

Famous Suffragettes

Celebrating Feminism throughout the Ages



The Weaker Vessel

Jan 1656

Margaret Cavendish

Dear Diary,

Already the whispers are circulating. I have heard some of them... and they are not good. Most people are even more criticising than usual. The men are saying that it is not the place of a woman to write, and that we are the weaker vessel, unable to do anything but be a loving wife and dutiful mother. What is worse is that the Church knows - and agrees.

But I do not.

*Just because Eve was created from Adam's rib, males think they are superior to us. Well, I disagree. God has given both men and women intelligent souls - how is it fair that only men should be allowed to improve them? In my recent book, *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, I have rightly stated that women are kept like birds in cages. We are not allowed any power, and men prohibit us the rights we should have.*

I write because women are denied so much else in public life. Men just think of us as their slaves. We are forced to do all the domestic work without a penny, and in the end, the blame falls on men for making us subordinate. Why are men born free and women born slaves? Because males decided that was how it should happen.

Now, some may say that I wish for women to have power over men, but that is not true at all. I just desire them to have power over themselves. To not have all their decisions made by the 'all-knowing' man. To not lose all their rights when they marry. To not be treated like the weaker vessel.

Words as Weapons

6th June 1794

Olympe de Gouges

Dear Diary,

It is the middle of our Revolution against the monarchy here in France, and since the talent of woman is ignored as per usual, I have resorted to my only way of discussing the rights of women - my writing.

I fear that I may be captured, but that does not matter. What does matter is that women's voices are finally heard. Women in the revolution have the right to mount the scaffold. They should likewise have the right to mount the rostrum.

Thousands of women marched on the Palace of Versailles demanding for bread to feed ourselves and our families, and we effectively toppled the then crumbling French monarchy. Yet men still refuse to acknowledge the rights we have been clamoring for so long.

And all for what?

Why are we taught from childhood to be subordinate and inferior to our male counterparts? Why must we run around the household doing domestic chores without a penny? Why must we be ignored thus?

We could rival men's achievements if we were only permitted a similar education.

Liberty is portrayed as a woman, yet women do not have liberty, because it is forbidden to them. If only women were given a proper education, then they could be extraordinary, amazing, and wonderful! They could be anything.

It should be time women have the rights we deserve.

We deserve to be able to vote and earn and spend our own money. We deserve to get a proper education and share the same jobs and status as men.

Not to resort to words as our weapons.

A Lasting Influence

1832

Harriet Martineau

Dear Diary,

Frankly, I am outraged. Our world is male-dominated at the moment – in every aspect. Also, the situation is not great for females either. Actually, that is an understatement.

Due to the Industrial Revolution, small businesses and industries are falling apart, forcing people to move to big factories. The work there is extremely dangerous, and very low paying, especially for women.

One of my close friends works at a big textile factory, and do you know how much she is paid a week? Four dollars! Yes, \$4! But she won't stand up for herself, so it's up to people like me to do it.

Unfortunately, people are more likely to believe males over females; especially males in a position of power, such as factory owners, who are exactly who we are fighting against. But there is only one goal that feminists are after – to ensure women have the same rights and pay as men. I simply cannot understand why that is so impossible for men and authorities!

Women, like men, are usually given an education. However, unlike men's education, women's education is missing something fundamental. Women, like men, must be educated with a view to action, or their studies cannot be called education. After all, education is not the learning and memorizing of facts, but the training of the brain to think.

Sometimes, I think that only two things are infinite: the universe and anti-feminism stupidity. I am also not sure about the former.

Yesterday, that very friend, Marina Stewart, asked me if I had a wish, just one wish, what I would wish for. And I replied "To be a lasting influence on feminism."

The Fight to Qualify

February 1866

Elizabeth Blackwell

Dear Diary,

It has been 15 years since my dear friend has died from a terminal disease, and I am still unable to get over her death. At the time, she confided to me that she felt embarrassed going to male doctors, and she would have felt better seeing a female one.

That was the main reason I decided to enter the medical profession, but the journey to get there was extremely difficult. Most of the student body at Geneva Medical College thought it was a joke when I got accepted into the prestigious school.

However, despite the extra pressure, I managed to rank first in my class and I became the first woman to become a doctor of medicine (in the contemporary era).

Unfortunately, the struggle wasn't over yet. When I returned to New York in the mid-1850's, I faced a lot of prejudice and was struggling financially.

Now, though, I have returned to England, and I have recently been offered a position at London School of Medicine for Women, as a lecturer. I accepted, of course. I would be a fool not to!

The situation for women in medicine has improved by leaps and bounds, but we still face criticism and judgement. Training is still not equal for men and women, where it should be. There should be no special concessions for women.

Also, as a woman, I am often not allowed entry into hospital, and as often as not have to argue my way in. But, obviously, women understand more about women's health than any man ever can or will.

Sometimes, though, comments and judgements wrench their way deep into the depths of my heart, and then I have to stop and remember about what I have done, what I have yet to do. About the fight I made to qualify as a medic. And then I realise I can't give up. Not yet, at least. Until no woman has to face the fight to qualify.

In the Beginning, Woman was the Sun

26 September 1911

Raichō Hiratsuka

Dear Diary,

In the primordial age, woman was once the sun. But not anymore. Now she is a sickly moon, forced to endure being inferior, when all we must do to become the sun once more is awaken, unfold our wings, and not fight back, but simply not allow ourselves to face such sexism.

In order to fight back, however, we must develop the literary genius that is inside of all women.

Recently, I founded a literary society, known as Seitōsha (bluestockings). We publish our own magazine, Seitō (bluestocking). Why? To support feminism, of course. Why else? Seitō allows women to not only discuss literary topics but also: society and its conventions, politics, women's lives and problems, etc. It is basically a magazine completely revolving around the idea of feminism, to restore women to their rightful status as the Sun.

The main reason I have been fighting for so long is because in the beginning, Woman was the Sun. I want to fight, to live, to enjoy the freedom as she is restored to that status. After all, all of our fighting shouldn't be in vain, it shouldn't just have been in the beginning that woman was the sun.

A Final Message

In conclusion, these stories are not real; but the feminists are. These are tales of famous suffragettes, and their journey through time. All these women had one common ideology that bound them together – or would have bound them together, had they lived in the same time. That one special ideology was their feminism, the struggle they made to gain women the rights they deserved. Each one laying down a different stone in the same path for women's rights. Which is why we must honor these women and honor the changes they made, and the rights we would not have had if not for them, and other feminists.