A COMPANION TO GENDER HISTORY

Edited by

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In the past two-and-half centuries feminism has transformed every facet of the lives of women, men, and children. It has crossed over and transcended physical, geographical, and political boundaries, religious and political beliefs, as well as traditional historical periodization. Feminist movements have changed the way in which women and men work, play, think, dress, worship, vote, reproduce, make love, and make war. Revolutions evoke images of people storming barricades, clashing armies, mass demonstrations, charismatic political leaders, organized political parties, armed conflict, seizures of power usually resulting in a clearly defined economic, political, and social transformation of society. In this feminist revolution, women were on barricades, demonstrated in the streets, even took up arms, organized and were leaders of political parties. However, millions more women organized this social revolution in the private sector, the often-ignored women’s domain of schools, factories, offices, kitchens, bedrooms, hospitals, libraries, back yards, market places, community centers, and places of worship. Much of this social upheaval has been local and decentralized, many of its leaders still unknown and unnamed. While women as a group have not seized power, have not overthrown any particular government or nation state, do not control any particular national economy, or for that matter dominate any national political government, they have, nonetheless, challenged the traditional belief that women’s work and lives are of lesser value. Women’s lives today would be unrecognizable to those of their great-grandmothers.

Feminist Movements and Feminism

In *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, Estelle Freedman (2002) defines feminism as “a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other hierarchies.”

Because feminism is a word representing a movement, its meaning and application has changed over time. There continues to be conflict, debate, and discussion
over the very usefulness or relevance of the term. Throughout history, there have been many different kinds of women’s movements, some with goals to change and improve women’s position within a particular society, some to conserve the existing gendered status quo, and others to undo changes made. Within these movements there have always been conflicting ideals, goals, and perspectives. Even those who champion women’s rights share ambivalence about the use of the word “feminist,” or “feminism,” arguing that it is too narrowly focused on the West, or on the experiences of Western women.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (1972: 1050), “feminism,” meaning the advocacy of women’s rights, was not used in the English language until 1895. Women and movements agitating to challenge male authority existed before the term feminism even existed. Sheila Rowbotham writes that Charles Fourier, an early-nineteenth-century French socialist, first used the word “feminist.” He hoped that a “new woman,” opposing the capitalist ideals of competition and profits, would help create a new society based upon communalism and cooperation. His ideas of self-emancipation combined with social emancipation influenced later generations of women. In the nineteenth century, feminism described women who sought to extend the liberal ideas of individual rights to women. Most of this was expressed in the women’s movement that fought for women’s suffrage and women’s property rights.

There were other strands within the women’s movement, which claimed that if popular sovereignty meant that people had the right to shape the society in which they lived, then women who are half the population must be included. Other arguments asserted that maternal ability entitled them to rights within society because their reproductive and socializing role contributed to the material well-being of the nation. Still another argument claimed that women’s moral authority allowed them to improve the “public sphere” and create a better society. This strand of feminism emphasized the uniqueness and difference of women, without fundamentally challenging established gender roles. The development of a socialist movement in the nineteenth century contributed to new meanings of women’s role as workers as well as challenging the capitalist notion of the family. By the 1920s, feminism was a term used to describe not just the campaign for suffrage, but for economic, social, and sexual rights for women.

With the resurgence of women’s liberation movements in the 1960s, the word feminism took on multiple meanings. Barbara Smith notes: “Feminism is the political theory and practice that struggles to free all women: women of color, working class women, poor women, disabled women, lesbians, old-women, as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women” (Smith, 1982). The idea of global feminism culminated at the 1995 Beijing Conference with the Declaration asserting “women’s rights as human rights.”

**Women and Rebellion**

Historically men have held power over women. Almost every society values and privileges boys and men over girls and women. Theories, poems, songs, and religious tracts not only extol male virtue, but also condemn women as inherently dependent, wickedly sexual, or simply evil. The major religions buttress male authority by ordaining that men should rule over women; in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, the most
important medieval Christian theologian, women are “defective men.” The Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions begin with the story of God the all-powerful male; the first woman, Eve, seduced the first man, Adam (hence mankind), which brought sin and corrupted humanity, thus supplying biblical authority for distinct and unequal gender relationships. In the New Testament, women were instructed to be silent in church and obey male authority because “the man is not of the woman, but the woman is of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man” (1 Timothy). The sacred Hindu text, the Laws of Manu, compiled sometime between the first century BCE and the third century CE, classified Indian society by caste and gender. The nature of woman is “to seduce men in this world; for that reason the wise are never unguarded in the company of females . . .” Imam Nawawi, a Syrian Muslim teacher (imam), explained in Gardens of the Righteous that “Allah the Exalted has said: Men are appointed guardians over women.”

While women have historically been subordinate to men and dependent upon their authority, culturally demeaned, and reviled, patriarchal rule has neither been static nor universal. Prehistoric artifacts suggest that at different times and in differing regions women have shared spiritual and temporal roles and responsibilities with men. Female deities such as the Middle Eastern fertility goddess Astarte, the Sumerian deity, Innana, the Greek goddess Gaia, or the Aztec goddess Coyolxauhqui, are indications that at different periods women were looked upon as revered spiritual forces.

Women’s participation in economic life has also varied. Some women, usually elite or aristocratic, wielded some formal power, as rulers, engaging in statecraft and enacting laws. In the Egyptian Old Kingdom (c.2686–2181 BCE) women were not necessarily restricted to their homes. Non-royal but elite women were priestesses in important cults; daughters could inherit equally with their brothers, and women were allowed to participate in marketplace activities. In pre-Hispanic Aztec civilizations, women experienced what Brenda Rosenbaum described as “gender parallelism, (where men and women played different but parallel and equivalent roles) with gender hierarchy” (Rosenbaum, 1996). Men and women could inherit property from both fathers and mothers, male and female deities were equally important, and women and men had access to priestly roles, although men assumed these roles for life. In other societies, women had greater influence in a wide range of areas. Women of the Seneca nation in North America shared child-rearing responsibilities with men. They also cultivated the land and controlled the food supply. Men could not declare war unless elder women allocated food for such purposes.

