

# Future History: Women's Revolt Sparks Global Revolution

January 5, 2018



The *Future Historians'* International Study Group and Collaborative Writing Project has obtained the following excerpts from the 2117 high school history book "*Then, Now and How.*" The title of this chapter is "*#MeToo and the origins of today's egalitarian society.*"

For more information, go to <http://futurehistorians.org/doku.php?id=start>.

"... It is often difficult for today's students - raised in societies where equality, and gender equality in particular, is the norm - to comprehend the oppressive conditions under which women workers were forced to labor just a century ago. Twenty-one seventeen was the year things started to change when numbers of female employees in Western media, business and government circles came forward to accuse their bosses - prominent, powerful men - of perpetrating predatory sexualized violence on them; 2118 was the year they *were finally heard.*"

It was then that, thanks partly to social media, the ancient wall of silence surrounding male violence and bosses' "right" to compel sexual favors with impunity had been breached. That breach was first opened up by women in the celebrity class, whose names gave them credibility. Through that breach poured a vast army of angry, indignant lower-ranking female workers and employees who were tired of suffering fear, humiliation or sexual violence on the job and were now also demanding justice. This flame of women in revolt spread from one country to another and eventually grew into an international mass movement to put an end to male predation in the workplace and to contest the patriarchal power on which the then-existing class system was based.

## Celebrity Sex Scandals

The spark that lit the flame in 2017 was the publication in early October, of a *NY Times* story detailing numerous accusations of sexual harassment against a powerful movie producer named Harvey Weinstein, whose films had won a number of Academy Awards. The story detailed three decades' worth of sexual harassment and unwanted physical contact accusations made against Weinstein by a number of women, including actress Ashley Judd. The story started a flood of new accusations from dozens of other women, including some who said Weinstein had raped them.

Weinstein's predatory behavior had been an open secret in Hollywood for years, but his victims were cowed by his threats of retaliation, and the industry establishment had kept his secret.

At last the genie of "sexual harassment" was out of the bottle. Under the hash tag #MeToo, thousands of U.S. women began outing famous predators, and the rebellion spread to France, where the taboo protecting males was deeply entrenched, under the hash tag #*balance ton porc* ("out your pig"). Among the upstanding Americans outed were a liberal talk-show host and media icon named Charlie Rose (who preached "character") and Alabama Senatorial Candidate Roy Moore - who as a judge had famously placed the Ten Commandments in front of his court (a breach of the Constitutional separation of church and state), for which he was twice fined. Moore, a racist reactionary accused of molesting teenage girls, was strongly defended by President Trump - a self-confessed "pussy grabber" whom sixteen women had accused of sexual harassment.

At first this rebellion against sexualized workplace violence played out in the celebrity spheres of politics and entertainment where the media, had a field day publicizing ever-new sex scandals about the rich and famous. The underlying labor issue of power and inequality in the workplace was downplayed.

"It is not at all the same thing to tweet in 140 characters and to bring a complaint in court," said Marilyn Baldeck, a lawyer with the European Association Against Violence Against Women at Work in France, where legal procedures enabling female employees to sue their bosses for sexual harassment were quietly being further restricted. These legal procedures generally lead to more humiliation and paltry results, and in any case ordinary working women with children to feed were too scared to complain and find themselves fired, as was often the case when women did complain, a process that often led to more humiliation and paltry results. Acting on legal precedent, U.S. courts routinely dismissed cases brought by workers who claim their supervisors propositioned them, kissed them or grabbed their breasts. The judges declared that the conduct does not constitute harassment in a legal sense, and refused to let the cases go to trial. [1]

## **Collective Resistance**

Low-wage women, too poor to bring a lawsuit and too obscure to interest the media, struck back collectively. They picked up the one method of struggle they were familiar with: the picket line. First in NY, then in Paris and around the world, "Out Your Pig!" picket lines began springing up in front of McDonald's and other fast-food emporiums. Indignant women carried picket signs demanding predators be fired including the names (and photos) of the bosses they were outing. While guilty supervisors cringed inside and desperately called headquarters for help, customers, both female and male, turned away or joined the pickets. Local media had a field day covering the picketing, videos of confrontations went viral, and "Out Your Pig" picket lines sprung up outside hospitals, factories, retail stores wherever bosses and supervisors were using their power to abuse their workers.

