

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 Race and Ethnicity

Key Concerns of the Women’s Movement Feminists of color greatly expanded the scope and power of the women’s movement. They demanded that the movement focus not only on sexism, but also on racism and poverty, which greatly affected many women of color. Feminists of color both criticized the white, middle-class focus of the women’s movement and helped push for equal rights for all women.

Similar Viewpoints Women of color in the women’s movement strongly supported and participated in the fight for equal pay, legalized abortion, and government-supported childcare centers. According to one 1972 poll, 67 percent of African-American women supported women’s liberation, compared to 35 percent of white women. Other women of color also supported the movement, despite some objections and concerns. One Laotian-American woman asserted, “There are barriers between women of color and white women, but we have so much similarity.” A Filipino-American woman stated, “I am a strong feminist....[I] focus on women’s issues, issues around oppressed people, and poverty issues.”

Differing Perceptions of Work Despite their commonalities with the mainstream women’s movement, many feminists of color felt the movement did not address key issues that concerned them. For example, the mainstream women’s movement was primarily composed of middle-class white women, many of whom had not worked outside their homes. They wanted to change family structure and society’s expectations so they could more easily find fulfilling opportunities in the workforce. In contrast, the majority of women of color—well over 50 percent—had always worked outside the home, in addition to raising children and doing housework. One Latina woman remembers, “[Work] wasn’t just a man’s thing, it was a side-by-side thing.... [We] had to work to survive.” In addition, in 1970 nearly 40 percent of African-American families lived in poverty while only about 10 percent of white families did. Thus, rather than focusing on their entry into the paid workforce, women of color in the movement focused on increased pay, more opportunities for higher-level jobs, and overcoming racial discrimination within their workplaces.



- What concerns did white feminists and feminists of color share?
- What was white feminists’ main concern regarding work?
- How did the concerns of women of color differ from that of white feminists?

Dual Forms of Discrimination Feminists of color wanted people both inside and outside the women’s movement to recognize that they faced more than one form of discrimination in all areas of life. In many areas, they did share the concerns, needs, and priorities of white feminists. For example, women of color were often torn between siding with the men in their community to fight racism and confronting the sexism to which they were frequently subjected. Many such women felt that racial solidarity was extremely important and wanted to create stronger, rather than divisive, relationships with men. For example, Elvira Valenzuela Crocker, author of a history of the Mexican-American Women’s National

Association (MANA), noted that some male Latinos “tried to tell us you couldn’t be both a Chicana and a feminist. Nevertheless, when analyzing any feminist issue, MANA always asked two questions, ‘How does this affect our women?’ and ‘How does this affect our people?’” In another example, Sharon Sayles Belton states in *In the Company of Women*:

People, quite frankly, want you to choose. Are you black or are you a woman? I mean, how can I choose one over the other? Because I work on feminist issues, or on issues that are important to women, doesn’t mean that I’m not concerned about the discrimination I experience because of my race. I have to do both. It’s not either/or. I think women of color have gotten some gains, too [through the women’s movement]. But we have special needs that other women need to understand, and they need to join us in that fight, our fight. I’m not going to get equality with white women unless white women understand racial discrimination and decide to band with me on that.

Racism Within the Women’s Movement Many feminists of color also believed that white feminists were unwilling to face their own racism. One African-American feminist noted, “In too many instances it seemed that white women wanted careers and high paying jobs so that they could hire black women to take care of their children without paying them a decent wage.” Many women of color were reluctant to join predominately white women’s groups such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) because they felt their concerns were not seriously considered. One Native-American activist noted, “The leadership of the national women’s organizations has got to change color. They can’t play the game of getting a few [women] who have the skin color required, but whose philosophy is so close to that of the leadership that it’s indistinguishable.”



- What types of discrimination did women of color face?
- What concerns did they challenge white feminists to recognize?

Changes in Recognition of Race and Ethnicity Feminists of color led the women’s movement in addressing a wider range of issues, such as the ways poverty and racism affected women in the paid workforce. They worked for more inclusive consideration of women’s rights, challenging the mainstream women’s movement to joins struggles such as those for better working conditions in mines and factories. Feminist of color also successfully pressed white feminists to look beyond their points of view and confront their own prejudices. They slowly achieved leadership positions in mainstream feminist organizations. Furthermore, women of color formed their own activist organizations, such as the National Black Feminist Organization, the Organization of Chinese-American Women, and the Mexican-American Women’s National Association to fight both sexism and racism.



- How did feminists of color widen the focus of the women’s movement?
- Why were their contributions important in the fight for women’s rights?