Women have historically critiqued and challenged their subordinate role. In 248 CE, a Vietnamese peasant woman, Trieu Thi Trinh, told her brother that: “My wish is to ride the tempest, tame the waves, kill the sharks. I want to drive the enemy away to save our people. I will not resign myself to the usual lot of women who bow their heads and become concubines” (Rowbotham, 1992). Women also challenged the male claim to religious authority and power. A’ishah, Muhammad’s third wife, for example, battled a Khalife in 656, and afterwards created her own religious laws. In eighth-century India, women involved in the bhakti (a popular revolt against a form of Hinduism) broke with their families, created their own spiritual writings, and demanded that men treat them as spiritual equals. European women preachers and heretics claimed direct connection with God thus creating religious and feminist impulses. Guillemine of Bohemia, a late-thirteenth-century preacher and mystic,
challenged Catholic dogma, and created a women’s church that attracted aristocratic as well as ordinary women.

One of the first persons systematically to critique gender relationships and challenge male definitions of women’s nature was the French courtier, Christine de Pizan (1365–c.1430). In 1405 she wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*, in which she confronted men’s power to determine women’s value. “There is not the slightest doubt that women belong to the people of God and the human race as much as men and are not another species of a dissimilar race, for which they should be excluded from moral teachings” (Anderson and Zinsser, 1988). Historians Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser believe that the European feminist movement began with Pizan who created an ideology which united the women who embraced it in subsequent centuries. From the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, women followed Pizan’s critique, asserting that women’s virtue made them equal to men, urging greater education for women and girls, and demanding greater respect and kinder treatment from husbands.

The debate about the role and status of women in Western European society continued into the eighteenth century, a period identified as the European Enlightenment, which traditionally has been viewed as the triumph of rationality over the religious world-view of medieval Europe and the beginning of the “modern” world. Eighteenth-century Enlightenment thinkers used a secular and rational approach to women’s position in society and politics. However, Enlightenment thought was both confusing and contradictory, for arguments centered on nature as well as reason. Did women have distinct and different natures? Would equal education and equal laws enable women to develop the reason necessary for involvement in political decision-making? Jean Jacques Rousseau believed that women’s nature meant they should be kept out of the public sphere of politics. Their passions were such that they would overwhelm men’s capacity for reason. Other radical writers such as Catherine Macauley believed that women must have access to equal education and more just laws for only then would they be able to develop reason. These debates about equality and difference had implications that continued into the twenty-first century.

The legacy of the Enlightenment is problematic in other ways as well, not just in terms of gender, but also for class and race. Some Enlightenment thinkers who saw women as closer to nature and therefore less capable of reason idealized non-Europeans as natural as well while others saw them as exotic or inferior. By the late nineteenth century, Western beliefs about equality and emancipation were imposed upon colonized women in the East as they were beginning to demand equal rights. These cultural biases of the Enlightenment have profoundly influenced contemporary feminist thought.

In England, the seventeenth-century Puritan revolution unleashed a political ferment that challenged royal hierarchies and other forms of power and domination. In 1649, “Mary Tattle-well” and “Joan Hit-him-home” wrote a pamphlet called the *Women’s Sharpe Revenge*, which called for greater education for women and protested the double standard of sexual morality. In 1642, women petitioned the Long Parliament, claiming that “Women are sharers in the common calamities that accompany both Church and Commonwealth” (Rowbotham, 1992).

The radical and democratic implications of Puritanism crossed the Atlantic. Women like Anne Hutchinson, a seventeenth-century midwife, began to interpret the
scriptures and preach the Bible. “You have stepped out of your place,” Puritan church fathers warned her. “You have rather been a husband than a wife and a preacher than a hearer, and a magistrate than a subject . . .” She had brought together a group of women to discuss and critique the scriptures. Hutchinson was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for defying masculine authority both religious and secular.

Political ferment, direct challenges to male authority in the family, the Church and the State did not yet constitute a feminist movement. In the seventeenth century European women had not yet staked any universal claim to equal rights. Alternatives to women’s subordination were largely mystical or highly individual. The idea of connecting women to a transformed world had yet to be realized.

The French Revolution (1789–95) established the most important precedents for modern democracies. Revolutionaries developed the doctrine of citizenship, human rights, and popular sovereignty. They established political parties, legislative assemblies, political clubs, the popular press, and other institutions of political involvement. Millions of French women and men were mobilized in political conflict. In the French Revolution, the feminist aspirations of the ladies of the salon met with the collective action of the women of the streets. Class and gender began to interact with the ideals of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality.

Women participated in every aspect of this upheaval. In 1789, women articulated their grievances and demands, publishing the Petition des Femmes du Tiers-Etat au Roi (Petition of Women of the Third Estate to the King). The anonymous writers asked the king to listen to their voices and act on their behalf. An unidentified Madame B. B. called for the representation of women only by women in the Estates General, protesting “Why does one sex have everything and the other nothing?”

Working women in Paris played a leading role in moving the Revolution forward. Enraged by the scarcity and high cost of bread, some six thousand women marched to Versailles in heavy rain to bring back the king. From then on the royal family became hostage to the Parisian crowd. Women marched through the streets and a few even dared to disrupt the proceedings of the National Assembly, vote on motions and even sit in the Speaker’s chair. These women’s actions were a direct attempt to intervene in a political process from which they had been excluded.

However, the revolutionary concepts of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality, and Citizenship were gendered. In August 1789 the National Assembly formulated its Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, a doctrine based on class and gender. Active citizens were defined as men who could meet the tax qualification. In spite of their legal exclusion, women claimed citizenship through their continued participation in the revolution. Etta Palm D’Aelders, a Dutch woman active in the Revolution, called for equal rights for women in the areas of marriage, education, and entrance into civil and military life. In 1791, Olympe de Gouges, playwright and publicist, champion of the emancipation of the Jews and the abolition of slavery, drafted The Declaration of the Rights of Woman and the Female Citizen: “Women, wake up; the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe, discover your rights . . .” The Declaration called for equal education, equality within marriage, and the right of women to own and inherit property, public workshops for the unemployed, a national theater for women and the right of women to legitimate their children regardless of their marital state. Women who were politically radicalized,
including laundry women, seamstresses, shop girls, and workers’ wives, organized themselves into what appears to be the first exclusive female political activist group, the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women. This was not a feminist organization; its members did not speak in terms of women’s specific rights, but rather of the role of mobilizing women for the Revolution. Pauline Leon, one of its members, collected a petition with more than 300 names concerning a woman’s right to bear arms. They wore striped pantaloons and red liberty caps. They pressured the National Assembly to regulate prices and supplies, curb aristocratic excesses, and support the revolutionary army.

