



## Challenging a Stereotype

“The unspoken assumption is that women are different. They do not have executive ability, orderly minds, stability, leadership skills, and they are too emotional. It has been observed before, that society for a long time discriminated against another minority, the blacks, on the same basis—that they were different and inferior. The happy little homemaker and the contented “old darkey” on the plantation were both produced by prejudice. As a black person, I am no stranger to race prejudice. But the truth is that in the political world I have been far oftener discriminated against because I am a woman than because I am black.”

—Shirley Chisholm, Address to the United States House of Representatives, May 21, 1969

▲ National Organization for Women button

▲ Civil rights leader Coretta Scott King speaks to a group of feminists at a National Women's Conference.

# The Women's Rights Movement

## Objectives

- Analyze how a movement for women's rights arose in the 1960s.
- Explain the goals and tactics of the women's movement.
- Assess the impact of the women's movement on American society.

## Terms and People

feminism  
Betty Friedan  
NOW

ERA  
Gloria Steinem  
Phyllis Schlafly

## NoteTaking

### Reading Skill: Identify Causes and Effects

Record the causes, effects, and main figures of the women's movement in a chart like this one.

The Women's Movement		
Causes	Proponents/ Opponents	Effects
• •	• •	• •

**Why It Matters** Following World War II, most women gave up their jobs to returning servicemen and went back to their homes to take care of their families. Social analysts and popular culture portrayed women, especially suburban housewives, as the personification of America's achievement of the good life. By the end of the 1960s, however, a broad-based movement to attain sexual equality had arisen. The women's movement fundamentally changed American life—from family and education to careers and political issues. **Section Focus Question:** What led to the rise of the women's movement, and what impact did it have on American society?

## A Women's Movement Arises

Historians often refer to the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s as the second wave of **feminism**, or the theory of political, social, and economic equality of men and women. They want to emphasize that the struggle for women's rights has had a long history, going back at least to the 1840s, when women drafted the Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca Falls, New York. The phrase *second wave of feminism* also reminds us that the first wave, which culminated with women's winning the right to vote in 1920, ended well before the nation addressed the call for full equality. In the decades that followed, women made little legal or social headway. Several factors influenced the rebirth of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s.

**Seeking to Redefine Traditional Roles** The civil rights struggle prompted women to look at the ways in which society judged and discriminated against them as a group. As Casey Hayden and Mary King, two veterans of that movement, put it: “Sex and caste. There seem to be many parallels that can be drawn between the treatment of Negroes and the treatment of women in society as a whole.” The civil rights movement both inspired women to demand gender equality and taught them ways to get it. It also brought black and white women together, strengthening their shared cause.

Women also wanted to redefine how they were viewed. Many women objected to the inaccuracy of the housewife stereotype. Some needed to work to support themselves or their families. Others wanted more opportunities than their lives as housewives could offer. **Betty Friedan** powerfully articulated this message in her groundbreaking book *The Feminine Mystique*.

#### Vocabulary Builder

gender—(JEHN der) *n.* a person’s sex

#### Primary Source

“The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction. . . . Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—‘Is this all?’”

—Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963

**Looking for Better Work** Despite the stereotypes, the number of women in the workforce grew throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Yet working women often found themselves in deadend jobs. Even those with training and education had their access to careers or advancement blocked, in many cases, by blatantly discriminatory employers. Sandra Day O’Connor, who ultimately became the first female Supreme Court Justice, graduated near the top of her class at Stanford Law School in the early 1950s. Yet while she found few employment opportunities upon graduation, her male counterparts won job offers at prestigious law firms. Facing such restrictions, women increasingly demanded equal treatment in the workplace.

✓ **Checkpoint** How did the women’s movement of the 1960s begin?

## Women Find Their Voices

Several years after she wrote *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan helped establish the **National Organization for Women (NOW)**. The organization—which dedicated itself to winning “true equality for all women” and to attaining a “full and equal partnership of the sexes”—galvanized the women’s movement.

