International Women’s Day

Today is the 8th of March and like every year women all over the world celebrate **International Women’s Day**, celebrating their newly conquered independence, human rights and opportunities. Unfortunately, not all countries all over the world can celebrate freely, because there are still many places that relegate women and treat them as if they were “second choice humans”.

As two young women growing up in a patriarchal society, we would like to talk about great women who inspire us and many other girls and women. But first, a little history of this important day (which is not just made to buy flowers, sweets and go to male strippers parties).

International Women’s Day didn’t happen on March 8 until 1975, the International Women’s Year, when every communist country celebrated this day as a women’s day. The first countries to strike for women rights and independence have been the **United Kingdom** and the **United States**, both in turmoil. But the earliest Women’s Day observance happened in New York in 1909 suggested by **Theresa Malkiel** and organized the **Socialist Party of America**. The big fire at the Triangle factory is not the main reason this day is celebrated, it is one of the reasons, because it includes work safety rules that were non existent.

An **International Women’s Conference** was organized in August 1910 to precede the general meeting of the **Socialist Second International** in Copenhagen. Inspired in part by the American socialists, **Luise Zietz**, a German Socialist, proposed the establishment of an annual International Women’s Day and was supported by the socialist and later communist leader **Clara Zetkin**, who was supported by **Käte Duncker**. No date was though specified.



By Hochgeladen und Bearbeitet von –Nightflyer (talk) 21:58, 4 February 2011 (UTC) (Self-scanned), via Wikimedia Commons

In 1913 **Russian women** observed their first International Women's Day on the last Saturday in February, by the Julian calendar then used in Russia. In 1914, March 8 happened to be on a Sunday and so from that moment on it has been celebrated on that day. In 1917 on the Gregorian calendar, in the capital of the Empire, **Petrograd**, women textile workers started demonstrating, covering the whole city. They went on strike that day for "**Bread and Peace**" – demanding the end of World War I, which meant an end to food shortages, and the end of czarism. This marked the beginning of the Russian Revolution.



Sylvia Pankhurst being arrested

On March 8 1914 there was a march from Bow to Trafalgar Square in support of women's suffrage. **Sylvia Pankhurst**, an important British activist and communist, and daughter of the former **Emmeline Pankhurst**, another important activist and suffragette, was arrested in front of Charing Cross station on her way to speak in Trafalgar Square.

In 1975 the UN decided to establish the 8th of March as an **International Women's Day**, following the revolutions in the Soviet Nation and the Spanish Civil War. In 1977, the **United Nations General Assembly** invited member states to proclaim it as the UN Day for **women's rights and world peace**.

The suffragette movement is obviously the ancestor of the feminism movement, which is now called intersectional feminism. It is considered an extremist movement by men and some women too, but it's because people see the real extremist feminists who are not actually considered part of the movement, as they do not embrace the ideology that it pursues. Being a feminist in the 21st century is almost considered as being nazist or fascist, believing in the supremacy of women on men, but that is incorrect.

As **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** says, "*some people ask: "Why the word feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?" Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general—but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women.*"

It is useless saying that there are many great women throughout history who changed our world. Here are some of them.



Judith Slaying Holofernes (1611) – Artemisia Gentileschi

Artemisia Gentileschi's story is not well-know

n as it should be: introduced to painting in her father's atelier – the tuscan pain

ter **Orazio Gentileschi** -, she immediately developed a personal painting style

deeply inspired by **Caravaggio**'s dramatic use of light; her favorite subjects were rest

rong women. Today she is considered one of the most accomplished painters of the Ba

roque generation, overshadowing even male painters; in an era when women artist

were not easily accepted she became the first female member of the Accademia di Ar

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Florence Nightingale was a pioneer, practically inventing the nurse career**:** she transformed the traditional caretaker job into a modern professional figure. Her work was highly praised, above all during the Crimean War, where she organised the tending to wounded soldiers. Icon of the Victorian culture, she was called “The Lady with the Lamp”, checking the state of wounded soldiers at night.

Born in 1949, **Anna Lee Fisher** is an American chemist, emergency physician, and a former NASA astronaut**.** She is mother of two children, married to Bill Fisher, a fellow astronaut, and in 1984 she was the first “Mom in Space”. During her career, she has been involved with three major programs: the Space Shuttle, the International Space Station and the Orion project. She was the oldest active astronaut.

Before skateboarding was cool and not only a sport for delinquents, Ellen O’Neal changed everybody’s mind. She has been the first female pro skateboarder. Born and raised in Southern California, Ellen had only been skating for a year before she was sponsored by Gordon & Smith, Bennett Trucks, and Vans.



