



2016

2016-17 Women's Power, Women's Justice Annual Theme

Illinois Wesleyan University

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Women's Power, Women's Justice: 2016 Theme

In the spirit of collaboration and mutual support, a working group of faculty, students and staff members selected "Women's Power, Women's Justice" as a 2016-2017 intellectual theme that reflects faculty-led interest that we hope will permeate the campus community and conversations throughout the academic year.

In the United States today, women's contributions in a wide range of endeavors are both expected and celebrated. Women are leaders in politics and business with increasing numbers of women representatives, company leaders, and local officials. Women's creative work in the arts, entertainment and literature is garnering not just attention but also national and international awards. More women are attending college than ever before, more are receiving advanced degrees, and nearly 200,000 women are currently athletes in programs across the country. But these examples of success are relatively new, and equal justice for women has not always been found here and around the world.

Women represent over fifty percent of the world's population, which might suggest that women could easily achieve equality and the opportunity for equal representation in a democratic society. However, in the United States and all over the world, women's opportunities to lead self-directed and meaningful lives and make strong leadership contributions in their communities are challenged by cultural expectations, religious ideologies, and political restrictions.

In the United States, women and girls have fought to address these injustices for centuries, with a series of victories along the way, beginning with the first women's rights convention held in Seneca Falls in 1848 (with the signing of the Declaration of Sentiments), organized by the Quaker Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. At an 1851 women's rights convention in Ohio, Sojourner Truth, a freed slave and abolitionist, demanded the inclusion of black women in the call for women's rights. Women's struggle for their rights continued with the opening of the first birth control center in 1916 by Margaret



Women's Power, Women's Justice

As part of Illinois Wesleyan's strategic initiatives and commitment to a strong intellectual campus environment, we continue to enhance the use of intellectual themes in curricular and co-curricular programming. Ultimately, the goal is create an annual campus-wide theme that serves to frame engagement for the summer reading, convocations, the IWU course cluster, May term programming, and other collaborative efforts across campus. This year, the theme that's been selected is Women's Power, Women's Justice.

Sanger (leading to the founding of Planned Parenthood), the passing in 1920 of the 19th Amendment to the Constitution granting women the right to vote, the publication of the groundbreaking *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan in 1963, followed by the second and third waves of the feminist movement. By 2015, women found opportunities for equal pay with the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Restoration Act and increased presence in government, including Supreme Court justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan.

The articulation of women's power and women's justice may be seen in novels, sermons, political campaigns, legal rights work, and philosophical treatises, and all of these provide the opportunity to learn and change. When societies offer fairness and equality, women may find their power in education, job opportunities, caring relationships, and personal agency. Our failure to provide equality leaves women unable to choose their own life paths, work at satisfying jobs, receive fair compensation, address pressing healthcare needs, and care for themselves and their families adequately. This is the heart of the justice that women still seek: not anger against men or hate for social norms, but sharing and self-determination on their own terms. One of the first to explain these connections was Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, who wrote in 1792, "I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves" (*Vindication*, Ch. 4).

Much work remains to create the world we envision for ourselves and others. In the twenty-first century, women will--with the support of fair-minded men-- step up to take on the challenges that still remain and that newly confront them and work to institute equal rights and social justice in all of their roles.

The theme of "Women's Power, Women's Justice" invites us to cross, intersect, and transcend borderlands in the ways we think about others and ourselves by deconstructing notions of gender and identity. We invite all students, faculty, and staff to explore the concepts and realities of "Women's Power, Women's Justice" and we encourage you to think about how this theme can be a part of the programs that your department, class, or student organization may sponsor this year.



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