**NOW’s Goals and Tactics** NOW set out to break down barriers of discrimination in the workplace and in education. It attacked stereotypes of women in the media and called for more balance in roles in marriages. It had two major priorities. The first was to bring about passage of the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)**, an amendment to the Constitution that would guarantee gender equality under the law. The ERA initially had been proposed in the early 1920s but had never passed. The second was to protect reproductive rights,

### HISTORY MAKERS

#### Betty Friedan (1921–2006)

Educated at Smith College, where she edited the school newspaper, Betty Friedan did graduate work in psychology before becoming a journalist. She married in 1947 and was fired from her job when she became pregnant with her second child. Friedan raised three children and occasionally wrote articles for magazines. As she was working on one article, she realized that many educated women who had become housewives shared the uneasiness she felt about her life. This led her to write *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which helped launch the women’s movement by inspiring women to join in the struggle for equal rights. In a later book, *The Second Stage* (1981), she criticized the direction of the women’s movement, arguing that it had become too hostile to families.





## A Diverse Movement

Women take part in a NOW rally in Washington, D.C., in 1970. A *Ms.* magazine cover from 1972 shows that women from all different backgrounds participated in the women's movement. *What women's issues might have been especially important to women in the military?*

especially the right to an abortion. NOW worked within the existing political system, lobbying for political reforms and readying court cases to compel the government to enforce existing legislation that banned discrimination. For some women, NOW seemed too extreme; for others, it was not extreme enough. Still, NOW served as a rallying point to promote equality for all women.

**Raising Society's Awareness** Finding NOW too tame, radical feminists sought a more fundamental restructuring of society. Rather than seeking legislative change, these protesters sought to show the way society trapped women into adopting restrictive roles. In addition to public protests of the Miss America Pageant, radical feminists engaged in small-scale consciousness-raising efforts. Other feminists sought to raise public awareness by making personal issues political. Charlotte Bunch, for example, wrote that “there is no private domain of a person's life that is not political and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal.”

Some feminists, like **Gloria Steinem**, tried to change awareness through the mass media. After graduating from college, Steinem worked as a freelance writer, including a stint of undercover work at a club run by *Playboy* magazine. While society tended to view Playboy bunnies in glamorous terms, Steinem revealed how much humiliation they had to endure to make a living. In 1972, she helped co-found *Ms.*, a feminist magazine. Its title meant to protest the social custom of identifying women by their marital status rather than as individuals.

**Opposing the Women's Movement** Some Americans—both men and women—openly challenged the women's movement. **Phyllis Schlafly**, for example, is a conservative political activist who denounced women's liberation as “a total assault on the family, on marriage, and on children.” She worked hard to defeat the ERA, arguing that the act would compel women to fight in the military, end sex-segregated bathrooms, and hurt the family. Her argument resonated with many conservatives. With their support, the ERA fell three states short of becoming a constitutional amendment.



**Checkpoint** What were the various goals of the women's movement?

# Lasting Effects of the Women's Movement

The women's movement affected all aspects of American society. Women's roles and opportunities expanded. Women gained legal rights that had been denied them. And feminists sparked an important debate about equality that continues today. Yet the issues they raised continue to divide Americans. Some say that women haven't made enough gains. Others fear that the movement has actually harmed society.

**Making Legal Headway** Before the 1960s, there were no federal laws prohibiting gender discrimination. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, however, gave feminists a legal tool. It included a clause, called Title VII, that outlawed discrimination on the basis of sex. The clause was actually inserted by civil rights opponents, who thought it was so outlandish that it would make the entire bill look ridiculous. When the bill actually passed, however, women used Title VII to challenge discrimination. The bill also set up the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce the federal prohibition on job discrimination.

