



# Women Fight for Equality

## MAIN IDEA

Through protests and marches, women confronted social and economic barriers in American society.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

The rise of the women's movement during the 1960s advanced women's place in the work force and in society.

## Terms & Names

- Betty Friedan
- feminism
- National Organization for Women (NOW)
- Gloria Steinem
- Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)
- Phyllis Schlafly

## One American's Story

During the 1950s, writer **Betty Friedan** seemed to be living the American dream. She had a loving husband, healthy children, and a house in the suburbs. According to the experts—doctors, psychologists, and women's magazines—that was all a woman needed to be fulfilled. Why, then, wasn't she happy? In 1957, after conducting a survey of her Smith College classmates 15 years after graduation, she found she was not alone. Friedan eventually wrote a book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she addressed this "problem that has no name."



### A PERSONAL VOICE BETTY FRIEDAN

"The problem lay buried, unspoken. . . . It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. 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?'"

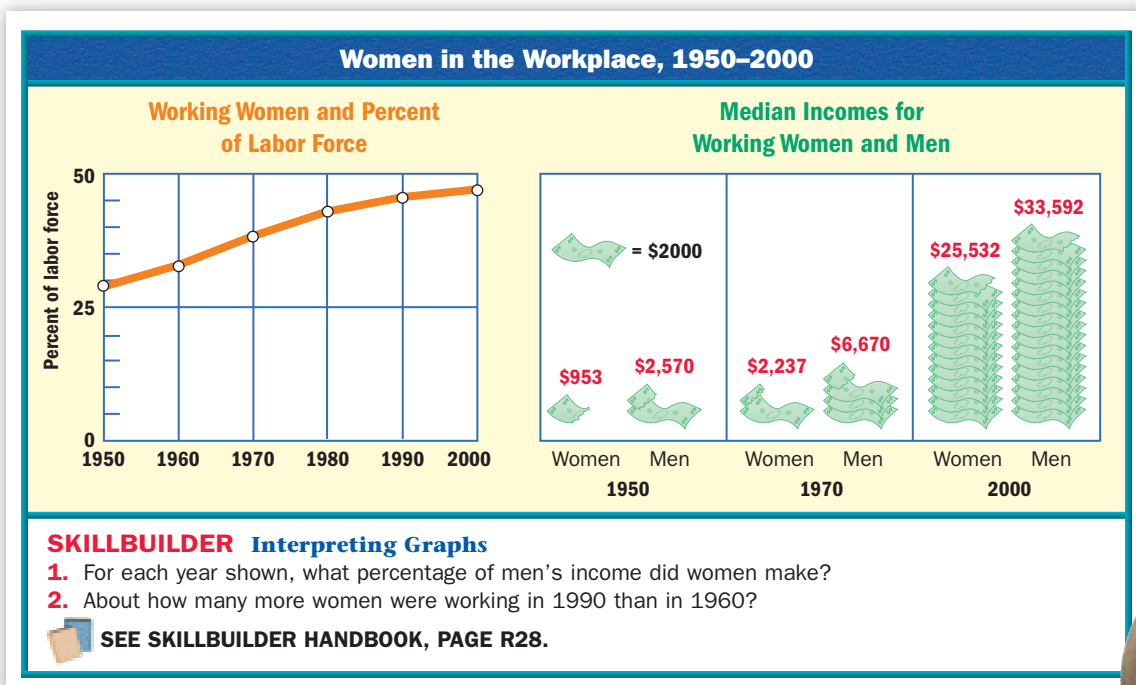
—*The Feminine Mystique*

**Betty Friedan,**  
November 1967

During the 1960s, women answered Friedan's question with a resounding "no." In increasing numbers they joined the nation's African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans in the fight for greater civil rights and equality in society.

## A New Women's Movement Arises

The theory behind the women's movement of the 1960s was **feminism**, the belief that women should have economic, political, and social equality with men. Feminist beliefs had gained momentum during the mid-1800s and in 1920 won women the right to vote. While the women's movement declined after this achievement, it reawakened during the 1960s, spurred by the political activism of the times.



