

(Re)Learning Moment

Four Waves of Feminism

Historians often divide the feminist movement in the United States into four waves, outlining the tumultuous and evolving history.

First Wave (1848 – 1920)

Sub-Groups/Movements: Women’s Suffrage Movement

First wave feminism focused on securing women’s right to vote during the 19th and early 20th century. Historians often tie the beginning of the wave with the first formal Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY in 1848. Some critics often note that this wave focused on individual rights over collective action, ignoring issues of Women of Color and working-class women.

Second Wave (1963 – 1980s)

Sub-Groups/Movements: Women’s Liberation | Reproductive Freedom

Second wave feminism lasted about two decades beginning in the 1960s. During this wave, feminists aimed to challenge patriarchal institutions and created spaces for women empowerment, specifically in the workforce. Similarly, to the first wave, the movement largely addressed the concerns of educated middle-class, White women, marginalizing the concerns of women from other classes and races.

Third Wave (1990s)

Sub-Groups/Movements: Riot Grrrl | Intersectional Feminism

Emerging from civil rights gains in second wave feminism, third wave feminists worked to redefine their movement to be more diverse and intersectional. Specifically, this wave challenged the universality of the previous waves, including LGBTQ+, anti-racism, and global solidarity in their goals. However, critics argue that the movement focused too much on personal choice and identities rather than structural inequalities.

Fourth Wave (2010s – Present)

Sub-Groups/Movements: #MeToo Movement | Everyday Sexism Project

Immediately following the third wave, fourth wave feminism marks the current movement phase. With similar goals as the previous wave, fourth wave feminists used internet and social media tools to amplify voices, challenge gender norms/stereotypes, and combat sexual violence. Some critics argue that the movement may be too reliant on social media activism, creating a superficial, disconnected movement without a clear agenda.

(Re)Learn About the Four Waves of Feminism

Resources curated by Miranda N. Rutan, MS

General Educational Resources

- A Brief History of Feminism | [E-Book](#)
- Hood Feminism | [E-Book](#)
- The Missing Waves of Feminism | [Multimedia Article](#)
- What Are the Four Waves of Feminism? | [Article](#)

First Wave Feminism

- Feminism: The First Wave | [Multimedia Exhibit](#)
- Documenting First Wave Feminism | [E-Book](#)
- When Voting Rights Didn't Protect All Women | [Video](#)
- Women's Suffrage | [Video](#)

Second Wave Feminism

- Feminism: The Second Wave | [Multimedia Exhibit](#)
- Ms. Magazine | [Reference Entry](#)
- Sisterhood Is Powerful | [Physical Book](#)
- We Were There | [Physical Book](#)

Third Wave Feminism

- Feminism: The Third Wave | [Multimedia Exhibit](#)
- The Riot Grrrl Collection at New York University | [Digital Collection](#)
- Third-Wave Feminism: A Transnational Perspective | [Journal Article](#)
- Year of the Woman | [Article](#)

Fourth Wave Feminism

- Feminism: The Fourth Wave | [Multimedia Exhibit](#)
- Lupita: The Indigenous Activist Leading a New Generation of Mexican Women | [Documentary Video](#)
- Networked Feminism | [Physical Book](#)
- New Feminist Activism, Waves and Generations | [Discussion Paper](#)