

American Nation, Paul Boyer, TX: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 2005. [7-9]

[948]

Women's Rights

EYEWITNESSES TO HISTORY

"I guess I've been pretty much influenced by the Women's Movement because of the people I work with.... A lot of them were in that movement, so I've become more aware of it that way. I've just become much more aware of being a woman and the rights a woman should have.... Before, what I knew about the movement was really limited to just what I saw -- people in demonstrations and the type of women who were professionals and their side of things." -- Cathy Tuley, quoted in *Nobody Speaks for Me!*, by Nancy Seifer.

Cathy Tuley, a hospital clerical worker, discussed her perceptions of the women's movement. Tuley's experiences mirrored those of many other women who entered the workforce during the 1960s and 1970s.

A Revived Women's Movement

One of the lasting effects of the 1960s was a change in the traditional roles of women. After years of inaction, the women's movement experienced a widespread revival, sparked in part by the work of author Betty Friedan.

In 1957 Friedan conducted a survey of women who, like herself, had graduated from Smith College 15 years earlier. She hoped to dispute the popular notion that higher education was harmful to women. To Friedan's surprise, the women who responded to her questionnaire expressed dissatisfaction with their lives. Almost all the women whom Friedan surveyed were full-time homemakers. Many found their lives unfulfilling. In her 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan concluded that many women felt trapped by the "comfortable concentration camp" of domestic life.

History Makers Speak: "The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question -- 'Is this all?'" -- Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*.

By the end of the decade *The Feminine Mystique* had sold more than 1 million copies. Inspired by its message, many women began to examine their lives. Seeking change, they demanded increased opportunities and fair treatment in the workplace.

(photo) Betty Friedan wrote the influential book *The Feminine Mystique*.

READING CHECK: Summarizing: What did *The Feminine Mystique* reveal about women, and how did readers respond to it?

READ TO DISCOVER:

1. What influence did *The Feminine Mystique* have on the women's movement?
2. How did the federal government try to assist working women in the early 1960s?
3. What tactics did leaders of the women's movement use?
4. What gains and setbacks did the women's movement experience during the 1970s?

IDENTIFY: Betty Friedan, Equal Pay Act, National Organization for Women, Gloria Steinem, National Women's Political Caucus, Education Amendments Act, Phyllis Schlafly, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm.

WHY IT MATTERS TODAY: Women continue to play important roles in the U.S. economy. Use [CNN Student News.com] or other current events sources to research jobs where more women have begun working in recent years. Record your findings in your journal.

[949-950]

Helping Women at Work

Most of the women polled by Betty Friedan were homemakers. However, the number of women in the workplace had grown dramatically in the years before her book was published. The number of working women rose from 25 percent in 1940 to 35 percent in 1960. By 1963 almost 25 million working women made up more than one third of the American labor force. Yet female workers received lower wages than men did. In 1960, for example, women who worked full-time earned 40 percent less than working men. Women typically held service jobs that paid poorly, but in many cases they received lower wages even when they did the same work as men. As one business executive confessed, "We pay [women] less because we can get them for less."

Kennedy responds. The Kennedy administration hired few women but did not ignore the problems that working women faced. President Kennedy issued an executive order requiring that civil-service hiring occur "solely on the basis of ability to meet the requirements of the position, and without regard to sex." His administration also backed a new bill that would make it illegal for employers to pay female workers less than male workers for the same job. Congress approved this Equal Pay Act, which Kennedy signed in June 1963. The act had a limited impact, however. Its provisions did not cover women in agricultural, professional, or service industries -- about two thirds of working women. Nevertheless, the law served as an important first step toward equality in the workplace. In the decade following its passage, 171,000 workers used the law to win \$84 million in back pay.

Kennedy also created the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) and appointed former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt as its chairperson. Kennedy authorized the PCSW to investigate the lives of American women. Completed in October 1963, the commission's report noted that female workers continued to experience discrimination in the workplace despite their increasing numbers. The report set new goals for the treatment of working women and called for "equal opportunity in hiring, training, and promotion."

Title VII. Female workers received additional and unexpected assistance from the federal government in 1964. That year Congress debated legislation intended to protect the civil rights of African Americans. Representative Howard Smith of Virginia proposed adding a clause to the bill that would protect women from discrimination. Smith opposed the civil rights bill and actually hoped that his amendment would weaken its chances of passing.

Female members of Congress seized the opportunity. Representative Martha Griffiths of Michigan declared, "A vote against this amendment today by a... man is a vote against his wife, or his widow, or his daughter, or his sister." Congress approved the Smith amendment, and the bill passed. As a result, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed sexual discrimination in employment. The act also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). This federal agency is charged with ensuring that employers followed the provisions of Title VII.

(photo) In June 1963 President John F. Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, which required that women receive equal pay for equal work.

(graph) Occupations of Women, 1960-1970. Interpreting Graphs: The number of working women increased from 1960 to 1970. Skills Assessment: By how much did the number of women working in white-collar professions increase?

(photo) The EEOC works to prevent discrimination in employment.

