

The Women's Movement

READING FOCUS

- What was the background of the women's movement?
- How did women organize to gain support and to effect change?
- What was the impact of feminism?
- Which groups opposed the women's movement and why?

MAIN IDEA

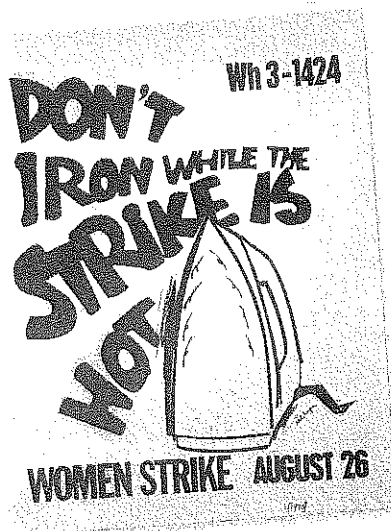
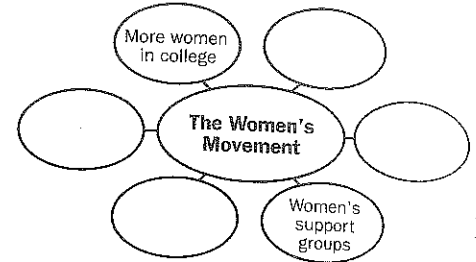
The women's movement, which was dedicated to ending discrimination based on gender, found inspiration in the civil rights movement and other activist causes.

KEY TERMS

feminism
National Organization for Women (NOW)
Roe v. Wade
Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

TAKING NOTES

Copy the web diagram below. As you read, write the conditions that led to the women's movement in the bubbles on the left. Write the effects on the right.



On August 26, 1970, the anniversary of the passage of the constitutional amendment granting women suffrage, thousands of women took the day off from jobs and household chores to observe Women's Equality Day.

Setting the Scene Songwriter Bob Dylan's 1964 hit "The Times They Are A-Changin'" reflected the atmosphere of the sixties. The fifties had been primarily a time of unprecedented prosperity and security, but not all groups had participated equally. The sixties ushered in an era of activism, as these groups and their supporters seized the opportunity to make their voices heard. One demand for change came from women who did not want to be limited to the traditional roles of wife and mother. These women demanded the same opportunities as men. Pop singer Helen Reddy's 1971 song exemplified this new point of view:

*"I am woman, hear me roar
In numbers too big to ignore,
And I know too much to go back
and pretend. . . .
Yes, I've paid the price
But look how much I gained.
If I have to, I can do anything.
I am strong, I am invincible,
I am woman."*

—Ray Burton and Helen Reddy

These lyrics reflect the sense of self-confidence and strength that helped to create the new women's movement in the 1960s and continued to drive it forward into the 1970s.

Background of the Women's Movement

The crusade for women's rights was not new in 1960. In the late 1800s, particularly, women had worked for the right to vote and for equality in education and in jobs. The term **feminism**, which came to be associated with the 1960s, had first come into recorded use in 1895 to describe the theory of political, economic, and social equality of men and women. Feminists were those who believed in this equality or took action to bring it about.

While much progress had been made since the 1890s, the full equality sought by feminists had not been achieved. The women's movement of the 1960s sought to change aspects of American life that had been accepted for decades. The 1950s stereotype of women still placed them in the home, married and raising children. For many women, this stereotype did not reflect either reality or necessity. As had been the case in earlier decades, many women needed to work in order to support themselves or to help support their families. Furthermore, World War II had opened many new employment opportunities for women. During and after the war, more and more women entered the labor force. By the beginning of the 1960s, about 38 percent of all women held jobs. In addition, many women were educated, and looked forward to putting their education to use in professional careers.

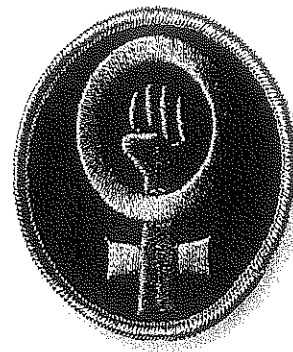
Education and Employment An increasing number of women began going to college after World War II. In 1950, only 25 percent of all Bachelor of Arts degrees were earned by women. Twenty years later, in 1970, the number was 43 percent. Better-educated women had high hopes for the future, but they were often discouraged by the discrimination they faced when they looked for jobs or tried to advance in their professions.

