

What Is Feminism?

A CONCISE HISTORY OF THE F WORD

Feminism, a word that describes a social-justice movement for gender equity and human liberation, is often treated as the other F word. Partly because it's a word of great power, it's nearly as unseemly as those other girl terms, cunt or bitch. This in part explains why by the time the two of us were at college, learning that we were indeed feminists, the term was dripping with qualifiers. "I'm a . . . power, postmodern, Girlie, pro-sex, Prada, academic, gender, radical, Marxist, equity, cyber, Chicana, cultural, eco, lesbian, Latina, womanist, animal rights, American Indian, Indian, international, diva, Jewish, Puerto Rican, working-class, Asian-American, philanthropic, bisexual, transsexual, lipstick, punk rock, young, old . . . feminist." All of these adjectives help women feel described rather than confined by a term that should simply connote an individual woman's human rights, and the possibility of liberating oneself from patriarchy.

Some of the ideas behind this word were planted in Europe sometime before the late period of Western imperial expansion

around A.D. 1400. In 1405, Christine de Pisan, a Parisian scholar, wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in which she argued that there have been women rulers in France throughout history who challenged the patriarchal structure. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, a German philosopher, described such a structure in 1529: "By the excessive power of male tyranny which prevails against divine justice and the laws of nature, women's liberty is denied to them by law, suppressed to them by custom and usage, and eradicated by upbringing."¹⁸ The word itself, feminism, was being used to describe the activities of women like Hubertine Auclert, a French suffragist, in the late 1800s. Feminism was a cool word, like calling someone hip or savvy. It denoted youth, psychology, sexiness, financial independence, and self.¹⁹ By the nineteenth century, the term feminism implied three evolving philosophies: the political belief that the sexes are culturally, not just biologically, created; the process of opposing male supremacy; and a woman's right and responsibility to realize her own potential. The F word was first recorded in America in a 1906 article about the European socialist and suffragist Madeleine Pelletier. Whether the word retained hip or had become tacky in France, its arrival on the shores of America elicited squeamishness and fear.

At the beginning of the Second Wave, women's liberationist was the favored term among radical women in the late sixties. But soon feminism gained common currency, uniting the radicals and the liberal women's movement under one umbrella term. Some felt that this merger compromised the revolutionary ideas of freedom and ushered in an empty prescription for social equality. In 1970, radical women's liberationist Ti-Grace Atkinson said "feminism is a theory but lesbianism is a practice," while Betty Friedan and the women of NOW were declaring that feminism meant gender parity, and had nothing to do with the person with whom one logged time in the water bed. By the time the Second Wave was drenching all America, the meaning of the word had become symbolic not of fairness

but, more aggressively, of social upheaval and a fear that female superiority was its ultimate goal. This was not unlike how white people felt about black nationalists, with their raised fists, as compared to civil-rights workers singing "We Shall Overcome" arm in arm with whites. In 1979, Barbara Smith wrote that "feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women. . . . Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement." Although Smith's definition was both incontrovertible and in line with what feminism had always meant, fewer women were taking up the moniker to identify themselves. The term could be used against women, it seemed. Some thought, Better not to wrangle with it.

Just as the former slight suffragette doesn't sound any worse than the preferred term suffragist more than a generation later, bra-burner and its sister slight women's libber have lost their teeth as put-downs. Girl, bitch, slut, and cunt—all of which are titles of records and books by feminists of our generation—are no longer scary words we have to keep in the closet, in fear that they will become weapons to be deployed against us. Calling an adult woman "girl" was once insulting, like calling an adult black man "boy." But now that we can choose and use the word ourselves and not have it forced on us, "girl" is increasingly rehabilitated as a term of relaxed familiarity, comfy confidence, the female analogue to "guy"—and not a way of belittling adult women. More and more women own bitch (and what it means to be released from the "please like me" gene), cunt (both the complex, odiferous body part and the wise, badass woman), and slut (the girl whose sexuality is owned by no one but herself).

Thus it can't be far off that independent, self-respecting women begin to call themselves feminists—bravely, without qualifiers—owning the term rather than letting other people use feminism against women.

[Feminists are] just women who don't want to be treated like shit.

—SU,

an Australian woman interviewed
for the 1996 anthology *DIY Feminism*

In 1998, during the middle stages of Bill Clinton's personal "woman problem," Barbara Ehrenreich made a curious statement. In a *New York Times* op-ed entitled "Silence of the Belway Feminists," the great leftist author lamented "The feminists didn't even give [Paula Jones] a hearing," and went on to say that "Paula Jones isn't the only woman betrayed by organized feminism." Ehrenreich is famous for dissecting sexual politics, feminizing the sexual revolution, and authoring books vindicating witches and abortionists, so it seemed odd that as long as she had the floor she—a self-proclaimed feminist—hadn't thought to give Jones that fair hearing, a hearing that the National Organization for Women (NOW) attempted to schedule with Jones on two occasions and each time was stood up by the famous plaintiff herself. So why didn't Ehrenreich wage her own defense of her maligned sister Paula? And if she thought she had, with that op-ed, or later, when she reported on Jones for the *Time* magazine piece "The Weak Feminists Got Laryngitis," wasn't that a feminist defense?

Of course, Ehrenreich isn't alone in distancing herself from the movement. Other amnesia feminists—brilliant, usually prominently political women who forget that they are within the movement when launching a critique—include Katha Pollitt (columnist for *The Nation*) and Gwendolyn Mink (a professor of politics at the University of California at Santa Cruz). Mink criticized feminists' inactivity on welfare reform in the feminist monthly *Sojourner*, and, in *The New York Times*, attacked feminists for not taking up Jones's and Monica Lewinsky's cases as incidents of blatant sexual harassment. (The law dis-

agreed with Mink's argument, which is why Jones's case was thrown out. As for Lewinsky, she never charged sexual harassment, and made it clear that she had initiated sexual relations with Clinton.) Shortly after the news broke about Clinton having an affair with an intern, Pollitt remarked in her *Nation* column that the "Feminists are hypocrites with a double standard," implying that these women, usually opinionated, were hypocritically unwilling to speak negatively about "their" President. The specter of these otherwise feminist women pointing their fingers at "the feminists" begs two questions: Who are the feminists? and What is feminism?

By feminists, we mean each and every politically and socially conscious woman or man who works for equality within or outside the movement, writes about feminism, or calls her- or himself a feminist in the name of furthering equality. In reality, there is no formal alliance of women we can call "the feminists." Although there are institutions and other forums under which women and men organize and rally, feminism isn't a monolith like communism or Scientology. It's a loose collection of individuals, like those women who were at our dinner party. There is one exception that we can think of. In the late sixties, there was an actual group of activists in New York City who called themselves The Feminists. Ti-Grace Atkinson, a Second Wave woman warrior who started off her career with the liberal gals at NOW but soon out-radicalled the radicals, was the most prominent of the group, but because they didn't subscribe to formal hierarchies, she was never the leader. Hard-core as hell, The Feminists were known for having the strictest membership rules: only one-third could be married or living with a man ("hostages," Atkinson called those ladies who socialized with possessors of the Y chromosome). At meetings, to promote a sort of communal conversation ethic, an equal number of poker chips was doled out to each woman. Whenever a member wanted to speak, she paid by tossing down a chip. Of course, some women chose to speak for twenty minutes with

each toss, so it wasn't an incorruptible system. But, defunct since 1973, The Feminists are not who Ehrenreich, Mink, and Pollitt mean when they wonder where feminists are.

