

THE
STAR
WARS
TOOLKIT

**EPISODE I:
WOMEN IN POLITICS AND
RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS**

FANDOM FORWARD >

Fandom Forward is an international non-profit that turns fans into heroes by making activism accessible through the power of story. This toolkit provides resources for fans of Pokémon to think more deeply about the social issues represented in the story and take action in our own world.

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#FFToolkit

@FandomForward

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
FACILITATOR TIPS	5
REPRESENTATION.....	6
WOMEN IN POLITICS.....	12
WOMEN IN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS.....	15
OBSTACLES WOMEN FACE.....	20
TALK IT OUT.....	22
TAKE ACTION	23
RESOURCES.....	24

Note on citations: Throughout the toolkit, we'll use the following format to cite specific films:

- The Phantom Menace: TPM
- Attack of the Clones: AOTC
- Revenge of the Sith: ROTS
- Rogue One: RO
- A New Hope: ANH
- The Empire Strikes Back: TESB
- Return of the Jedi: ROTJ
- The Force Awakens: TFA
- The Last Jedi: TLJ

All other media cited in text or in Resources section.

Thus, A New Hope will be cited as [ANH]. You can find a full list of recommended media in the Resources section.

INTRODUCTION

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away..

The contributions of women go unappreciated and unremembered. While their efforts undoubtedly change the course of history, for better and worse, the majority of planet Earth lives wholly unaware of their contributions.

Thousands of years of systematic oppression have gone by with frighteningly little advancement to respecting and supporting the women who are leaders in politics and resistance movements. The planet and the galaxy, are subsequently hurt by the destructive force of gendered oppression.

However, many movements have made it their mission to combat this widespread destruction. It is our mission to highlight the individuals, movements, and organizations who work tirelessly to create a more balanced, fair world ..

This Fandom Forward toolkit is a guide to using Star Wars as a way to further explore social justice. In this toolkit, we'll be discussing women in politics and resistance movements. We encourage you to share what's in this toolkit with your friends, family, and community. Each section ends with discussion questions (Talk it Out) and action items (Take Action) so you can turn your love of Star Wars into positive social or political change. We are mostly using the Star Wars films as references and points of entry, but other Star Wars media may be incidentally referenced.

FACILITATOR TIPS

You are welcome to use this toolkit on your own time, but if you plan on working through the toolkit with a group, it's important to keep some things in mind that we hope will make it a better experience for everyone.

1. Support Each Other

You never know what a particular subject may mean to someone personally or how a discussion may impact them. A great way to start is to set some guidelines as a group for what is and is not acceptable in your circle. If things start to get too uncomfortable, don't be afraid to end a line of discussion or steer it to another topic. Remember that not all of us are ready to go on this kind of journey – make sure you let your group know they'll be participating in a discussion or action beforehand so that everyone can choose whether or not to participate.

2. Listen to Each Other

Every member of your group has a unique viewpoint and things to share. These subjects are complicated, and different viewpoints are okay – take time to listen, let everyone speak, and challenge each other without devaluing each other or resorting to personal attacks.

3. Think First

It's important to discuss these subjects before immediately taking action. Use the Talk it Out sections to think more deeply about the subjects at hand before deciding how you want to tackle them.

4. Don't Jump to Conclusions

Don't assume you know everything about a subject, even if you feel knowledgeable about it already. If you have anyone in your group whose identity or lived experiences are impacted by a subject that does not directly impact you, consider asking them ahead of time if they would feel comfortable contributing to or even leading the discussion. This way, you know in advance whether or not they want to be called upon to share those experiences with the group.

5. Take Action

When you and your team feel ready to jump in, use the Take Action suggestions to get started. If your team comes up with a different idea, that's awesome – don't be afraid to get creative!

6. Keep Learning

We've only begun to scratch the surface – these subjects are highly complex and constantly evolving. Take what you learn from this kit and continue to educate yourself.

7. Need Backup?

That's okay, there's a whole team of volunteers ready to help. Just send us an email at info@fandomforward.org – we're happy to answer questions or help you with facilitation or action items.

8. All Characters Are Flawed

We've done our best to represent the issues in this toolkit as accurately as possible, but because these subjects are so complex, there are bound to be things we missed or things you have different views on. If you find factual errors in this toolkit, please let us know!

REPRESENTATION

When we begin looking at subjects in a story, we always begin with talking about representation - how well is this story representing the true diversity of our world? Star Wars is a vast, ever-expanding fandom with both positive and negative examples of representation. In this section, we will only cover a few, but we encourage you to continue the conversation online with #SWRepMatters.

THE WOMEN OF STAR WARS

While *Star Wars* was, and often still is, viewed as a “boy’s club,” women have always been a part of the production and fandom. Here are a few of the women who helped create the *Star Wars* universe.

BEHIND THE SCENES



Leigh Brackett

Leigh Brackett is the only woman who is credited with writing or directing a *Star Wars* film. Brackett wrote the original screenplay for *TESB*, though she died before the film was shot. Before working on *Star Wars*, she was an accomplished science fiction writer.

Marcia Lucas

Marcia Lucas won the Academy Award for Best Editing for her work on *ANH*. She was married to George Lucas at the time and heavily influenced the final creative direction of the original trilogy.