This 1960s pin displays a slogan used by Betty Friedan at the National Women's Political Caucus.



**WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE** In 1950, only one out of three women worked for wages. By 1960, that number had increased to about 40 percent. Still, during this time, certain jobs were considered “men’s work” and women were shut out. The jobs available to women—mostly clerical work, domestic service, retail sales, social work, teaching, and nursing—paid poorly.

The country largely ignored this discrimination until President Kennedy appointed the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. In 1963, the commission reported that women were paid far less than men, even when doing the same jobs. Furthermore, women were seldom promoted to management positions, regardless of their education, experience, and ability. These newly publicized facts awakened many women to their unequal status in society.

**WOMEN AND ACTIVISM** Ironically, many women felt the sting of discrimination when they became involved in the civil rights and antiwar movements—movements that toted the ideological banner of protecting people’s rights. Within some of these organizations, such as SNCC and SDS, men led most of the activities, while women were assigned lesser roles. When women protested this arrangement, the men usually brushed them aside.

*“Move on little girl; we have more important issues to talk about here than women’s liberation.”*

A MALE ANTIWAR ACTIVIST

Such experiences led some women to organize small groups to discuss their concerns. During these discussions, or “consciousness-raising” sessions, women shared their lives with each other and discovered that their experiences were not unique. Rather, they reflected a much larger pattern of sexism, or discrimination based on gender. Author Robin Morgan delineated this pattern. **A**

**A PERSONAL VOICE** ROBIN MORGAN

*“It makes you very sensitive—raw, even, this consciousness. Everything, from the verbal assault on the street, to a ‘well-meant’ sexist joke your husband tells, to the lower pay you get at work (for doing the same job a man would be paid more for), to television commercials, to rock-song lyrics, to the pink or blue blanket they put on your infant in the hospital nursery, to speeches by male ‘revolutionaries’ that reek of male supremacy—everything seems to barrage your aching brain. . . . You begin to see how all-pervasive a thing is sexism.”*

—quoted in *Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*

**Vocabulary**

**ideological:** concerned with a certain set of ideas

**MAIN IDEA**

**Analyzing Effects**

**A** What effects did the civil rights and the antiwar movements have on many women?



**THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT EMERGES** *The Feminine Mystique*, which captured the very discontent that many women were feeling, quickly became a best-seller and helped to galvanize women across the country. By the late 1960s, women were working together for change. “This is not a movement one ‘joins,’” observed Robin Morgan. “The Women’s Liberation Movement exists where three or four friends or neighbors decide to meet regularly . . . on the welfare lines, in the supermarket, the factory, the convent, the farm, the maternity ward.”

## The Movement Experiences Gains and Losses

As the women’s movement grew, it achieved remarkable and enduring political and social gains for women. Along the way, however, it also suffered setbacks, most notably in its attempt to ensure women’s equality in the Constitution.

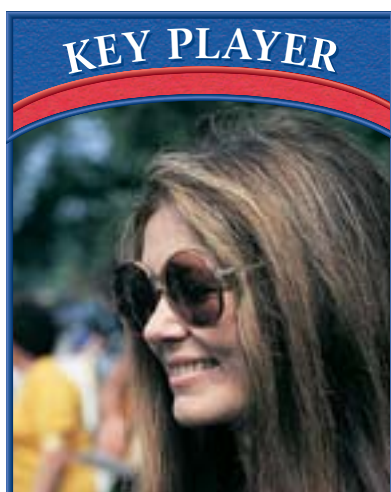
**THE CREATION OF NOW** The women’s movement gained strength with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, and gender and created the Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to handle discrimination claims. By 1966, however, some women argued that the EEOC didn’t adequately address women’s grievances. That year, 28 women, including Betty Friedan, created the **National Organization for Women (NOW)** to pursue women’s goals. “The time has come,” the founders of NOW declared, “to confront with concrete action the conditions which now prevent women from enjoying the equality of opportunity . . . which is their right as individual Americans and as human beings.” **B**

NOW members pushed for the creation of child-care facilities that would enable mothers to pursue jobs and education. NOW also pressured the EEOC to enforce more vigorously the ban on gender discrimination in hiring. NOW’s efforts prompted the EEOC to declare sex-segregated job ads illegal and to issue guidelines to employers, stating that they could no longer refuse to hire women for traditionally male jobs.

