

2019

# Who was Jane Walker? Remembering Women's Activism

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## Publication Details

S. Crozier-De Rosa & V. Mackie 2019 Who was Jane Walker? Remembering Women's Activism Australian Women's History Network  
<http://www.auswhn.org.au/blog/jane-walker/>

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## **Abstract**

In April 2019, Time Magazine released its annual list of the '100 most influential people'. Alongside such leaders as US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, a surprising figure came in at number 101: Jane Walker.

## **Keywords**

jane, activism, women's, was, remembering, who, walker?

## **Disciplines**

Arts and Humanities | Law

## **Publication Details**

S. Crozier-De Rosa & V. Mackie 2019 Who was Jane Walker? Remembering Women's Activism Australian Women's History Network <http://www.auswhn.org.au/blog/jane-walker/>

Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie, 'Who is Jane Walker? Remembering Women's Activism' VIDA: Blog of the Australian Women's History Network, 5 June 2019: <http://www.auswhn.org.au/blog/jane-walker/>

## Who was Jane Walker? Remembering Women's Activism

*Sharon Crozier-De Rosa and Vera Mackie explore the complex interconnections between the history of women's activism and its memorialisation in the twenty-first century.*

In April 2019, *Time* Magazine released its annual list of the '[100 most influential people](#)'. Alongside such leaders as US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, a surprising figure came in at number 101: Jane Walker.

But who is Jane Walker? She is actually a fictional character, the name of a special brand of Johnnie Walker whisky for women that was released to mark International Women's Day in March 2018. It was made available throughout March, which is Women's History Month in the United States. The company [promised](#) that, for every bottle of Jane Walker whisky sold, they would donate one dollar to organizations championing women's causes – in 'recognition of the women in history who fought for progress'.

Jane was represented by the 'Striding Woman' icon, accompanied by the slogan 'With Every Step we all Move Forward' and the hashtag #WalkwithJane.

This is just one example of a recent trend for corporations to link their brand names with feminism. It also provides an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which feminist movements have been remembered, as well as on what this tells us about the gendering of history and memory.

While we were completing our monograph, [Remembering Women's Activism](#), we were riveted by the Women's March in Washington in January 2017, and its many global offshoots. The momentum continued as International Women's Day approached in March that year. This has been repeated each year since. The Hollywood-based #MeToo movement against sexual violence then started in late 2017, soon becoming entangled with these other feminist campaigns and commemorations.

As we tracked the reporting of these events, it felt like we could see history in the making. If we had simply followed what was being documented in the day-to-day media reporting on Facebook, Twitter, and other media feeds, though, it would have been easy to see novelty where there were, in fact, precedents. Even where precedents like the women's suffrage movement or International Women's Day were acknowledged, this was done with varying degrees of accuracy, as we shall see below.

A longer span of history was necessary in order to fully interpret these current events.

## WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

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On 21 January 2017, an estimated five million people participated in nearly 700 Women's Marches worldwide. They were responding to a call to action by women in the United States, who proposed a Women's March on Washington.

It was first proposed in November 2016 after Donald J. Trump defeated Hillary Rodham Clinton in the US presidential election. Organisers declared that the Women's March would 'send a bold message to our new administration on their first day in office, and to the world, that [women's rights are human rights](#)'.

This phrase, 'Women's Rights are Human Rights,' was widely attributed to Clinton herself, who had embraced the slogan in her address at the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995.

The slogan did not, however, originate with Clinton. It was first used by Chilean jurist Cecilia Medina in a 1985 [article](#) on 'Women's Rights as Human Rights' in Latin American countries. The phrase appeared again in an [influential article](#) by Charlotte Bunch, published in *Human Rights Quarterly* in November 1990. Bunch, in turn, credited the Filipino feminist coalition GABRIELA with using the phrase at an Amnesty International Regional Conference.