Gloria Katz

Gloria Katz and her husband Willard Huyck were asked by George Lucas to help improve the dialogue and characterization in *ANH*. Huyck and Katz wrote **approximately 30% of the dialogue** in *ANH* and helped develop the iconic humor of *Star Wars*. Katz is often credited as being integral to Leia’s character and witty lines.

LEIGH BRACKETT

“I don’t know who you are, or where you came from, but from now on, you do as I tell you.”

- LEIA ORGANA

Carrie Fisher

Carrie Fisher’s impact on *Star Wars* can’t really be quantified. While most know her as playing the iconic role of Princess/General Leia, she also had a major impact on the production of the films. Fisher worked as a **script doctor** for the original trilogy (often rewriting dialogue on set), the prequels, and *The Last Jedi*.

Victoria Mahoney

Victoria Mahoney is the first woman of color to hold a major role in the production of *Star Wars* as the second-unit director on *Star Wars: Episode IX*. Mahoney has directed episodes of *Queen Sugar*, *Gypsy*, and *Seven Seconds*.



CARRIE FISHER

ON SCREEN

Women have also been, and continue to be, outnumbered by men in on-screen roles. Vulture magazine compiled a [video](#) of “every line spoken by a woman not named Leia in the original *Star Wars* trilogy” and it only adds up to 63 seconds. The series total runtime is 386 minutes. That’s a pretty big gap.

Carrie Fisher, who played Leia Organa, definitely had the most lines of any woman in the original trilogy; however, she still faced a lot of sexism and objectification. Fisher was very honest and critical of many of the sexist aspects of *Star Wars* and her character’s wardrobe. In a 2015 interview with The Wall Street Journal, Carrie Fisher gave an [iconic response](#) to whether or not toys should be made of Leia in her *ROTJ* bikini:

“The father who flipped out about it, ‘What am I going to tell my kid about why she’s in that outfit?’ Tell them that a giant slug captured me and forced me to wear that stupid outfit, and then I killed him because I didn’t like it. And then I took it off. Backstage.”

Similarly, in her memoir *Wishful Drinking*, Fisher recalls how she was informed that she would not be allowed to wear a bra under her dress while filming *ANH*:

George comes up to me the first day of filming and he takes one look at the dress and says, “You can’t wear a bra under that dress.”
So, I say, “Okay, I’ll bite. Why?”
And he says, “Because... there’s no underwear in space.”

I promise you this is true, and he says it with such conviction too! Like he had been to space and looked around and he didn’t see any bras or panties or briefs anywhere.

What happens is you go to space and you become weightless. So far so good, right? But then your body expands??? But your bra doesn’t — so you get strangled by your own bra.

[...]

Now I think that this would make for a fantastic obit — so I tell my younger friends that no matter how I go, I want it reported that I drowned in moonlight, strangled by my own bra.

- CARRIE FISHER, [Wishful Drinking](#)



In typical Carrie Fisher fashion, in both instances, she made the discussion less about her body and more about the men (both on screen and in real life) who forced her into objectifying outfits.

And while the roles for women in *Star Wars* have increased since the original and prequel trilogies, there is still a long way to go. White men still have the **majority of dialogue** in the films.

It's important to recognize that there are no canon transgender characters in *Star Wars*. This obviously doesn't reflect the diversity on Earth or in the world of *Star Wars*. According to a 2016 **study** by The Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law, approximately **1.4 million individuals** in the United States identify as transgender. Another **study** published by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 2019 found that "nearly 2 percent of high school students identify as transgender, and 35 percent of these trans students have attempted suicide in the past year." Having positive representation of trans characters is more than important.

According to Sarah Kate Ellis, President and CEO of GLAAD:

“**As LGBTQ acceptance in government and the broader American culture reverses course, television is a critical home for LGBTQ stories and representation matters more than ever. At a time when the Trump administration is trying to render LGBTQ people invisible, representing LGBTQ people in all of our diversity in scripted TV programs is an essential counterbalance that gives LGBTQ people stories to relate to and moves the broader public to support LGBTQ people and families.**

- (SOURCE)

As you read through this toolkit, please keep in mind that “women” includes all women, including transgender, nonbinary, and cisgender women.

RACIAL REPRESENTATION



LANDO CALRISSIAN

***Star Wars* takes place in a galaxy far, far away; however, white folks still dominate the narrative both on and off screen, and *Star Wars* continues to reinforce racism on screen in other ways.**

Star Wars's unintentional use of **tropes**, for instance, contributes to this problem. Tropes are conceptual figures of speech – storytelling shorthand for concepts that the audience will recognize and understand instantly – to exemplify storylines or problems, and while tropes aren't always harmful, they

often strengthen harmful ideas.

For example, *Star Wars* has used the **Humans Are White** trope throughout its history. This trope is pretty self-explanatory – in the *Star Wars* universe, the vast majority of humans are white. There are more green and blue aliens than there are people of color. This trope not only negatively impacts fans of color who want and deserve to see themselves represented on screen – it also limits the roles for non-white actors.

In the original trilogy, there are only two Black characters – Lando Calrissian and Grizz Frix, an X-wing pilot who dies in *ROTJ*. And while the talented James Earl Jones voiced Darth Vader, he isn't shown on screen.



BODHI ROOK



ROSE TICO AND FINN

The prequel trilogy added only a few more characters of color, such as Mace Windu and Captain Panaka, played by Samuel L. Jackson and Hugh Quarshie.