READING CHECK: Identifying Cause and Effect: How did Smith's opposition to a civil rights bill lead to an opportunity for women's rights?

[950-951]

Heightened Activism

Women quickly discovered that many government officials were not interested in righting gender discrimination. Herman Edelsberg, director of the EEOC, called Title VII "a fluke." Sonia Pressman, an attorney for the EEOC, later explained why the

agency did not respond to women's needs.

History Makers Speak: "We had an agency with a mandate [order] to prohibit sex discrimination... in a country that was not conscious of the fact that women were the victims of discrimination. After all, while the creation of the EEOC was in direct response to the movement for black rights in this country, there had been no similar movement immediately prior to 1965 for women's rights." -- Sonia Pressman, quoted in *Faces of Feminism*, by Sheila Tobias.

Analyzing Primary Sources: Identifying Bias What reason does this speaker give for the EEOC's failure to respond to women's needs?

NOW. In June 1966 a group of women attending a conference on women's status met in Betty Friedan's hotel room to discuss their frustration. Some wanted to create an organization to lobby for women's rights. Instead, the group decided to present a resolution condemning the EEOC. Participant Pauli Murray recalled, "I left Betty Friedan's room that night thoroughly discouraged; it seemed to me that we had fumbled a major opportunity to begin mobilizing [organizing] women nationally to press for their civil rights." The next day, the conference rejected the resolution. During lunch these women decided to form a women's rights group. The National Organization for Women (NOW) was the result. NOW claimed some 1,000 members within its first year in existence. The organization lobbied, or tried to influence, elected officials to ensure social and economic equality for women.

A new generation. Some women rejected NOW's moderate approach to political change. Critic Marlene Dixon maintained that NOW would secure "limited and elitist [exclusive] day-care programs... [and] an effective end to job discrimination at least on the elite level." Dixon argued that "these programs give the illusion of success, while in fact assuring the destruction of any hope for women's liberation."

Dixon voiced the opinion of a new generation of female activists. Many of these women had participated in other social movements, such as the struggle for civil rights. They realized that they faced just as much gender discrimination in these movements as they did in mainstream society. Mary King and Casey Hayden were volunteers for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In 1964 they noted that SNCC's "assumption of male superiority" was "as widespread and deep rooted and... as crippling to... women as the assumptions of white supremacy are to the Negro."

During the late 1960s many female social activists began standing up for their own rights. Numerous small women's groups sprang up nationwide. Some held discussion sessions to improve their self-image. Others took direct, and often controversial, action. In 1968, feminists disrupted the Miss America Pageant, charging that beauty contests degraded women.

Journalist Gloria Steinem was one of the women inspired to activism during the late 1960s. Steinem was born on March 25, 1934, in Toledo, Ohio. She spent most of her teenage years caring for her invalid mother. In 1952 Steinem entered Smith College, where she graduated with honors. "I loved Smith," she recalled. "They gave you three meals a day to eat, and all the books you wanted to read -- what more could you want?" Her love of reading and writing led her to become a journalist.

In 1968 Steinem started writing a political column for New York magazine. Her work brought her into contact with many activists. Steinem did not initially consider herself a feminist. She later recalled, "Though I was old enough to be part of the Feminine Mystique generation, I wasn't living in the suburbs, wondering why I wasn't using my college degree. I'd ended up in the work force many of these other women were trying to enter."

Steinem's interest in civil rights and political activism eventually led her to consider the status of women in American society. She began writing openly feminist articles. In one article Steinem stated that cooperation by radical feminists, middle-class reformers, and poor women could create a powerful movement for women's causes. In 1971 she

helped found the National Women's Political Caucus to encourage women to run for political office. The next year, she became editor of a new magazine for women entitled *Ms.*

"There is nothing outside of [the movement]," Steinem said. "I once thought I would do this for two or three years and go home to my real life." Steinem remains a leader in the women's movement. She has written several books and helped found numerous organizations for women, including the Coalition of Labor Union Women and Women Against Pornography.

(photo) Buttons and patches like these served as outward signs of women's determination to win equality with men.

(photo) Gloria Steinem

(photo) **INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD: Women's rights.** These women are marching through the streets of Washington, D.C., to demand equal rights. Based on this march, how well did the women's movement appeal to women of all ages? Explain your answer.

READING CHECK: Categorizing: In what different ways did female activists participate in the women's movement?

[952-953]

The Women's Movement: Gains Momentum

The women's movement made progress in the 1970s. Leaders worked to elect more women to public office. Many all-male colleges allowed female students to enroll for the first time. Other universities instituted courses in women's studies. In 1972 Congress passed the Education Amendments Act, which outlawed sexual discrimination in higher education.

Mixed Success. In 1973 the Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision affecting women. In the case *Roe v. Wade*, the Court overturned a state law limiting women's access to abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. The Court ruled that a woman and her doctor, not the state, should make such decisions. While most feminists hailed *Roe v. Wade* as a victory, opponents protested that the ruling violated the right to life of the unborn.