No, the organized feminists whom people seem to feel betrayed by are the leaders of feminist institutions and those anointed as "the feminists" by the media: most often Patricia Ireland and her company at NOW; Eleanor Smeal and the Feminist Majority Foundation; and Gloria Steinem of *Ms.* magazine and Voters for Choice, among other allegiances—women whose every statement is taken as representative of us all. For example, when the stories about Clinton groping Kathleen Willey and having an affair with Lewinsky broke in January 1998, the media, including Pollitt and Ehrenreich, devoted two months to asking, "Where are the feminists?" Then, on March 22, Gloria Steinem wrote an op-ed for *The New York Times* in which she argued that Clinton's behavior was gross and probably pathological but not sexual harassment and therefore not actionable. The next week, columns abounded: "Feminists Are Divided on the Clinton Scandal." It's a surefire sign of oppressed status when an entire group gets reduced to one, or even three, individuals.

At about the same time that the pro- and anti-woman media were hunting for feminists, we, two young feminists living in New York City, were reading Jennifer Pozner's criticisms of Clinton's behavior in *Sojourner*; we were attending Refuse and Resist's rallies that called for an end to the witch-hunts heading toward Clinton's impeachment; and we were writing our own thoughts on the subject, specifically "In Defense of Monica" for *The Nation*. This is only to say that we knew exactly where quite a few of the other feminists were. That said, feminists, too, are guilty of calling on the same triumvirate to opine rather than calling on ourselves. One feminist does not a movement make. In fact, the voices of many individuals are what give the movement its credibility.

Now for the second question. When the topic of feminism

tumbles out of anyone's mouth, whether it be the Vamp red-painted lips of lesbian film fatale Guin Turner asking, "What does feminism mean anymore, anyway?," the earnest jaws of your grandfather, or one of the seventy-five or so people who visit Ask Amy each week, the inevitable question arises: "What is it?"

In the most basic sense, feminism is exactly what the dictionary says it is: the movement for social, political, and economic equality of men and women. Public-opinion polls confirm that when women are given this definition, 71 percent say they agree with feminism, along with 61 percent of men. We prefer to add to that seemingly uncontroversial statement the following: Feminism means that women have the right to enough information to make informed choices about their lives. And because *women* is an all-encompassing term that includes middle-class white women, rich black lesbians, and working-class straight Asian women, an organic intertwining with movements for racial and economic equality, as well as gay rights, is inherent in the feminist mandate. Some sort of allegiance between women and men is also an important component of equality. After all, equality is a balance between the male and the female with the intention of liberating the individual.

Breaking down that one very basic definition, feminism has three components. It is a *movement*, meaning a group working to accomplish specific goals. Those goals are *social* and *political change*—implying that one must be engaged with the government and laws, as well as with social practices and beliefs. And implicit in these goals is *access to sufficient information to enable women to make responsible choices*.

The goals of feminism are carried out by everyday women themselves, a point that is often lost on the media. Maybe you aren't sure you need feminism, or you're not sure it needs you. You're sexy, a wallflower, you shop at Calvin Klein, you are a stay-at-home mom, a big Hollywood producer, a beautiful bride all in white, an ex-wife raising three kids, or you shave, pluck, and wax. In reality, feminism wants you to be whoever

you are—but with a political consciousness. And vice versa: you want to be a feminist because you want to be exactly who you are. That may be someone patriarchal society doesn't value or allow—from a female cadet at the Citadel to a lesbian mother. Maybe you feel aligned with the self-determination and human rights implicit in feminism, but you also organize your life around race, religion, or class, rather than solely around gender. For instance, in *The Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History*, the editors list seventeen prominent kinds of feminism based on identity, including American Indian, Arab-American, Asian-American, Jewish, Latina, lesbian, Marxist, Puerto Rican, and working-class. There are also womanists, which, as coined and defined by novelist and poet Alice Walker, designates a black feminist (womanists are rarely men) without having to "add a color to become visible." Womanism, as distinct from feminism's often white-centered history, is an alternative casting of the same basic beliefs about equality and freedom, and few womanists would deny the link to feminism. While each of these groups is magnetized by political equality, some additional aspect of their personhood needs to be emphasized because it affects their struggle for equality.

Using a qualifier in order to further define identity is very different from forgoing the feminist label altogether. For instance, women within other social-justice movements—environmental, peace, human rights, and hip-hop, for example—often opt for the term *humanist*. Although humanism includes men (and especially those who aren't white or otherwise privileged), in reality it is a retreat from feminism. Using *humanism* as a replacement for *feminism* is also a misuse of the term; theologically, humanism is a rejection of supernaturalism, not an embrace of equality between men and women. Feminism seeks to include *women* in human rights. Internationally, nearly twice as many women as men are illiterate, and it was only in 1998 that an international court denounced rape as a form of torture in prison, and as a war crime when conducted systematically by the military. Along those lines, gender-based persecution isn't

recognized as grounds for asylum in the United States, which means that women who are likely to be killed by their husbands or sure to be genitally mutilated if they return to their countries are usually put on the next plane back, regardless of this potential danger (Or, like Adelaide Abankwah and Fauziya Kassindja, they are imprisoned for years, and granted permanent residency, and later asylum, only after long campaigns conducted on their behalf by U.S. feminists.)

Most women come to feminism through personal experience, as we noted in "The Dinner Party," which is one of the reasons the core identity of feminism has to be so elastic. The term represents an incredible diversity of individual lives. Often, a woman who otherwise wouldn't align herself with feminism seeks it out when she is confronted with an abusive relationship, or if her boss is paying her less than her male counterparts are paid, or, on a positive note, if she needs credit to start her own beauty salon. Historically, who else besides feminists have been there to help women, whether they be Calvin Klein devotees or vegan Earth Mothers? Many women tap into or create feminist resources while not even knowing they are on a feminist path. On the work front, secretaries founded 9 to 5—a union for (mainly) pink-collar women workers—and feminists supported the National Committee on Pay Equity as well as micro-lending and the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, because no one else was interested in the problems of working women. Kris, a stylist who wrote in to Ask Amy, turned to feminist resources when she wanted to open her own salon. She didn't appeal to the Small Business Administration (SBA) because its process is complicated and full of red tape, when all she needed was a little money to tide her over as she built up her client base. Amy sent her to New York City's Women's Venture Fund, which makes microloans. Women even turn to feminism when they want to learn how to masturbate—vulvas were mapped out in Betty Dodson's video *Sex for One*, and orgasms expanded on in Susie Bright's 1990 *Susie Sexpert's Lesbian Sex World*. Most safe-sex shops were founded by feminists, from

Eve's Garden in New York City, opened by Dell Williams in 1974, and Good Vibrations, founded by sex therapist Joani Blank in San Francisco in 1977, to newer sex shops like Toys in Babeland in New York City and Seattle.

Clearly, the only people who are actively paving the paths to women's equality are feminists. Eventually, most women seeking to expand or change their lives find feminism. This makes it sound as if the movement is a huge force of conscious feminists constantly fortified by new recruits. Actually, though, diminishing "enrollment" is a problem in the movement, largely due to political co-optation. The moment a concern pioneered and promoted by feminists—such as domestic violence, microenterprise, the fight for affordable health care, and day care—becomes mainstream or at all successful, it is no longer seen as a women's issue but simply as a newsworthy issue. It becomes depoliticized, taken out of the hands of the grass roots, and divorced from the very process that was necessary to its success.