Thankfully, the sequel trilogy and spin-off films like *RO* have featured actors of color in major roles. In the sequel trilogy, **John Boyega** plays Finn, a reformed stormtrooper. **Oscar Isaac** plays Poe Dameron, a Resistance pilot. **Kelly Marie Tran** plays Rose Tico, a member of the Resistance. For many fans, seeing Black, Vietnamese-American, and Latinx actors in *Star Wars* is incredibly affirming.

EXCLUSIONARY FAN CULTURE

Although the *Star Wars* fandom has been portrayed as an all-male fandom in pop culture, the reality is that women and nonbinary people have always been involved.



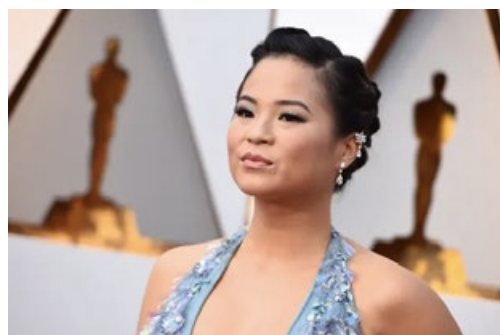
Looking For Leia is a six-episode docu-series that explores the *Star Wars* phenomenon from the perspective of “fangirls,” women and girls who connect deeply to the galaxy far, far away. The series is helmed by **Annalise Ophelian**, a San Francisco-based documentary filmmaker and psychologist.

Looking for Leia shatters the mainstream notion that women don’t like *Star Wars* or haven’t been involved in fandom culture until recently. It also looks at the roots and effects of sexism in fandom. In an **interview** with the Verge, Ophelian said, “The perception of male dominance in fandom is, I think, accurate, and a reflection of how sexism functions in the world.”

The docu-series also explores further intersections of identity and fandom. In an **interview** with Syfy, Ophelian said, “I’m interested in talking with women of color, because I want to know what’s been their experience of fandom. And that’s going to mean not limited to white women, limited to cis women. Not limited to women 18-35, or able-bodied. Not limited to women in the United States. That’s a really narrow group, and I’ve got to have a broader lens, because I think you actually get a much truer representation of what we mean by women, which is actually a hugely diverse category. Which is not a monolith for a homogeneous category in the least.”

Exclusionary fan culture also affects the people involved in making *Star Wars*: Kelly Marie Tran, who plays Rose Tico, left social media due to harassment.

In her **essay** for The New York Times, Tran wrote about how racist and sexist abuse online re-instilled the narrative she was taught her whole life — that women of color aren’t heroes:



KELLY MARIE TRAN

“Because the same society that taught some people they were heroes, saviors, inheritors of the Manifest Destiny ideal, taught me I existed only in the background of their stories, doing their nails, diagnosing their illnesses, supporting their love interests, and - perhaps the most damaging — waiting for them to rescue me. And for a long time, I believed them.”

AN INTERVIEW WITH #SWREPMATTERS



The [#SWRepMatters](#) (Star Wars Representation Matters) movement works to bring fans of Star Wars together to talk about representation. Join the conversation on Twitter using the [#SWRepMatters](#) hashtag.

Why did you start #SWRepMatters?

“I started it because I had been having these conversations with fellow fans in the Star Wars Twitter community, and we wanted those conversations to reach further than our own circles. With a hashtag, more people can join in, it can be tracked, and you can help inform people or change people’s minds. There’s a lot of disparate communities talking about representation, and we realized a lot of people have opinions about it.” - Klaudia Amenabar, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@kaludiasays)

“We started #SWRepMatters because we wanted to bring issues of diversity and inclusion to fandom and Star Wars as a whole. We want to have people who may have felt unwilling to have this discussion understand why it is so important. Diversity or inclusion is not a checklist - it’s a state of being where anyone from any group can easily see themselves represented, both in front of and behind the scenes... With this campaign, we hope that Lucasfilm will commit to further diverse hiring practices and more pointedly have far more creatives of color, women, LGBTQIA people, and other marginalized people behind the scenes creating stories in a galaxy far, far away.” - Swara Salih, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@swarzseawalker)

Why is it important to you to talk about representation in Star Wars?

“For me, personally, I think Star Wars sits in an incredibly unique position in media, in that it is

one of the most recognizable and bankable mass-media franchises in the world. If something that makes as much money and has as big a reach as Star Wars can do the right thing, then other brands and storytellers will follow their lead.” - Klaudia Amenabar, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@kaludiasays)

“I’m a white, straight man. In fact, when people think of your stereotypical demographic for Star Wars fans, I pretty much fit the bill. It’s important for me because I have enjoyed the privilege of seeing people just like me, villains and heroes alike, in the Star Wars universe for decades. It’s time for everyone who isn’t like me to have that same opportunity.” - Ross, #SWRepMatters member (@Wolfesghost)

“The media we consume matters. It shapes people’s perceptions about marginalized communities, and portrayal can be damaging if done poorly. Good representation and inclusion break down stigmas and create change, especially in younger generations. Star Wars is a very large and popular franchise and is in a unique position to be a leader on this front... ‘Being seen’ is hugely important for marginalized communities as well. There’s a deep psychological effect to being absent in popular media. It essentially tells you that you don’t belong. When you see someone that looks like you or has had a similar experience to you, it’s powerful and deeply profound. It’s hard to explain this feeling to someone who has always been represented in media.” - Jess Shitara, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@spacejessss)