**A DIVERSE MOVEMENT** In its first three years, NOW’s ranks swelled to 175,000 members. A number of other women’s groups sprang up around the country, too. In 1968, a militant group known as the New York Radical Women staged a well-publicized demonstration at the annual Miss America Pageant. The women threw bras, girdles, wigs, and other “women’s garbage” into a “Freedom Trash Can.” They then crowned a sheep “Miss America.” Around this time, **Gloria Steinem**, a journalist, political activist, and ardent supporter of the women’s liberation movement, made her voice heard on the subjects of feminism and equality. Steinem’s grandmother had served as president of the Ohio Woman’s Suffrage Association from 1908 to 1911; Steinem had inherited her passion and conviction. In 1971, Steinem helped found the National Women’s Political Caucus, a moderate group that encouraged women to seek political office. In 1972, she and other women created a new women’s magazine, *Ms.*, designed to treat contemporary issues from a feminist perspective.

**LEGAL AND SOCIAL GAINS** As the women’s movement progressed, women began to question all sorts of gender-based distinctions. People protested that a woman’s physical



### GLORIA STEINEM 1934–

Gloria Steinem became one of the more prominent figures of the women’s movement after she and several other women founded *Ms.* magazine in 1972. The magazine soon became a major voice of the women’s movement.

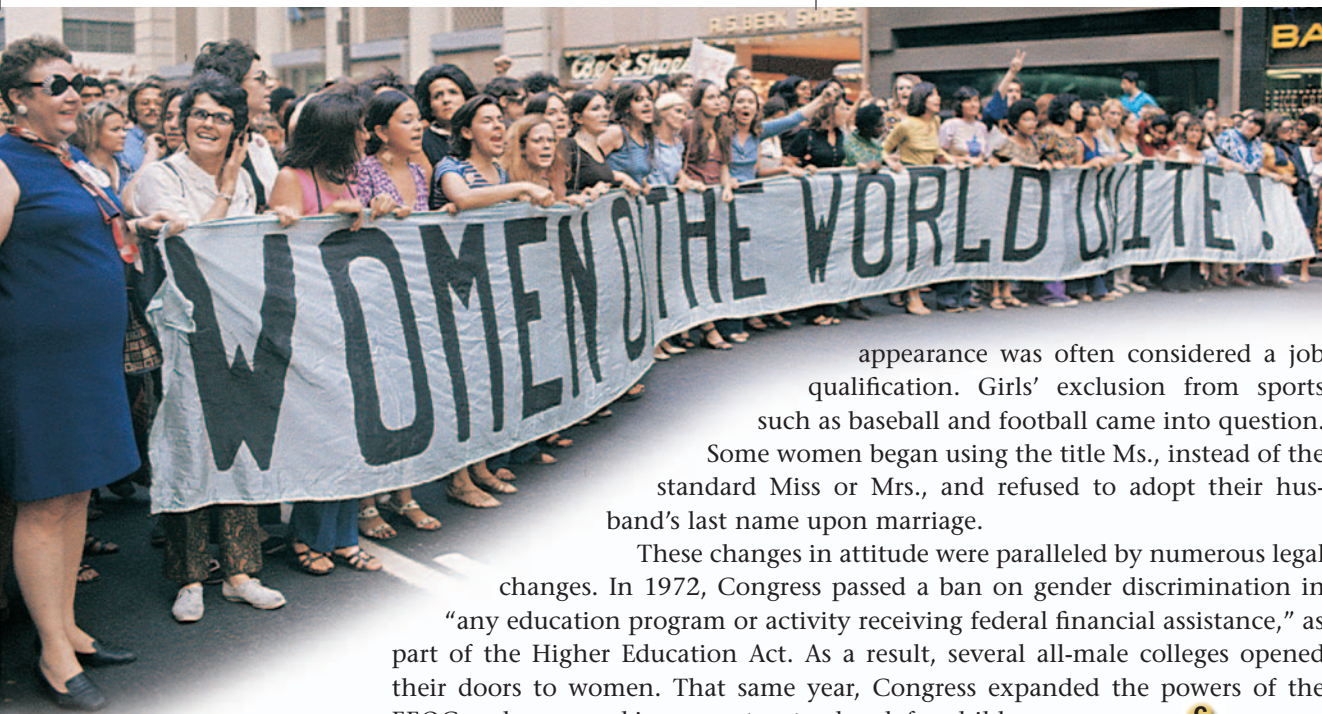
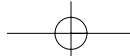
Steinem said that she decided to start the feminist magazine after editors in the mainstream media continually rejected her stories about the women’s movement:

“Editors who had assumed I had some valuable biological insight into food, male movie stars, and textured stockings now questioned whether I or other women writers were biologically capable of writing objectively about feminism. That was the beginning.”

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**B** What prompted women to establish NOW?



Thousands of women march through the streets of New York City during the summer of 1970 to promote women's equality.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Making Generalizations

**C** What sort of gains did the women's movement make by the early 1970s?

appearance was often considered a job qualification. Girls' exclusion from sports such as baseball and football came into question.

Some women began using the title Ms., instead of the standard Miss or Mrs., and refused to adopt their husband's last name upon marriage.

These changes in attitude were paralleled by numerous legal changes. In 1972, Congress passed a ban on gender discrimination in "any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance," as part of the Higher Education Act. As a result, several all-male colleges opened their doors to women. That same year, Congress expanded the powers of the EEOC and gave working parents a tax break for child-care expenses. **C**

**ROE v. WADE** One of the more controversial positions that NOW and other feminist groups supported was a woman's right to have an abortion. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that women do have the right to choose an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. Some thought the ruling might "bring to an end the emotional and divisive public argument. . . ." However, the issue still divides Americans today.

**THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT (ERA)** In what seemed at first to be another triumph for the women's movement, Congress passed the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** in 1972. The amendment then needed ratification by 38 states to become part of the Constitution. First introduced to Congress in 1923, the ERA would guarantee that both men and women would enjoy the same rights and protections under the law. It was, many supporters said, a matter of "simple justice."

The amendment scared many people, and a Stop-ERA campaign was launched in 1972. Conservative **Phyllis Schlafly**, along with conservative religious groups, political organizations, and many anti-feminists, felt that the ERA would lead to "a parade of horrors," such as the drafting of women, the end of laws protecting homemakers, the end of a husband's responsibility to provide for his family, and same-sex marriages. Schlafly said that radical feminists "hate men, marriage, and children" and were oppressed "only in their distorted minds."

#### A PERSONAL VOICE PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY

"The U.S. Constitution is not the place for symbols or slogans, it is not the proper device to alleviate psychological problems of personal inferiority. Symbols and slogans belong on bumper strips—not in the Constitution. It would be a tragic mistake for our nation to succumb to the tirades and demands of a few women who are seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems."

— quoted in *The Equal Rights Amendment: The History and the Movement*



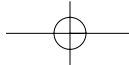
Phyllis Schlafly

### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**D** What concerns motivated those who opposed the ERA?