These images of working women in revolt soon spread around the globe. The pent-up indignation of super-exploited female workers in sweatshops from Central America to South-East Asia, long brutalized and sexually humiliated by their bosses, exploded into direct action. In Dhaka, Bangladesh, scene of the disastrous 2012 garment factory fire, a sewing machine operator, trapped in the stockroom by her supervisor who expected her to submit to his advances instead called loudly for help. Her fellow workers came to her defense, swarmed over the supervisor, and, laughing, pulled down his pants to shame him! This predatory supervisor was never seen again, and his colleagues suddenly began acting more respectful. A video showing him trying to run away with his bottom bare and his pants around his ankles soon went viral. "How *em-bare-assing!*"

This boss' humiliation gave a new meaning to the expression "out your pig," and from then on there

was no way to stop the swarming and de-pantsing scenario from repeating itself all over the world. When the factory women informed the press that their company was making clothes for famous brands like Timmy Hilfiger, women in the U.S. declared a boycott to pressure management to clean up their act.

In the midst of this crisis, women across the world took to the streets during the 2017 International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Crowds poured into the streets in Peru, Mexico, France, Sweden, Spain, Mozambique, and other countries and protest femicide, rape and sexual harassment. In Turkey, thousands of women clashed with police in Istanbul during the protest. "They do not even let this (march) happen. They cannot even tolerate this. They do not want us, the women, to be free. But we will not leave the streets, as long as we can."

In France and Morocco, the outing of vastly popular Moroccan singer Saad Lamjarred exposed the underlying culture when the woman he raped was vilified and the King supported the rapist. "This case is a little summary of the reality in Morocco," said Saida Kouzzi, a founding partner of Mobilizing for Rights Associates, a nongovernmental organization based in Morocco. "We can be tolerant about rape and forget all moral and religious values when it concerns men," she added, "while at the same time we are not willing to protect women." Marital rape is not a crime in Morocco, and sex outside of marriage is illegal. Both rules discourage rape victims from coming forward because of the fear of being incriminated, advocates said. "Going to the police to file a complaint about rape can also become an admission of having sex outside of marriage," Ms. Kouzzi said.[2]

## **Women and the Labor Movement**

The women's new-found power naturally sparked further struggles for better wages and conditions. Historically, women workers' resistance to the boss' sexual predations had been at the origins of the organized labor movement. In 1905, many of the women who hand-painted the world-famous Limoges vases and figurines went on strike in France — not because they were poorly paid or toiled long hours, but because they were prey to the factory overseer's sexual urges. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century similar struggles brought together young women textile workers in Massachusetts, U.S.A. in 1844 and so continued on.

In the U.S., the women workers' revolt grew out of the developing 21<sup>st</sup> century culture of social-movement style labor organizing among low-paid workers. These underpaid jobs had long been consigned to women and oppressed minorities. Since 2012, the "Fight for \$15" movement, backed by progressive unions like SEIU, had grown from a walkout by 200 fast-food workers in New York City to a global movement of home health aides, child care teachers, airport workers, adjunct professors, retail employees - and underpaid workers in over 300 cities on six continents demanding a \$15 an hour minimum wage. Soon the ardent demand for gender justice was grafted on to a movement which was already allied with the movement for racial justice. The change to "\$15+Dignity" seemed hardly a big jump for this movement of largely female workers.