Ellen photographed by Jim Goodrich in the 1970s

Big Bang Theory teaches us that women can be “brains” too. But did you know that the thing you use everyday to connect to the Internet, the so-called Wi-Fi, has been invented by a beautiful actress? Well, not the actual Wi-Fi, but at the beginning of World War II, **Hedy Lamarr** and composer George

Antheil developed a radio guidance system for Allied torpedoes, which used spread spectrum and frequency hopping technology to defeat the threat of jamming by the Axis powers.[1] Although the US Navy did not adopt this technology until the 1960s, the principles are arguably incorporated into Bluetooth technology, and are similar to methods used in legacy versions of CDMA and Wi-Fi.[2]



Hedy Lamarr Publicity Photo for The Heavenly Body 1944, By Unknown – eBay, Public Domain

Books every feminist should read

My first choice is definitely ***I love Dick*** by Chris Kraus. After 20 years, her book becomes famous on international

scale, thanks to feminist influencers like Lena Dunham, Sheila Heti and many other women who have (re)discovered this autobiography. The reason of this new fame is to be found in the anti-heroine essence of the book. Chris is a normal woman, but her life is not perfect, it is actually a total mess, but through her book and her love for Dick, every woman can find herself. Just like young women can identify with the characters in the series *Girls.* Thanks to this new fame, there are many books being published that have been inspired by Chris, who has also written other books and made a film.

It is an obvious choice, but as a former literature student, I cannot forget about Virginia Woolf's ***A Room of One's Own.*** A necessary essay on women's access to education, on a probable sister of Shakespeare as the embodiment of female writers, lesbianism and the four Marys, who were hanged because they rejected motherhood. It is, together with *The Second Sex* by Simone Beauvoir and *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a book that every woman should have in her library. It is something you should pass on to your daughters.

To learn something more on black identity, I recommend Zadie Smith's ***On Beauty*****.** Her writing is wonderful and the book is so good it will be difficult to put it down. It has won the Anisfield-Wolf Book Award and the Orange Prize for Fiction in June 2006. With this novel she did an homage to *Howards End* by E.M. Forster (1910), which speaks about social conventions and codes in England. She wrote many other books, which I also recommend reading as she is a great writer.

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, while a lot of time has passed since the publication of this book (1963), Friedan's words are still a landmark in feminist treatise, adjectives barely do justice to how incredibly she captured the frustration of a generation who only apparently was accessing to the institutional realm; she analysed and described ***The problem that has no name***: radicalised beliefs, social-institutions that were undermining women's confidence in

their intellectual capabilities, just to keep them home. We must understand that this book was written in a time where most women had to marry: 60% of women students had to drop out of college to get married, Betty Friedan showed women that they could reclaim their lives.



Betty Friedan, c. orionpozo, Flickr – https://www.flickr.com/photos/orionpozo/

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, still quite an "old" book, yet it still resounds in me; this amazing pen is capable of wonders: de Beauvoir is willing to free women from their status of minority, obliged to see herself as the *Other from the man*, without having the chance to develop as a real *Other*. With her well-known vehemence she reviews the roles attributed by male society to women – bride, mother, prostitute – and its attributes – narcissistic, in love, mysticism -. The result is *la femme indépendante*, a woman who has the right to vote, but most-importantly freedom thanks to her economic independence and the possibility of self-realizing herself.



Jean Paul Sartre and Simone De Beauvoir welcomed by Avraham Shlonsky and Leah Goldberg

Films or TV series for the women

Needless to say, I will start with **Sofia Coppola** and one of my favourite films: ***The Virgin Suicides***, based on the novel by Jeffrey Eugenides. The theme of the film is not feminism or other social problems, but I think it’s one of Sofia’s best films. I also loved Marie Antoinette and Lost in Translation, but the colour palette and the acting of the girls just makes me dizzy everytime I watch it.



A TV series that everyone, especially women, should watch is **The Handmaid's Tale**, directed by Bruce Miller and based on the dystopia novel by the feminist Margaret Atwood. The story is dark and terrible, the future depicted is horrible. But both TV series and book explore the themes of women's submission and the way politics use their body and their sexual organs for their purpose.



Mulan, as silly as it may sound, is a cartoon that shaped my childhood: the story of this brave heroine who decides to take the place of her elderly father Fa Zhou – the only man in

their family and an injured army veteran – in the war against the Huns; she disguised herself as a man and proves to be nothing less than the rest of the army both physically and mentally, saving China thanks to her brilliance. Not only she does not need a prince – quite the opposite to the rest of Disney protagonists – but she saves him from certain death. It is a story of disobedience and on becoming who you really are.

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