



# THE FUTURE IS FEMINIST

This August will mark 100 years since the ratification of the 19th Amendment, which theoretically created universal women's suffrage — although women of color in many states could not vote until as late as the 1960s.

The feminist movement has fought to upend rape culture, from SlutWalks to Take Back the Night marches. Feminists champion reproductive rights by supporting organizations like Planned Parenthood and pushed for Title IX, which protects women from gender discrimination in education and athletics. Feminism is almost standard in today's America.

But the movement's core message, equality and inclusivity for all women, can get lost in the clever posters and pink hats that flood Instagram during annual women's marches.

Privileged women easily become trapped in our own insular bubbles, transforming into "white feminists" who care only about issues that personally affect us. We may choose to ignore issues of race, class and sexuality and instead focus on hot-button topics such as abortion and wage disparities.

Posters boast both "pussy power" and "intersectional feminism," but equating womanhood with reproductive anatomy alienates transgender women and those struggling to conceive. The same women who fall into the consumerist traps of "Notorious RBG" merchandise are often guilty of clutching their wallets more tightly when a homeless woman on Franklin Street asks for help or changing the channel when they see a Black mother shattered by her son's murder.

Don't get me wrong, I will always cherish the embroidered "Strong Women..." pillow I got as a little girl. My 2020 calendar features 12 biographies of inspirational women; I'm a sucker for a "Smash The Patriarchy" mug.

However, I also try to remind myself that equality requires actions, not just ideas. Feminism isn't feminism if it does not include women of every shape, size and color. If you only fight for women who look like you, you're not fighting for all women.

Many feminists, myself included, have let their white privilege shelter them from recognizing the mistreatment of women of color within the feminist movement.

Fortunately, many feminists are waking up to this reality.

I had been vaguely aware of the lack of intersectionality in feminism for years, but the media coverage of the #MeToo movement in 2017 forced me to finally open my eyes. The rallying cry, created by Black activist Tarana Burke a decade earlier, became synonymous with white actress and activist Alyssa Milano. After TIME's #MeToo cover excluded Burke, I could no longer ignore the mistreatment of Black women by mainstream feminism.

First-year Sarah Torzone says she has noticed a similar shift in her own experiences with other feminists.

"In recent years, it's come to light that feminism has been seen as a primarily white movement," Torzone said. "Now it's becoming more inclusive and we're trying to recognize that it's actually mostly women of color and specifically Black women that are the backbone of [many feminist movements]."

"I think nowadays it's probably more inclusive than it used to be," Torzone said. Because of the world younger generations are growing up in, "we have more resources to understand the perspectives of other women, whereas older white women might not understand their own privilege and they might not understand the people that their white feminism is hurting."

As with women of color, the LGBTQ+ community has gained more support but continues to be left behind in mainstream feminism.

"A big problem is trans women not

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being represented under the movement of feminism and not being recognized for their contributions to feminism," Torzone, who identifies as LGBTQ+, said.

Far more feminists know fictional character Rosie the Riveter than Marsha P. Johnson, a trans activist and symbol of the Stonewall riots.

Gloria Steinem is quoted more often than Roxane Gay, an equally prolific feminist author who speaks openly about her experiences with race, sexuality, and body image.

How many of us knew that suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton opposed the 14th and 15th Amendments, which gave rights to Black Americans, while abolitionists Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth were staunch supporters of women's rights?

Or that three women founded Black Lives Matter?

Even as awareness grows, Torzone feels feminists can better address the needs of marginalized people. "Women do have different experiences based on the different categories that they fall under," she said. "Women of color obviously are going to have a different experience in the world than white women."

As white feminists — as many of us inadvertently are — we love to preach "girl power," but only to the extent that it impacts our own lives. When we ignore poverty, racism, police brutality or climate change simply because it does not affect us, our feminism is reactionary. Instead, it should be revolutionary.

But feminism can be revitalized. The movement transformed dramatically over the last century, and I am confident it will continue to grow toward equality for all women.

Let's get to work.