

Women's Rights Newscast

Introduction:

From the beginning of the republic, American society was divided into two spheres: the domestic sphere and the public sphere. Religious beliefs held that women should excel in the domestic sphere—caring for children, keeping house, and providing support for a husband—and stay out of the public sphere of professions and politics. During the 1800s, women were prohibited by law from testifying in court, owning property, and establishing businesses. Women were also not permitted to vote, giving them the status of second-class citizens in the new democracy. However, many women refused to accept such secondary status. In 1848 a group of feminists, or activists seeking equal rights for women, met in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss the position of women in American society. They issued the Declaration of Sentiments, which declared that "all men and women are created equal." Feminist efforts to draw attention to women's second-class status encouraged more women—and some men—to join the fight for women's right to vote. Women finally won the vote with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

A few years later, Quaker feminist Alice Paul proposed another amendment to the Constitution, this one ensuring women's legal rights. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), as it was called, stated: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged [reduced] by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Congress refused to consider the proposed amendment, but women's groups continued to lobby for it during the 1930s and 1940s. The first and second world wars created new opportunities for women to work beyond the domestic sphere and help support the war effort in jobs as welders, factory workers, pilots, and professional baseball players. However, by the 1950s, as male veterans claimed the jobs they had held before the war, women were again encouraged to return to homemaking.

*The women's movement grew dramatic support and momentum in the 1960s, inspired by the African-American civil rights movement and a groundbreaking book by Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*. Friedan argued that American society should be changed to allow women to reach their full potential inside and outside the home. In addition, in 1961 President John F. Kennedy authorized a commission to write a report on the status of women. By 1964, over 64,000 Americans had bought the report, which documented the ways in which women were discriminated against and recommended 24 ways to improve women's status.*

When the women's movement revived the ERA, thousands of women and men lent their support. In 1972, the amendment was approved by Congress and submitted to the states for ratification. However, some groups in society began to advocate more strongly against the women's movement. As a result, the ERA was not ratified by the 1982 deadline; only 35 of the 38 states needed for ratification approved the amendment.

Despite the failure of the ERA, women made numerous gains in equal rights in many areas of American society. Feminists advocated for reproductive rights, improved childcare facilities, and opportunities for women in numerous professions, in sports, and in the media—in short, in every facet of American life. Declaring that the "personal is political," reformers sought to break down the barriers between the domestic and public spheres so women could move more freely between them. Their efforts were largely successful, radically altering the lives of every American, both male and female.

Class Procedure: The class will be graded together (5pts) on the flow of the newscast and the organization between groups. The class should choose an anchor and a co-anchor who will set the order of the presentation and handle the lead ins to the subtopics, writes and reads off the lead story.

Group Procedure: Learns about the topic by reading the information provided by the teacher, chooses an "on-scene reporter," writes a story and dialogue for the newscast and acts out the event. Rehearse your story (2-4 minutes) and get appropriate props and attire for your presentation.

Everybody: Takes notes on other sections while the newscast is progressing and participates in the discussion with the teacher after by being prepared for the following questions.

- What were the most prominent concerns of the women's movement?
- What were the most prominent successes of the women's movement?
- What were the chief frustrations of the women's movement? What obstacles and failures did feminists experience?
- In what significant ways did the women's movement change American society?
- Did the women's movement achieve full equity for American women? Explain.
- In what tangible ways have your daily lives and future aspiration been changed by the women's movement?

Press Release on Education

Key Concerns of the Women’s Movement A primary goal of the women’s movement was to eliminate sex discrimination at every level of education. Some of feminists’ key concerns were the limited number of women in higher education, sexist images of girls and women in schoolbooks, the domestic-oriented curriculum for girls, and the quotas imposed on women by professional schools. To eliminate these and other forms of sex bias in education, feminists pushed legislation through Congress, filed charges against academic institutions, and created new opportunities for women on college campuses.