“I’m a brown Middle Eastern-American, I’ve loved fantasy and sci-fi my whole life, and I can count on one hand the amount of times I’ve seen myself represented in my favorite franchises. While I’ve related to Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa my whole life, it’s felt demoralizing to only be able to relate to white characters on screen, and not to those of my background. However, I did relate to characters like Bail Organa, played by the Puerto Rican Jimmy Smits. While not Middle Eastern, it was gratifying to see another brown person on screen, if only briefly. Because of that and the simply amazing character he is, I latched onto Bail Organa and Alderaan as a whole. I still do. However, I am not of that ethnicity, and know and am grateful for the representation he, Poe Dameron, and Cassian Andor give to the Latinx community. I hope to see a Star Wars hero played by a Middle Eastern actress or actor, who would combat damaging stereotypes of people from the region that are far too prevalent in mass media. It was great to have the Pakistani-British actor Riz Ahmed as Bodhi Rook, but he is South Asian, not Middle Eastern. Let’s have Arab, Kurdish, Persian, and Turkish Jedi or rebel fighters to inspire a whole new generation, along with people of every other background out there.” - Swara Salih, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@swarzseawalker)

What are your hopes for the future of Star Wars and representation?

“I’ve been so happy to see an increase in racial diversity in Star Wars, especially in the new trilogy, in background and lead characters. And maybe I’m biased because I’m queer, but I truly think queer representation needs to be a focus. Most media right now is just dipping its toe into one or two queer characters, and wrapping its brain around racially diverse casts, but Star Wars needs to step up and have a queer protagonist. Side characters and passing mentions and queer coding are the thing of the past, and in order for me to truly consider Star Wars as moving into a new era of storytelling, they’re gonna need to step up with that.” -Kludia Amenabar, #SWRepMatters

co-creator (@kaludiasays)

“I truly hope we get more mixed-race representation. Biracial kids have a unique and confusing position in their respective communities and it’s rarely talked about publicly. We often feel like we are not enough for either culture and often form our own ways of connecting to our backgrounds. We also desperately need inclusion of Black women, Latinas, and LGBTQ folks. Right now, we have zero people from these groups being represented in big ways on screen, much less behind the camera.” - Jess Shitara, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@spacejesss)

“Besides hiring diversely in front of the camera, I’m very concerned about Lucasfilm’s hiring practices behind the scenes. The writers and directors for the films and most of the TV episodes have been straight white men. While there may be great characters of color and women in these films and TV, they are often underserved, or fall into tropes as a result of the lack of diverse eyes in the writers room. Because of their own limited and often privileged experiences, they may not understand why a story decision for a character of color may be offensive to some people. It’s a blind spot.” - Swara Salih, #SWRepMatters co-creator (@swarzseawalker)

“More POC in powerful roles. I want to stop groaning every time we get another casting announcement centered around yet another white male or female. Better LGBTQ representation, not just mentioning it after the fact as something implied on screen when it clearly isn’t. 100% more representation behind the scenes with writers of color, directors, producers. We have a long way to go, unfortunately.” - Sith Witch, #SWRepMatters member (@southerncynic)

WOMEN IN POLITICS

From the Galactic Senate to the Rebel Alliance, women play a critical role in the politics of *Star Wars*. Padmé Amidala, Leia Organa, Mon Mothma, Vice Admiral Amilyn Holdo, and many more (often unnamed) women are essential to the galaxy's politics. While the politicians in *Star Wars* aren't based on any specific women, it's easy to make connections between politicians in the franchise and politicians in our own galaxy.



PADMÉ AMIDALA

In the prequel trilogy, Padmé Amidala served as a key politician in the Galactic Republic. When the Trade Federation invaded and occupied her homeworld of Naboo, Padme became a voice for peace and diplomacy in the Galactic Senate. Her lobbying power could only get her so far, though; she knew that, being a teenage girl, she wouldn't always be taken seriously in the Senate.

Being a young, female leader facing opposition is a very real situation many leaders have faced. **Queen Seondeok of Silla**, the first female ruler of Silla (one of the Three Kingdoms of Korea) reigned from 632 to 647. Before her rule, she had to convince her father to make her his heir *and* stop an assassination attempt on her life led by officials who didn't approve of a female ruler. Much like Padmé, Queen Seondeok focused on the livelihood of her people and creating positive relations with nearby empires, like the neighboring Tang dynasty of China. However, Emperor Taizong, the ruler at the time, refused to acknowledge her as a ruler because of her gender. Further, both Padmé and Queen Seondeok were targets of assassination and political opposition during their political careers.

Padmé also often dressed one of her servants up in royal garb to stand in for her while she stood back in secret and worked as a political spy for the resistance. Padmé not only wielded a mighty political power, but held her own with a blaster and sharp wit.

Padmé's daughter, Leia Organa, later known as Princess Leia and General Organa, was not only a powerful leader in the the Rebel Alliance, but she also held several seats of political power. She was a princess of Alderaan, a member of the Imperial Senate, and a leader of the Alliance to Restore the Republic. She believed in the principles of the Galactic Republic and refused to accept the new leaders under the Galactic Empire, even after her home planet



GENERAL ORGANA



was destroyed. **Velu Nachiyar**, the queen of the **Sivaganga estate** in India from 1780 to 1790, also continued to fight after the British occupation killed her husband and forced her from her land. After her escape, Velu Nachiyar found alliances and formed an army to fight the British forces. Velu Nachiyar is known as the first queen to fight for freedom from the British in India. Much like Leia, Velu Nachiyar didn't rely solely on political power for her resistance.

