

The American Nation, James West Davidson and Michael B. Stoff, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998. [7-9]

[820-821]

Rights for Women

Like other groups, women struggled to win equal rights. Women faced discrimination in jobs, pay, and education.

Job discrimination. Many employers refused to hire women for certain jobs even though the women were qualified. Even when women were hired, they were not treated the same as men. A female steelworker complained:

“One woman's husband was a weight lifter and she could also lift weights. She worked in the masonry department. She could carry two buckets when most of the men carried only one. She got fired because she was too short and they said it was unsafe for her.”

When men and women held the same job, women were often paid less. Also, women were seldom promoted as fast as men. Many law schools and medical schools gave preference to male applicants.

Struggle for equality. In 1966, Betty Friedan helped to set up the National Organization for Women (NOW). It worked 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.

Women made some gains through new laws. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 required equal pay for equal work. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination in hiring based on gender as well as on race. Yet some employers continued to deny women equal opportunities. As a result, women brought many cases to the courts.

In 1972, Congress passed a proposal for an equal rights amendment to the Constitution. However, Americans were divided over whether the amendment was needed. After 10 years of campaigning, the amendment failed to be ratified in enough states. Even so, the decades of reform brought women more power and equality. The leaders of the women's movement vowed to continue the fight for equal pay and equal opportunity.

(photo) The Women's Movement. Like other groups, the National Organization for Women gained influence by electing women to public office. Citizenship. What were the goals of NOW?

History and You: Does your school have a strong sports program for girls? If so, it is probably because of a law passed by Congress in 1972 as a result of the women's rights movement. The law forbids discrimination by sex at any school that receives federal aid. [872]

Women Today

The women's rights movement has continued to press for equal treatment of women. It claims many successes.

New jobs. Prodded by affirmative action programs, businesses hired and promoted many talented women. For the first time, women held large numbers of managerial and professional jobs.

In government, women have taken increasingly prominent roles. In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman Justice of the United States Supreme Court. Twelve years later, a second woman, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, was appointed to the Court. Still, women held only a small percentage of all elective positions. In 1996, for example, women held only 7 of the 100 Senate seats.

Overall, women's incomes continued to rise. On average, however, women earned just 70 percent of what men earned. Some jobs were still seen as "women's work" and paid less than "men's work."

Changing role in the family. By the 1990s, almost 60 percent of American women worked outside the home. With many Americans struggling to make ends meet, the

two-job family had become typical of two-parent families.

At the same time, more and more households were headed by single women. Such households were likely to be poor. More than half the children in families headed by women lived below the poverty line. To address this problem, women's groups proposed reforms in child care and job training.

(graph) Women Working Outside the Home. GRAPH SKILLS. For most of the nation's history, the majority of American women did not work outside the home. By the 1980s, however, that situation changed dramatically. * During which period did the number of women working outside the home pass 50 percent?