Enforcing Title VII, even with the EEOC, was often difficult. Still, NOW and other feminist organizations tirelessly filed suits against employers who refused to hire women or to pay them fairly, compelling the federal government to act. President Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 to examine workplace discrimination. Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1972 banned discrimination in education. The Equal Credit Opportunity Act, passed in 1974, made it illegal to deny credit to a woman just because of her gender.

## Comparing Viewpoints

### Do Women Need to Fight for Equal Rights?

Inspired by the successes of the civil rights movement, many American women in the late 1960s renewed their own demand for equal rights. Other women, however, argued that their demand was destructive.

#### PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

Schlaflly (born 1924) is a lawyer and political organizer who first became famous for her anticommunist views. She became an opponent of feminism.

##### Primary Source

"Feminism is doomed . . . because it [attempts] to repeal and restructure human nature."

"Women have babies and men provide support. If you don't like the way we're made you've got to take it up with God."



#### GLORIA STEINEM

Steinem (born 1934) is a journalist who founded political organizations to help women lobby for equal rights. She became the most famous feminist leader of the 1970s.

##### Primary Source

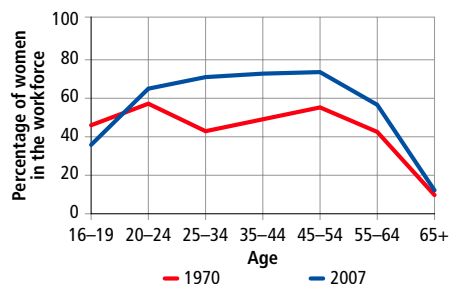
"Sex and race, because they are easily visible differences, have been the primary ways of organizing human beings into superior and inferior groups, and into the cheap labor on which this system still depends."



#### Compare

1. What do you think each woman would say about the role that biology plays in women's lives?
2. What is unusual about Schlafly's insistence that women should devote themselves to staying home and raising a family?

## Women in the Workforce, by Age



**Graph Skills** Compare the lines for 1970 and 2007 on the graph. Notice that the 1970 line makes the shape of a letter *m*. What factors explain this? Why is the 2007 line different?

accounting—have opened up as well. The general shift in attitudes symbolized by these changes has created a world of possibilities for many young women who never knew a time when women were not allowed to do these things.

Despite these gains, the average woman still earns less than the average man, partly because many women continue to work in fields that pay less. Some people have referred to this situation as a “pink collar ghetto.” Whether this is because of discrimination, or because women who shoulder family responsibilities often have limited job choices, remains a matter of debate. Many studies suggest that a “glass ceiling” exists, limiting the advancement of even the most highly educated and skilled women workers.

Most troubling, the United States has witnessed a feminization of poverty over the past 30 years. This means that the majority of the nation’s poor people are single women. These are the women in the lowest-paying jobs, with the fewest benefits. Many of these poor women are single mothers, who must bear the costs and responsibilities of raising children alone while also working.

**Checkpoint** What legal and social gains has the women’s movement made?

## SECTION 2 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice  
Web Code: nea-1721

### Comprehension

- Terms and People** What is the relationship between each of the following items and the women’s movement?
  - feminism
  - Betty Friedan
  - NOW
  - ERA
  - Gloria Steinem
  - Phyllis Schlafly

### 2. NoteTaking Reading Skill:

**Identify Causes and Effects** Use your cause-and-effect chart to answer the Section Focus Question: What led to the rise of the women’s movement, and what impact did it have on American society?

### Writing About History

- Quick Write: Identify Arguments** Suppose that you are either Betty Friedan or Phyllis Schlafly and you are giving a speech about women’s roles in society. Identify and list the main arguments that would support your position.

### Critical Thinking

- Draw Inferences** Why did so much time elapse between the first and second waves of feminism?
- Identify Assumptions** What beliefs led women to support the women’s movement? What beliefs led women to oppose it?
- Formulating Questions** Make up two or three questions that will help you decide whether American women have made significant strides toward equality.