

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 Work

Key Concerns of the Women’s Movement A prominent focus of the women’s movement was the fight against sex discrimination and inequality in the paid workforce. By 1960, 38 percent of American women were in the workforce, a majority of them in low-status, low-paying jobs that offered little opportunity for advancement. Feminists fought for equal pay for women, an end to sex discrimination, and more job opportunities, both in terms of advancement in their current fields and access to fields traditionally closed to women.

Equal Pay The 1960s women’s movement demanded equal pay for women workers. On average, in 1960 women made only 60 cents for each dollar men earned, and women of color often made even less. Many employers openly discriminated against women in their pay practices, paying women less than men for the same, or similar, jobs. According to one study conducted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), 10 out of 14 male office workers were paid more than their female counterparts for performing the exact same job. The women’s movement pressured government agencies to investigate equal-pay violations, and brought lawsuits against employers that practiced wage discrimination. In *In the Company of Women*, Vivian Jenkins Nelson describes the inequalities women faced:

One day the phone rang at the college and it was one of the banks. It was a woman who said she was checking on a credit application for “Bill.” ... [S]he said, “And I want to verify his salary. He’s making \$12,000?” I said, “I hope to God not,” and hung up the phone. When I was hired...I ended up taking \$9,000. And this jerk, with the same rank, hired the same day, was making \$3,000 more!... [Another woman and I] went in and grabbed our boss, who was actually a sweetheart, and said, “Tom! What do you mean?” He said, “But he’s head of household.” “It isn’t fair,” we said, “we’re heads of households too,” but we were told it was just the way it had always been.



- How did men’s and women’s pay compare in 1960?
- How did employers discriminate against women workers in their pay practices?

Sex Discrimination The women’s movement brought attention to other forms of discrimination against women in the workplace. It criticized companies who refused to hire women, saying their customers preferred to interact with men, and demanded that women be judged on their performance rather than their gender. They also protested against company policies of firing recently married women because the employer believed they were going to “get pregnant and leave anyway,” firing women before less-experienced men during company lay offs, and firing pregnant women. Finally, feminists argued that male workers should be penalized for harrasing women sexually on the job.

Equal Opportunities Feminists further believed that women, like men, should be able to choose any type of work they wanted. They argued that most women in the paid workforce were clustered into jobs that male employers considered appropriate “women’s work.” These

were typically service-oriented jobs that reinforced women's role as caretakers or assistants to others. They included domestic workers (housekeepers and nannies), nurses, elementary school teachers, office clerks, secretaries, and waitresses. African-American women had even fewer job opportunities. Through the 1960s, they were mostly banned from peacetime factory work, and secretarial and sales jobs. Not uncoincidentally, female-dominated positions tended to be low paid and held little prestige (high respect). The women's movement pressed for legislation that would guarantee women's entry into new fields of work and open up advancement opportunities in the fields in which they already worked.



- **How did employers discriminate against women workers in hiring and firing?**
- **What types of jobs were considered “women’s work”?**
- **What changes in job opportunities did the women’s movement seek?**

Changes in Women’s Work The women’s movement led to significant improvements for women workers. In particular, feminists’ efforts were key in the passing of two pieces of employment legislation. The first was the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which stated that women should be paid the same as men for jobs “requiring equal skill, responsibility, and effort.” By 1970, over 50,000 women had used the Equal Pay Act to sue for equal pay. Between 1965 and 1975, women received over 30 million dollars in back pay. However, although women continued to make small, hard-won gains toward equal pay, by the late 1970s they were still being paid much less than men on average.

The second key piece of legislation was Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII made it illegal for employers to discriminate against job applicants because of “race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.” Furthermore, in 1967 President Lyndon B. Johnson expanded affirmative action—which required employers to show a “good faith effort” toward correcting workplace discrimination—to include women. As a result, women were hired in fields from which they had traditionally been excluded (left out). A woman bank vice president stated: “Equal opportunity laws [such as affirmative action] have made a big difference....I don’t think the bank or many other companies would have [hired women] if it hadn’t been that they...had to show some activity....[The laws] opened doors that I don’t think would have opened for a long time.” By 1984, 52 percent of women worked outside the home, and more were working as lawyers, architects, construction workers, scientists, and aviators than ever before. Still, while many women made great gains, some women of color continued to face barriers because of racial discrimination. One African-American activist put it this way: “On the job, [black women are] low women on the totem pole. White women have their problems. They’re interviewed for secretarial instead of the executive thing. But we’re interviewed for mopping floors and stuff like that.”



- **What two pieces of legislation did the women’s movement lobby for?**
- **How did the Equal Pay Act of 1963 help women workers?**
- **What was Title VII? How did it help women workers?**
- **What additional challenges did women of color face?**