“ ***I would rather be a monster that believes in something, that would sacrifice everything to make the galaxy better, than be someone who sits on the sidelines and watches as if it has no consequences to them.***

- GENERAL LEIA ORGANA



LICIA RONZULLI

Like many politicians, both Leia and Padmé continued to work during their pregnancies. While pregnant with twins, Padmé joined a **group of senators** that were either wary of or outright opposed to Senator Palpatine’s policies (this scene was unfortunately cut from the final film). And while it is not shown in the films, it’s clear that Leia would not cease leading the Resistance while pregnant with her son Ben. The reality of working while pregnant and while raising children is one that many parents understand. In 2018, Illinois Senator **Tammy Duckworth** became the first sitting senator to give

birth while in office. In 2010, Italian politician **Licia Ronzulli** began bringing her daughter to parliament six weeks after giving birth. Unfortunately, not all mothers and parents have been welcomed back to government work with their children. Japanese politician **Yuka Ogata** was **forced to exit** a Kumamoto Municipal Assembly meeting in 2017 because she brought her then-seven-month-old son.

WOMEN IN POLITICS TODAY

The 2018 US midterm election saw some incredible women take office, many breaking boundaries in the process. For the first time in American history, two Native American women were elected to Congress, as well as two Muslim women and the youngest women ever elected to Congress.

These women remind us of *Star Wars* rebels leading the fight against the Empire.

Deb Haaland is a Leguna Pueblo Democrat. Alongside Sharice Davids (a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation), Haaland is one of the first Native American women elected to Congress. During an interview with Fandom Forward, Haaland said, “There’s never been a Native woman in Congress... When I was running for office, there were a lot of people who were skeptical of me... and the only way to show them wrong is to do it, right?”



Haaland’s work fighting for immigrant and native rights reminds us of Leia’s role in the Rebel Alliance. In 2014, Haaland’s party had just lost control of the New Mexico State House and Trump was touring the country spreading anti-immigrant rhetoric. The Empire seemed to be winning. Haaland didn’t give up, though. When she was elected president of the New Mexico Democrats in 2015, she set to work fighting against Trump’s hateful messages. With help from her colleagues, Haaland launched a grassroots campaign, driving all over the state to raise money and fight against Trump’s anti-immigrant rhetoric. During her tenure, her party took back control of the State House. Haaland plans to work for environmental sustainability, indigenous justice, and working families legislation while in office.

“...In the midnight and deep darkness that it feels like in our political environment... there is still hope for this nation.

- ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ



ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ

Another politician kicking Empire butt is **Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez**. At 29 years old, she is the youngest congresswoman in US history. Ocasio-Cortez was born in the Bronx to working-class parents. Her mother was born in Puerto Rico and cleaned houses to support her family while her husband owned a local business in the Bronx. She is a member of Democratic Socialists of America with a background in activism, education, and community organizing. On June 26, 2018, Ocasio-Cortez won the Democratic primary in New York's 14th District, defeating incumbent Congressman Joe Crowley, an upset victory that is now being hailed as the largest in the 2018 midterm election. Her grassroots approach to campaigning has earned her a reputation of being for the people and by the people; none of her campaign contributions were from corporate entities. "The message that we sent to the world tonight is that it is not okay to put donors before your community," she told a crowd upon receiving the news that she'd won the primary.

“Whenever you're the first, that comes with it's own challenges.

- CONGRESSWOMAN ILHAN OMAR

Ilhan Omar made US history when she was elected one of the first Muslim congresswomen alongside Rashida Tlaib. She is also the first Somali-American congresswoman. Omar is a politician from Minnesota who immigrated to the US as a child refugee with her family. At eight years old, her family was living in a refugee camp in Kenya before arriving in the US. She told **Elle Magazine**, "...When we arrived, we were driving through Manhattan, and I remember seeing panhandlers and homeless people sleeping on the street and graffiti and trash everywhere. I remember turning to my father and saying, 'This isn't the America you promised.' And my father said, 'Well, you just wait. We haven't gotten to our America yet.'" Omar became civically engaged at a young age, serving as her grandfather's translator during the Democratic-Farmer-Labor caucuses. In 2016, Omar became the first Somali-American legislator in US history and, alongside her team, increased voter registration in her community by 37%. During her congressional campaign, Omar ran on a platform of guaranteed access to education, economic justice for working families, and reform of the criminal justice system. Omar is dedicated to fighting for a more just America - the one she was promised as a child.



ILHAN OMAR

WOMEN IN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

Star Wars is about more than cool ships and laser guns - it's about resisting fascism. The Rebel Alliance is a passionate group composed of people fighting for freedom across planets, while dismantling systems of oppression like the First Order.



ROSE TICO

Rose Tico, for example, witnessed firsthand the colonization and destruction of her homeworld, a poor mining colony, by the First Order. The First Order forced Rose and her people to mine the planet's natural resources to fuel their war efforts. After the destruction of their planet, Rose and her sister Paige joined the Resistance as a maintenance worker and pilot, respectively.

