actually benefited women (of all racial/ethnic groups) most. As the great majority of American women increasingly need to work for wages throughout their lives, more men are taking more responsibility for housework and child raising. Although women continue to do the bulk of that work, it is still commonplace today to see men in playgrounds, supermarkets, and PTA meetings.

America's poorest women have not shared equally in these economic gains. At the beginning of the movement, feminists in several major cities participated in and supported welfare rights campaigns, and the National Welfare Rights Organization won significant victories in prohibiting

household searches, residence requirements, and cutoffs without hearings. With the conservative resurgence of the 1980s, however, poor women lost ground both in welfare and in employment: capital flight, deunionization, outsourcing, cutbacks in benefits, and increasingly authoritarian work rules and supervision have disproportionately disadvantaged women. When, as a culmination of several decades of conservative attacks, welfare was repealed in 1996, what remained of the women's movement did not prioritize the problems of poverty and increasing inequality.

Feminism changed how women look and dress and what is considered attractive. Increasing numbers of women refuse to wear the constricting, uncomfortable clothes that were required in the 1950s (although some are making a comeback) – girdles, garter belts, and stockings; tight, flimsy, pointed and high-heeled shoes; crinolines and cinch belts; tight short skirts. Beauty standards are changing so that women wearing pants, loose jackets, walking shoes, and no make-up feel attractive and are recognized by others as attractive. The Miss America pageant of 2000 earned its lowest television ratings in forty-one years. Mainstream political women such as Senator Hillary Clinton regularly wear pant suits. Women's newfound passion for athletics has made fashionable a look of health and strength, sometimes to an oppressive degree as women feel coerced to reach a new kind of thinness that is muscular and firm. A few older movie stars, such as Susan Sarandon, Olympia Dukakis, and Meryl Streep, are recognized as desirable, and women entertainers in many media and art forms are rejecting simplistic, demeaning, and passive roles, despite the reemergence of misogynist and hypersexualized entertainments. In the fine arts in general women's progress has been slower, illustrating the fallacy of assuming that the elite is less sexist than those of lesser privilege.

Even the way we speak has been altered: new words have been coined, like “sexist” and “Ms.” and “gender”; many Americans are at least self-conscious about the use of “he” to mean a human, and textbooks and even sacred texts are being rewritten in inclusive language. Women are being called “women” instead of “ladies” or “girls.”

Some of the biggest transformations were personal and familial, and they have been hotly contested. Indeed, even from a feminist perspective, not all of them are positive. Women's relationships with other women are more publicly valued and celebrated, even in the popular commercial media, and lesbianism is more accepted. People are marrying later and some are choosing not to marry. Most women today enter marriage or other romantic relationships with the expectation of equal partnership; since they do not always get this, women seem more willing to live singly than to put up with domineering or abusive men. More women think of

marriage as only one possible option, aware that singleness and lesbianism are reasonable alternatives, and as only one aspect of life, supplementing motherhood, work, and self-fulfillment. Despite the conservative backlash, there is a growing sentiment that families come in a variety of forms.

Religion is another arena of feminist success. More women are in the pulpit than ever before: women are one-seventh of Episcopalian clergy and 45 percent of newly ordained Reform rabbis. Some of the largest divinity schools now enroll more than 22 percent women, curricula in these schools have been reshaped to include women, and many religious services now use androgynous language.

Judicial and legislative victories have been considerable, but also vulnerable to attack and erosion. These gains include the legalization of abortion in 1973, federal guidelines against coercive sterilization, rape shield laws which encourage more women to prosecute their attackers, affirmative action programs which aim to correct past discrimination, parental leave, albeit unpaid – but not, however, the Equal Rights Amendment. Feminism was one of the forces behind federal and state hate crime laws and domestic partnership laws. The Violence Against Women Act of 1994 created an unprecedented federal government bureau devoted to combating violence against women.

None of these gains is necessarily permanent. Yet despite major expenditures by foundations, journalism, and lobbying against feminist programs, compared to the small amounts of money and volunteer labor available to women's liberation, the remarkable fact is that public opinion remains strongly in favor of woman's rights and sex equality.

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