

# Lecture Series on Contemporary Theories Feminist Criticism: Lecture 3

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# Feminist Criticism

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**First Wave Feminism** - late 1700s-early 1900's: writers like Mary Wollstonecraft (*A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792) highlight the inequalities between the sexes.

Activists like Susan B. Anthony and Victoria Woodhull contribute to the women's suffrage movement.



# Feminist Criticism

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In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft responds to those educational and political theorists of the 18th century who believed that women should not receive a rational education. She argues that women's education ought to match their position in society, and that they are essential to the nation because they raise its children and could act as respected "companions" to their husbands. Wollstonecraft maintains that women are human beings deserving of the same fundamental rights as men, and that treating them as mere ornaments or property for men undercuts the moral foundation of society.

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Wollstonecraft, though an early feminist, is still talking about rearing women to be companion to men, because at that time, women stepping out of the house and earning a living was unthinkable, especially amongst the nobility, and that is the “class” that Wollstonecraft is talking about.

The most acceptable means of income for the women was being a governess or a teacher.



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**Second Wave Feminism** - early 1960s-late 1970s: building on more equal working conditions necessary in America during World War II, movements such as the National Organization for Women (NOW), formed in 1966, cohere feminist political activism. Writers like Simone de Beauvoir (*Le Deuxième Sexe*, 1949) and Elaine Showalter established the groundwork for the dissemination of feminist theories dove-tailed with the American Civil Rights movement.

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**The American Civil Rights Movement** was a political movement and campaign from 1954 to 1968 in the United States to abolish institutional racial segregation, discrimination, and disenfranchisement throughout the United States.

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**Third Wave Feminism** - early 1990s-present: resisting the perceived essentialist (over generalized, over simplified) ideologies and a white, heterosexual, middle class focus of second wave feminism,



# Feminist Criticism

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**Third wave feminism** borrows from post-structural and contemporary gender and race theories to expand on marginalized populations' experiences. Writers like Alice Walker work to “...reconcile it [feminism] with the concerns of the black community...[and] the survival and wholeness of her people, men and women both, and for the promotion of dialog and community as well as for the valorization of women and of all the varieties of work women perform” (Tyson 107).

(Some of the content has been taken from open sources on Internet)