

United States History, Annotated Teacher's Ed., Jerome R. Reich and Edward L. Biller, Fl: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988. [7-9]
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The American People, 1968-1980

Learn these important terms: women's rights, Equal Rights Amendment, Hispanics, Equal Employment Opportunity Act, Environmental Protection Agency, American Indian Movement, Gray Panthers, ecology, toxic waste, League of United Latin American Citizens

Remember the main idea: During the 1970s, Americans increasingly turned their attention to the problems of women's rights, minority rights, and pollution.

Look for answers to these questions: 1. How did the role of women change in the 1970s?; 2. What progress did minority groups make during this decade?; 3. What were the goals of the ecology movement?

The dawn of the 1970s did not wash away the problems of the 1960s. The war in Vietnam still raged. Blacks still struggled for racial equality. And poverty still had not vanished from the land. During the 1970s, Americans faced yet another set of social issues.

Women's Rights

One of the hottest issues in the 1970s was that of women's rights. Women made up more than 50 percent of the population. Despite being the majority, they did not enjoy the same rights as men. Most women working outside the home found themselves in low-paying, low-level jobs. Only a small number were hired as doctors, lawyers, or executives. Other jobs, such as truck driving and carpentry, were not considered appropriate for women at all. Even when women performed the same jobs as men, they often received less money.

Since the 1960s, many women like Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem had been working for women's rights. In the 1970s, the women's rights movement gained strength. People realized that men and women should be treated equally.

The government began passing laws to ensure equality. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 required equal pay for equal work. And that same year, Congress approved an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution. It was designed to guarantee women equal rights under the law. This amendment failed to become law because not enough states ratified it. Thirty-eight states needed to vote for it; only thirty-five did so. Still, the campaign for the ERA helped make Americans aware of the women's rights movement.

As attitudes changed, new career paths opened up to women. More women began working outside the home. Some took jobs because they or their families needed the money. Others worked because they enjoyed the challenge. By 1980, there were significant numbers of women in almost every occupation. New choices brought new problems, however. Women struggled to balance their careers with their roles as wives and mothers.

(photo) Think: Gloria Steinem and other women marched to gain support for the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA was meant to end all laws that discriminated against women. Respond: What were the successes and failures of the women's movement? [Equal Employment Opportunity Act required equal pay, changes in attitude; Equal Rights Amendment not passed.]

Research Assignment: Have the students write biographies about the following prominent women of the 1970s: Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, Aileen Hernandez, Wilma Scott Heide, Martha Griffiths, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Elly Peterson, Margaret Chase Smith, Jeanne Holm, Alene Duerk, and Anna May Hayes.