While there are female pilots throughout the *Star Wars* films (if fewer than male pilots), women haven't always been allowed to serve as military pilots in our world. During World War II, however, **Nadezhda Popova** was one of the brave "**Night**

Witches," who were members of squads of all-female pilots. Nadezhda Popova was among the first female pilots to volunteer for service in the Soviet military during World War II. She became a squadron commander and flew 852 combat missions, including 18 in a single night. While other nations, **including the United States**, allowed women to volunteer only in non-combat missions, the Night Witches often flew in combat missions. Like Paige, the Night Witches flew into danger knowing there was a chance they wouldn't fly home.



Rose Tico

Rose's involvement in the Resistance is also a personal fight. Rose grew up on Hays Minor, an impoverished mining community colonized by the First Order, which forced her people into slavery. When Rose returns to Hays Minor on a mission, she tells Finn what happened when the First Order came to her planet. "They stripped our ore to finance their military, then shelled us to test their weapons. They took everything we had. And who do you think these people are?" she asks, referring to the rich socialites in the casino. "There's only one business in the galaxy that will get you this rich... Selling weapons to the First Order. I wish I could put my fist through this whole lousy, beautiful town." (*Star Wars: TFA*, 2015)

Later, Rose and Finn make their escape on the back of a Fathier, followed by an entire herd, which gets away into the wilderness. They manage to lose the First Order following them, but for only a few moments. Rose and Finn find themselves cornered on a cliffside, awaiting First Order troops. "We're trapped," says Rose. "It was worth it, though," Finn says, "To tear up that town; make 'em hurt." Before getting caught, Rose is able to release the last Fathier, tearing off its saddle and sending it off to freedom. "Now it's worth it," she says with a smile. (*Star Wars: TLJ*, 2015)

Women have always played important roles in resistance movements. These women remind us of Star Wars rebels leading the fight against the Empire.

THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Lakshmi Bai, the Rani of Jhansi: A lasting symbol of resistance for her leadership in the Indian Rebellion of 1857, Manikarnika (Manu, for short) led a life filled with tragedy but also with some triumph. Manu grew up with her father, who allowed her to learn fencing, horse riding, shooting, and a variety of martial arts in addition to her regular studies, all of which would come in handy on the battlefield later in her life. Before she became the warrior she is known as now, she married the Maharaja of Jhansi and was given the name Lakshmi Bai.



THE RANI OF JHANSI

After the death of her infant son, and shortly before the premature death of her husband, she and the Maharaja adopted the Maharaja's cousin's son. Despite the presence of British officers during the adoption to ensure the child would be recognized as lawful heir, two years later, the mega-corporation known as the British East India Company (with the help of British Governor-General Lord Dalhousie) applied the **Doctrine of Lapse** and seized control of Jhansi and confiscated the state jewels. Lakshmi Bai, however, did not leave and keep quiet, as she was ordered to do. She tried to appeal in British court, but since the courts were run by the very people causing the problems in the first place, her petitions were unsuccessful. Meanwhile, British occupiers were overtaxing the people and continuing to disrespect her and the local religious beliefs, so she gathered an army composed largely of other women, and they joined the Indian Rebellion as the British Army advanced upon Jhansi. Rani Lakshmi Bai fought courageously through multiple encounters, and she died fighting fiercely on the battlefield. Her role within the Indian Independence Movement remains the subject of many books, songs, poems, and films.

The Trung Sisters: The Trung sisters, known around the world for leading the first major resistance against the expansion of Chinese rule in Vietnam, continue to be lauded as heroes with an annual **festival** in their honor. The sisters' rebellion began in earnest in 39 AD, after a Chinese governor executed Trung Trac's husband for protesting increasing tax rates. In response to his death and in continuation of the work she and her husband had started together, Trung Trac and her sister Trung Nhi rallied other women and men to join the fight against the Chinese occupiers. Partly, they fought because women in their culture had different types of freedoms compared to women in China at the time, and they were unwilling to alter their own cultural practices.



THE TRUNG SISTERS

The sisters recruited 36 women generals, including their own mother, and by the end of 40 AD, they had control of 65 citadels. Leading their army into battle perched atop the backs of elephants, the Trung sisters pushed the opposition back and became queens of the region. They served their people for four years, fighting back those who sought to conquer them. They eventually saw defeat but chose to die by suicide rather than be captured by the enemy. Today, they signify the embodiment of the spirit of resistance, independence, and strong women who resist forces that would oppress them.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF MODERN RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS AND LEADERS:

STANDING ROCK

The #NoDAPL movement started in April of 2016 when Native American tribes, especially the Standing Rock Sioux, took a stand against the approval of the Dakota Access Pipeline. The pipeline, which was approved by Donald Trump despite adamant protest, runs through lands sacred to the Sioux and risks water contamination for 10 million people.

Native women played an essential role in the #NoDAPL and Water Is Life movements. "Our people always believe that the women are the backbone [of society]... the women would meet first and then the guys [warriors] would act on our meeting," Lakota Water Protector Char Bad Cob **told teleSUR**.

LaDonna Brave Bull Allard is one woman on the frontlines of the Water Is Life movement. She believes that water is female, so it's no surprise that the US government is abusing the land. "The abuse against women is well know in American history, world history — and this tells you a lot about what is happening to our Earth. If you respect women, you respect Earth and you respect water," **says Allard**.



