



## AMERICAN FEMINISM

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**ABSTRACT:** - This article shows the description of the theme of American Feminism. Feminism is defined as the belief in women's full social, economic, and political equality. Feminism arose largely in response to Western traditions that limited women's rights, but feminist thought has many forms and variations around the world. Shortly, this article is about the topic of American Feminism and its phases in America.

**KEYWORDS:** Gender equality, worldwide movement, public life, feminist philosopher, a feminist broadside, Enlightenment, Declaration of Independence, Feminist movement, Feminist literature.

### INTRODUCTION

Feminism is the belief in gender equality in social, economic, and political matters. Feminism is a worldwide movement that is represented by various institutions dedicated to advancing women's rights and interests, despite its origins in the West. Throughout most of Western history, women were confined to the home, while men were

allowed to participate in public life. Women were denied the right to own property, study, and participate in public life in medieval Europe. They were still forced to cover their heads in public in France at the end of the nineteenth century, and a husband could still sell his wife in parts of Germany. Women could not vote or hold elective office in Europe and most of the United States until the early

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twentieth century, when several territories and states granted women's suffrage long before the federal government did. Women were not allowed to conduct business without the presence of a male representative, such as a father, brother, husband, legal agent, or even a son. Without their husbands' permission, married women could not exercise control over their own children. Women also had limited or no access to education and were excluded from the majority of professions. Women are still subjected to such restrictions in some parts of the world.

### THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDINGS

There is little evidence of early organized opposition to such restrictions. When Consul Marcus Porcius Cato resisted attempts to repeal laws restricting women's use of expensive goods in the third century BCE, Roman women flooded the Capitoline Hill and blocked every entrance to the Forum. "What will they not attempt now that they have won?" Cato sobbed. "They will have become your superiors as soon as they begin to treat you as equals."

However, that uprising was exceptional. For the majority of recorded history, only a few isolated voices spoke out against women's inferior status, foreshadowing future debates. Christine de Pisan, the first feminist philosopher, challenged prevailing attitudes toward women with a bold call for female education in late 14th- and early 15th-century France. Laura Cereta, a Venetian woman who published *Epistolae familiares* ("Personal Letters"; Eng. trans. *Collected Letters of a Renaissance Feminist*, 1488;), a volume of letters dealing with a wide range of women's complaints, from denial of education and marital oppression to the frivolity of women's attire, took up her mantle later in the century.

By the end of the 16th century, when another Venetian author, Moderata Fonte, published *Il merito delle donne* (*The Worth of Women*, 1600.) a feminist broadside, the defense of women had become a literary subgenre. Defenders of the status quo painted women as superficial and inherently immoral, while emerging feminists produced long lists of courageous and accomplished women and declared that if women were given equal access to education, they would be intellectual equals to men.

The so-called "women's debate" did not arrive in England until the late 16th century, when pamphleteers and polemicists fought over the true nature of womanhood. Following the publication of a series of satirical pieces mocking women, the first feminist pamphleteer in England, Jane Anger, wrote *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women* (1589). This debate raged on for more than a century, until another English author, Mary Astell, published *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, a more reasoned rebuttal (1694, 1697). The two-volume work proposed that women who were neither married nor religious should establish secular convents in which they could live, study, and teach.

The Renaissance feminist voices never came together to form a coherent philosophy or movement. Only after the Enlightenment did women begin to demand that the new reformist rhetoric about liberty, equality, and natural rights are applied equally to men and women.

Initially, Enlightenment philosophers focused on social class and caste inequities, ignoring gender. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Swiss-born French philosopher, for example, portrayed women as silly and frivolous creatures born to serve men. Furthermore, after the revolution of 1789, the Declaration of the Rights of Man

and Citizen, which defined French citizenship, omitted to address the legal status of women.

The Age of Enlightenment became a period of political upheaval, with revolutions in France, Germany, and Italy, as well as the rise of abolitionism. Feminist activism began in the United States when female abolitionists attempted to apply the concepts of freedom and equality to their own social and political circumstances. Their work brought them into contact with English female abolitionists who were coming to the same conclusions. Feminist issues had added to the tumult of social change by the mid-nineteenth century, with ideas being exchanged across Europe and North America. Louise Otto, a German, built on the work of Charles Fourier, a French social theorist, in the first feminist article she dared to sign with her own name, quoting his dictum that "by the position which women hold in a land, you can see whether the air of a state is thick with dirty fog or free and clear." After Parisian feminists launched *La Voix des femmes* ("The Voice of Women") in 1848, German writer Luise Dittmar followed suit a year later with her journal, *Soziale Reform*. Louise Otto, a German, built on the work of Charles Fourier, a French social theorist, in the first feminist article she dared to sign with her own name, quoting his dictum that "by the position which women hold in a land, you can see whether the air of a state is thick with dirty fog or free and clear." After Parisian feminists launched *La Voix des femmes* ("The Voice of Women") in 1848, German writer Luise Dittmar followed suit a year later with her journal, *Soziale Reform*.