In the decade between the Third United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and the Beijing Conference in 1995, activists had been engaged in campaigns to highlight issues which concerned women. Some of these campaigns revolved around the 1993 United Nations Conference on Human Rights in Vienna. The use of the slogan 'Women's Rights are Human Rights' was the culmination of their campaigns.

But, by the 2010s, the fruits of years of feminist campaigning were in danger of being reduced to a slogan tied to one well-known individual.

## DID #METOO START IN HOLLYWOOD?

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In October 2017, [The New York Times](#) and [The New Yorker](#) reported that dozens of women had made allegations of rape, sexual assault, and sexual abuse against Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein. After these revelations, women started using the hashtag #MeToo to articulate their widespread experiences of sexual harassment, sexual abuse and sexual assault.

What had apparently started in the entertainment industry spread to the worlds of fashion, beauty, politics, and the church. In the succeeding year, at least 200 influential men were [sacked](#) for allegations of sexual harassment. The hashtag

#MeToo also featured in the second Women's March on Washington in January 2018. One year after the allegations about Weinstein, people were [talking about](#) the 'first anniversary' of #MeToo. This featured on the cover of [The Economist](#), with the tagline: 'A movement sparked by an alleged rapist could be the most powerful force for equality since women's suffrage'.

Actor Alyssa Milano was widely credited with spreading #MeToo across 2017. But this hashtag actually had a longer history, as acknowledged by Milano herself.

The #MeToo hashtag was first used by social activist and community organiser Tarana Burke as far back as 2006, when she was working with survivors of sexual violence. In a recent TEDX talk, Burke [explained](#) that 'the work of the #metoo movement was to teach survivors that it is OK to share their experiences and to raise public awareness'. #MeToo was not a new hashtag. But it was certainly given far greater global prominence in this recent iteration via social media, among celebrities and non-celebrities who came together to protest the abuse of power by prominent men.

## HILLARY CLINTON'S WHITE SUIT

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At various junctures in the movements associated with the Women's Marches and #MeToo, supporters rallied to make political statements through their choice of dress. Sometimes they chose black, the colour of mourning in many Anglophone and European cultures, and sometimes they chose white as the colour of purity.

Those attending Trump's 2018 State of the Union address were enjoined to wear black. At the [Golden Globe Awards Ceremony](#) that year, women and some of their male supporters also wore black in solidarity with the #MeToo movement. Many brought activists to the award celebrations as their 'plus one'.

Actor Michelle Williams was accompanied by Tarana Burke as her guest. Williams was quoted in [The Washington Post](#) as saying:

*Really the most exciting thing is, I thought that I would have to raise my daughter to learn how to protect herself in a dangerous world and I think because of the work that Tarana Burke ... has done and the work that I am learning how to do, we actually have the opportunity to hand our children a different world. So, I am moved beyond measure to be standing next to this woman. Tears in my eyes, smile on my face.*

This brought the recent iteration of the #MeToo movement together with Burke's pioneering work. Burke will share the 2019 [Sydney Peace Prize](#) with Australian journalist Tracey Spicer for their contributions to the #MeToo movement.

At the 2018 Grammy Awards, guests were enjoined to wear white roses because, they were told, 'white stands for hope, peace, sympathy and resistance'. The singer,

Kesha, was surrounded on the stage by women wearing white clothes, described as [suffragette white](#).

This sartorial protest movement culminated in choices made at the 2019 State of the Union address, where US Speaker Nancy Pelosi and many of the record number of newly-elected female representatives wore white suits. Rather than the chamber being largely populated with men in sombre colors, over one hundred female representatives clustered together in their white suits, making a [stunning visual statement](#).

Hillary Clinton also wore a [white suit](#) at various important occasions in her career – for her acceptance speech at the Democratic Convention in 2016, where her presidential candidacy was confirmed; at her last debate with Donald Trump; again at Trump’s presidential inauguration; and once again in 2017, at Trump’s first speech to the House and the Senate.