In many cases, employers were reluctant to invest in training women because they expected female employees to leave their jobs after a few years to start families. Other employers simply refused to hire qualified women because they believed that home and family should be a woman's only responsibility.

Women who did enter the work force often found themselves underemployed, performing jobs and earning salaries below their abilities. Working women earned less than working men doing similar or even identical jobs. In 1963, women, on average, were paid only 59 cents for each dollar that men earned. By 1973, this figure had dropped to 57 cents. This financial inequality created a growing sense of frustration among women and led to renewed demands for equal pay for equal work.

The Impact of the Civil Rights Movement While social, educational, and economic conditions set the scene for the women's movement, the civil rights movement provided a "how-to" model for action. It also provided inspiration. Black and white women had joined in the struggle for civil rights and gained valuable skills from their work in the movement. At the same time, they had endured frustration over their second-class status in civil rights organizations. As they worked to end racial discrimination, women were expected to make coffee and do clerical work while men made most of the policy decisions. Frustrated over their assigned roles, women began to apply the techniques that had been successful in the civil rights movement to a new movement that would address their own concerns.

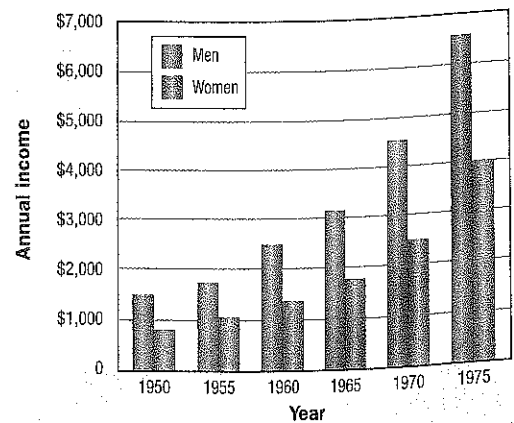
The civil rights movement also provided women with legal tools to fight discrimination. One such tool was the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Originally, the section of the act called Title VII prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, or national origin. When Congress debated the bill, however, some opponents of civil rights added an amendment to outlaw discrimination on the basis of sex. This action was a strategy to make the entire bill look ridiculous, so that it would fail in the final vote. To the dismay of its opponents, both the amendment and the bill passed. The



The new women's movement chose symbols of power to represent its cause.

INTERPRETING GRAPHS
 Women's incomes continued to lag behind men's earnings, partly because many low-paying jobs were traditionally considered "women's work." **Making Comparisons** How did the gap change between 1950 and 1975?

Incomes of Men and Women, 1950-1975



SOURCE: Statistical Abstract of the United States

Focus on CULTURE

The Feminine Mystique Betty

Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* caused a sensation in the suburbs of America. It addressed the women who had everything that society said they should want: husbands who were good providers, healthy children, a house in the suburbs—often even the time and money to furnish and refurbish the comfortable homes they ran for their families. But many of these women were not happy, and when they said so, they were often called “neurotic” or not normal. Friedan called it “the problem that had no name”—the dissatisfaction of not being able to realize one’s own full potential. Many women were dissatisfied with being regarded only as support services for their families, with constantly subordinating their own need for personal growth and fulfillment to the needs of their families, and with second-class citizenship in law and in the marketplace. Friedan gave these women the courage to ask, “Is this all?”—and her book helped women realize that it doesn’t have to be.



new Civil Rights Act now had a provision that gave women a legal framework to challenge discrimination.

Even with the added boost of the new legislation, progress took time. Women soon discovered that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) set up by the bill did not take women’s discrimination claims seriously. Nevertheless, Title VII would be tremendously important as the women’s movement gained strength.

Women’s Groups Organize

As the 1960s unfolded, women began to meet in groups to compare experiences. Women active in the civil rights movement met to look for ways in which they could play a larger role in that struggle. Soon they went beyond politics, exploring other aspects of their lives. The growing movement drew women who were active in other forms of protest and reform. They included student radicals, opponents of the Vietnam War and the draft, and workers for welfare rights and other social issues. Another important influence was Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. The dissatisfied housewives that Friedan described in her book began meeting, too, to discuss their lives and their roles in society.

