

The American Nation, James West Davidson and Michael B. Stoff, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005. [7-9]

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Viewing History: Marching for Women's Rights

American women became politically active during the 1960s and 1970s. Many joined the efforts of the National Organization for Women. Here, women march together to express their solidarity. Applying Information: What causes are important to these women?

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The Women's Rights Movement

Women had long fought inequality. Since the 1960s, their drive for equal rights has been known as the Women's Rights Movement.

In the workplace qualified women found that male employers were unwilling to hire them for certain jobs, and they were usually paid less than men, even for the same work. They were fired before men and promoted less quickly.

In 1966, writer Betty Friedan helped to set up the National Organization for Women (NOW), which worked for equal rights for women in jobs, pay, and education. It also helped women bring discrimination cases to court and campaigned for maternity leave and child-care centers. Urging women to be more politically active, NOW organized the Strike for Equality Parade down New York's Fifth Avenue in 1970. Some 50,000 women marched.

New laws helped women make some gains. 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 and on race.

In the 1970s, the women's movement suffered a major defeat. In 1972, Congress passed a proposal for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution. The amendment would ban discrimination based on gender. However, Phyllis Schlafly and other conservative women led a successful campaign against ratification of the amendment. They said the ERA would lead to women being drafted into the military and would harm the traditional family. Despite this defeat, the women's movement brought women more power and equality.

Target Skill: Understand Effects. What were the effects of the women's rights movement? Add these effects to your chart.

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Women

The women's rights movement continued to press for equal treatment of women. Progress came but not as quickly or completely as many women hoped.

In government, women have taken more prominent roles, especially on the local and state levels. On the national level, women won more seats in Congress. By the late 1990s, two of the nine Supreme Court Justices were women. In 1997, Madeleine Albright became the first female secretary of state, the highest-ranking cabinet position.

About 60 percent of American women worked outside the home by 2000. Women held jobs once closed to them, from fire fighters to professional basketball players. As more women were promoted to higher positions in business, their incomes rose. The gap between women's and men's wages narrowed but did not disappear. On average, women earned less than 75 percent of what men earned.

An increasing number of single women were heads of households. More than half the children in these households lived in poverty. Working mothers also had the problem of finding affordable, adequate day care.

(graph) Women Working Outside the Home, 1960-2000. GRAPH Skills. For most of the nation's history, most women did not work outside the home. That situation changed after the 1960s. 1. Comprehension: During what decade did the majority of women work

outside the home for the first time? 2. Critical Thinking: Making Predictions: Do you think the trend shown on this graph will continue? Why or why not?