The most recognizable example of feminist issues being co-opted is the movement against domestic violence. Before feminism, there was no word for battered women or domestic violence, no legal argument of self-defense for women who killed their abusers, and no shelter system. In the seventies and eighties, shelters, funded by grassroots feminist groups and fledgling foundations (like the early Ms. Foundation for Women), proliferated, but the government, the police, and the media outlets still paid very little attention to violence inside the home. For example, the first shelter for women in the United States was started in California in 1964. (This was out of pure need, not because feminists were franchising.) Now, there is an organized battered women's movement of shelters, awareness campaigns, reformed laws and police practices, and legislative strategies. October is Domestic Violence Awareness month, and 1994 saw the passage of the Violence Against Women Act, which set the precedent for prosecuting abusers who cross state lines, and a mandate for nationwide enforcement of protection orders. Nonetheless, in 1994, when Nicole

Brown Simpson was murdered and her hulking football-hero ex-husband was accused of the crime, domestic violence was launched into the mainstream—"professionalized," according to one young activist—and divorced by the media from the grassroots organizations that had named its reality and pioneered its treatment. What this means is that a woman like GE executive Sam Allison can now be on the board of the Women's Center in Milwaukee and claim that she's not a feminist but simply an "advocate to end violence against women."

Similarly, in 1991 entrepreneur Melissa Bradley broke ground in the field of women's economic development without connecting it to the feminist legacy of this work—for example, the pioneering work done by Connie Evans, who started the Women's Self-Employment Project a dozen years earlier. By 1998, Evans had dispensed more than \$1.3 million in six hundred short-term microloans, establishing the largest small-business fund for low-income women—all undertaken by her as feminist work. Bradley, who is the founder of the Entrepreneurial Development Institute and worked for the federal government's Office of Thrift and Supervision, where she advised on and critiqued welfare-to-work programs, until recently didn't consider her work to be feminist.

This could be construed as assimilation, and in some ways it is our goal. After all, as long as Women's History and African-American History are independent curricula, history itself will still be a white man's story. In that same way, the women's rights movement will have been successful when we no longer have to advocate separately for half the population's human rights. On the other hand, ideally women's egos would be more invested in their work. You can't continue change if you don't know the process that got you this far. If feminists first exposed domestic violence as a reality in many women's lives, funded the first women's shelters, and drafted and fought for legislation that is now working to end violence against women, then an "advocate to end violence against women" (Sam Allison's term for herself) is just another term for femi-

nist. Issues divorced from their feminist roots eventually become depoliticized, and the resulting social programs are reduced to treating the symptoms rather than curing—or preventing—the disease. In order to have a robust movement, domestic violence and economic development need to be re-identified as feminist issues and victories. And people like Allison and Bradley need to be outed as feminists.

FEARING FEMINISM

Now, let's discuss what a feminist isn't. T-shirt and button slogans such as a feminist is the "opposite of a doormat" and "not a masochist" have outworn their usefulness in bringing clarity to the subject. Feminism is more often described by what it isn't than by what it is, which creates some confusion (and is the reason that we defined it before going into all this). The inadvertently humorous descriptions by right-wing ideologues like Pat Robertson don't help, either: "Feminists encourage women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, become lesbians, and destroy capitalism." Of course, that definition is not so much wrong as hyperbolic. To a fundamentalist, that's just a description of no-fault divorce laws, abortion rights, rejection of God as the Father, acceptance of female sexuality, and a commitment to workers.

Nonetheless, women far to the left of Robertson still fear feminism. The fact that the feminist movement has developed networks to help women who are victimized is one reason that women fear the word. Identifying ourselves as feminists means addressing uncomfortable topics: the humiliation of being discriminated against, the fact that we are vulnerable when we walk home late at night or even in our homes, or the sadness of discovering that the sons in our families are treated altogether differently from the daughters. Injustice and oppression are hard to face, a fact that is evident in the number of rape and sexual-harassment charges that emerge years, even decades, after the event actually happened. To use one example, Juanita Roadrick waited twenty years to accuse Bill Clinton of forc-

ing her into sex in a hotel room. This was during a time when forced sex among acquaintances—what is now called date rape—was excused as relatively inevitable, certainly not criminal, male behavior. Feminists fought for a realistic legal definition of rape that acknowledged degrees of sexual assault (and protected male rape victims, too), a minimum one-year statute of limitations, rape shield laws that prohibit using a victim's sexual history against her (or him), and the training of emergency-room and police personnel to gather evidence, including a so-called rape kit, when a victim comes into their hospitals or precincts. Had the incident happened today, feminism would mean being there for Broadrick—utilizing the legal system and social-service institutions—the second she could get out of the hotel room to press charges. To take it one step further, the goal of feminism is to create a climate in which Clinton couldn't possibly have raped Broadrick, or anyone, without knowing that "no means no" and a prison sentence was imminent.

Even at the beginning of the Second Wave, women were resistant to acknowledging discrimination. The results of the 1972 Virginia Slims poll (the first one that recognized women's issues) found that men observed discrimination against women more often than women did. As we said, consciousness is everything. Even now, acknowledging inequality begs one to do something about it—and that is a daunting, albeit righteous, responsibility.

More things feminism is not: Feminism's philosophy certainly isn't narrow-minded enough to be solely about our sexuality or our paychecks, and is certainly not about man-hating or chivalry. (In our opinion, whoever gets to the door first should be responsible for opening it.) Still, some people choose to stay away from feminism because they don't want to be associated with spooky stereotypes about feminists and their freaky excesses. You know this rap: *some feminists think all sex is rape, all men are evil, you have to be a lesbian to be a feminist, you can't wear girly clothes or makeup, married women*

are lame, et cetera. This conversation is usually baiting and can ride the force of homophobia or internalized phallophilia (socialized glorification of the male principle and men). Women who love lipstick and also love standing up for themselves, but are not politicized, are especially vulnerable to being conned into distancing themselves from the feminist movement.

A good example of this is the evolution of Lilith Fair. Canadian chanteuse Sarah McLachlan put together a historic mothership of ladies. Most of the Lilithites were stars who had topped the music charts, and McLachlan trotted them across America to make the point that not only are female rock stars achieving a critical mass but that women rake in the audiences. The tour earned more than \$16.4 million in the first year alone and drew more than 70-percent female audiences during all three years of its existence. To make it even more stunning, the Lilith management gave checks averaging \$20,000 to a battered women's shelter or grassroots social-service agency in every locale in which the lavender Lilith backdrop undulated. But what happened when McLachlan was asked about women and politics? "The tour isn't a soapbox for extremist feminism," she said in a New York *Newsday* interview during the first tour. "This is not at all about dissing men." There are certain assurances we just shouldn't have to make, especially when a majority of the backup band members are male, as is the vast majority of the stage crew, sound people, bus drivers, talent management, and the male-owned companies that underwrote the tour. Besides, as a friend of ours pointed out, even if there weren't a male presence behind the front women at Lilith, there's no need for the disclaimer. After all, an all-black tour of hip-hop musicians wouldn't feel obligated to assure people that they're not dissing whites.

Furthermore, if Sarah McLachlan had brushed up on her feminist history, she would have been aware of Olivia Records, Redwood Recordings, Ladieslipper distribution, and Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. Then she could have built upon that separatist womyn's music movement (which flourished in the

seventies and still exists) as her foundation, a movement that created a network of producers, labels, and festivals entirely outside the mainstream. Shining a light on the long line of women who continue to transform the male-run music industry would have gotten Lilith closer to its implied goal of equal treatment for women. Happily, McLachlan didn't remain fearful of the feminist implications of her tour. According to Amy Ray of the Indigo Girls, an artist who performed on all three Lilith tours, after a few years of being immersed in this experience, McLachlan changed her tune and proudly called the tour feminist. "I think Sarah always had the same vision for Lilith," says Ray. "But she became much more confident about standing up for the idea that women—audiences and musicians—need an all-female tour, they want it, and they're going to take it without apology."

