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**The Women's Rights Movement**

Like other groups in America, women struggled to achieve equal rights. Women won the right to vote in 1920. Yet they still faced discrimination in jobs, pay, and schooling. In the 1950s, many employers refused to hire women for certain jobs even though the women were qualified. When men and women held the same job, women were often paid less. Also, they were seldom promoted as fast as men. Women students were often turned down by medical and law schools in favor of men.

In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. In it, she protested the unequal conditions women faced. Three years later, Friedan helped to set up the National Organization for Women, or NOW. Its goal was to work for equal rights for women in jobs, pay, and education. Since the 1960s, this struggle for equality has become known as the women's rights movement.

**New laws.** Women made some gains through new laws. Under the Equal Pay Act of 1963, workers had to get equal pay for equal work. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in hiring not only based on race but also on sex. Yet some employers ignored these laws. They continued to deny women equal opportunities. As a result, women brought their cases to the courts and often won.

In 1972, Congress passed a proposed equal rights amendment. It was known as the ERA. It guaranteed equal rights under the Constitution. The ERA ran into strong opposition. Phyllis Schlafly organized a group called Stop ERA. She argued that the amendment was not needed. Also, she said that it threatened American traditions. Despite the work of pro-ERA groups, the amendment was not ratified.

**Ongoing struggles.** The women's rights movement achieved some important results. Women found new opportunities in education. More women became lawyers, doctors, engineers, and business executives than ever before. Businesses made efforts to hire and promote qualified women. During the 1970s, the number of women in state legislatures tripled.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan named Sandra Day O'Connor the first woman justice of the Supreme Court. Two years later, Sally Ride became the first woman astronaut in space. As you read, Geraldine Ferraro made history when the Democratic Party chose her to run for Vice President in 1984.

In the 1970s and 1980s, women's income rose but not as fast as men's. Because some jobs were seen as "women's work," they paid less well than jobs usually held by men. As a result, a skilled nurse might be paid less than a city bus driver. Women's groups called for "equivalent pay." They wanted to compare the skills needed for different kinds of jobs. Then each job would be paid according to the skills it required. Most employers protested, saying it would cost far too much.

The women's rights movement opened new fields to women. At the same time, women continued in traditional roles as wives and mothers. As in the past, many volunteered their time to work for important social and political causes.

(graph) **GRAPH SKILL** The number of women working outside the home has risen steadily in the past 35 years. About what percentage of women were working outside the home in 1950? In 1970? In 1980?

(photo) The women's rights movement helped open new jobs to women. However, many women continued to find satisfaction in the roles of wife and mother. At top, a research scientist works in her laboratory. Below, a woman and her young son prepare a meal.