The "Declaration of Sentiments" that guided the Seneca Falls Convention was written by Stanton. She drafted 11 resolutions, including the most radical demand—the right to vote—using the Declaration of Independence as her guide to proclaim that "all men and women [had been] created equal." All 11 resolutions

passed, and Mott even got approval for a final declaration "for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce," with Frederick Douglass, a former slave, arguing eloquently on their behalf.

Feminists assumed that after the American Civil War, the Fifteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, which prohibited disfranchisement on the basis of race, would include women's suffrage. Leading abolitionists, however, refused to support such inclusion, prompting Stanton and temperance activist Susan B. Anthony to found the National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. Initially, they based their demand for the vote on the Enlightenment principle of natural law, frequently invoking the Declaration of Independence's concept of inalienable rights granted to all Americans.

In *Women and Economics* (1898), Charlotte Perkins Gilman argued that women would not be liberated until they were free of the "domestic mythology" of home and family that kept them reliant on men. "By refusing the right to anyone over her body...by refusing to be a servant to God, the state, society, the husband, the family, etc., by making her life simpler but deeper and richer," she said, women would gain their freedom.

Mainstream feminist leaders like Stanton were successful in marginalizing more extreme demands like Goldman's and Gilman's, but they were unsuccessful in getting women the vote. It wasn't until a different kind of radical, Alice Paul, re-ignited the American women's suffrage movement by imitating English activists that the movement was re-ignited. British suffragists, led by the National Union of Woman Suffrage Societies, had taken a ladylike approach to their struggle, similar to the Americans. In 1903, however, a dissident

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group led by Emmeline Pankhurst launched a series of boycotts, bombings, and pickets. Women householders, householders' wives, and female university graduates over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote by the British Parliament in 1918. Following the British lead, Paul's forces, the American suffrage crusade's "shock troops," organized mass demonstrations, parades, and police confrontations. With the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1920, American feminism won its first major victory.

The feminist movement in Europe and the United States nearly died out once suffrage was achieved. The Women's Joint Congressional Committee, a lobbying organization, fought for legislation to promote education and maternal and infant health care; the League of Women Voters organized voter registration and education drives; and the Women's Trade Union League launched a campaign for protective labor legislation for women.

Each of these organizations made a contribution to the community, but none of them were specifically feminist. To fill the void, Paul's National Woman's Party proposed an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) that would prohibit any government-sanctioned sex discrimination. Infighting began because many feminists were not looking for strict equality; they were fighting for laws that would directly benefit women. Protective legislation, such as laws requiring female factory workers to work maximum eight-hour shifts, Paul argued, actually closed the door to opportunity for women by imposing costly rules on employers, who would then be inclined to hire fewer women.

Americans, like their European counterparts, believed that women had achieved their liberation. Women voted, albeit in small

numbers and nearly identically to their male counterparts. Even radical feminist Suzanne La Follette concluded in 1926 that "women's struggle is very largely won." Before any flaws in that proclamation could be investigated, the country — and the world — was thrown into the Great Depression. Following that, World War II effectively ended feminist activism on all continents. The difficulties of the previous 15 years in the United States were followed by a new culture of domesticity. Women started marrying younger and having more children after the 1920s. Television shows like *Father Knows Best* and *Ozzie and Harriet* reflected an idyllic suburban lifestyle, according to many observers. When compared to 1930, the percentage of employed female professionals was lower in 1960.

President John F. Kennedy was concerned about women's issues. He established the President's Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 and named Eleanor Roosevelt as its chairperson. Its 1963 report firmly supported the nuclear family and the preparation of women for motherhood. However, it revealed a national pattern of workplace discrimination, unequal pay, legal inequity, and inadequate support services for working women that needed to be addressed through legislative guarantees of equal pay for equal work, equal job opportunities, and expanded child-care services. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 provided the first guarantee, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was amended to prohibit employers from discriminating against employees based on their gender. Some saw these measures as insufficient in a country where classified ads still separated job openings by gender, state laws limited women's access to contraception, and rape and domestic violence cases went unreported. Women of all ages and circumstances were swept up in debates about gender, discrimination, and the nature of equality in

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the late 1960s, when the idea of a women's rights movement arose concurrently with the civil rights movement.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Feminist literature is fiction or nonfiction that promotes feminist goals such as defining, establishing, and defending women's equal civil, political, economic, and social rights. It frequently portrays women's roles as unequal to men's – especially in terms of status, privilege, and power – and the consequences for women, men, families, communities, and societies as undesirable.

The feminist movement gave birth to feminist fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, sparking renewed interest in women's writing. In response to the belief that women's lives and contributions have been underrepresented as areas of scholarly interest, it prompted a general reevaluation of women's historical and academic contributions. There has also been a strong link between feminist literature and activism, with feminist writing typically voicing key feminism concerns or ideas in a given era.

The rediscovery and reclamation of texts written by women occupied much of early feminist literary scholarship. Studies like Dale Spender's *Mothers of the Novel* (1986) and Jane Spencer's *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (1986) were groundbreaking in Western feminist literary scholarship because they asserted that women have always been writing.

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