The French Revolution unleashed the power of women in the streets, political clubs and political assemblies. The men of the Revolution, while needing women’s support to remove the King and to push the more radical Jacobin agenda forward, feared the power of women’s organization. In the name of public order, the Jacobins outlawed the radical women’s clubs and chastised their behavior as going against nature. The anti-feminist Jacobins told the women that their role in the Republic was to “be simple in your dress, work hard in your household; never attend the popular assemblies with the idea of speaking up, but rather with the idea that your presence there will sometimes encourage your children” (Offen, 2000). From 1793–5 decrees abolished women’s clubs, prohibited women from attending the Convention or other political meetings, and outlawed women gathering in the streets in groups of more than five. Cross-dressing (wearing pantaloons) was abolished. The French republican regime decreed that men wore the pants, men were the citizens and all other political activity was clearly gendered male.

Amidst the chaotic promises of liberty thrown up during the French Revolution, a radical Englishwoman, Mary Wollstonecraft, wrote A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), a 300-page instant best seller, that became the foundation for modern feminism. The Vindication drew from the past ideas of the Enlightenment, brilliantly described the present experience of women, and changed future thinking regarding feminism. Wollstonecraft’s clarion call resonates even today; she bitterly denounced denial of education, equal work, and political rights as domestic tyranny. Women’s financial dependence on men in marriage was nothing less than “legal prostitution.” The Vindication also marks a break with the past. Understanding collective social movements, Wollstonecraft identified herself not as an individual woman, but as part of a group: “I plead for my sex – not for myself.” She ushered in modern feminism by seeing the State as an agent of social reform, demanding that the nation guarantee equal education and that the enactment of legislation reversing traditions and institutions that subordinated women.

Wollstonecraft was a bridge from the eighteenth century to the nineteenth; her life and writings foreshadowed the ideals of nineteenth-century liberal or equal-rights feminists and the utopian or socialist feminists. On the one hand, the Vindication clearly spoke to issues of women’s equal rights and equal access; Wollstonecraft’s life however embodied the radical essence of social and sexual liberation, which foreshadowed the ideas of later utopian, anarchist, and socialist feminists. Wollstonecraft passionately believed in sexual freedom and social revolution. She died in childbirth in 1797 after giving birth to another Mary, the future author of the first gothic novel Frankenstein. In the period of reaction that followed the French revolution, Wollstonecraft’s ideas on sexuality were so outrageously scandalous for the time that
her critics even questioned her own person. Wollstonecraft’s life and writings remain a corner-stone of feminist thought and political activity.

The Nineteenth Century

Feminism could never have become so powerful if it had been confined to a body of ideas. New forces such as capitalism, industrial growth, and democratic and socialist movements contributed to and sustained feminism. In the West, feminism as a social movement developed alongside a number of other social reform and protest movements, especially the abolition of slavery. Feminists were looking to transform every facet of gender relations: marriage, family, work, play, dress, and sexuality. The first organized manifestation of feminism, a women’s rights conference, took place in 1848. In the small but bustling upstate New York town of Seneca Falls, some 240 women and men met specifically to discuss women’s rights. Lucretia Coffin Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the meeting. Stanton had drafted the “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments,” which began by paraphrasing the Enlightenment arguments of the Declaration of Independence, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal.” Introducing a litany of centuries-old grievances, the Declaration called for women’s entrance into higher education, medicine, and the pulpit, and denounced the absence of married women’s legal and property rights. The Declaration further demanded that women be given all the rights and privileges which belonged to all male citizens of the United States, including the right to vote. However, the suffrage resolution, introduced by the African-American abolitionist and feminist Frederick Douglass, was the only resolution not unanimously supported by the conference.

The Declaration expressed a strand of political thought within the women’s movement defined as liberal or equal-rights feminism, that called for women to be granted political and legal rights equal to men. These concerns were also the concerns of those who were in a position to own or hold property or to enter the professions. The majority of the delegates were white middle-class women. When they spoke of woman, they spoke in universal terms. However, their vision did not include inviting to their conference members of the Lowell Female Reform Association, the first association of factory women in the United States. This organization of self-educated women workers in the Lowell Mills of Massachusetts campaigned for women’s equality in the workplace, temperance, the abolition of slavery, the ten-hour working day, and the end of capital punishment. The women of Lowell knew about the Seneca Falls convention; in all probability, the women of Seneca Falls also knew about their Massachusetts sisters.

While the Declaration of Sentiments expressed the finest of the Enlightenment ideals, it also expressed problematic ideas about race and class. The third grievance in the Declaration stated that “He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men – both native and foreigners.” Here Stanton clearly articulated grievances of class, ethnicity, and race. In this period of Jacksonian “democracy” suffrage had been extended to white males, including working-class white men. Stanton, like many other women of her class resented the fact that immigrants and other working-class men could also possess an “absolute tyranny” over her. Herein lies the contradiction: as with the earlier American and French
revolutions the promise of universal rights excluded women, but at Seneca Falls the hierarchies of class and race compromised the promise of women’s emancipation and universal sisterhood.

The relationships between race, gender, abolition, and women’s rights in the United States were complicated and conflicting. The birthplace of North American and Western European feminism was, in part, found in the anti-slavery movement. White women’s determination to speak out against slavery brought women into direct confrontation with men about women’s rights. White women seemed more open to radical ideas of social equality than male white abolitionists. Free African-American women were also at the intersection of women’s rights and anti-slavery. A few, like Sojourner Truth, spoke about the inseparability of race and gender. After the American Civil War, race and gender came into conflict over the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, which defined US citizenship as male, and the Fifteenth Amendment, which enfranchised former male slaves, but did not include women (or Native American women or men). Splits developed among former abolitionist and women’s rights reformers about privileging race over gender, or gender over race.