Support Groups Meeting in kitchens and living rooms, women began gathering in consciousness-raising groups, which were dedicated to increasing their members’ awareness of women’s situation in society. One participant, Nancy Hawley, who was a community activist in Boston, Massachusetts, was troubled by patterns she saw at work. “Though many of us were working harder than the men,” she noted, “we realized we were not listened to and often ignored.” Growing numbers of women recognized the negative attitudes, or sexism, directed toward them. Many told of being ridiculed for attending women’s groups. Such lack of support outside the group made their bond stronger within the group.

Organizing NOW In 1966, a group of 28 professional women, including Betty Friedan, established the **National Organization for Women (NOW)**. These women were frustrated that existing women’s groups were unwilling to pressure the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to take women’s grievances more seriously. The goal of NOW was “to take action to bring American women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now.”

NOW sought fair pay and equal job opportunities. It attacked the “false image of women” in the media, such as advertising that used sexist slogans or photographs. NOW also called for more balance in marriages, with men and women sharing parenting and household responsibilities. A year after NOW was founded, it had 1,000 members. Only four years later, some 15,000 women had joined.

For some women, NOW seemed too extreme; for others, it was not extreme enough. Some saw NOW—and the women’s movement in general—as mainly benefiting white, middle-class women. Nonetheless, NOW served as a rallying point to end sex discrimination and to promote equality for all women.

The Impact of Feminism

The women’s movement came of age in the early 1970s. In August 1970, a New York City march celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of women’s suffrage drew

tens of thousands of demonstrators supporting women's equality. More women began identifying themselves as feminists. Even those who did not join feminist groups could now find new kinds of information and opinions on women's issues. One new source was a book called *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. This handbook, published in 1970 by a women's health collective in Boston, encouraged women to understand their own health issues. It sold 200,000 copies in the first several years after its publication and three million by 1990.

In 1972, journalist Gloria Steinem and several other women founded *Ms.* magazine. Devoted to feminist issues, *Ms.* provided women with viewpoints that were decidedly different from those in *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, and other women's magazines of the day. All 300,000 copies of the preview issue sold out in eight days. Only one year later, *Ms.* had nearly 200,000 subscribers. While not all readers considered themselves feminists, the magazine familiarized its audience with the arguments and issues of the women's movement.

A Shift in Attitudes Slowly the women's movement brought a shift in attitudes and in the law. For example, in 1972, Congress passed a prohibition against sex discrimination as part of the Higher Education Act. A survey of first-year college students revealed a significant change in career goals—and opportunities. In 1970, men interested in fields such as business, law, engineering, and medicine outnumbered women by eight to one. Five years later, the margin had dropped to three to one. More women entered law school and medical school. Women were finally admitted to military academies to be trained as officers.

In 1971, the National Women's Political Caucus was formed to expand women's participation in politics. By working from within the system, women were able to gain broader support for the goals of the women's movement. Women also became more influential in politics. New Yorker Shirley Chisholm, who was a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus, served in the House of Representatives from 1969 to 1983. In 1972, she ran for President, winning 152 delegates to the Democratic National Convention before she withdrew from the race. Chisholm's candidacy demonstrated that an African American woman

READING CHECK

What were some of the effects of the women's movement?

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

Working Mothers

In the early years of the women's movement, experts disagreed over the issue of working mothers.

Analyzing Viewpoints What assumptions and biases about women and about children are revealed by each author? What reasonable argument does each author use?

In Favor of Working Mothers

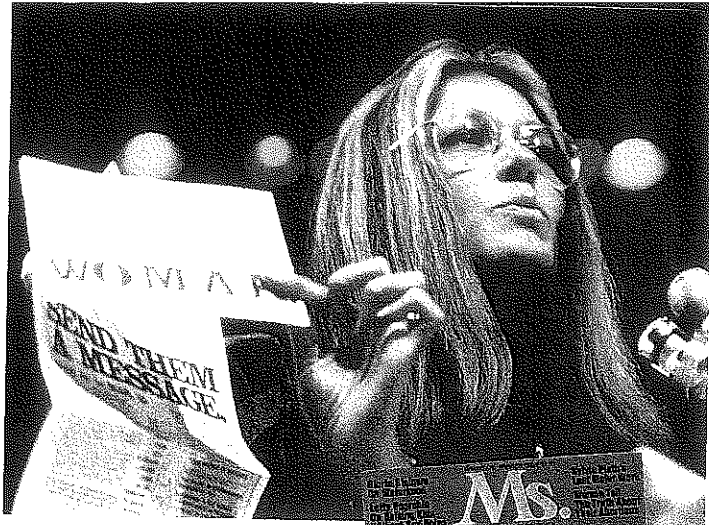
"At the present time, one can say anything—good or bad—about children of employed mothers and support the statement by some research finding. But there is no definitive evidence that children are less happy, healthy, adjusted, because their mothers work. The studies that show working women to be happier, better, more mature mothers do not get much publicity."