**THE NEW RIGHT EMERGES** In order to combat the ERA and the pro-abortion supporters, conservatives built what they called a new "pro-family" movement. In the 1970s, this coalition—which focused on social, cultural, and moral problems—came to be known as the New Right. The New Right and the women's movement debated family-centered issues such as whether the government should pay for daycare, which the New Right opposed. Throughout the 1970s, the New Right built grassroots support for social conservatism. It would later play a key role in the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980. **D**



## The Movement's Legacy

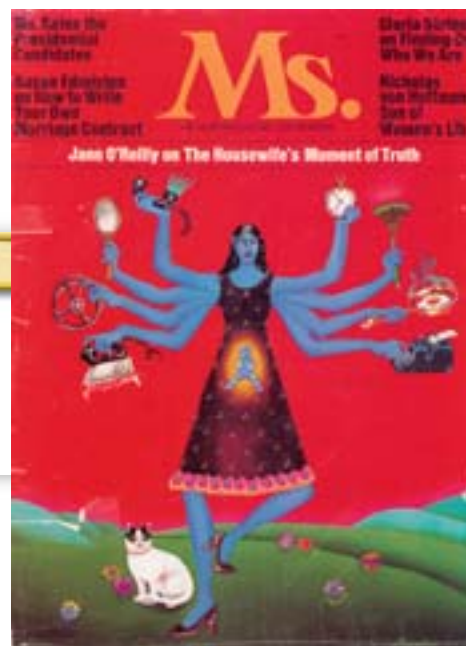
The New Right and the women's movement clashed most dramatically over the ERA. By 1977 it had won approval from 35 of the 38 states needed for ratification, but the New Right gained strength. By June of 1982—the deadline for ratification—not enough states had approved the amendment. The ERA went down in defeat.

Despite ERA's defeat, the women's movement altered society in countless ways, such as by transforming women's conventional roles and their attitudes toward career and family. Interviews with women graduates at Stanford University reflect the change. Of graduates in 1965, 70 percent planned not to work at all when their children were of preschool age. When the class of 1972 was surveyed, only 7 percent said they would stop working to raise children.

The women's movement also succeeded in expanding career opportunities for women. For instance, as of 1970, 8 percent of all medical school graduates and 5 percent of all law school graduates were women. By 1998, those proportions had risen to 42 and 44 percent, respectively. Yet many women ran into a "glass ceiling"—an invisible, but very real, resistance to promoting women into top positions.

By 1983 women held 13.5 percent of elected state offices as well as 24 seats in the U.S. Congress. More importantly, as historian Sara Evans has noted, by 1980 "feminist concerns were firmly on the national political agenda and clearly there to stay." Most of all, the women's movement helped countless women open their lives to new possibilities. "For we have lived the second American revolution," wrote Betty Friedan in 1976, "and our very anger said a 'new YES' to life."

As this poster shows, women have made significant political strides by being elected to the U.S. Congress.



### SECTION 2

#### ASSESSMENT

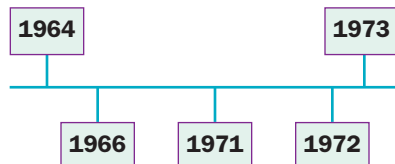
**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- Betty Friedan
- National Organization for Women (NOW)
- Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)
- feminism
- Gloria Steinem
- Phyllis Schlafly

#### MAIN IDEA

##### 2. TAKING NOTES

Create a time line of key events relating to the women's movement.



Explain which event you think best demonstrates progressive reform.

#### CRITICAL THINKING

##### 3. HYPOTHESIZING

What if the Equal Rights Amendment had been ratified? Speculate on how women's lives might have been different. Use reasons to support your answer.

**Think About:**

- rights addressed by the amendment
- legal support that the amendment might have provided
- possible reactions from groups opposing the amendment

##### 4. ANALYZING VISUAL SOURCES

Examine the drawing on this 1972 cover of *Ms.* The woman shown has eight arms and is holding a different object in each hand. What do you think these objects symbolize in terms of women's roles? What do you think this drawing says about women in the 1960s? Explain.