In the latter part of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the women’s suffrage movement in the US continued despite its internal conflicts. Millions of women became active in the political arena, demonstrating in words and deeds a commitment to citizenship and sisterhood. Yet at the same time, the major suffragist organizations often used racist, anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and anti-Semitic sentiments to bolster their demands for women’s suffrage. Even though African-American women organized for women’s suffrage, the major women’s suffrage organizations were segregated. When women’s suffrage was finally ratified in 1920, the existence of Jim Crow legislation effectively disfranchized most African-American women and men. Not until the Voting Rights Act of 1970 were African-American women and men actually able to vote in many places in the South.

Class, race, and gender conflicts were apparent in the European women’s suffrage movement as well. Middle-class women were raising claims of equal rights as builders of the nation and empire and demanding the vote on the same basis as men – in other words, class- and nation-based suffrage. While the struggle for women’s suffrage was a unifying issue for women internationally, and American and European suffragists sought to create international alliances, their campaign for the vote excluded colonized women. The expansion of European, and after the 1890s the United States’ empires in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and the Pacific served Western economic and strategic interests. Gender also played a key role in the justification of Western or white domination. The demand for white women’s suffrage in the United States, Australia, or New Zealand, for example, was argued in part as a necessity for nation and empire building. Western women traveling and living abroad took up the “white woman’s burden,” defining colonized women as victims of uncivilized and brutish men, in need of rescue. Colonialists further argued that the more the colonized women’s lives resembled those in Western Europe or the United States, the more ‘civilized’ the culture. Feminist universalism, internationalism, and equality contrasted with the class-, religion-, and race-based beliefs and actions of the women’s suffrage movement in the West and in some of the colonies such as New Zealand and Australia.
Socialism and Feminism

One political response to the rise of capitalism in Europe was liberalism. Equal-rights or liberal feminism called for equal access to education, property, and the suffrage. A contrasting political movement opposed the new capitalist system. These radicals opposed private property, privately owned capital, and what they considered to be the cruel consequences of the industrial revolution. They believed that more socially and economically just societies should be based upon cooperative and communal working and living. In direct opposition to the central tenets of capitalism, they thought that workers, peasants, artisans should collectively own and control the fruits of their labor and that social class was the reason people were excluded from meaningful decision-making at work, in government, in the family, and in the community. These early-nineteenth-century radical reformers, or “utopian socialists,” had an expanding vision of social equality that was changing as fast as the economic organization of Europe. Charles Fourier, the French socialist who coined the term “feminism,” was the first theoretician of feminism and socialism. He believed that “the extension of privileges of women is the general principle of all social progress,” connecting women’s emancipation to progressive social change (quoted in Rowbotham, 1972: 51). Other utopian socialists attempted to create egalitarian societies. Robert Owen, who started out as an enlightened factory owner, built a model community in New Lanark, Scotland. No believer in egalitarianism, but rather in the belief that external conditions could foster greater personal cooperation, Owen bought land in the United States and created a community in New Harmony, Indiana. Unlike Scotland, the American Owenites were far more interested in women’s rights; New Harmony inspired other utopian socialists and feminists such as Francis Wright, the British reformer. She bought land in Nashoba, Tennessee, and attempted to create a community of newly freed slaves and free whites who would live in racial, gender and economic cooperation and equality. Because of Wright’s commitment to “free love,” and interracial relationships, Nashoba was a target of attack and ultimately failed. To her opponents Wright symbolized immorality and sexual scandal. Dress reform, birth control, educational reform, prison reform, changes in divorce and family law were also issues that these utopian feminists embraced.

Some of the early socialist feminists anticipated the socialist theories of Karl Marx. Jeanne Deroine, a Saint-Simonian, organized for workers’ and women’s rights. Jailed in 1848, she re-emerged during the revolution of 1848, publishing the journal *Voix des Femmes*. Like the Jacobins a generation earlier, the revolutionary men forbade women’s participation in political clubs. Arrested in 1851 with her sister Saint-Simonian and comrade Pauline Roland, prison walls could not imprison their socialist feminist internationalism, however. Sending “joyous greetings” to feminists in the United States, they wrote “Sisters of America! Your socialist sisters of France are united with you in the vindication of the rights of women to civic and political equality.” Flora Tristan, an aristocrat raised in poverty, found her social consciousness awakened. She traveled to England, worked with Owenites and in 1843 published the *Workers Union*, which argued for the self-emancipation of the working class and working women as a means to social equality and liberation. These French socialist feminists laid both the intellectual and organizational framework for alliances between socialists and feminists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
In the second half of the nineteenth century, a new kind of socialism emerged, one which inspired an international, lasting political movement of workers and intellectuals. Marxist theory contained a systematic analysis of women’s oppression. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, August Bebel and V. I. Lenin, leading Marxist theorists, believed that women’s subordination in society came about at the period in history that private property emerged which then led to the development of monogamous marriage and the patriarchal family. This was, as Engels argued in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, “the world historic defeat of the female sex.” Another central Marxist tenet was the belief that women’s emancipation would come about by bringing women into the paid labor force and into organized trade unions and other political movements, which would undermine women’s dependent role within the family. Women’s low wages kept them economically dependent upon their husbands as well as politically conservative. Marx and Engels further argued that in order for capitalism to accommodate women in the paid labor force, it would have to socialize the means of reproduction, that is the family, child-rearing, and housework. Given their analysis of women’s subordination, Marxists believed that the destruction of private property, bourgeois monogamous marriage, and the patriarchal family would eradicate the basis for women’s subordination. “Real freedom for women is possible only through socialism,” wrote Lenin in 1920.

The development of mass socialist parties in nineteenth-century Europe, and the emergence of socialist movements in non-European countries such as China, for example, in the twentieth century, linked issues of class and gender in the struggle for women’s emancipation. There was however, minimal attention paid to women’s rights within the First International of Socialist Parties (1864–76). After the collapse of the First International, socialists’ concern with women’s issues increased. August Bebel published *Women Under Socialism* in 1879, Fredrich Engels *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, in 1884; both opened the way for more systematic work for women’s emancipation. The Second International of Socialist Parties (1889–1914), created an International Women’s Secretariat, and in Germany the Social Democratic Party (SPD) created a structure for women independent from men. This separate structure was the key to the success of the German socialist women’s movement, which was the largest political movement of women of any kind on the continent. Bebel’s *Women Under Socialism* supported basic feminist demands: the right to vote, entrance into the professions, and ownership of property, as well as marriage and divorce reform. Bebel also advocated the right of women to sexual satisfaction. The German socialist, Clara Zetkin, the organizational and theoretical leader of the socialist women’s movement, organized the Socialist Women’s International in 1907 to fight for suffrage, equal pay, and maternity insurance. Zetkin contended that women could not be emancipated without socialism, and socialist parties could not achieve their goals without the full participation of working women. Designating March 8 as International Woman’s Day, this group met sporadically until 1914.