Although in that period it was nearly impossible for low-paid workers to actually strike and legally win union rights under US labor laws, they were able to win victories by adapting the tactics of the civil rights movement through "direct action, taking to the streets, organizing" Indeed, the alliance between labor and the Black liberation movement went back to the 1960s, and you may have read Martin Luther King met his assassination when went to Memphis, TE to support a municipal strike of Black garbage workers in 1968. This alliance was renewed in Memphis in 2017 by a public alliance between the ASCME union and *#Black Lives Matter*. The women's revolt for dignity completed the picture.

## Women Take the Lead

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the most dynamic unions remaining on the dismal US labor scene were movements of majority female workers led by women, like the Chicago Teachers Union, the California Nurses and the Social Service Employees. In contrast, membership in traditional, male-dominated bureaucratic unions was at an all time low. Thus a new alliance, between labor, civil rights and the gender justice movement was being formed in the struggle against the male violence, openly racist billionaire class war offensives of the Trump era.

From the very beginning, women had taken the lead in uniting the fractured elements of the U.S. resistance to misogynist Trump. On January 21, 2017 the day after Trump was inaugurated, a national Woman's March brought millions of women and their allies into the streets in Washington, New York, and six hundred cities in the U.S. and world-wide. As Trump's support plummeted to 32% in the polls, the *New York Times* reported that the women's protest was three times the size of the Inauguration crowd.

The Women's March had been organized, rather spontaneously, soon after Trump's election, by a bunch of women who got together via social media, started the ball rolling and created a loose federation of networks and social movements. The Women's March brought together unprecedented masses to state loud and clear their solidarity with all oppressed people - women, exploited workers, ethnic, religious and sexual minorities, civilian casualties of American imperialist wars abroad. In the words of actress America Ferrera:

We are gathered here and across the country and around the world today to say, Mr. Trump, we refuse. We reject the dehumanization of our Muslim mothers and sisters. We demand an end to the systemic murder and incarceration of our black brothers and sisters. We will not give up our right to safe and legal abortions. We will not ask our LGBTQ families to go backwards. We will not go from being a nation of immigrants to a nation of ignorance. We won't build walls, and we won't see the worst in each other. And we will not turn our backs on the more than 750,000 young immigrants in this country currently protected by DACA.

Against Trump's open misogyny and racism, the marchers maintained that women's oppression is the basis of all oppressions. The speakers and signs proclaimed mutual solidarity among the social movements they represented - while at the same time maintaining each own group's demands. Many signs took up the 2011 slogan of Occupy Wall Street: "This is what America Looks Like." The most original feature of the demonstration was the proliferation of knitted Pussy Hats - a charmingly feminine satirical jibe at America's pussy-grabber-in-chief that actually warmed peoples heads.

The Harvey Weinstein scandal broke out nine months later, nine months into the Trump regime, which turned out to be more horrendous, but also more divided than had been imagined by the January pussy hat marchers. And so the stage was set for a showdown...

**EDITORS' NOTE:** In further chapters, we will discuss how women spearheaded the popular mass revolts that provoked a split in the U.S. ruling classes when the Trump administration called upon Federal troops to brutally disperse their demonstrations and sentenced activists to long prison terms. We will also study the origins of the famous March 8 International Assembly of Working Women, which inaugurated the first global strikes against multinational corporations which forced them to their knees through a bottle-neck strategy interrupting their global supply-lines.

## Topics For Further Discussion:

Faced with an entrenched social evil, the media consensus in 2017 America was to indict “human nature” (which of course could not be changed!) instead of indicting politically sanctioned workplace oppression and inequality. Thus, the *Times* which first broke the story published an essay a month later entitled “The Unexamined Brutality of the Male Libido[3]”. The author, one Steven Marche, apparently blind to the power and impunity of a self-protective male establishment, accused “the nature of men in general” and concluded that “the problem at the heart of all this [is] the often ugly and dangerous nature of the male libido.”

