

## WHAT WOMEN WANT

The story of what women want—equality, independence, voice, and value—has been described as a series of waves. While some historians see these waves as too simple a way to explain things, it's a common way to talk about the different stages of the women's movement. The four waves are often explained as:

1. **First-wave feminism** (19th and early 20th century): This wave focused on property rights and the right to vote. It included the movement for women's right to vote in the 1900s, known as the "Suffrage Movement."
2. **Second-wave feminism** (1960s–1980s): This wave addressed women's roles in society. It gained momentum in the 1960s, '70s, and '80s and was labeled "The Women's Liberation Movement."
3. **Third-wave feminism** (1990s–2000s): This wave pushed for equality for women of all races and ethnicities, recognizing that different women face different challenges.
4. **Fourth-wave feminism** (2010s–present): This wave opened conversations about gender, abuse, and how women's bodies are portrayed in the media.

Behind these waves are strong female figures, both real and fictional, who stood up for themselves and for other women. Examples include Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Mary Wollstonecraft, Sojourner Truth, Jane Austen's Elizabeth Bennett, and Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. These women paved the way for later **suffragettes**—those who protested for women's right to vote.

In the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, women's **activism**—action using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change—in the United States gained significant attention and was labeled the **Women's Liberation Movement**. Betty Friedan, a college-educated housewife, played a crucial role by writing *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. This book is believed to have kick-started the second wave of feminism, addressing issues like wage equality, birth control, and women's education. While Friedan faced later criticism from **feminists**—advocates of women's rights based on the equality of the sexes—for focusing only on the challenges of white, middle-class women, her book highlighted the societal issues that kept women at home as housewives.

Despite criticisms, Friedan contributed significantly to the women's rights movement. She helped found key organizations like the **National Organization for Women (NOW)** and advocated for equal pay and changes to abortion laws. She was able to show through her analysis that the problems were not individual but societal.

Later waves of feminism, especially the third and fourth, argued that Friedan's work did not directly address the experiences of women of color. Activists, calling themselves **womanists**, took a more inclusive approach, addressing issues of race, class, and gender. Methods like consciousness raising and women's liberation writing played a crucial role in sharing ideas.

Women used various forms of media, including poetry, fiction, plays, films, and visual arts, to tell their stories.

After 1970, it was not uncommon for women's groups, independently or collectively, to hold strikes and demonstrations, including the **Women's Strike for Equality** (August 26, 1970) and the **Women's March on Washington** (January 21, 2017). In recent years, movements like **#MeToo** have continued the legacy of feminist and womanist activism, addressing issues of abuse, harassment, and assault. This movement builds on the concerns of all four waves, highlighting the ongoing struggle for equality and justice.

*\*This essay was adapted by ChatGPT.*

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