

Women

Step 1 Read about women's struggle for civil rights in Section 2, and complete the Reading Notes for this group.

Step 2 Read the excerpt below.

Step 3 Complete your Station Notes for this group by doing the following:

- Copy one sentence from NOW's Statement of Purpose that more fully explains what changes women were fighting for. Draw a line connecting this quotation to your "Changes Wanted" notes.
- Sketch and label at least one detail from the photograph of the NOW protesters that shows what actions women used to achieve change. Draw a line connecting this sketch to your "How Achieved" notes.

In 1966, author Betty Friedan and other feminists founded the National Organization for Women. NOW became an important venue for bringing attention to women's issues. In the following excerpt from NOW's Statement of Purpose, Friedan outlines the beliefs of the organization and its strategy for achieving change.

Excerpt from NOW's Statement of Purpose

We, men and women who hereby constitute ourselves as the National Organization for Women, believe that the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes . . .

WE BELIEVE that the . . . protection guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution to the civil rights of all individuals, must be effectively applied and enforced to isolate and remove patterns of sex discrimination, to ensure equality of opportunity in employment and education, and equality of civil and political rights and responsibilities on behalf of women, as well as for Negroes and other deprived groups . . .

WE REJECT the current assumptions that a man must carry the sole burden of supporting himself, his wife, and family . . . We believe that a true partnership between the sexes demands a different concept of marriage, an equitable sharing of the responsibilities of home and children and of the economic burdens of their support . . .

NOW WILL HOLD ITSELF INDEPENDENT OF ANY POLITICAL PARTY in order to mobilize the political power of all women and men intent on our goals. We will strive to ensure that no party, candidate, president, senator, governor, congressman, or any public official who betrays or ignores the principle of full equality between the sexes is elected or appointed to office.

Women



Women Demand Equality

Like Dolores Huerta, many women who fought for civil rights and workers' rights later became active in the movement for women's rights. More than a century before, in the 1830s and 1840s, many women abolitionists had followed a similar path. In fighting to end slavery, they had come to recognize their own status as second-class citizens. These early advocates of women's rights held the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention and launched the women's suffrage movement. In the same way, many women who were inspired by the black civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s went on to forge the women's movement.

One Half of America

Although women make up half the American population, in the early 1960s many women felt they were being treated like a minority and denied their rights. They wanted equal opportunity and the same rights as men. In 1963, author Betty Friedan exposed the unhappiness of many middle-class women in her book *The Feminine Mystique*. She described women who had the things they thought they wanted—marriage, home, family—but were still dissatisfied. As Friedan wrote, the typical housewife wanted something more:

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?"
—Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963

Many middle-class wives had attended college, but few had entered professions. Although the number of women in the workforce was rising, most held what were considered to be women's jobs. They were secretaries or bank tellers. For example, while men might work as lawyers, doctors, or business executives. Because they held lower-status jobs, they earned less than men. In 1965, they made only about 60 cents for every dollar men earned. Even women in higher positions were paid less than male colleagues. Although the gap has narrowed, it remains significant. In 2004, women earned about 76 cents for every dollar men earned. Meanwhile, relatively few women have been promoted to upper management. The invisible barrier to women's professional advancement has been called the glass ceiling. This term has also been applied to minorities.

Organizing for Action

In the early 1960s, Congress passed two laws banning sex discrimination, but neither had much impact. The first, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, outlawed "wage differentials based on sex" in industries that produced goods for commerce. This law only affected jobs that were nearly identical, however. Since women and men generally did different types of work, the law had little effect on women's wages. The second law, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, also prohibited discrimination based on sex. This law set an important precedent, but it brought few immediate benefits for women.