Other female politicians in the United States had previously worn white on important occasions. In 1972, Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005) – the first African-American woman elected to Congress in 1968 – wore white to [announce](#) her Presidential campaign. Geraldine Ferraro (1935–2011) also [wore white](#) for her acceptance speech for her Vice-Presidential campaign nomination at the 1984 Democratic National Convention.

In 2019, the youngest woman in history to be elected to the US Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, [wore white](#) to her swearing-in ceremony. Afterwards, she [explained](#) that she wore white to honour the women who paved the way for her, from the woman suffrage movement to Shirley Chisholm. Wearing white was widely recognised as a reference to the movement for women’s enfranchisement.

## THE WOMEN’S MARCH OF 1913

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Wearing white clothing as a political statement has a longer history. British suffragettes wore white dresses with white, green and purple sashes. This was part of the suffrage movement’s attention to the politics of the [spectacle](#). White represented [purity](#) and allowed the suffragists to present themselves as ‘respectable’ women. Suffragists were encouraged to wear white for large-scale events like rallies and marches. The result was that they looked coordinated and unified.

In the United States, too, suffragists were enjoined to wear white. While British suffragettes wore white, green and purple, suffragists in the United States wore sashes in gold and purple with white.

On 3 March 1913, the eve of the inauguration of Woodrow Wilson, more than 5,000 women marched on Washington, D.C., forming an early precedent for the 2017 Women’s March just over a century later.

In 1913, half a million spectators lined the streets as women clothed in white marched, bearing placards and banners. The march was led by suffragist, lawyer, journalist, labour activist, and renowned 'beauty' Inez Milholland (1886-1916), who wore a long white cape astride a large white horse. Her striking poise and beauty acted as a rebuke to those who caricatured feminists as unfeminine, unsightly and lacking respectability.

## ELIZABETH ARDEN'S LIPSTICK

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Hollywood celebrities as well as the entertainment and beauty industries responded to the #MeToo movement by developing the #TimesUp slogan.

One of the spokespersons for #TimesUp was actor and producer Reese Witherspoon, who had also been photographed wearing black at the Golden Globes. Witherspoon was quoted as [saying](#):

*It just became clear that with all of the news that's been coming out that it couldn't just be business as normal. We wanted to stand up and do something for all people to say time's up on discrimination, harassment and abuse in the work place.*

A major cosmetics company, the Elizabeth Arden Corporation, [established](#) a campaign with Witherspoon in partnership with Unifem, the United Nations women's organisation. Witherspoon was described as the company's 'Storyteller in Chief' and the campaign used the slogan 'March On'. A special red lipstick was launched around International Women's Day 2018, with proceeds going to charity. The campaign was repeated in 2019 with a new shade of lipstick, [Pink Punch](#), 'a pink that makes a powerful statement'.



‘MARCH ON: INSPIRED BY OUR HISTORY. EMPOWERING WOMEN TODAY.’  
IMAGE VIA ELIZABETH ARDEN.

Recent movements were thus brought together with the history of the woman suffrage movement in the United States. It was reported that Elizabeth Arden (1878-1966, real name Florence Nightingale Graham) had been a staunch supporter of women’s enfranchisement. Some articles reported that Arden had distributed lipsticks at suffragist marches.

We have been unable to find any evidence to verify the lipstick story, but Arden’s support for the woman suffrage movement is [well-documented](#). The use of International Women’s Day and the invocation of feminism in corporate campaigns has been growing in recent years.

## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY

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International Women’s Day was established in the early twentieth century and revived in the mid-twentieth century, although its origins are [contested](#). This day, 8 March, often provides a convenient framework for [announcements](#) related to gender equity.

In Australia, too, businesses and charities are increasingly using anniversaries such as International Women’s Day in their [sales pitches](#). On a recent walk through our local shopping centre in Wollongong in New South Wales, for example, we noticed such chain stores as Dymocks Books, the Sussan women’s clothing store, the Lorna Jane activewear store and the Supré young women’s fashion store gesturing towards an acknowledgment of International Women’s Day.

This is the context for the Diageo (Johnnie Walker) corporation's invocation of International Women's Day and the international movement for women's suffrage.