Most of those Ladyslipper/Michigan/Olivia feminists are womyn-loving-womyn, an association that Lilith and many other women in rock tend to fear. "The idea that all feminists are lesbians is scary enough for some women to stay away from the feminist label and movement, even when their beliefs are basically feminist," wrote Barbara Findlen, then Ms. magazine's executive editor, in her pioneering anthology *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation*. Rooting homophobia out of the movement is as essential as rooting out racism. To eschew calling yourself a feminist because you don't want to be called a "dyke" is like not joining the civil-rights movement because you don't want to be called a "nigger" or a "nigger lover." Besides, regardless of one's sexuality, everyone has a vested interest in reclaiming the inherent dignity of the terms *lesbian*, *gay*, and *queer*, since straight women who refuse a subservient role (and straight men who refuse to dominate) are likely to be called gay. Findlen also points out the odd way that some straight women reconcile themselves with this threat: by arguing that feminists aren't *all* dykes. (Which implies, among other ignorant assumptions, that all gay women are inherently feminist.) Rather than challenge the homophobia—and misog-

yny—head-on, this tactic sidesteps the issue, allowing women to embrace a limited feminism without disavowing dyke-baiting.

In truth, the movement is made up of women from all points on the sexual spectrum. And, because they may be more able to risk male disapproval, lesbian and bisexual women have had a particularly creative and strong history in the women's movement, from founding the aforementioned womyn's music scene to writing world-changing books such as *Sexual Politics* (Kate Millet), *Sister Outsider* (Audre Lorde), and *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (Robin Morgan) and being the most iconic activists Barbara Smith, Angela Davis, and Rita Mae Brown). It's interesting to note that homophobes never attack feminist critic Camille Paglia for being of the Sapphic persuasion—proof that dyke-baiting is employed only in the service of feminist-bashing. As Kaia Wilson, formerly the guitarist for lesbian supergroup Team Dresch and currently for The Butchies, puts it, "There can be really good reasons for not wanting to call yourself a feminist, but most of the time it's due to misogyny."

Even when the winds of misogyny and homophobia aren't blowing feminism's house down, women can be their own big bad wolves. Injudicious niceness, which is a socialized disease, often explains why women tend not to demand equality. It also may be why feminist women feel it's necessary to answer questions that are hostile to feminism, regardless of how silly or offensive they are. Conversely, when a woman is politically oriented and knowledgeable about history, she knows the burden of proof should be on the questioner and is less likely to have a misguided sense of politeness. When someone asks, "Why is it that all feminists think they're better than men?" (or assert any weird generalization involving lesbians, matriarchies, and hatred of sex), one should respond with something along the lines of "Who are you referring to?" Imagine the organizing and theorizing that has not happened because we have allowed ourselves to be delayed by these distractions. In the case of the mythical statement "Andrea Dworkin says that all sex is rape,"

recommend actually reading her book *Intercourse* (the salient chapter is called "Occupation/Collaboration"), and starting the conversation from there.²⁰ To give you a taste, Dworkin writes pungently: "Women lie about life by not demanding to understand the meaning of entry, penetration, occupation, having boundaries crossed over, having lesser privacy: by avoiding the difficult, perhaps impossible (but how will we ever know?) questions of female freedom." Clearly, she is making a much more subtle, disturbing, and ultimately liberating point than an easy generalization could convey. If you want more clarity, you could do what the *Hungry Mind Review*, now called *The Ruminator Review*, did, and ask Dworkin directly what she thinks sex is. "I think of sexual contact and sexual intimacy as, pleasure," she told them. "And as a way of experiencing freedom."

Feminism is often mistaken as being an enabler, a "sop" discouraging women from taking action in their lives, the genesis of the victim culture that critics like Katie Roiphe and Christina Hoff Sommers so despise. Even women who rely on and are seeking feminist resources can mistake feminism for the equivalent of a Knight in Shining Armor to save them from their woes. In fact, the urge to protect women is part of the problem feminists fight. As Susan Faludi (famed author of *Backlash*) and, more recently, *Stiffed*) and others have noted, protection starts out polite—women and children first off the sinking ship and so forth—and ends up justifying why women can't be naval captains or firefighters or subjects for medical research. Women can't ride this antiquated stereotype and at the same time fight for independence. In reality, feminism requires action and taking responsibility for oneself.

Take job discrimination as a case in point. A clerk at Wal-Mart, sensing that she was getting a raw deal, recently wrote to Ask Amy. For the last five of her ten years at the store, her salary had stayed the same, while male cashiers were given annual raises. Other feminists had done their part by creating laws against sex discrimination, trainings for implementation of these laws, and organizations to help women through the

process. Amy's Web site informed her of her legal rights but also pointed out that now the Wal-Mart clerk must do her part: document the discrimination and file a complaint.

To sum up, feminism is helped by a working knowledge of history, and requires a willingness to act on behalf of yourself, and to stand up for all women in the face of everything from misogyny to a social mandate that says "be nice."

THE STORY UP TILL NOW

"It's our memory that connects us," says the poet Sonia Sanchez. She understands that, when women feel disconnected or put off by feminism, it's important to go back to the roots of the movement—whether it's in books or in our mothers' and grandmothers' lives—and find out what the struggle for equality has meant and could mean. And it's especially critical to excavate this history if you are working within the feminist movement, whether at NOW, as an individual activist, or as a women's studies major. Sadly, the women's movement too often misses the essential tool of collective memory. (The unmaliciously ignorant early meanderings of the *Lilithites* is a case in point.) Our history has been kept out of the mainstream, diverted to a stagnant pool that all but the most intrepid historian would miss. The books that sparked our foremothers' rebellion are out of print, and histories of the women who fought before us are just barely becoming archived. This isn't a new problem. Most of the American women who fought for the vote didn't know that they had a French forebear in Christine de Pisan or an example of living feminism in Native American women sharing their same piece of land; nor did they have such access to the work of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of the early manifesto *The Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, until after they had begun their campaigns. Most college students in the sixties didn't study Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, though they probably studied her much-archived lover Sartre, and knew only a limited amount about the suffragists. (Among the things they learned was that these women were *all* white,

reformer, racist, and ridiculous in their bloomers and blue-stockings—none of which is true, except perhaps the mild humorousness of their garb.)

Today, young women rarely learn about Victoria Woodhull, who, in the 1872 election, was the first woman to run for president, and was also the first female stockbroker on Wall Street. Nor do many of us know about seventies radicals Carol Downer and Lorraine Rothman, who invented the Del-Ern, the first menstrual extraction device, even though this safe, do-it-yourself early-abortion technique might be a smart thing to know about as our right to choose is increasingly restricted. (In 1970, Carol Downer performed a self-exam at a California women's bookstore, and became the first person ever to be arrested for teaching women how to see their own cervixes. She was charged with practicing medicine without a license.) Nor do we learn that the activism of women of color was feminist activism; for example, that Fannie Lou Hamer campaigned against coerced sterilization and was a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus, that Aileen Hernandez was the first head of the EEOC, or that Shirley Chisholm, who ran for president in 1972, said it was harder to be a woman in politics than to be black. But Second Wave women are beginning to document their history and to retell their stories via women's studies courses, millennium wrap-ups, memoirs, histories, and PBS documentaries, all of which concretize women's contribution to history (if still not fully the contribution of women of color). As a result, it is possible that future generations of women won't have to excavate their history but simply learn it as they do "Dewey Defeats Truman" or "Neil Armstrong Walks on the Moon." Pragmatically, recounting the stories of feminism shows older women that the next generation is aware of their struggles, and shows younger women that their rebellion has a precedent. Having our history might keep feminists from having to reinvent the wheel every fifty years or so. Therefore our own revisiting of it in this chapter is incentive to build on this legacy rather than to have to rebuild.