Despite these important theoretical breakthroughs and organizational achievements, Marxist theorists accepted traditional gendered beliefs about women’s physical inferiority as well as the accepted ideas about the gendered division of labor within the family. The Marxist theoretical approach also failed to resolve the contradictions between women’s dual role – as worker and as mother. By arguing that the “primary
contradiction” in a capitalist society was class struggle, and that struggles against other forms of oppression – racism and sexism for example – were secondary, the Marxist tradition kept women’s interests secondary in the making of socialist revolutions. A tiny number of women like Sylvia Pankhurst attempted to connect socialism, feminism, and suffrage by organizing working-class women in London’s largely working-class East End. But such women were few and isolated from the mainstream in both the suffrage and socialist movements. Feminists found that they had to struggle against governments and industry, which attempted to crush popular movements, as well as against their socialist comrades who often opposed feminism and their participation in the labor and socialist movements.

Socialist feminists also found that they had to struggle on a personal front. Their vision of emancipation was not necessarily confined to political power or public collective ownership of wealth, but rather a cultural transformation and a way in which people could create new egalitarian relationships. Socialist feminists raised sexual politics within the socialist movement when they focused on such issues as birth control, abortion, the structure of marriage, sexual fulfillment for women, free unions, housework, child-rearing, gender identity, and homosexuality. Yet around these issues of sexuality and personal life, there was little consistency in either theory or practice amongst socialists – individually or organizationally. There was also little relationship between political radicalism and openness to sexual radicalism.

World War I (1914–18) created an international social and political crisis that unleashed forces of revolution, anti-colonial struggle, and new international feminist political configurations. Four Western empires – the German, the Austro-Hungarian, the Russian, and the Ottoman collapsed; anti-colonial and nationalist movements in China, India, South Africa, and Egypt challenged European hegemony; the two movements of international feminism and socialism, although dominated by the West, were thrown into confusion. Prior to 1914, socialists and most feminists opposed war; however when fighting broke out, many abandoned their principles of “sisterhood” and “international working class solidarity” to support their own nation against workers and “sisters” of other nations.

There was a wide range of opinions from feminists, supporting as well as opposing the war. Some woman suffragists, most notably the Englishwomen Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, founders of the militant suffragette organization, the Women’s Social and Political Union, and the American Charlotte Perkins Gilman, supported their nations from a nationalistic point of view. Others, such as Millicent Fawcett, saw the war as a chance for women to prove themselves worthy of citizenship. There were diverging expressions of anti-war feminism. These included the views that women, as mothers, suffered the worst in wars; that mothers are inherently pacific as guardians of the race; that women should use reason, not force to solve international problems; while left-wing feminist socialists such as Sylvia Pankhurst, Clara Zetkin, and the Russian Alexandra Kollontai denounced war as only serving the interests of capital.

Anti-war feminists mobilized internationally. Clara Zetkin organized the left wing of the socialist women’s movement into the Conference of International Socialist Women and Rosika Schwimmer led the formation of the International Women’s Congress at The Hague in 1915. Both organizations called for peace and urged women to pressure their governments to end war, but to no avail. After World War I
political and gender differences over issues of pacifism remained as some continued to work for the League of Nations or for the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, an organization not necessarily feminist but one that worked to promote pacifism, and opposition to imperialism and fascism.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, which began on International Woman’s Day, had a profound impact on feminism internationally. Socialist women such as Inessa Armand, Nadezhda Krupskaya and Alexandra Kollontai were involved with working-class women prior to the Bolshevik seizure of power. The leader of the Revolution, Vladimir Lenin, who was married to Krupskaya and a close friend of Armand, supported civil and political rights for women, but was hostile to feminism. The newly constituted Communist Party enforced statutes giving women equal pay and equal job opportunities; protective legislation enabled pregnant and nursing mothers to work in greater comfort and safety; arranged marriages were outlawed, and people were allowed to choose their partners irrespective of religion or nationality; divorce was liberalized; abortion and contraception were legalized; homosexuality was decriminalized. The Communist Party engaged in wide-ranging debates about the sexual, social, and cultural changes necessary for women’s emancipation.

However, external as well as internal forces – civil war, famines, privations, the backwardness of the Russian economy, and political repression – contributed to the defeat of the early promises of the Russian Revolution. Under Stalin, women suffered equally with men through forced collectivization, imprisonment, military terror, and exile. Divorce was made more difficult, protective legislation was abandoned, and homosexuality was again criminalized. Kollontai, the only female member of the Communist Party Central Committee, was isolated and exiled, and the socialist working women’s organization she founded in 1905, the Xhenodetl, was disbanded. The legacy of the Soviet Union was opposition to autonomous women’s organization, and a state policy that emphasized women as producers or reproducers regardless of women’s needs or wants. Under these conditions, socialist feminism was silenced for decades.

The rise of Fascism in Germany, Spain, Italy, and Portugal, the rise of Stalin’s Soviet Union, and the advent of World War II halted European feminist movements. Even where there were substantial social protest movements in capitalist democracies such as England, France, and the United States, women’s movements were insignificant. A few such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the International Woman’s Suffrage Alliance, the International Council of Women or the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom attempted to maintain international links.