—Betty Friedan,
The Feminine Mystique, 1963

Opposed to Working Mothers

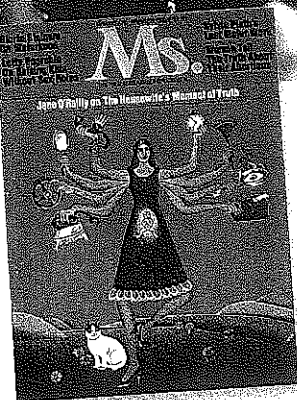
"To work or not to work? Some mothers have to work to make a living. Usually their children turn out all right, because some reasonably good arrangement is made for their care. But others grow up neglected and maladjusted. . . . It doesn't make sense to let mothers go to work making dresses in a factory or tapping typewriters in an office, and have them pay other people to do a poorer job of bringing up their children."

—Benjamin Spock, M.D.,
Baby and Childcare, 1957 (first published in 1946)



VIEWING HISTORY Gloria Steinem, above, was one of the founders of *Ms.* magazine. The first issue is shown at right.

Analyzing Visual Information
How does the *Ms.* cover show the many roles women were expected to fill?



could gain support for national office. And she paved the way for Geraldine Ferraro's selection as the Democratic Party's vice presidential candidate in 1984.

Many women did not actively participate in or support the women's movement. Still, most agreed with NOW's goal to provide women with better job opportunities. Many were also pleased that the women's movement brought a greater recognition of issues important to women. These issues included the need for child-care facilities, shelters for homeless women, more attention to women's health concerns, and increased awareness of sexual harassment.

Despite many shared concerns, the women's movement continued to be divided regarding some of its goals and strategies. Radical feminists emphasized the need to end male domination, sometimes even rejecting men, marriage, and childbearing. Other women rejected the strong opinions of the radicals, fearing they would cause a split in the women's movement. These women emphasized that they sought only equality with men, not rejection of them.

Roe v. Wade One issue that had the potential to divide the movement was abortion. NOW and other groups worked to reform the laws governing a woman's decision to choose an abortion instead of continuing an unwanted pregnancy. Many states outlawed or severely restricted access to abortion. Women who could afford to travel to another state or out of the country could usually find legal medical services, but poorer women often turned to abortion methods that were not only illegal but unsafe.

A landmark social and legal change came in 1973, when the Supreme Court legalized abortion in the controversial *Roe v. Wade* decision. The justices based their decision on the constitutional right to personal privacy, and struck down state regulation of abortion in the first three months of pregnancy. However, the ruling still allowed states to restrict abortions during the later stages of pregnancy. The case was, and remains, highly controversial, with radical thinkers on both sides of the argument.

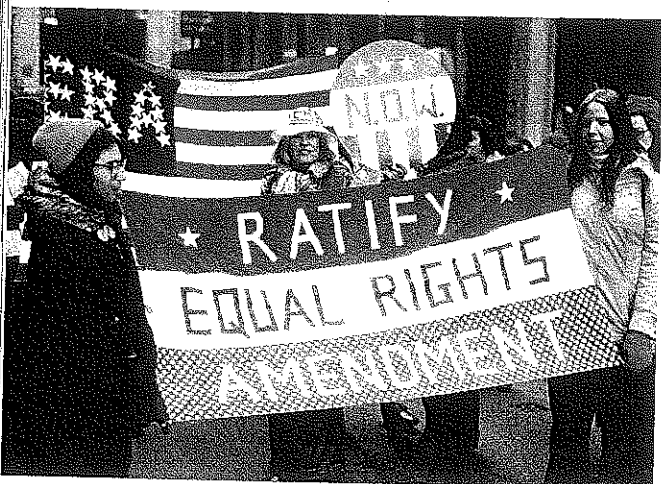
The Equal Rights Amendment Many women also took part in the campaign for a change to the Constitution that would make discrimination based on a person's sex illegal. In 1972, Congress approved passage of the **Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)** to the Constitution:

KEY DOCUMENTS

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

—Equal Rights Amendment, 1972

Many women demonstrated in favor of ratification of the ERA.



