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Tarana Burke: Amplifying Voices in the Fourth Wave of Feminism

The Fourth Wave of Feminism, which began in the 2010s, took activism to a whole new level. This generation of feminists didn't just protest in the streets—they spoke up online, using social media to unite voices across the world. This wave focuses on inclusion, intersectionality, and giving power back to survivors of sexual violence. One woman who truly defines this era is **Tarana Burke**, the founder of the *#MeToo* movement. Her story isn't about fame or viral moments—it's about empathy, healing, and building community for those who've been silenced. Through her movement, Burke showed the world that feminism in the digital age can be both personal and global.

Tarana Burke was born on September 12, 1973, in The Bronx, New York. Growing up, she saw firsthand how issues like race, gender, and class could shape people's lives. She also experienced sexual violence at a young age, which deeply impacted how she saw the world (Burke, *Unbound*). Instead of letting her pain define her, Burke used it to help others. Her mother was very involved in community work, and that inspired Tarana to do the same. When she attended Auburn University, she started mentoring young girls and volunteering for youth programs. Those experiences pushed her to think about how to create safe spaces for Black girls to be heard, supported, and believed.

In 2006, Burke started a nonprofit called **Just Be Inc.**, which focused on teaching young Black girls about self-worth and self-love. Around this same time, she created the phrase "*Me Too*." It started as a simple way to tell survivors of sexual assault that they weren't alone. At first, it was just a small community-based effort, not something meant to trend online. But the message was powerful—"me too" became a form of emotional connection and shared strength. Burke said the phrase was meant to "empower through empathy," reminding people that healing starts when we realize we're not isolated in our pain (Burke, *Unbound*).

Fast forward to 2017—Hollywood actress **Alyssa Milano** posted "*#MeToo*" on Twitter after sexual abuse allegations surfaced against movie producer Harvey Weinstein. Within hours, millions of women shared their own stories. What many people didn't realize at first was that the phrase came from Tarana Burke over a decade earlier. Once Burke's name resurfaced, her original message finally got the recognition it deserved. This moment showed how the internet can take a grassroots idea and make it global. Through digital activism, the *#MeToo* movement

became the face of the Fourth Wave of Feminism—using technology to unite women, call out injustice, and push for real accountability (Parker).

What made Tarana Burke stand out was how she stayed true to her original message: *#MeToo* wasn't just about exposing abusers, it was about helping survivors heal. She made it clear that the movement was rooted in compassion, not revenge. Burke also made sure that the movement included all women—not just those with fame and privilege. She reminded the world that women of color, low-income women, and LGBTQ+ women experience sexual violence too, but their stories often get ignored. Her work highlighted what scholar **bell hooks** called *intersectionality*—understanding how systems of oppression overlap. By centering those often left out of feminist conversations, Burke helped redefine what modern feminism looks like.

Burke also partnered with organizations like **Girls for Gender Equity (GGE)**, where she worked to create programs and resources for survivors, especially young Black girls. Her leadership brought real change—not just in online conversations but also in workplaces and laws. After *#MeToo* went viral, many companies revised their harassment policies, and governments began reevaluating how they handle sexual assault cases. In 2017, *TIME* magazine named Tarana Burke one of the “**Silence Breakers**,” recognizing her for sparking one of the most powerful movements of the 21st century.

In her memoir *Unbound*, Burke talks about how storytelling became a form of activism and self-healing. She explains that sharing your truth can be both painful and freeing. Her story connects with women everywhere who have ever felt unseen or unheard. Burke's leadership reminds us that feminism isn't only about fighting—it's also about caring for one another, listening, and creating spaces where everyone feels safe.

The legacy Tarana Burke leaves behind is massive. She took something deeply personal and turned it into a worldwide movement for justice and healing. Her work embodies everything the Fourth Wave stands for—digital connection, inclusivity, and collective strength. Burke encourages 21st-century women to speak up, support each other, and never underestimate the power of their voices. She's proof that you don't need a huge platform to make change; you just need compassion, courage, and consistency.

In the end, Tarana Burke's impact connects the past and present of feminism. She carries the same fire that women like **Sojourner Truth**, **Mary Church Terrell**, and **bell hooks** had, but brings it into the modern world. The *#MeToo* movement isn't just a hashtag—it's a continuation of generations of women demanding respect and equality. Burke's message is timeless: healing and activism can coexist. She reminds us that every “me too” is an act of

strength, and when women stand together, change always follows.

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