Fewer Women in Higher Education A primary concern of the women’s movement was the trend after the 1940s toward fewer women enrolling in college and more dropping out to marry and become housewives. By 1958, women made up only 35 percent of the college student population (compared with 47 percent in 1920), and they earned fewer degrees than they had in the pre–World War II era. This trend was reflected in the joke that women were out to get an “M.R.S.” degree, since so many met their future husbands at college and then dropped out to marry and have children. As one woman recalled in the 1950s, “Education, work, whatever you did before marriage, was only a prelude [introduction] to your real life, which was marriage.”

For many African-American women, however, the pattern was different. Most expected they would work outside the home and had to overcome discrimination based on sex, race, and often economic status, while trying to gain an education. One black woman recalled, “For a black girl coming up in [the 50s], the primary thing was education. My Grandma used to say, ‘You can always get married.’” Although there were far fewer African-American women in colleges than white women, more than 90 percent of them completed their college degrees.



- Why were fewer women enrolling and staying in college after 1940?
- How was the educational experience of African-American women different?

Poor Portrayals of Women Another concern of the women’s movement were the limited, often-negative images of females seen in schools. In children’s very first readers, there were twice as many pictures of boys as girls. While the boys were depicted as active investigators, girls were usually depicted as passive, meek, and somewhat stupid. In addition, textbooks for older students largely ignored the history of women, particularly the achievements of individual women, and left out entirely the history of the women’s movement in the late nineteenth century. One woman, Sandra Menefee Taylor, recounted the lack of information about women in *In the Company of Women*:

When I was in school and it was time to do a report on an artist, I wanted to find the women who had gone before me—but they weren’t there. They absolutely were not there, forget it....So, you had no history. There were virtually no images that were a reflection of yourself and your experience....Women were not reflected anywhere in the art world.

A Different Curriculum for Girls and Women Another feminist concern was that girls' education was often limited to preparation for a career in homemaking. Sometimes high school girls were not allowed to take advanced science and math classes, and girls were often encouraged to pursue classes in “feminine” areas, such as sewing and cooking. Girls had very little involvement in athletics, while the bulk of classes, teams, facilities, and funds were reserved for boys. A domestic-oriented curriculum was also the norm in college—including all-women's colleges—and reinforced the prevailing attitude that “a woman's place is in the home.” As a result, prior to the 1970s, women who did complete their degrees had difficulty finding jobs, except in traditionally female occupations, such as teaching, nursing, and secretarial work. Their ability to pursue alternative careers was also constricted because many graduate schools set quotas limiting the number of women they would accept.



- How were girls and women portrayed in schoolbooks?
- Why did feminists believe that curriculum for girls was discriminatory?

Changes in the Legality of Discrimination By the 1960s, civil rights legislation made sex discrimination illegal in student admissions, faculty hiring, promotions, and appointments to administrative positions. Women had to fight long and difficult legal battles to make sure the law was enforced, which ultimately led to changes in educational institutions. These advancements opened the door for one of the women's movement's greatest legislative successes: helping to push Title IX through Congress. Part of the 1972 Educational Amendments, Title IX outlawed sex discrimination in educational programs that received federal money. Under Title IX, if a school was caught discriminating on the basis of sex, the government would cut off its funding. While Title IX helped further equality for women in many types of school programs, its greatest impact was on women's sports programs, which were greatly expanded through increased funding—despite tremendous resistance.

Changes in Higher Education The women's movement helped create dramatic changes in attitudes about education. While some feminists pursued legislation in Washington DC, others fostered change on college campuses. Female professors began to organize within their fields, women's groups sprang up to address feminist issues, and there was an explosion of Women's Studies programs. In 1969, there were only 17 college courses about women's issues; by 1973, there were 2,000. Along with changes in the curriculum came new attitudes about careers: by the mid 1970s, the number of women planning to enter a traditionally “feminine” career dropped from 31 percent to 10 percent, and women's applications to law and medical schools climbed 500 percent. By the mid 1980s, women made up 40 percent of the entering classes of the nation's law, medical, and business schools. A decade later, women earned more bachelor's and master's degrees than men, and in more types of fields than ever before.



- How did Title IX change educational institutions?
- What changes did the women's movement cause on college campuses?
- How has equal opportunity in education affected women's career choices?