# MeToo Wins Symbol of the Year Vote for 2017

STANFORD, CA, JAN. 26, 2018 - Affiliates of the Symbolic Systems Program at Stanford University have chosen #metoo as the Symbol of the Year from 2017, in their sixth annual vote for notable symbols.

The citation for the Symbol of the Year said: "The 'Me too' hashtag, popularized in 2017 by Alyssa Milano, and building on the use of the phrase by Tarana Burke starting on MySpace in 2006, united women especially (as well as men) who had experienced sexual harassment and assault. While public attention focused on accusations against famous men in media and politics, the wider message reached wherever power differences had facilitated abuses and misogyny."

The winning symbol was nominated by a record 17 individuals, including alumni/ae, faculty, and current students. One of the nominators, Emily Mandelbaum (Class of 2002), said, "#metoo galvanized a movement of speaking up and being believed. It created a watershed moment this year." James Landay (Professor of Computer Science), said that #metoo "opened up the conversation within our society on how prevalent this issue is and how we must reform our ways to create a more equitable and just society."

Others who nominated #metoo included Lisa Wallace (Class of 2014), Josh Elman (Class of 1997), Deena Weisberg (Class of 2003), Keith Devlin (Senior Researcher at H-STAR), BJ Fogg (Social Science Research Scholar at H-STAR), Joshua Solomin (Class of 2000), Clayton Mellina (Class of 2011), Ariana Qayumi (Undergraduate Major), Ash Brown (Class of 2003), Emma Garforth (Class of 1989), Susan Holmes (Professor of Statistics), Will Barkis (Class of 2001), Matt Kodama (Class of 1997), Catherine Hartley (Class of 1999), and Bruno-Ken Shiozawa (Class of 1995).

Other Notable Symbols from 2017 chosen by voters for their significance were:

- **the kneeling player.** The wave of National Anthem protests, begun by Colin Kaepernick in 2016 as a statement against oppression of color and people of color in the U.S., resumed in 2017 even as Kaepernick appeared to have been blackballed by the NFL. President Trump said players who "take a knee" should be fired, but others saw the gesture as patriotic dissent.

- **the pussyhat.** Pussyhats arose as a DIY, anti-Trump counterpart to the prefabricated "MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN" hats that were chosen as our 2016 Symbol of the Year. Pussyhats referenced remarks by then candidate Trump on the Access Hollywood video. They featured prominently in the Women's March of January 21, 2017 -- the largest single-day protest in U.S. history.

- **"fake news".** While the meaning of “fake news” shifted over 2016 and 2017, the slogan “fake news” came to be used to discount or dismiss any unfavorable or disagreeable reporting, regardless of the underlying facts. Widespread use of the slogan “fake news” is a symptom of America’s partisan and dysfunctional political culture, and its usage spiked in 2017.

- **#resist.** The hashtag #resist was often used in the aftermath of the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, as a way to unify efforts to oppose Trump's ideas and policies. The "Resistance"
was particularly prominent in protesting against Executive Orders on immigration issued by President Trump early in his Administration.

**Bitcoin and the Bitcoin logo.** Bitcoin's spectacular value rise became a major financial story in 2017. But the cryptocurrency itself is arguably a symbol, as is any form of money whose value derives from social agreements about what it represents -- as a store of value, a medium of exchange, and a unit of account. The prevailing Bitcoin logo serves as a symbol of Bitcoin.

**images of the 2017 total solar eclipse.** The solar eclipse of 2017 was the first total eclipse visible across the entire contiguous U.S. since 1918, and was experienced by many as a transcendent moment. Photographs and videos of the eclipse added to a history of recording eclipses dating as far back as the Loughcrew Cairn stone images of a solar eclipse from Nov. 30, 3340 BCE in Ireland.

**the Robert Edward Lee statue in Charlottesville.** The Unite the Right rally on August 12 in Charlottesville, Virginia was called to oppose the removal of this statue of Confederate commander Robert E. Lee in the city's Emancipation Park. Paralegal Heather Heyer was killed by a Nazi sympathizer driving into a crowd, and many others were injured. Two state troopers also died in a helicopter crash.

**the march.** Protest marches have featured in many eras, but 2017 represented a high point both in terms of participation (the Women's March of January 21 was the largest single-day protest in U.S. history), and the variety of causes represented on the streets during the year. In some cases, there were concurrent marches for different sides of an issue.