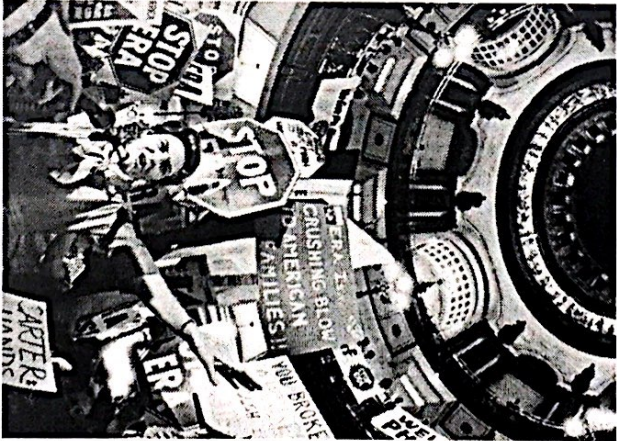
To advance women's rights, Betty Friedan and other activists formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. This group pledged "to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society." NOW was made up mostly of middle-aged, middle-class women. Like the more moderate organizations of the civil rights movement, NOW placed much of its focus on legal reforms and workforce discrimination, demanding equal opportunity for women.

On August 26, 1970, NOW organized the Women's Strike for Equality. The date marked the 50th anniversary of the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the right to vote. The strikers urged women not to do their usual domestic tasks that day. Their slogan was, "Don't iron while the strike is hot." That day, 50,000 women marched in New York City. Altogether, more than 100,000 people around the country took part in the strike, making it the largest action for women's rights in American history.

A more radical branch of the women's movement arose in the late 1960s. It was made up of younger women who had worked in the civil rights movement. They used the term sexism to describe oppression of women in the workplace and home. They used the term women's liberation to describe their goal. They wanted to emancipate women from customs and laws that kept them subordinate to men. Many of these ideas became part of the broader women's movement.

Working for Equal Rights

One of the main goals of the women's movement was to win passage of the equal rights amendment to the Constitution, or ERA, which stated that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." The ERA had been submitted to every session of Congress since 1923. In 1972, for the first time, Congress passed the ERA and sent it to the states to be ratified. At first it seemed certain that three-fourths of the states would ratify the ERA and it would become law. But the amendment provoked a backlash. Some Americans feared that the ERA would devalue the roles of mother and homemaker. Some also believed it would lead to requiring women to serve in the military. As a result, the ERA failed to achieve ratification by the 1982 deadline set by Congress, falling 3 states short of the required 38 states.



Despite the growing prominence of the women's movement, many Americans at the time opposed feminism, the movement for women's equality. They believed that feminism posed a threat to traditional values and would undermine marriage and weaken the American family. They claimed that traditional roles for women gave them a strong and respected place in society and argued that feminists wanted to make women more like men.

Despite that loss, women's efforts to attain equal rights succeeded on many fronts. Some clear examples came in education. Between 1969 and 1973, the number of women law students nearly quadrupled, while the number of women medical students almost doubled. By 1997, women made up the majority of college students and earned the majority of master's degrees. Women's opportunities in education were enhanced by federal legislation. A law called Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972 prohibited discrimination on the basis of sex in any school program receiving federal funds, including school athletics.

The Fight over Birth Control and Abortion

The struggle for women's rights also focused on birth control and abortion. Many feminists believed that to control their lives, women must be able to control when, or if, they had children.

The development of the birth control pill was a major step in this direction. In 1960, the Food and Drug Administration approved the pill, and by 1965, five million women were using it. The pill had a tremendous impact on women's lives, and on society, by allowing women greater control over reproduction.

Some Americans disapproved of the pill. They favored abstinence as a form of birth control and argued that family-planning centers should not advise couples on other methods to avoid pregnancy. But in 1965, the Supreme Court ruled that married couples had a "right to privacy in marital relations" that included access to counseling on birth control, including use of the pill.

Several years later, the Supreme Court extended this right of privacy to the question of abortion. In 1973, the Court ruled in *Roe v. Wade* that the "right of privacy . . . is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy." Feminists considered this ruling a major advance in the struggle for women's civil rights, but the ruling has remained controversial. Opponents argue that life begins at conception and see abortion as murder. Supporters say women have the right to control their bodies and that abortion should remain legal.