For the sake of historical convenience, many scholars and historians have broken feminism down into the First Wave (the seventy-five years beginning in 1848 and winding down in the mid-1920s) and the Second Wave (which we're about thirty years into). Each wave has brought a swelling of momentum that has carried us closer to women's equality. Many young feminists today are choosing to call themselves the Third Wave in order to herald the future.

For most historians, feminism began in the United States sometime just before an 1848 meeting in Seneca Falls, New York, where female abolitionists began pondering why they could work their asses off in a movement to gain the rights of citizenship for a group of disenfranchised men when they themselves didn't have those rights. (At the time, the mid-1800s, women had fewer rights than a man deemed insane.) Empowered to think they could affect change via their own activism on behalf of American slaves, these women and at least a few men, including ex-slave and American icon Frederick Douglass, launched the women's suffrage movement by ratifying the Declaration of Sentiments at that 1848 meeting.

Although this is the first example of American feminism noted by white historians, sexual equality on this continent dates back before Columbus's chance arrival, to a time when there were five hundred thriving American Indian tribes, most of them offering a model of a much more egalitarian society than Europeans had ever witnessed. In the Iroquois and Cherokee traditions, for example, clan mothers decided who the chiefs would be and made many significant decisions, from food allocation to war strategy. Equal education was guaranteed to boys and girls, and divorce and women's control over their fertility, and their children, were basic rights. Matilda Joselyn Gage, the great First Wave leader and writer, *did* recognize the organic feminism of Native Americans. In historian Sally Roesch Wagner's authoritative pamphlet on Gage, she writes that the suffragist was so committed to the local Mo-

hawk nation that she was adopted into the wolf clan in 1893. Having been tried that same year for voting in a school-board election, her role as a Mohawk—where she was being considered for full voting rights—must have struck her with a bitter irony. But worse than Gage's conflict is not knowing that equality is possible because equality was part of the not so distant past. "Feminists too often believe that no one has ever experienced the kind of society that empowered women and made that empowerment the basis of rules and civilization," wrote poet and novelist Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions*. "The price the feminist community must pay because it is not aware of the recent presence of gynarchical societies on this continent is necessary confusion, division, and much lost time."

Now that we have acknowledged the "red roots of white feminism," in Gunn Allen's term, we can turn our attention to the "Seneca Falls Five," the aforementioned abolitionists who became incensed by their own disfranchised state. They were Jane Hunt, Mary Ann McClintock, Lucretia Mort, Elizabeth Cady Stanton—the grande dame and intellectual heavyweight of First Wave feminism—and Martha Wright. The Declaration of Sentiments, which they drafted at that Seneca Falls meeting, was modeled on the Declaration of Independence—but included women. "[T]he speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce," they wrote in that document. Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joselyn Gage, and Sojourner Truth joined these women after the 1848 meeting. Truth, a former slave, was instrumental in clarifying the true moral—and collaborative—nature of the struggle. Acknowledging that the forces working against both women and blacks were white men, she also made visible the frequently ignored civil-rights plight of the *woman* who is also *black* and advised against the efforts of white male abolitionists to award citizen-

ship to black men but to deny it to women of any race. The inaccuracies persist today. For example, at the historic site of Lucretia Mort's birthplace on Nantucket Island, Massachusetts, a plaque identifies her as the first female abolitionist when she was merely one of the first *white* females to agitate against slavery.

In 1920, seventy-two years after this charter convention, radical tactics borrowed from the suffragettes in England (and a soft-pedaling of other radical goals) helped women attain passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. It states: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Because of racist poll taxes and other means to disfranchise black citizens, black men and women, particularly those in Southern states, didn't really enjoy suffrage until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned race discrimination. Although the Seneca Falls Five, Truth, Gage, and Anthony all died without seeing women across the nation win the right to vote, these First Wavers earned women many other basic rights as they fought for suffrage. Besides helping to attain the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865, feminists won the right to divorce, to own property, to claim their inheritance, and to keep their own names (as Lucy Stone did when she married Henry Blackwell in 1855). Stone, an abolitionist and a somewhat conservative feminist, was one of the first women to rewrite marriage vows omitting the word *obey*. She was also the first woman from New England to graduate from college—graduating in 1847 from Oberlin, the first college to admit women, just as it had been the first to admit blacks. Her name was so inspiring that her name became synonymous with dependent women. In Stone's day, instead of being called a rich or a woman's libber, a spunky woman was called a "Lucy Stoner," as well as an "unnatural woman" and other epithets. Although at least two generations came between the Seneca Falls Five and its twentieth-century descendant, the National Woman's Party, the two groups are both thought of as the First Wave, a demarcation based on the goal of suffrage and not on

the culture or strategies of the women involved. Around the turn of the century, young women began infusing the First Wave—they were the new Lucy Stoners, replete with radical ideas and brave claims on freedom. For example, Emma Goldman pioneered her free-love movement, the women of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Zora Neale Hurston, began documenting black culture, and radical suffragist Alice Paul founded the National Woman's Party as a protest against her more complacent and conservative colleagues and some foremothers. (Stanton and Gage were as radical as they come, but Anthony ultimately caved in to conservatism—or pragmatism—and her foothold in history was much stronger than that of the more hard-core women.) Paul, the most instrumental activist in the final push for the Nineteenth Amendment, saw the vote as a baby step. She thought women needed the Lucretia Mott Amendment, also known as the Equal Rights Amendment, which Paul wrote. First introduced in 1923, the passage of the ERA was, to Paul, the only way that women could have any real claim to equality.

First steps or not, the women of the nineteenth century did enough for female emancipation that twentieth-century women were able to begin organizing in their own independent fields. In 1903, labor organizer Mary Harris ("Mother") Jones took children who were forced to work in Philadelphia's textile factories to President Theodore Roosevelt's Long Island home to demand the abolition of child exploitation. Jones's leadership led to state and federal child-labor laws, as did the work of other female reformers such as Jane Addams. Sparked by the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Fire, in which more than a hundred immigrant women workers (and many men) perished because their employer locked them inside their workplace, Rose Schneiderman organized against hideous labor practices as the head of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union. Mary McLeod Bethune founded the National Council of Negro Women, and Mabel Keaton Staupers desegregated the U.S. Army Nurse Corps during World War II. Meanwhile, nurse

Margaret Sanger (creator of an early zine called *The Woman Rebel*) realized that women should no longer suffer injury, disease, death, and curtailed sexual freedom from numerous pregnancies, and thus began her crusade for legalized birth control. These women were breaking fertile ground and planting seeds for the further advancement of women's rights, but despite these breakthroughs women still confronted "fifty years of ridicule," as Second Wave author Shulamith Firestone called the backlash between the vote and the surge of Second Wave radical feminism.²¹

The modern women's liberation movement, or the Second Wave, percolated from at least two sources. One was political women working in the civil-rights and anti-war movements. They were often women from Northern universities who went down South in the summer to participate in literacy training and voter education, volunteering for such groups as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, as well as Southern community activists. Well-trained organizers like the abolitionists a century earlier, these women eventually turned their raised consciousness to their own oppression, fighting their pigeonholed status as coffeemakers and sex providers for the New Left male leaders. The second source was composed of awakening white middle-class women who were fleeing their houses and "the feminine mystique" (as described by Betty Friedan in her 1963 watershed book) to find meaningful work, as well as the industrial stalwarts who had begun looking for equality in Eleanor Roosevelt's day and never stopped. (And perhaps many women were jazzed by Helen Gurley Brown's 1962 tale of the glamorous working girl's life, *Sex and the Single Girl*.)