During the 1970s controversy also followed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). A proposed constitutional amendment, the ERA sought to bar discrimination on the basis of sex. Activists had first proposed such an amendment during the 1920s, but it did not pass. The ERA received strong support from NOW and other women's groups. Gloria Steinem testified before Congress on behalf of the amendment.

History Makers Speak: "women suffer second-class treatment from the moment they are born. They are expected to be rather than to achieve, to function biologically rather than learn. A brother, whatever his intellect, is more likely to get the family's encouragement and education money, while girls are pressured to conceal ambition and intelligence." -- Gloria Steinem, testimony before Congress, 1970.

Congress passed the ERA in 1972, but the amendment required the approval of at least 38 states. Ratification initially seemed certain. However, conservative groups that regarded the ERA as a threat to traditional women's roles launched a campaign to prevent ratification. By the 1982 deadline set by Congress, the ERA was still three states short of ratification. As a result, the amendment failed to become law.

Opposition. The fight over the ERA revealed that many women believed that the women's movement primarily served wealthy white women. Many nonwhite women and working-class white women felt left out. These women felt that the leaders of NOW and other feminist groups simply did not understand the problems they faced every day. Referring to Gloria Steinem, Cathy Tuley stated, "I feel she's fighting for women like herself, professional women, and that she's not thinking of women in the whole sense, just part of them."

The movement also offended many middle-class women. These women viewed *Roe v. Wade* and the ERA as threats to traditional family life. Critics warned that the ERA would "nullify [cancel] any laws that make any distinction between men and women." Eventually, they argued, men and women would even be forced to share public restrooms. Conservative critic Phyllis Schlafly was pleased when the ERA failed to win ratification. She claimed, "The defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment is the greatest victory for women's rights since the woman's suffrage movement of 1920."

Despite such disagreements over the role of women in American society, women had made some gains by the end of the 1970s. More female politicians took office in the U.S. Congress, although they made up less than 5 percent of its members. New York representatives Bella Abzug and Shirley Chisholm received national attention. Abzug became an outspoken supporter of women's issues in Congress. In 1972 Shirley Chisholm -- the first African American woman elected to Congress -- also became the first African American woman to run for president. Although she did not receive the Democratic Party's nomination, her campaign illustrated how far some women had come. Most women still held low-paying jobs, but the number of women holding professional jobs had increased. In 1970 just 5 percent of the nation's lawyers and 25 percent of all accountants were women. Ten years later, 12 percent of lawyers and 33 percent of accountants were women.

(photo) Phyllis Schlafly was a vocal opponent of the Equal Rights Amendment

READING CHECK: Making Generalizations: How did *Roe v. Wade* and the ERA define the women's movement during the 1970s?

[952]

Then and Now: Women and Sports

The women's movement supported increased opportunities for women in all areas of life, including sports. Before 1972 just 1 percent of the money spent on athletic programs at institutions of higher education was spent on women's sports. As a result, only some 16,000 women attending colleges and universities participated in sports programs.

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments Act declared that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." The law did not mean that all college sports had to become coeducational. Rather, it required universities to fund women's sports programs fairly. By 1984 spending on women's athletics had improved. That year, women's sports received 16 percent of all athletic funds, and some 150,000 women participated in college sports activities. By the 1990s more than 160,000 women were involved in college athletics. The increase in girls' participation in high school sports programs was even more impressive. The number of female high school athletes rose from 294,105 in 1972 to almost 2.8 million in 2001.

(photo) Basketball player Chamique Holdsclaw

[1086]

Work and Family

Some observers expressed concern about the state of the American family in the 1990s. By 1998 only 26 percent of American households were made up of married couples with children. Most single parents had a difficult time financially. Patricia Mull, a Los Angeles seamstress who stretched her income to send her daughter to private school, described the stress she faced. "I worry about the rent. I worry if I can make the payment in time. I worry if I have enough money left for other things. I worry about money every day, every night."

Many two-parent families shared Mull's concerns as they struggled to balance job and family responsibilities. Nearly 60 percent of married women worked outside the home in 1995, up from about 30 percent in 1960. The increase of single-parent families

and families with both parents in the workforce created the need for affordable day care. Employers increasingly realized that family concerns affected their employees' jobs. To help employees balance work and family, a group of businesses in 1992 announced a program to build more day-care and elder-care centers across the country.

The U.S. government also recognized the need to help working families. In February 1993, just two weeks after his inauguration, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act. The legislation requires large companies to provide workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave. Workers can use this time for family and medical emergencies without losing their medical insurance or their jobs.

This legislation reflected the significant changes in attitudes toward work and family that have occurred in the United States in the 1990s. As businessperson Florence Skelly noted in 1993, "Rather than trying to climb the economic ladder, people are becoming more concerned with relationships and family and community involvement." (photo) **INTERPRETING THE VISUAL RECORD: Children.** The number of singleparent households and households with both parents working outside the home is rising. What does in this photograph might lead you to assume that this mother works outside the home?

READING CHECK: Making Predictions: How did government efforts help families the 1990s?