To become law, the amendment had to be ratified by 38 states. Thirty states did so quickly. When a few others also ratified it, approval seemed certain. By 1977, 35 states had ratified the amendment, but opposition forces were gaining strength. The effort to add the ERA to the Constitution limped along until the 1982 deadline for ratification and then died.

Opposition to the Women's Movement

It was a woman, conservative political activist Phyllis Schlafly, who led a national campaign to block ratification of the ERA. She said this about the amendment:

“It won't do anything to help women, and it will take away from women the rights they already have, such as the right of a wife to be supported by her husband, the right of a woman to be exempted from military combat, and the right . . . to go to a single-sex college.”

—Phyllis Schlafly

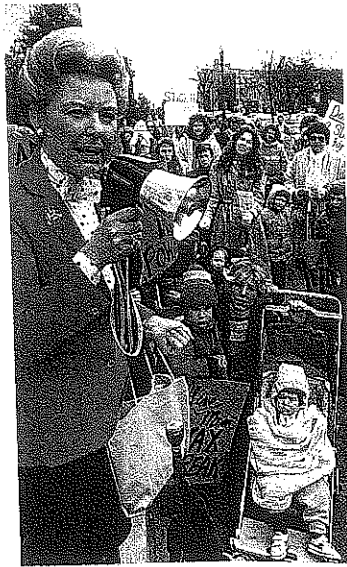
Women already had legal backing for their rights, Schlafly argued. ERA supporters contested Schlafly's charges about the supposed effects of the ERA, such as the establishment of coed bathrooms and the end of alimony. Nevertheless, arguments such as Schlafly's were instrumental in preventing the ERA from being ratified before the deadline.

Schlafly was not alone in her opposition to the ERA and to the women's movement in general. Many men were also hostile to the feminist movement, which was sometimes scornfully called “women's liberation” or “women's lib.”

Nor were all women sympathetic to the goals of the women's movement. Some women responded by stressing their desire to remain at home and raise children. They were happy with women's traditional roles and resented being told that they should feel dissatisfied. These women felt that their roles as wives, and particularly as mothers, were being undervalued by the women's movement. The result, as these women saw it, was less rather than more respect for women and for the important task of raising the next generation.

Opposition came from other quarters as well. Some African American women felt that combating racial discrimination was more important than battling sex discrimination. In 1974, NOW's African American president, Aileen Hernandez, acknowledged that “Some black sisters are not sure that the feminist movement will meet their current needs.” Many working-class women felt removed from the movement, too. They believed they were being encouraged to give up homemaking in order to take up undesirable paid labor.

Nevertheless, the women's movement continued to make gains, to change minds, and to expand opportunities for women. In so doing, it became one of several important strands of reform in the era of activism.



VIEWING HISTORY Phyllis Schlafly spoke out against the ERA. **Determining Relevance** Do you think the fact that Schlafly was a woman made her a more effective or less effective advocate for her point of view? Explain your answer.

Section

1

Assessment

READING

COMPREHENSION

1. What is **feminism**?
2. (a) When was **NOW** formed?
(b) What was its purpose?
3. Who was Shirley Chisholm?
4. Explain the **Roe v. Wade** decision.
(a) What was the **ERA**? (b) How many states eventually ratified it?

CRITICAL THINKING AND WRITING

6. **Identifying Assumptions** (a) What beliefs led many women to support the women's movement? (b) What beliefs led others to oppose it?
7. **Writing an Opinion** Would there have been a successful women's movement without the example of the civil rights movement? Support your opinion in a paragraph.



Take It to the NET

Activity: Making a Poster Learn more about the battle over ratification of the ERA. Make a poster either for or against ratification. Use the links provided in the *America: Pathways to the Present* area of the following Web site for help in completing this activity.
www.phschool.com