Simultaneously, the Black Power movement had replaced the core egalitarian and racially integrated civil-rights movement, which meant not only that whites were kicked out but that, generally speaking, black women were demoted from being organizers to simply being "nation-builders" (mothers). Black women who didn't buy that line created their own feminist

groups, and some, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Florance Kennedy, Pauli Murray, and Aileen Hernandez, partnered with or helped to found mainstream feminist groups such as NOW (founded in 1966 by Betty Friedan and twenty-nine other women) and, later, the Women's Action Alliance (founded in 1970 by Brenda Feigen, Jane Galvin Lewis, Gloria Steinem, and Dorothy Pittman Hughes), and the National Women's Political Caucus (founded in 1972 by Bella Abzug, Betty Friedan, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Gloria Steinem, among others).

So the organizing began. Women's liberation groups sprouted up in cities: in Boston, Cell 16; Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Gainesville, Florida, had groups called Women's Liberation; in Seattle, Women's Liberation, Radical Women, and the Majority Union; and in New York, New York Radical Women, New York Radical Feminists, the Feminists, and Redstockings. The new-guard feminists, many of whom came out of the male left, devised and deployed such strategies as consciousness-raising, zap-action demonstrations, and speak-outs. By 1970, the women's health movement, also known as the women's self-help movement, was confirmed with the publication of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which demystified women's bodies and the doctor-patient relationship. The philosophies of women's liberation and women's political equality were delivered to suburbia and the rest of America in 1972, when the monthly feminist glossy called *Ms.* magazine hit the stands, the first feminist magazine to be available cross-country on newsstands and by subscription.

Some of these Second Wavers began where Alice Paul left off, fighting for an Equal Rights Amendment that would constitutionally guarantee women equality under the law. (And others didn't think it was radical enough to fight for.) In 1972, the ERA suddenly swept handily through Congress, thanks largely to the liberal (NOW) faction of the Second Wave and the few women in Congress, and was sent to the states for ratification. Within a year, thirty of the thirty-eight states needed for ratification had signed on. By 1975, five more states had signed on, and by 1977 what would have been the Twenty-seventh

Amendment needed just three more in order to become the law of the land. But a cold and sinister backlash against equality was already sweeping through the country. When Alice Paul heard that the ratification deadline was just seven years, she predicted that the ERA would not pass. She knew firsthand the conservatism of state legislatures. By 1982—the deadline—women were still the same damn three states short of the necessary supermajority. The amendment did have a majority in simple terms: three-quarters of the women who were polled about the ERA were *for* it. But the most visible opposition was, annoyingly, also female. Most famous among the enemies of equality were Phyllis Schlafly and Beverly LaHate, who made set careers for themselves telling other women to stay home. In 1982, the ERA went into hibernation, where it remains, waiting a kiss from twenty-first century feminist leaders. Some states are puckering up: in 1998, Iowa and Florida initiated state ERAs, proving that, despite confusion about the efficacy of the ERA, women do want constitutional equality. In 1998, trying to improve upon the brand name, the Feminist Majority Foundation and more than 110 other organizations introduced the National Women's Equality Act, a much more comprehensive and inclusive omnibus bill that sets up the wish list of an updated ERA.)

We don't have an ERA, and, to Phyllis Schlafly's relief, public restrooms are still separate and, judging by the long lines at the ladies' room, still unequal. (Actually, rest-room allocation isn't covered in any version of the ERA.) Even without the ERA, the recent feminists have succeeded much more than they have needed. The Second Wave has integrated the Little League, police departments, and help-wanted ads; it named and achieved legal redress for domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, displaced homemakers, child sexual abuse, lesbian custody rights, homophobia and gay bashing, and the right to be a single mother by choice. Women can be in combat, too, without the ERA, as the Gulf War proved. What feminists do have worry about without the ERA is that any legislative body

can make new laws based on gender—and they have to be challenged one at a time, since laws based on gender are constitutionally lawful. To give you some examples of how this plays out, in some states a father may be able to give permission for a child's medical treatment, but the mother cannot do so without also having permission from the father. In rural states, a farm wife may have to pay inheritance tax on her land if her husband dies; but the farm husband doesn't have to if he is widowed. He is seen as the owner of the land, she as the passive recipient, even though they are equally integral to running the farm.

Many Second Wave feminists do not consider the ERA to be the defining issue of the seventies and eighties. Certainly, some of us developed an interest in the ERA simply because the campaign loomed large in our eyes as kids. Whether or not Second Wavers believed in the importance of the battle for an Equal Rights Amendment, it's clear that the bulk of their legacy has at its heart formal and legal equality. They drafted and successfully lobbied for the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, Title IX (which guarantees equal allocation of money for boys and girls in schools that receive federal funding), the right to have an abortion (and thus equal ownership of our bodies), and so much more. Most significant, the Second Wave created an awareness of sexism through such innovations as the click, consciousness-raising, and by analyzing the politics of everything from hierarchical decision making versus leaderless groups to the politics of the clitoral orgasm and hysterectomy. There now exists an organized movement, with institutions and associations that sustain themselves, such as the National Black Women's Health Project, the National Women's Health Network, 9 to 5, and the National Women's Studies Association.

The Second Wave ushered in an era of feminist historians and other documentarians of the women's movement here and abroad. In fact, since the seventies, one can actually make a living as a feminist intellectual. Women's studies busted open the canon—uniformly white and male—and African-American

studies, Native American studies, Chicano studies, Asian-American studies, and queer studies set up equivalent academic disciplines to fill out the histories we learn in school. From the beginning, women of color have been publishing important feminist texts, such as the National Black Feminist Organization's statement of purpose, which was circulated widely at the start of the Second Wave, the anthology *The Black Woman* by Toni Cade Bambara, as well as the work of Celestine Ware. Later came Michele Wallace's *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga's *This Bridge Called My Back*, Patricia Bell Scott, Gloria Hull, and Barbara Smith's *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, but Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, and bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. The Third Wave was born into the diversity realized by the latter part of the Second Wave. Furthermore, we came of age politically amid the backlash.

The early nineties also gave birth to contemporary Alice Pauls—young women who felt ignored by the women's organizations founded by another generation. Some of these young women felt that Second Wave tactics didn't speak to their media-savvy, culture-driven generation. Others weren't necessarily consciously feminist but simply living feminist lives, honoring the dignity and independence that were, in effect, their birthright. These young feminists appeared on this nation's radar in 1991 when Naomi Wolf, who is consciously political, called for a rekindling of feminism in her best-selling book *The Beauty Myth*. In early 1992, Rebecca Walker responded to *The New York Times's* effort to declare an era of postfeminism. She wrote in *Ms.* magazine, "I am not a postfeminist. I am the Third Wave."

"I beglajn to realize that I owe it to myself," Walker said, "... to push beyond my rage and articulate an agenda... My anger and awareness must translate into tangible action... To be a feminist is to join in my sisterhood with women when often we are divided..." The media attention on Wolf and

Walker was a belated recognition of a generation that was already galvanizing.

