

## Our Freedom

By Giada S.

Women. Some of the strongest people on Earth. Women are made to be ripped apart to give birth, then they heal themselves. Somehow, women have been looked down upon, told they are lesser than, and beaten for speaking up. Feminists are told to not be so angry and to quiet down, but women have had their voices remain silent for too long. Women did not and still do not have a say in what happens to their bodies, are told they are just objects for men to use, and that it is their fault if someone takes advantage of them. That is why there have been women-led protests for two hundred years, like the suffragette movement, the 1960s women's rights movement, and the third wave of feminism in the 1990s.

The suffragette movement started in the mid-1800s when women began to fight back and demanded the right to vote. They were threatened with violence, put in prison, and beaten, all just for using their voices. Although these women knew they could be beaten and imprisoned, they showed moral courage. Moral courage is the ability to do the right thing, even if you are afraid or you will be the only one doing it. Moral courage is the ability to split from the crowd to do the right thing, even if you are instinct tells you otherwise. Everyone has that feeling inside them that is tugging them to do the right thing and speak up, but moral courage is listening to it and doing what is right. This huge movement essentially started with two women, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. While on her honeymoon in London to attend a World's Anti-Slavery Convention, Stanton met abolitionist Lucretia Mott, who, like her, was also angry about the exclusion of women at the convention. Mott and Stanton, now friends, promised to call a woman's rights convention when they returned home. Around that time, women were scared to speak up for fear of getting hurt or becoming an outcast. But these women did what was right and ended up impacting future generations.

The 1960s were generally a time associated with a large women's rights movement, mostly about getting equal rights and opportunities and more personal freedom. This movement was originally triggered by the release of *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty

Friedan. Friedan saw what was happening to women, they were able to vote but were still being oppressed and discriminated against. Something she took notice of was the pattern of her editors cutting out the careers of her subjects in the articles she contributed to in women's magazines (Gale In Context; Biography). Sadly, this was a common occurrence for many women at the time, their achievements and interests were not considered to be worth anything. Most women around the time stepped down and stayed silent, having the belief that they would not be able to do anything to change it. Betty Friedan had a different idea. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, finally exposed the terrible social expectations that were placed on women, one of them being that women were meant to focus on their appearance to attract a man. Friedan's book was a hit! She became a voice for women, sparking one of the most memorable women's movements in history. If this didn't work out for her, her career could have fallen apart and many other things could have been destroyed, but she worked past her fears to stand up for the greater good.

Furthermore, the mid-1990s women's movement was about tackling problems that still existed, like sexual harassment of women and a shortage of women in positions of power. The woman who sparked this movement was Anita Hill. In 1991, Hill made history when she spoke up about being sexually harassed by her superior for multiple years. Women who were sexually harassed or assaulted didn't speak up about it, and even if they did, a lot of the time no one believed them. Originally, when Anita Hill spoke up about her sexual harassment her bravery was met with a lot of hate from the media and the public. Despite this, her courage empowered many women to speak up about their own experiences and it helped raise awareness about sexual harassment at work. This one woman sparked a movement that lasted twenty years! Although harshly criticized, she persevered and made her story known, changing the world for future generations of girls.

As a teenager, I can already see how these movements have affected my life. When Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott fought for women to have the right to vote, that also meant they were fighting for women to have an impact on society and the right to control themselves, not have choices made for them. I try to honor these women every day by speaking up about the injustices of others and stopping discriminatory language or

actions in their tracks. Middle schoolers tend to think that since everyone is doing it, they should be too. I make it my mission every day to educate those using sexist and discriminatory language so I can help make the next generation better, using the voice. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Stanton gave to me.

In schools today, they are constantly preparing us for our future, telling us to aim high and reach for the stars. I want to graduate college, become my own boss, and run multiple charities when I'm older. But, without Betty Friedan, I wouldn't have been able to picture a future like this because she made opportunities more accessible to women. I wouldn't be able to make my dreams come true.

Finally, Anita Hill made it more widely known about the sexual harassment and assault of women. Because of her, I can speak up for women and their bodies. All of these women have made it possible for me to use my voice and actions to join in the fight for women around the world.



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