John Stuart Mill

By Natan and Julie
Biography: John Stuart Mill (May 20, 1806 - May 8, 1873)

- English philosopher, political economist, and civil servant
- Member of the liberal party and played a large part in the First Wave
- Famous for writing *The Subjection of Women* with his wife, Harriet Taylor Mill

Three major parts of women’s lives are hindering them:

1. Society and gender construction
2. Lack of education
3. Marriage
Context of the Era

- Second Great Awakening (1800-1820)
  - Large Religious Influence
  - Universal Suffrage Movements
- Industrial Revolution (1820-1840)
  - New Markets
  - Need for employment
- Western Expansion
  - New occupations
  - Political Tensions
Chapter 1: The question can be raised

**WOMEN:**
- submissive, under the power of their husbands
- purpose of life is to serve others
- devote one’s life to husband and children

**MEN:**
- self governing
- pursue their own interests
- devote one’s life to projects outside of home i.e. work
What started women’s subordination to men?

1. Physical dominance
2. History of slavery

First Wave Feminism:

1840: World Anti-Slavery convention

1848: Women’s Rights conference in Seneca Falls NY

1850s: alliance between women’s rights and abolitionist movements in United States

“The principle that regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong itself, and is now one of the chief obstacles to human improvement; and it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality that doesn’t allow any power or privilege on one side or disability on the other.” - John Stuart Mill
“But, it will be said, the rule of men over women differs from all these others in not being a rule of force; it is accepted voluntarily; women make no complaint and are consenting parties to it” (75)

“No enslaved class ever asked for complete liberty at once”
- John Stuart Mill

Mirrors later Feminist movement stages!

Freedom for heterosexual females → then freedom for bisexual/lesbian females → then freedom for transgender females/males → then freedom for nonconforming genders

...Freedom in stages
Chapter 2: The laws governing marriage

Marriage is:

- “the destination assigned to women by society”
- “the prospect they are brought up to”
- “the objective they are intended to pursue”

“hardly any slave . . . is a slave at all hours and all minutes.”
Chapter 3: Occupations for Women Outside Marriage

- Lack of education = Low skilled jobs
  - Domestic Work
  - Textile Jobs
  - Childcare
- Assumptions:
  - Changeable, too intensely under the influence of the moment, uneven and uncertain in their command of their faculties.
- Women have low skilled jobs because they are tied to these assumptions.

Women can hold leadership positions:

“The wives and sisters of monarchs, when they are called on, are found to be as competent as the monarchs themselves in the business of royalty. There is no reason in the nature of things why this shouldn’t also be true”
Chapter 4: What Good Would Reform Do?

Moral Reasons:
- Wrong in the eyes of God
- Justice: each person’s respect for the rights of every other person
- Prudence: each person’s ability to take care of himself.

Doubling the Brain Pool:
- Opening up a different perspective
- Creating new occupations

Freedom:
- Basic human right to have freedom.
- Freedom from subjection
Compared to Mary Wollstonecraft....

Wollstonecraft:

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)

Religious Movements (Enlightenment Writer)

Believed in education for women

Temperance Movement

Mill:

The Subjection of Women

Inspired by enlightenment ideals (Second Great Awakening writer)

Believed freedom came with education

Temperance Movement

*Both believed in (Universal suffrage Movements)*
“Give women the free use of their faculties, leave them the free choice of their employments, and open to them the same field of occupation and the same prizes and encouragements as to other human beings to double the mass of mental faculties available for the higher service of humanity”

- John Stuart Mill (Freedman, *The Essential Feminist Reader*, 83)
Questions for you:

Mill focuses on the betterment of the future in this quote. How do you think the current feminist movement is different and/or similar to Mill’s argument for equality? Do we focus on the past more than the future? If so, is one way of thinking better than the other?

How important was the influence of religion in promoting women rights? Does religion tie into abolition and the feminist movement, or one more than the other?