In 1989, and again in 1992, hundreds of thousands of people flooded the Washington Mall to demonstrate support for reproductive freedom. In the early nineties, a loose network of young punk feminists in Washington, D.C., and Olympia, Washington, who called themselves Riot Grrrls, pioneered a feminist voice that was both political and distinctly new. These protoradicals, teenagers and women in their early twenties, reclaimed and defanged epithets that kept young women in line, such as "slut" and "fuck no fat chicks," by scrawling these words on their bodies. Whether or not they knew that their mother's generation had marched with buttons that read "cunt power" and banners that proclaimed, "We are the women our parents warned us against," it didn't matter. Riot Grrrls were finding their own voices. In February 1991, seven hundred high-school and college-age young women attended NOW's Young Feminist Conference in Akron, Ohio. These were young women who had already been awed by or were working in Second Wave organizations. Earlier that year, Students Organizing Students (SOS), founded in 1989 to agitate for reproductive rights, effectively organized a boycott of Domino's because of the pizza giant's financial support of pro-life organizations. In April 1992, Hunter College in New York City was the site of a conference entitled "I Believe Anita Hill," which featured a panel on Third Wave feminism. That summer, Third Wave Direct Action undertook a voter-registration drive in the spirit of the freedom rides of the civil-rights movement in the early 1960s, taking 120 young people to 21 under-registered communities across the U.S. and registering more than 20,000 new voters. Books were written—*Listen Up*, *Third Wave Agenda*, *Don't Believe the Hype*, and *To Be Real*—and magazines and newspapers began to take an interest in this new crop of feminists. In 1994, *Newsweek* ran a story on Gen Xers, profiling Girlie sex writer Anka Radakovich and feminist critic Katie Roiphe; later Cincinnati's *The Beacon Journal* asked, "Riding a

New Wave?"; in 1995, in *The New York Times*, Wendy Kaminer wondered, "What Do Young Women Want?"; and *The Boston Globe* targeted cultural agendas, rather than politics, as the new feminist domain in a 1997 feature called "The Third Wave: Rebels with a Cause."

As great as it was to have some representation, two snafus were evident in the mainstream media attention for this younger movement. One, the coverage focused on analyzing the word *feminism* as if it were an autonomous construct rather than on understanding what the term represents—which is women's lives—and thus it was riddled with terms like "post-feminist" and "pro-sex feminist," not to mention "selfish," "apathetic," and "apathetic." And, two, feminist action was reduced to a few star-studded examples, just as the media had often misrepresented the Second Wave as consisting of only a few well-known white women writers in New York. This time it meant that the movement was portrayed as cultural events starring feminists—for example, the all-star performance of playwright Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* or Courtney Love acting up at a Ms. Foundation event. This superficial assessment was swallowed despite the fact that what got young women moving in the first place was pushing voter registration, organizing against date rape, becoming women in rock, blowing the whistle on sexual harassment, publishing zines, and fighting for young women's reproductive rights. Young women were using their personal lives as a launchpad to a women's movement of their own.

The Third Wave of the movement doesn't have an easily identifiable presence but, if you're looking, you can't help running into the hubs that are unique to this generation. Besides the aforementioned Riot Grrrls, there are legions of young feminist activists, such as the five thousand members of Third Wave Foundation, the women who work with the San Francisco-based Young Women's Work Project, and the Girlies, pitomized by the writers in zines like *Bust* and *Bitch*. All are expanding feminism, and reclaiming the word *girl*, but in very

different ways. Riot Grrrls, who are mainly women in their teens and early twenties, breathe new life into feminism by marrying it with their own milieu, the youth movement known as punk rock. Girlies are girls in their twenties or thirties who are reacting to an antifeminine, antijoy emphasis that they perceive as the legacy of Second Wave seriousness. Girlies have reclaimed girl culture, which is made up of such formerly disparaged girl things as knitting, the color pink, nail polish, and fun. They also claim their right to a cultural space once deemed the province of men; for example, rock 'n' roll (although some Second Wavers were claiming the domain of rock music, too), porn, and judgment-free pleasure and sex. There are new politicos, women in such activist groups as Third Wave Foundation or Medical Students for Choice, who are the most likely to build on such Second Wave tactics as founding campus NOW chapters, emphasizing voting, and influencing (or challenging) the existing political system. There is also a thriving "girls' movement," which is distinct from Girlie and from the Third Wave. It was born of the Second Wave and counts as its beneficiaries girls aged nine to fifteen. Underneath all of these names and agendas is the same old feminism. All share a struggle for justice and equality, rather than paternalism or protection (or domination and violence). And all have their roots in fertile soil. It's up to us to continue this feminist work.

GETTING TO EQUALITY

"It's not surprising that we haven't achieved equality," observes critic-of-all-things Wendy Kammer, writing in *The Atlantic Monthly*. "We haven't even defined it." Our need for feminism in the privileged United States is manifest in the fact that women still make only seventy-four cents, on average, to the male dollar; that only 5.7 percent of the nation's philanthropic dollars go to programs benefiting women and girls; and that only 9 percent of U.S. senators are women. These examples prove that even the most basic bean-counting parity is far from reality.

How would feminism's goal of a roughly fifty-fifty balance

between men and women (of all races, classes, ethnicities, religions, abilities, and sexualities) in all manner of public and private life be attained? A false assumption about equality is that it means inserting some women into traditional men's roles and vice versa. Therefore women could break the glass ceiling and men would therefore have to be relegated to the sticky floors of low-wage jobs. Men could become homemakers and women the Wednesday golfers. But this would replace one set of inequalities with another and not change the system at all—which, of course, is not equality. This is where feminism, for all its simplicity of definition, becomes much more complicated and revolutionary in its implications. After all, if we could simply tag every man as "bad" and every woman as "good," the trip to equality would be that much shorter. Likewise, if feminism were only about improving women's lives and leaving men to stay the same, creating a separatist state might be a better plan.

We could take a page from the environmental novel *Ecotopia*, which proposed that Northern California, Oregon, and Washington secede from the United States to create an environmentally sound country. Building on *Ecotopia* and a wish list proposed by radical feminist philosopher Mary Daly, perhaps Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont could be seized to create Femitopia. Separatism, as annual week-long Michigan Womyn's Music Festival has proved, can be great in the short term—and for many feminists it's necessary to achieving certain kinds of consciousness, security, and possibilities that can be strong enough to transform the mainstream. The goal of liberation, however, is a radical restructuring of society, one that women can't achieve from the margins—even though they use this perspective to gain a clear vision of the center.

The separatist option may be only a stage leading to equality, but we can point to some concrete examples of what we mean by that goal of equality. Sometimes equality is as simple as numbers. Betty Friedan's *The Front Page Report*, for example, counted the number of male and female bylines in twenty ma-

for newspapers (and always revealed women to be doing worse than we think). For women to write 51 percent of the front-page stories would mean that jobs in journalism reflected the pool of writers and the readership more accurately. But equality also implies that the same level of respect and interest be paid to women and their issues of concern as the papers do to men and their issues. Therefore "women's issues," topics that affect women preponderantly—such as exposing the inequities of welfare reform, writing zealously about subsidized day-care programs, and using female subjects and doctors when writing a "Science Times" piece about lung cancer—would receive coverage as serious as do "gender neutral" mergers and acquisitions. To use a Third Wave example, women students have finally surpassed parity in enrollment numbers (61 percent) as undergraduates in liberal-arts colleges—in part because of the large number of returning older women students. However, one of the reasons liberal-arts schools traditionally had value is that this type of education was seen as the best preparation for future professionals and for earning potential. Indeed, blue-collar men with a high-school education have usually averaged more income than white- or pink-collar women with a college education.²² Now, many men are eschewing college to start up or join tech companies where they can make more money and avoid the debt of four years of college. Tech jobs are going to be the most influential and lucrative occupations in the twenty-first century.

While our own liberal-arts educations appear to have furthered us in our own professions and were even the sites of our feminist awakenings, we think that women should be pioneering the tech world along with men, not simply going after those liberal-arts degrees. Equality means social transformation. It means raising the floor.