**Anti-Colonialism, National Independence, and Feminism**

While a few movements for women’s rights, most notably for women’s suffrage and access to education, arose in a number of Latin American countries in the nineteenth century, feminist and women’s movements did not emerge in any significant way in the African, Asian and South American continents until the first half of the twentieth century. These movements, unlike their earlier European counterparts, were connected to the struggle for national liberation, anti-colonialism, and socialism. In *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Kumari Jayawardena (1986) remarked
that movements for women’s liberation in Asia and the Middle East were “acted out against a background of nationalist struggles aimed at achieving political independence, asserting national identity and modernizing society.” Women’s and feminist movements challenged both imperialist and gender hierarchies. Nationalist and anti-imperialist movements could no longer ignore women. In order to succeed against Western imperialism, women had to be politically (and often militarily) mobilized; this meant promises of greater political, economic, and social rights, and equality. Both communists and nationalists employed the rhetoric of women’s rights and women’s emancipation in the anti-colonial struggle, but opposed autonomous women’s organizations. Part of the justification was the concern that women’s groups not under the control of a communist or nationalist party might become bourgeois, reactionary, or imperialist.

The women’s movements that emerged embraced aspects of Western feminism while at the same time opposing Western domination. All were connected to nationalism, socialism, and anti-colonialism. Chinese women, many of whom had been educated by Western missionaries, joined in the struggle in the early twentieth century against the decaying Manchu dynasty and foreign imperialism. Feminist organizations sprang up in the early years of the twentieth century, and during the 1911 revolution, women began demanding the right to vote. The Chinese Suffragette Society demanded education, an end to foot binding, prohibition of concubinage and child marriages, reform of prostitution, political and civil rights within marriage and the family, and greater social services for women in industry. At the same time a radical cultural movement developed among China’s intellectuals proclaiming a commitment to personal freedom; rejecting of all forms of domination including marriage; and debating birth control, free marriage, celibacy, divorce, and even Confucianism in Chinese society. Women cut their hair, wore Western clothes, and sometimes dressed in men’s clothing. The Chinese Communist Party, founded by Mao Tse Tsung in 1921, linked women’s emancipation to the emancipation of the working class. In the 1920s Sun Yat-Sen’s nationalist Guomindang Party and the CCP worked together demanding social and economic equality. After an abortive workers’ rising in Shanghai in 1927, Chiang Kai-Shek, the new leader of the Guomindang, led a savage attack on the communists, brutally slaughtering thousands of communist women. The result was that the nationalists, associating feminism with communism, abandoned any commitment to women’s liberation.

By 1934, the Chinese Communist Party retreated from the more liberatory aspects of feminism and Mao disassociated the CCP from its early commitment to sexual liberation and declared that the socialist revolution came before women’s emancipation. In the decade and a half of Mao’s “Long March” to power, women in the CCP worked with peasant women, helped with their housework, childcare and other domestic chores. They formed groups in which the peasant women would “speak bitterness” about their gendered oppression, a form of organizing that would later influence the civil rights movement and early women’s liberation consciousness-raising groups in the United States in the late 1960s. When the CCP came to power in 1948 it proclaimed social, political, and economic equality for women and outlawed the most oppressive features of Chinese society including foot binding, arranged marriages, brideprice, and concubinage. Birth control and abortion were legalized; marriage and divorce laws were liberalized, and women obtained the suffrage.
Feminism in India differed from that in China in many respects. Critiques of women’s oppression appeared in India even before the emergence of a nationalist movement. Pandita Ramabi, the author of *The High Caste Hindu Woman* (1886), questioned the assumption that British imperialism had improved women’s status in India, citing the economic consequences of colonialism. She campaigned for education and medical training, started a number of women’s organizations, and was one of the ten women delegates at the founding conference of the nationalist Indian National Congress (INC) in 1889. In the early twentieth century, *swadeshi* – the militant movement for self-rule and support for indigenous culture – attracted women like Swarnakumari Devi, who also attended the founding meeting of the INC, as did her daughter Sarala Devi. A handful of European women committed to Indian independence also supported the emerging women’s movement. The socialist and birth-control advocate, Annie Besant, and Irish feminist Margaret Cousins joined with Dorothy Jinarajadasa to form the Hindu-dominated Women’s Indian Association in 1917. Muslim women mobilized as well; in 1916 the Begum of Bhopal formed the All-India Muslim Women’s conference.

India differed from China in that there was no significant communist movement competing with the nationalist movement. The role and influence of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the Indian independence movement, was also crucial. Gandhi hoped that India would develop independently from the West. While he was critical of male domination of women both politically and personally, he rejected Western feminist ideas of individual autonomy or equality of opportunity. Gandhi’s vision of women’s emancipation was based upon the essentialist belief that women, who embodied humility, virtue, and sacrifice, were best suited for domestic life and child rearing. Jawaharlal Nehru, the leader of the Indian National Congress, had a more secular approach to nationalist politics, and supported political rights for women including the right to vote. As the struggle against British rule intensified, women from all strata of Indian society engaged in largely non-violent resistance, even going to jail. In the 1920s Indian women achieved local suffrage and created the All India Woman’s Conference, bringing together Hindu and Muslim women. This religious cooperation was not reflected on the national scene. India won its independence from Britain in 1947 as a largely Hindu nation, at which point Pakistan became a separate, largely Muslim nation. With independence came significant political and social reforms. Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister, consistently supported women’s civil and political rights, but the debate over religious and state regulation of family practices and whether feminism was a Western import continued to simmer. Furthermore, the existence of constitutional rights for women has not been translated into social and economic equality in either India or Pakistan.

Like its Indian counterpart, Egyptian feminist consciousness, found in published writings in the 1870s, preceded colonial occupation and the rise of nationalism. The development of the Egyptian nationalist movement spurred on women’s rights. In 1911 Egyptian feminist and nationalist Bahithat al-Badiyah called upon the Egyptian National Congress to mobilize women to help build the nation; she demanded education for women, the right to employment, and women’s right to worship in mosques. In the early part of the century Badiyah and Huda Sha’arawi opposed unveiling of the face, a position held by male feminists. For these two feminists, veiling was a practical issue; unveiled women faced personal and physical attacks. In
1923 Sha’arawi founded the Egyptian Feminist Union (EFU), which marked the first explicit use of the word feminism, and was its president until 1947. The EFU demands included greater access to higher education, and reform of laws regarding prostitution, marriage, divorce, and child custody. During the national revolution from 1919 to 1922, the EFU mobilized hundreds of women to take to the streets in support of independence. During this period of nationalist militancy, the differences between women as feminists and as nationalists were minimized. However, by the 1930s, class and cultural divisions between feminist and religious fundamentalist women came to the fore. The EFU believed its programs and feminist ideology was compatible with Islam; for the women of the Muslim Women’s Society, feminism was a colonial ideology, one that undermined Islam. These disagreements persist today.