The fight for Native American rights and sacred land protection continues. Many women who were part of the Standing Rock protests were shot with rubber bullets and firehoses, arrested and held in animals cages, and denied access to proper care. **A report by the Urban Indian Health Institute** identified 506 cases of missing and murdered indigenous women across 71 cities. The Trump administration recently decided to rescind land ownership of 321 acres from the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribal Council in Massachusetts. At the forefront of each of these issues are native women battling against colonialism and standing up for the rights of their people.

BLACK LIVES MATTER

#BlackLivesMatter is the viral movement started in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman. Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi began the movement-turned-**nonprofit** in 2013. In the six years since, Black Lives Matter has become a member-led network of over 40 chapters worldwide combating institutional racism and violence against Black people. Black Lives Matter is "committed to struggling together and to imagining and creating a world free of anti-Blackness, where every Black person has the social, economic, and political power to thrive." The inclusive movement strives to uphold the belief that not only do Black lives matter but all Black lives matter. Black Lives Matter is dedicated to standing up for Black trans women, who statistically face the most violence.

Meet the Founders of Black Lives Matter

Patrisse Cullors is an artist and organizer from Los Angeles, California. She co-founded not only BLM, but also Dignity and Power Now. A New York Times best-selling author and Fulbright scholar, Cullors's multimedia performance art piece "**POWER: From the Mouths of the Occupied**" toured several US cities highlighting "the impact of mass criminalization and state violence in Black communities."



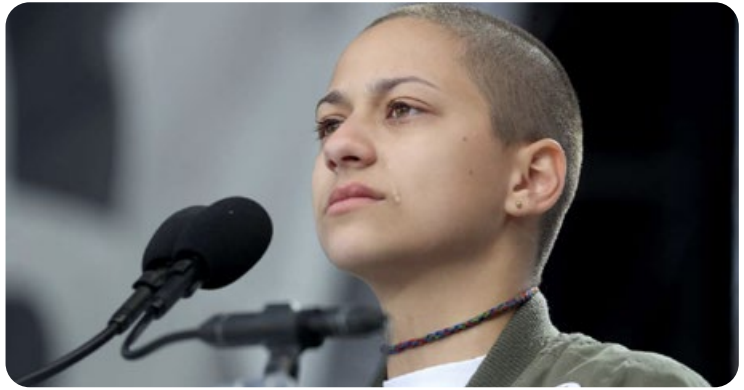
Alicia Garza is a queer writer, organizer, and public speaker based in Oakland, California. In addition to co-founding BLM, Garza is also the Special Projects Director for the National Domestic Workers Alliance, an organization that fights for domestic workers' dignity and fairness in the US. She has been featured in Time, Mic, The Guardian, Elle.com, Essence, Democracy Now!, and The New York Times.

Opal Tometi is a Nigerian-American writer, organizer, and strategist living in New York. She holds an honorary doctorate from Clarkson University and is the Executive Director of the **Black Alliance for Just Immigration**. Tometi has been featured in the Smithsonian for her contributions to history. She was also awarded BET's Black Girls Rock Community Change Agent Award and has been featured in Fortune and POLITICO and received the first-ever Webby Social Movement of the Year Award.



MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

In response to the **Stoneman Douglas High School shooting**, students rallied behind **Emma González** and other Stoneman Douglas High School students in a **nationwide march** for common-sense gun laws. Like Rey in *ROTJ* and *TFA*, González became an unlikely, reluctant hero at the age of 18. “Every single person up here today, all these people, should be home grieving,” González said in a **speech** just after the shooting. “But instead, we are up here standing together because if all our government and president can do is send thoughts and prayers, then it’s time for victims to be the change that we need to see.”



González and her fellow students have recently published a book about their experience with not only gun violence, but also student-led activism. ***Glimmer of Hope*** documents the Parkland students’ experiences both during and after the shooting, as well as their ongoing fight to end gun violence. 100% of the proceeds from this book go to the **March for Our Lives Action Fund**, which strives to fund gun violence research, push for anti-gun violence legislation, and create intervention programs.

OBSTACLES WOMEN FACE

While recent films like *TFA* and *RO* have put more focus on women in positions of power and influence in the *Star Wars* universe, the franchise has a history of excluding women.

Luke, Han, and Anakin leap into battle, flying through space at hyperspeed, facing dangerous Sith lords and Stormtroopers, while women like General Leia Organa and Queen Padmé Amidala are often relegated to the sidelines. Between Leia being captured as a sex slave and Padmé staying back to have children (and then die), strong women in *Star Wars* still seem to come second in the fight against the Dark Side. Yes, even in a galaxy far, far away, sexism is alive and well.

DISCRIMINATION IN THE WORKPLACE

In *TPM*, Padmé is a gun-wielding, diplomatic badass who makes a huge difference in the fight against the Trade Federation, and a strong woman for young girls to look up to. However, as soon as she meets her husband Anakin, her power dwindles. In the next two films, Padmé's role becomes more about her marriage and pregnancy than anything else. Unfortunately, this echoes a real-life problem for women in politics. Although pregnancy discrimination isn't technically legal, the **ACLU says** that "workers who are pregnant or breastfeeding are often fired or pushed out of the workplace." This is rooted in the sexist idea that women should be mothers, not workers.