CONFIDENCE VS. CONSCIOUSNESS

Fundamentally, feminism is a political movement organized for the purpose of getting women out from under subordination,

but, as we asserted in Chapter 1, its soul is consciousness. Vivian Gornick, a writer who chronicled Second Wave feminism for *The Village Voice*, described it this way back in the seventies: "For me feminism is, more than any other single thing, not a movement, not a cause, not a revolution, but rather a profoundly new way of interpreting human experience. It is a vital piece of information at the center of a new point of reference from which one both reinterprets the past and predicts the future."

Born with feminism simply in the water, the Third Wave is buoyed by the confidence of having more opportunities and less sexism. *Free to Be . . . You and Me* and the mantra "Girls can do anything boys can" protected us from the early decay (of their sense of possibility) to which our mothers' generation was vulnerable, and this political fluoride prepared us to expect equality. Unfortunately, our expectation exceeded reality and did not always indicate how gender fairness could be achieved. For that, we need a consciousness of women's place in society and of how the battles already won were achieved. The chasm between this generation's belief in basic feminism (equality) and its feminist consciousness (knowledge of what one is doing and why one is doing it) explains why, according to a 1998 *Time/CNN* poll, more than 50 percent of women between eighteen and thirty-four say they are simpatico with feminist values but do not necessarily call themselves feminists. Lack of consciousness is one reason that the movement is stalled: our mothers and foremothers gained their click that something was terribly unfair about doing all of the housework or having to resort to a coat hanger in order to avoid bearing an unwanted child. They changed those rules. We started where they left off, but often we spin our wheels at the starting gate.

"I think many women my age who consider themselves feminists are on automatic pilot, moving along according to directions set by women who came before us, but toward ends that have been determined more by the era of Reagan opportunism than by feminism," said former *Ms.* editor Gayle Kirshenbaum

in 1991 when she participated in a roundtable on feminism for the magazine. In other words, radical times—the ones that provoked one hundred representatives of New York Radical Women to toss their bras, girdles, and *Cosmos* into a “freedom trash can” at the Miss America Pageant Protest of 1968—aren’t a hallmark for those 50 percent of eighteen- to thirty-four-year-olds who espouse equality. (And, just to set the record straight, no bras were burned in those early years of protests and priming for the revolution, but only because the protesters were unable to secure a burning permit on the Atlantic City Boardwalk.) Many young women are pre-consciousness and haven’t yet had the opportunity to examine the politics of their own lives. They are pre-click, or maybe even pre-sexism in their own lives.

In addition to history and political consciousness, the Third Wave reputedly lacks a leader. It seems that everyone in this generation is looking for those very visible doyennes—as if we don’t have feminism if we can’t point to the “next” Gloria, Angela, Betty, or Alice (none of whom, incidentally, were famous in their twenties, either). Some might say that Ani Difranco magnetized girls toward feminism with her one-woman record label and incredibly loyal grassroots following. Rebecca Walker, one of the founders of the Third Wave Foundation, is a popular speaker at colleges and for young feminists. Others would cite Naomi Wolf for attempting to politicize ambitious women with her books, the now defunct Culture Babes²³ in the early nineties, and later co-founding the Woodhull Institute for Ethical Leadership, but generally the current movement seems to lack those clear-cut icons. And yet that’s not necessarily a sign of dissolution for feminism.

“[T]he public heroines of one generation are the private heroines of the next,” wrote Alice Rossi in the *The Feminist Papers*, meaning that people who do big things for one era are replicated on the local level for the next. Therefore perhaps we should be looking for our feminist leaders in less famous packages. There are countless young women who fit this profile. For

example, when Gina Amaro was twenty-one she co-founded Muevete, an annual Puerto Rican youth conference, which brought together more than a thousand young people in New York City. Samantha Gellar fought back at the age of seventeen when her Charlotte, North Carolina, high school refused to produce her prizewinning one-act play because it featured a lesbian romance. Hilary Russian agitated for “crip rights,” especially the right for people with disabilities to have dates and sex and organized sex workers’ art shows in Seattle, Washington. At twenty-three, Crystal Echohawk was living in Chiapas, organizing on behalf of the Zapatistas, and then went on to do this from the El Paso, Texas, office of the National Commission for Democracy in Mexico. This small sampling points to the reality of young feminist leaders. The dearth of easily identified, media-anointed stars means very little in light of how many younger feminists are simply out there building on the work of the Second Wave, doing things that their mothers never dreamed of doing.

So when you work with or meet women like Gina, Hilary, Samantha, and Crystal every day—as we do—imagine how annoying it is to hear from anyone (including the media and especially Second Wave feminists) that young women aren’t continuing the work of the Second Wave, that young women are apathetic or “just don’t get it.” We’ve heard this repeatedly, and reacted by scrambling to be better feminists and frantically letting these women know how much we look up to them. Finally, though, we have refused to accept this myth.

The larger invisibility of young feminists is why one moment in 1995 is significant enough to recount to you here. An editor friend called us to say that she saw a book proposal by a well-established Second Wave feminist being shopped around. The writer was addressing her frustration with young women for abandoning, rather than preserving, the rights and the movement her generation had worked to secure. We both cringed at the idea. The book sounded preachy, and we disagree with her premise that young women are fleeing feminism. But the biggest

reason for our cringe was that any message to stir young feminists, the pro-choice-but-passive ones, should come from young women themselves. If a Third Wave rallying cry were to be authentic and organic, then the author would have to lead by example. The book in question, *Letters to a Young Feminist*, by Phyllis Chesler, author of the Second Wave classic *Women and Madness*, was published by a small press in 1997. Chesler drew inspiration both from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, and from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*.

"I was one of the first to speak in a mother's voice," Chesler said when we asked her what she believes she accomplished with the book. "Many women of my generation, including the feminists, often continue to think and speak in their 'daughter-voice,' not in their mother voice." She continued, "In *Letters*, I tried to speak in a voice that embraced those much younger—and older—than myself." Though a maternal tone may have been necessary for her message to resonate with her generation, a "to-do" (and what not to do) list from a "mother" is a recipe for resistance from a younger generation already fluent in feminism. She offered insights from her experiences but forgot the essential ingredient that made *Letters to a Young Poet* so valuable: Rilke was responding to an actual person; Chesler was lecturing to her idea of a young woman.

Of course, once a real conversation has begun, talk of feminism goes only so far without the walk of activism. As Katha Pollitt—this time wearing her feminist hat—and others have pointed out, the problem with feminism nowadays isn't so much that women don't identify with its goals as that "a grassroots, militant, political movement" is not sufficiently in evidence. And what does exist is rarely reflected back by the media.

Feminists Want to Know: Is the Media Dead?

MS. TOPIA

When Ms. was born in January 1972, her peers were *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, and *Vogue*. These glossies, well fed with ads, rested on every coffee table and at every doctor's office, grocery store, and beauty parlor in America. On the margins, there was a crop of kinky, ugly-but-exciting feminist zines. These independents were ad-free, with confrontational names like *off our backs*, *Up from Under*, *Lilith*, *Aphra*, *Notes*, and *No More Fun and Games*.

Ms. was almost named *Sister*, *Sojourner*, *Bimbo*, or even the exclusive-but-snoozy *Everywoman*. But Ms., a fresh word, signaled equality and a break with the old, and it was perfect for its brand-new beast: a mainstream feminist magazine. The new community of feminist readers awaited their copies eagerly—especially in rural or suburban regions, where Ms. was then the only radical news in town. Having Ms. on one's coffee table signaled a certain kind of home—one in which *Stories for Free Children*," acknowledgment of all kinds of