Not all women’s movements originated among elite educated women. In South Africa, the nationalist movement emerged in reaction to the system of white minority rule and racial segregation called apartheid. The African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912, and while it supported women’s rights, its leadership was male and hierarchical. The ANC established the Federation of South African Women in order to involve and mobilize women in the struggle against apartheid. In 1913 grassroots women’s organizations demonstrated against racist laws that forced black women to carry special passes in order to travel from place to place. The struggle was revived again in the 1950s. The anti-apartheid struggle was the only arena in which African and white women worked together. The ANC and the women’s Federation called for legal equality, the vote, land redistribution, reform of marriage and divorce laws, and an end to child labor. When white rule ended in 1994 with the ANC coming to power, the South African constitution guaranteed women equality under the law.

Nationalist and anti-colonialist movements did not necessarily produce feminist movements. Some gains for women were part of programs of Westernization carried out by heads of state without any women’s participation. In the 1930s Kemal Ataturk, the head of state in Turkey, opposed the Islamic family code and adopted Western standards for the education of women; polygyny was outlawed in 1926 and women got the vote in the 1930s. Similarly, in the 1930s the Shah of Iran banned women wearing the veil and extended university education. Top-down male rule did not guarantee women political equality or authority however, and neither ruler was committed to feminism. Ataturk crushed feminist movements when they challenged his rule; the Shah ordered state control over all women’s organizations. In the 1970s, religious conservatives organizing the movement to overthrow the Shah and secular rule successfully branded women’s rights and feminism as a Western evil. In Algeria, feminism was associated with French colonialism. Even though women participated in the anti-colonial struggle against the French, the Algerian government dismissed calls for women’s emancipation as Western, imperialist, and non-Islamic.

Japan’s feminism originated with Westernization, beginning in 1868 when the Meiji government abolished feudalism, introduced forms of a capitalist economy and followed a path of modernization, following models of the West. Kishida Toshiko, pioneer of Japanese feminism, was the first woman to speak publicly during the reform period of the 1870s called the Popular Rights Movement. Her ideas of feminism were somewhat similar to those of European equal rights feminists. The Popular Rights Movement believed that the right of the state (meaning patriotism/
nationalism), people’s rights, and women’s rights were one and the same. Inspired by Kishida, Kageyama Hideko was first drawn to the Popular Rights Movement and then to the Japanese socialist movement; she published *Sekai fujin* (Women of the World), calling upon women to “rise up and form a social movement of our own.” The defeat of the Popular Rights Movement in the 1890s and the subsequent imperial constitution stripped women of all political rights while the 1890 Imperial Precept on Education defined women’s role as being “a good wife and a wise mother.”

Other Western forces such as Christianity contributed to Japanese feminism. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) founded the Tokyo Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Protestant missionaries, concerned about temperance and social purification, opposed polygamy and state sanctioned brothels and mobilized women to oppose restrictions on their political activity. Both the WCTU and the Shin Fujin Kyokai (New Women’s Group), an organization embracing conservative as well as socialist women, demanded women’s suffrage. The 1925 Universal Suffrage Law excluded all women from suffrage, and in 1930 and 1931 the Japanese parliament twice turned down women’s suffrage bills. With the emergence of Japanese militarism and aggression in the 1930s, the Japanese government maintained that feminism was not in the national interest. Although Japanese feminists continued to be active in local politics during the war, many supported the national cause. Only ten days after Japan’s surrender, feminists such as Ichikawa Fusae and Kubushiro Ochima met with other women to organize a woman’s committee to work to solve women’s post-war problems. At the same time, Japanese women long ignored the plight of Korean and Filipino sex slaves who were forcibly held by the Japanese army during the war. Chizuko Ueno, a leading Japanese feminist, has criticized women for ignoring the plight of these Korean and Filipino women.

Another manifestation of nationalism and anti-colonialism was Pan-Africanism, an ideology and movement that called for the unification of all Africans into a single African state, to which those in the African diaspora could return. Pan-Africanism, originally articulated by the intellectual, activist, and supporter of women’s rights, W.E.B. DuBois, connected people of the African Diaspora in a common struggle for African and Caribbean independence. From its inception in 1900, the Pan-African Congress supported women’s franchise, education, and involvement in political activities.

The largest black organization in modern world history was the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Founded by Marcus Garvey, the UNIA organized the participation of women. The UNIA’s feminism was promoted largely through Garvey’s two wives, Amy Ashwood Garvey and Amy Jacques Garvey. There were thousands of women in the general membership, and the UNIA had two specific women’s sections, the Black Cross Nurses and an all-woman paramilitary group, the African Motor Corps. Special organizational positions for women assured their representation at the UNIA’s highest levels. Women predominated on the central leadership bodies in a number of UNIA branches in the Caribbean. The UNIA did not specifically challenge the colonial ideology that subordinated women to the role of housewife and helpmate.

In South America, feminists chose not to challenge certain traditional cultural values, in particular gender roles defined by *machismo* (endorseing male supremacist values), and *marianismo* (the values of self-sacrifice, and non-sexual love as
embodied by the Virgin Mary) as well as the Catholic church. Many South American feminists extended these roles of domesticity, femininity, and motherhood into politics, arguing that women’s role in the public sphere would create a higher moral order. After 1910 a wide range of women’s organizations were founded such as the Argentinian Partido Feminista Nacional (National Feminist Party) and the Chilean Partido Cívico Feminino (Women’s Civic Party), the Uruguayan Partido Independiente Democratico Feminino (Women’s Independent Democratic Party) or the Colombian Union Feminina de Columbia (Colombian Women’s Union), the Brazilian Federação Brasileira Pelo Progresso Feminino (Federation for the Advancement of Women). Most South American countries granted women’s suffrage in the period from the 1930s through the late 1950s. However, according to historian Asuncion Lavrin (1978), even after winning the vote, “Machismo, marianismo, and the patriarchalism still meet to produce the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the co-madres of El Salvador, the white-clad figure of Nicaraguan president Violetta Chamorro, running an election as a widow and grandmother.”

