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[691-693]

The Women's Rights Movement

Like other groups in America, women struggled to achieve equal rights. Women 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 1966, Betty 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.

An effort to add an equal rights amendment to the Constitution failed. Many Americans supported the idea. But opponents, led by Phyllis Schlafly, argued that the amendment was not needed. Also, they said, it threatened American traditions.

Ongoing struggles. The women's rights movement gave women new opportunities. More women became lawyers, doctors, engineers, and business executives than ever before. In 1983, for example, Sally Ride became the first woman astronaut in space. Prodded by affirmative action programs, businesses made efforts to hire and promote qualified women.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the number of women elected to political office rose. In 1981, Ronald Reagan named Sandra Day O'Connor the first woman justice of the Supreme Court. As you read, Geraldine Ferraro made history when the Democratic Party chose her to run for Vice President in 1984. The gains were impressive when compared to the past. However, women still held only a tiny percentage of elected offices.

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. Women's groups called for "equivalent pay." They wanted the pay for each job to be based on the skills it required.

By the 1980s, more than half of all women worked outside the home. The two-job family became typical. At the same time, the number of households headed by single women increased. These families were often poor, in part because women earned less than men. More than half the children in families headed by women lived below the poverty line. To solve this problem, women's groups have proposed better child care arrangements and more job training.

The women's rights movement opened new fields to women. But many women chose to work at home in traditional roles as wives and mothers. As in the past, they volunteered their time 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 1960? In 1970? In 1980? [a) 34% b) 43% c) 52%]

(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.

[1. CITIZENSHIP As a joke, a conservative senator suggested adding the ban on sex

discrimination to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. To his surprise, the amendment became part of the legislation.

2. PAST AND PRESENT In 1984, NOW supported Walter Mondale for the Democratic nomination for President and in the general election.

3. VISUAL EVIDENCE Ask students to discuss the problems and benefits of combining a career with raising a family.

1. ACTIVITY Have interested students research the split between old and new members of the Civil Rights Commission over such issues as affirmative action and equivalent pay.]