Pam Elam, President of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Statue Fund and its [Monumental Women Campaign](#), which partnered with Johnnie Walker from 2018, commented that:

*Johnnie Walker is an iconic whisky brand with a mission to promote the spirit of progress. Monumental Women is an organization dedicated to bringing greater representations of women to public spaces. When Johnnie Walker approached Monumental Women to partner on the introduction of Jane Walker, we were excited to learn our missions aligned.*

*In challenging times like these, Jane Walker represents a step in the right direction. Jane Walker is a brand icon celebrating the many achievements of women and those on the shared journey toward gender equality and equal representation.*

What this celebratory pairing ignores is the importance of the influential women's temperance movement in the eventual granting of women's suffrage. Early-twenty-first century collaborations between the feminist movement and the liquor industry also elide the earlier [tension](#) between women's concerted efforts to limit or ban alcohol and the liquor industry's determination to oppose the woman vote in order to reduce the power of the temperance campaign.

Nevertheless, Diageo continues to associate itself with progressive causes. This global alcoholic beverage corporation also owns the Australian brand Bundaberg Rum, and has recently [announced](#) a progressive parenting leave scheme for its Australian employees.

## WHY ARE THERE NO REAL WOMEN IN CENTRAL PARK?

The Monumental Women campaign has been successful. In 2020, a statue dedicated to early American suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902) and Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) will be erected in Central Park, New York, to mark the centenary of women's suffrage in the United States. At present, there are existing statues of Stanton and Anthony elsewhere, including the 'When Anthony Met Stanton' sculpture in Seneca Falls, in upstate New York.



‘WHEN ANTHONY MET STANTON’ SCULPTURE, SENECA FALLS, JULY 2015.  
PHOTOGRAPH BY SHARON CROZIER-DE ROSA.

The new statue will join 22 statues of historical figures in Central Park, all of which are male. Currently, females are represented only by a bronze Mother Goose, Alice in Wonderland, and Shakespeare’s Juliet. Yet, as successful as the Monumental Women campaign has been, it is not without controversy.

Early in 2019, *The New York Times* asked in an [article](#), ‘Is a Planned Monument to Women’s Rights Racist?’ The maquette of the statue that was initially proposed depicted Anthony and Stanton unfolding a scroll between them that listed the names of 22 other women who were significant in the suffrage movement. Included among these names were African American women, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), Ida B. Wells (1862-1931), and Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954).

Critics pointed out that it appeared as if these black women had been relegated to the footnotes of history.

The model has since been amended to omit the scroll. Truth, Wells, and Terrell – ‘towering figures in the history of American social activism’ – are still not to receive statues of their own in this configuration. In the 1913 women’s march on Washington, its white organisers had forced African American women to congregate at the tail of the march. Instead of rectifying the racialised biases of the white women’s movement, the proposed new monument is seen by [some](#) to recapitulate the marginalisation that black women experienced in the suffrage movement.

## CONCLUSION

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While documenting recent feminist activities, we uncovered a complicated history of remembering women's activism.

In some cases, media outlets overlooked past campaigns when reporting on new ones. The effect was that the historical precedents for current activism were forgotten. In other cases, precedents were acknowledged but they were attributed with varying degrees of accuracy. In other efforts to acknowledge historical precedents, like the woman suffrage movement in the United States, past inequities were reproduced and racialised biases were replicated.

All of this reinforces the need, not only for feminist campaigns to work to document their own movements so that their efforts do not fall prey to historical amnesia, but also for the long, intersecting histories of women's activism to be readily available for the media – and for feminists – to refer to. That way, future feminists will know the complex stories of those who came before them, from the suffragettes to Hillary Clinton and from temperance activists to Jane Walker.



*[Sharon Crozier-De Rosa](#) and [Vera Mackie](#), from the School of Humanities and Social Inquiry at the University of Wollongong, are the authors of [Remembering Women's Activism](#) (Routledge 2019).*

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