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# The Waves That Molded Present-Day Political Climate

## The Waves of Wins

A feminist analysis of history is hard to come by since the movement is largely left out of what we choose to remember from the past. In order to understand the history of feminism, one must look at the three waves in which women's rights were fought for. The movements had different characteristics, but worked toward a common goal and understanding of equity and opportunity regardless of sex. Historical events proved to be large influences in the direction of the feminist movements. Three different "waves" emerged that molded themselves around the modern day political climate. First wave feminism garnered momentum after the civil rights movement and worked for suffrage; second wave feminism, during times of intense anti-war discourse and continued civil rights movements, shifted the focus on sexual and reproductive rights; third wave feminism continues to celebrate legal equality while fighting against institutional oppression.

After the civil rights movement, during the late 19th and early 20th century, the first unified wave of middle-class white feminists emerged; this period, which followed the heels of abolition and temperance movements, focused on suffrage. After suffrage was granted to black men, women realized that everyone deserved the vote, not just men. As seen in *Iron Jawed Angels*, directed by von Garnier, the women, led by Alice Paul, used explicit tactics like parades and picketing to gain awareness about the issue; the overall strategy, though, was to focus on the states, and start a congressional committee for a constitutional amendment. This time period was one in which masculine domination was accepted without questioning; this made it much harder for the women to earn the vote, because as the minority, they were not taken seriously. That is why people like Alice Paul were so influential; they were taken seriously because they fought an uphill battle against people who didn't value their contribution to society.

While the first wave focused on the white middle-class women, the second wave was much more inclusive of the non-dominant identities. This time period, during the 1960's, until the 1990's, focused on exclusionary laws preventing women from having the same opportunities as men. Another big part of the movement was sexual and reproductive rights – women were not allowed to have abortions, and could be raped by their husbands; the movement was to reclaim what it meant to be a woman, and why women deserved the same as men. Gloria Steinem, a figure of the second wave, was well known for her political outreach, and *Ms. Magazine*. People like her stood up to the men that were earning more, and demanded to be treated equally. As seen in "Makers: Women who made America," directed by Goodman and Wagner, women were excluded from things like the Boston Marathon, and were told to go to college just to meet a man. Gloria Steinem became a figurehead because she refused to be categorized as something she didn't believe in, and objectified for the men's pleasure.

Even though the laws were mostly in order, the third wave feminists emerged to fight a whole new beast: institutional, and cultural oppression. Women were originally exempt from military service so they could take care of the home, but that was struck down during the second wave of feminism in 1961 (Freeman, 2002). The difference, though, is that women were not allowed to serve on the front lines in the military until 2013; this resulted from gender bias and norms. This is precisely what the third wave of feminism is dealing with, the normative viewpoints and

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institutional structures that still prevent women from getting ahead. As Tavi Gevinson said in a Ted Talk, oppression today is “beneath the surface.” The laws support women for the most part, but the institutions that allow men to get ahead are still making women work towards equity against the current.

Throughout history there have been different definitions of feminism, and the focus of the movements have shifted and adapted to the political climate and priorities of the time. As women realized they were worthy of the same rights, the women emerged victorious, and garnered momentum. The first two waves of feminism were fighting against unjust laws that supported structures of patriarchy, while the third wave is still dealing with the institutional structures that leave women behind. The first wave of feminism started during a time of large industrial, capitalist expansion that has been growing and changing ever since. As this capitalist institution rose, it supported and enhanced masculine domination by allowing men vast economic opportunities, while making women dependents. After 1800, this growth necessitated feminist movements for as long as capitalism exists because the market system is designed to leave women behind (Freedman, 2002). Each wave emerged and shifted with historical events; the civil rights movement during the first wave, anti-war time during the second wave, and institutional oppression during the third wave. Feminists have achieved a lot in the past, but arguably have a much harder job today since oppression against women is largely beneath the surface.