Thus the *Times*, at the time considered the mouthpiece of US liberalism, was unwittingly spouting the same party line as the Saudi Arabian Wahhabist Imams, who also used that “dangerous male libido” as a pretext to lock up all Muslim women in the home and “protect” them by denying them civil rights and basic freedoms.

By now 22<sup>nd</sup> century readers are naturally asking: Was all this violence about sex? Or about power? Young people today are growing up free to explore and express your individual sexuality at your own pace. You live in a world where cooperation has replaced domination, and you understand that sex is about caring and sharing, about pleasure, adventure, lust and love. So you ask yourselves: what is “sexy” about a creepy powerful male dominating, humiliating and violating his helpless female subordinates? From your 22<sup>nd</sup> century viewpoint, it seems obvious that the male predation behavior of earlier historic times had more to do with power than with pleasure, with domination than with sex, with class society than with human nature.

Historically, male-dominated societies, priestly, royal or capitalist, had from earliest times proclaimed their rule to be ordained by the Gods, or more recently as “natural,” but this was propaganda. Modern archeologists and anthropologists have supplied ample evidence of the existence of stable matriarchal and matrilineal societies both in ancient history and among groups that remained isolated from Western influence well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Indeed, it was Morgan’s 19<sup>th</sup> century study of the Iroquois that inspired Friedrich Engels to conclude in *The Origins of Private Property, the Family and the State* (1884) that the rise of male dominance within previously egalitarian clans and the transformation of cattle, women and children into the personal property of the dominant male was the basis of all future class societies.

Under European feudalism, the lords of the manor gave themselves the “right” to compel the sexual services of the young women who worked and lived in their domains. In the U.S., whippings, beatings and the fear of having their children sold down the river, compelled enslaved African-American women to submit to their masters. The same oppression prevailed under capitalism, where bosses routinely expected female workers to submit to their lusts if they wanted to keep their jobs. In addition, despite legal “equality” under capitalism women were made to do most of the work, both as wage earners, as informal workers and as unpaid home-makers, cooks, child-care and elder-care providers.

No wonder why the elite men who ran those violent class societies united to keep women “in their place” and closed ranks against them. No wonder why many subordinate men, themselves exploited and humiliated in the workplace, were tempted to oppress and exploit the women this male culture placed under their power. And no wonder so many guilty men in those dark times unconsciously hated women, feared their power, and used violence to humiliate and subdue them.

Today in 2117 in our egalitarian society where women no longer fear male violence, where women are free to openly express their own libido and where social labor is cooperative and mostly voluntary, the question of “human nature” and the allegedly “uncontrollable male libido” seem

curiously antiquated. The early pioneer of psychoanalysis, Dr. Freud, mistakenly wrote the women suffered from “penis envy,” when it was the men who were suffering from the terror of the womb, from which they all came and the power of woman to give and sustain life.

---

[1] Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/opinion/harassment-employees-laws-.html?ref=todayspaper>

[2] Source: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/27/world/middleeast/saad-lamjarred-rape-accusation.-html?ref=todayspaper>

[3] [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/opinion/sunday/harassment-men-libido--masculinity.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fsunday&action=click&contentCollection=sunday&region=stream&module=stream\\_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=7&pgtype=sectionfront](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/25/opinion/sunday/harassment-men-libido--masculinity.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Fsunday&action=click&contentCollection=sunday&region=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=7&pgtype=sectionfront)

*Richard Greeman is a Marxist scholar long active in human rights, anti-war, anti-nuclear, environmental and labor struggles in the U.S., Latin America, France, and Russia. Greeman is best known for his studies and translations of the Franco-Russian novelist and revolutionary Victor Serge (1890–1947). Greeman also writes regularly about politics, international class struggles and revolutionary theory. Co-founder of the Praxis Research and Education Center in Moscow, Russia, and director of the International Victor Serge Foundation, Greeman splits his time between Montpellier, France and New York City.*

*Originally published by The Independent.*