**the "Unite the Right" tiki torch parade.** The "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia included white supremacists, white nationalists, neo-Confederates, Klansmen, neo-Nazis, and various militias. An Aug. 11 parade of mostly white men carrying tiki torches featured white supremacist and Nazi chants such as "White lives matter", "Jews will not replace us", and "Blood and soil".

**acrostic resignation letters.** In August, the 17 members of the U.S. President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities resigned in a letter that encoded "R-E-S-I-S-T". State Department science envoy Daniel Kammen then resigned with a letter in which the first characters of each paragraph spelled I-M-P-E-A-C-H. Both were examples of the coded writing form known as "acrostic".

The 11 recognized symbols were chosen from 32 nominations submitted between December 22nd and 26th, with voting taking place December 27th through December 30th. Nominations appeared on the ballot in the words of the nominators. Selection indicated only that the symbol had been significant during the year, rather than an endorsement of any point of view associated with it. One hundred and forty-five alumni/ae, students, faculty, and staff affiliated with the Program cast ballots in a system in which each voter could vote for any nominated symbol as Symbol of the Year, Other Notable Symbol, or neither.

All of the program's alums, current students, and faculty/staff were eligible to vote. The ballot stated that the purpose of the vote was "to recognize the important role that symbols play in our world" ("as affiliates of the Symbolic Systems Program").

The idea for a "Symbol of the Year" was inspired by the many annual "of the year" designations and awards that are put out by various organizations, especially the American Dialect Society's annual "Word of the Year" vote. Stanford's Symbolic Systems Program focuses on human and computational systems that use symbols to communicate and to represent information.

For "Criteria", the ballot stated the following:
"The Symbol of the Year need not be new to this year, but should have achieved widespread cultural importance during the year. A symbol is both used and understood to represent a concept, object, location, event, or linguistic unit. Types of symbols include the following:

- a flag or emblem (e.g. the Olympic flag, the AIDS awareness ribbon, a police badge, a union label)
- a costume or garment (e.g. a graduation gown, a cowboy hat, the Guy Fawkes mask)
- a grapheme, written character, or glyph (e.g. the '+' sign, the lowercase 'e', the Helvetica 'A')
- a hand signal or gesture (e.g. the 'A-Okay' sign, a military salute)
- an iconic object or animal (e.g. the Statue of Liberty, the black cat)
- a symbolic place (e.g. the agora, the Kremlin)
- an ideogram (e.g. the peace symbol, the caduceus symbol of commerce)
- a logo (e.g. the Red Cross logo, the Apple Inc. logo)
- a shape (e.g. the crescent, the upside-down triangle)
- a pictogram (e.g. the International Symbol of Access, the Universal Recycling Symbol)
- a screen icon (e.g. the magnifying glass/search icon, the trash icon)
- an auditory symbol or acoustic signal (e.g. the train whistle, the Intel bongs, the SOS prosign)
- a tactile symbol (e.g. a braille character, a TSBVI Standard Tactile Symbol)
- a symbolic action or event (e.g. the lighting of a candle, the sun setting)
- an iconic photograph or image (e.g. Migrant Mother, Guerrillero Heroico)
- a symbolic work or performance (e.g. the Star Spangled Banner, Romeo and Juliet)
- a color or pattern (e.g. Navy blue, the Royal Stewart tartan)
- a posted sign or signal (e.g. an exit sign, a red light)
- an abbreviation or acronym (e.g. 'lbs.', 'USA')
- an iconic person or group (e.g. the Pope, the Freedom Riders)
- a name or nickname (e.g. 'Betty Crocker', 'Joe the Plumber')
- a word or phrase (e.g. 'email', 'Win one for the Gipper!')
- a mascot or mythical/imaginary character (e.g. Ronald McDonald, Aphrodite, Yogi Bear)"

"Lots of things can be symbols," said the program's Associate Director, Todd Davies, after the first Symbol of the Year vote five years ago, "but relatively few things actually are. Being a symbol is an acquired status, that gets established through use. Symbols can obviously become notable because the things they represent are notable. But we wanted to draw attention to the significance that symbols themselves have, as symbols, beyond what they represent, and to get ourselves and others thinking about the role they play in contemporary life."

The photo above shows a sign that reads "#MeToo" from https://pixabay.com/en/metoo-women-harassment-sexual-2859980/, license: https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/zero/1.0/deed.en