In Cuba, Castro’s 1959 revolution made important strides for women. Following a Leninist model, Castro was a supporter of women’s rights while at the same time opposed to feminism. In spite of the US-imposed blockade, the Cuban government is able to provide a wide-ranging health and educational system for its women and children. Cuba provides childcare for working mothers and paid leave for childbirth, nursing and housework; yet there is a gendered division of labor; most childcare workers are women. The Cuban Central Committee and leading Politburo members are overwhelming male.

In the first half of the twentieth century there were attempts to bring together women’s rights activists and organizations from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean. African-American and Caribbean women organized the International Council of Women of the Darker Races in 1920, in part to oppose the racism and condescension of Western feminists. The Inter-American International Council of Women met in 1928 and the All Asian Conference in 1931. In 1935 Shareefeh Hamid Ali of India warned Western feminists that “any arrogant assumption of superiority or of patronage on the part of Europe or America” would only serve to further alienate women in Africa and Asia. These organizations gave elite, educated women a venue in which to meet and debate; they nurtured the development of feminism outside of European and US nations.

The advent of World War II (1939–1945) brought women’s movements to a standstill. In the 1940s and 1950s women’s organizations had to struggle for survival – feminism was all but forgotten. Even though Eleanor Roosevelt called for attention to women’s issues and helped establish the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1946, the UN paid little attention to women’s issues in the decades after its founding in 1945.

The rebirth in the 1960s and 1970s of United States and European women’s movements dramatically altered the political landscape. Created by women active in the civil rights, black liberation, anti-Vietnam war, and radical student rights movements, it challenged the status quo and charged that neither the Western political democracies nor socialist countries had emancipated women. Early radical feminists attempted to bring together the hierarchies of gender and race. Many histories of the early women’s liberation movement have ignored the role of black women, wrongly
relegating them to the status of critics of white women and maintaining the myth that black women in the US rejected feminism. Yet African-American women were involved in the rebirth of the feminist movement. Between 1966 and 1970 black women founded the Black Woman’s Liberation Committee of SNCC (the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee), and its offspring, the Third World Woman’s Alliance, the Harlem-based Black Women Enraged, and the Oakland (California) Black Women Organizing for Action. Critical discussions about women’s liberation took place within organizations such as the Black Panther Party and the National Welfare Rights Organization. In 1973 the National Black Feminist Organization attracted over 400 women at its founding convention, making it one of the largest autonomous black feminist organization. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective, an organization of black radical feminists, who fought many oppressions at the same time – racism, homophobia, sexism, and capitalism – were able to articulate a non-racist, non-hierarchical, and non-homophobic feminism. “We might use our position at the bottom,” stated the collective’s manifesto, “to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would be free since our freedom would necessitate the end of all systems of oppression.”

Women’s liberation ideas and organizations raised a wide range of issues including rape laws, job segregation, inequality in sports, reproductive rights, dress reform, and housework. The movement also created an intellectual analysis of male domination by creating Women’s Studies programs throughout academia. Radical feminists began with an internationalist vision that included opposition to the United States’ war in Vietnam, support for anti-imperialist and liberation struggles in South Africa, other colonized African countries, Palestine, Mexico, and Cuba; and support for workers’ struggles in France, Mexico, and Czechoslovakia in 1968. By 1970, women’s liberation activists rediscovered March 8, the socialist celebration of International Woman’s Day, and pressured the US Congress to declare March Women’s History month.

Women activists also pressured the United Nations, a bastion of male privilege, to designate 1975 as International Women’s Year, hold a World Conference on Women in Mexico City, and subsequently proclaim 1976–85 the United Nations Decade for Women. The Mexico conference revealed the strengths and weaknesses of international feminism, since 133 governments sent representatives. But many delegations were all male. Over 6,000 women attended as delegates of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), a number of which identified themselves as feminists. The final World Plan of Action only focused on the issue of colonialism refusing to mention women or sexism. Five years later at the world conference in Copenhagen, discussions around clitoridectomy (female genital cutting) and support for Palestinian rights enlightened and divided delegates.

Some progress was made. The passage of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) set national targets and strategies to involve women at all levels of government as well as in economic and social development. Nations set up women’s commissions and other such organizations and began to compile data regarding women’s role and status. Regional women’s associations such as the Asian Women’s Association influenced the international discussion, global exchanges of information and periodic world conferences
contributed to the development of international feminism, and 15,000 NGO delegates attended the Nairobi meeting in 1985. At that meeting, Western feminists confronted with their own biases as well as their own colonial history, recognized the necessity for non-Western women to lead the struggle against genital mutilation. In 1992 the Brazil Conference on Environment and Action included a chapter on women and two years later, the Cairo International Conference on Population concluded that women’s education and empowerment was the key factor in controlling population. Thirty thousand women participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995 which took up issues such as women and poverty, education and training of women, health, violence against women, women and armed conflict, the economy, power and decision making, the media, the environment and children; it declared that women’s rights were human rights.

International Feminism

The impact of the UN conferences galvanized women and nations to take stock of their own laws, institutions and practices. For the past twenty-five years feminists have continued to hold regional grassroots conferences that enabled feminism to affect other issues around the world. Women’s Studies is a global enterprise as feminists organize international conferences, develop feminist curricula and publications, and support and critique educational and other institutions which maintain gender discrimination. Rape warfare in the Balkans and elsewhere has been declared a war crime, the use of children and women in the international sex trade has been condemned, and there is a growing movement opposing sweated labor of women and children, all of which has met with uneven success. In the late 1990s feminists sought to raise the issue of the near-enslavement of women under the Taliban, an Islamic fundamentalist party, which governed Afghanistan until 2002. Not until the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, did governments join with feminists in claiming to support women’s rights in Afghanistan.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, feminists still continue to demand full economic, political, social, and sexual equality and justice for women. The forces of globalization, the revolution in communications combined with the international feminist networks, NGO’s, women’s studies programs and other feminist organizations will no doubt continue to press women’s claims. As Gertrude Mongello, secretary general of the Fourth World Conference on Women said in her concluding remarks at the Beijing conference: “a revolution has just begun, There is no going back. There will be no unraveling of commitments . . . This revolution is too just, too important, and certainly long overdue.”

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