The wage gap is another form of discrimination in the workplace. The **National Partnership for Women and Families** found in 2018 that "the median annual pay for a woman (in the United States) who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$41,977, while the median annual pay for a man who holds a full-time, year-round job is \$52,146." This means that, for every dollar a white man makes, white women make an average of 80 cents. This amounts to an annual wage gap of \$10,169. For women of color, this wage gap is even wider. Black women are only paid 61 cents, Native women only 58 cents, and Latinas only 53 cents to every dollar a white man makes. And this isn't problem isolated to the United States -- it is a **global issue**.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Sexual violence happens everywhere. At work, at home, in the middle of rebellions, and in galaxies far, far away. When Leia is captured by mob boss Jabba the Hutt in *ROTJ*, she is forced to wear a scantily clad metal bikini and serve him as a slave. The rest of Jabba's dancers and slaves seem terrified of him and one dancer takes her own life to avoid going back to his side. Unfortunately, Jabba's lair isn't the only place where sexual violence is an obstacle women face.



A recent **survey by the nonprofit Stop Street Harassment** found that 81% of women have experienced some kind of sexual harassment or assault in their lifetime. Further, sexual assault and domestic violence go largely unreported, especially in communities of color. According to the **Women of Color Network**, women of color often don't report for several reasons, including "high rates of poverty, poor education, limited job resources, language barriers, and fear of deportation." This is why legislation like the **US Violence Against Women Act**, which funds and administers programs assisting sexual assault survivors, is so important. VAWA also helped fund programs aimed at helping **Native American and Alaskan Native women, immigrant women, and trans women, in particular**. Further, the suicide rate among women veterans is nearly **5 times that of civilian women**.



Organizations like **Uplift** work to combat sexual violence in online and fan communities. Their work includes providing training for convention staff members and volunteers, assisting convention organizers in creating policies and codes of conduct, providing on-site resources at conventions, and creating custom attendee surveys. Uplift's work is vital to fan communities because it works to empower fans, organizers, and communities to do better.

TALK IT OUT

- Do you see yourself reflected in *Star Wars*? If so, how? If not, how could the franchise represent you and your communities?
- Do you feel included in fan culture?
- What obstacles have you faced in fandoms? What obstacles have you noticed others facing?
- Who is a woman or nonbinary leader in history or the modern day that you look up to? What makes you admire them? What obstacles did they overcome?
- Are any of your local representatives, at any level, women? Are any of them nonbinary? Have they ever been?
- How many female politicians can you name (without looking them up)? How many male politicians? How many nonbinary politicians?
- Have you ever considered running for office? Why or why not? If not, are there any obstacles that have kept you from running?
- What resources in your community exist to assist survivors of sexual assault? Are they accessible to everyone who needs them? Why or why not?
- When you were born, what kind of resources did your parents have? Were they able to take off work without fear of income loss? Did one of your parents stay home to take care of you? Which one?
- Do you know which **tribal lands you live on**? Can you name any of the indigenous tribes in your community?

TAKE ACTION

- Like Leia, use the shackles of your oppressors to overthrow their hold on you. It might seem like venturing into the belly of the beast, but working within the system to make change is an incredible way of making a positive impact. Vote in both local *and* national elections, call your representative in support of inclusive legislation, and even run for office yourself!
- If you have an issue that matters to you, you can propose it as a ballot measure in your next local election. In the US, different states have different processes for getting constitutional amendments, statutes, or special taxes on ballots. Half of American states require a petition signed by people in your area. Other states have different processes. Check out https://ballotpedia.org/Ballot_measure to find out more about getting a ballot measure added to your next local or state election!
- Part of being a good activist is staying an informed voter. Ballot writers often make their measures purposefully confusing in order to frustrate and confuse voters into voting against their best interest. Before each election, it's important to research every issue on the ballot to make sure you know what you're voting for. That goes for electing officials, too! Many US states allow you to get a sample ballot to look over before going to the polls. You can also check out candidates' websites to understand their platforms before deciding who to cast your vote for.
- There are many ways to join the Rebel Alliance! Many organizations like Black Lives Matter and March for Our Lives have local chapters you can get involved in. Fandom Forward has its own **Chapters Program** that spans 25 countries. One way of getting involved is seeing if there is a chapter of your chosen organization in your town – or starting your own!
- Attending protests and marches like #NoDAPL and the March for Our Lives is a great way to show your support for a movement while sending a message to people in power. Chances are, if you live in or near a big city, there's probably a march happening near you soon! Social media sites like Facebook and Twitter are good places to look for these events.
- Part of being a good activist is being a good ally. You can help existing movements by sharing their messages with your friends and on social media. Resistance groups often also have community meetings where you can learn more about how to help. Before you attend an event like this, though, make sure allies are allowed. Some meetings are only for the affected communities in order to create a safe space for marginalized people. Showing up as an ally to these events would be seen as very disrespectful. Being a good ally often means sitting back and listening. Take notes and do your own research afterward if you have questions, and be ready to take direction.
- If you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence (that includes both assault and harassment), there are resources available to you. In the US, survivors can call the sexual assault hotline at 1-800-656-4673 to speak to a sexual assault support service in your area.
- Use **5 Calls** to call and influence your representatives.

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THANK YOU

AMANDA NEUMANN

CHARLI RENKEN

CHRISTINE ROBERTS

BALEIGH GREENE

HUMBERTO FREIRE

DESIGN BY KRUPA HEBBAR