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[805-806]

WOMEN'S ROLES

During the 1950s, the role of homemaker mother was glorified in popular magazines, movies, and TV programs, such as *Father Knows Best* and *The Adventure of Ozzie and Harriet*. Time magazine described the homemaker as “the key figure in all suburbia, the thread that weaves between family and community – the keeper of the suburban dream.” Contrary to the ideal portrayed in the media, however, some women, like Carol Freeman, were not happy with their roles and felt isolated, bored, and unfulfilled. According to one survey in the 1950s, more than one-fifth of suburban wives were dissatisfied with their lives. Betty Friedan, author of the groundbreaking 1963 study of women and society, *The Feminine Mystique*, described the problem

A PERSONAL VOICE

For the first time in their history, women are becoming aware of an identity crisis in their own lives, a crisis which ... has grown worse with each succeeding generation.... I think this is the crisis of women growing up – a turning point from an immaturity that has been called femininity to full human identity.

BETTY FRIEDAN, from the *Feminine Mystique*.

Some women did have lives outside the confines of suburbia, though, and the number of women working outside the home steadily rose during the decade. By 1960, almost 40 percent of women with children between the ages of 6 and 17 held jobs. Some of these women worked because they were single, divorced, or widowed and had to support themselves and their families. Others worked to supplement their husbands' incomes or to seek personal fulfillment.

But having a job didn't necessarily contribute to a woman's happiness. A woman's career opportunities tended to be limited to fields such as nursing, teaching, and office support, which paid less than other professional and business positions did. Women also earned less than men for comparable work. Although increasing numbers of women attended four-year colleges, they generally received little financial, academic, or psychological encouragement to pursue their goals

THINK THROUGH HISTORY. D. Contrasting. How did women's roles and opportunities in the 1950s differ from women's roles today?

“Is this all?” BETTY FRIEDAN, quoting a dissatisfied 1950s homemaker.
[928-930]

Women Fight for Equality

Learn about the social and economic barriers that women faced in American society to understand the rise of a new and diverse women's movement during the 1960s.

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

During the 1950s Betty Friedan seemed to be living the American dream. She had a loving husband, healthy children, and a house in the suburbs. According to the experts -- doctors, psychologists, and women's magazines -- that was all a woman needed to be happy and fulfilled. Why, then, wasn't she happy? What was wrong with her that this wasn't enough? When Friedan attended her fifteen-year college reunion in 1957, she found she was not alone in asking such questions. Many of her former classmates also were struggling with what Friedan would refer to as “the problem that has no name.” Friedan eventually wrote a book, *The Feminine Mystique*, in which she addressed this seemingly indescribable problem.

A PERSONAL VOICE

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, lay beside her husband at night -- she was afraid to even ask of herself the silent question -- "Is this all?"

BETTY FRIEDAN, *The Feminine Mystique*.

During the 1960s, more and more women answered Friedan's question with a resounding "no." As the nation's African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans pushed for greater civil rights, many of the country's women also fought for equality in society.

A New Women's Movement Arises

The theory behind the women's movement of the 1960s was feminism, the belief that women should have economic, political, and social equality with men. Feminist beliefs gained momentum during the mid-1800s and led to woman suffrage, or women's right to vote, in 1920. The women's movement declined after this achievement. However, it reawakened during the 1960s, when many women began to recognize their social and economic inequality. This realization helped spark a new, powerful feminist movement.

WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE. By 1960, the number of women joining the work force was on the rise. In 1950, only one out of three women had worked for wages. By 1960, more than 40 percent of all women had jobs outside the home, and women made up a third of the nation's work force. While their numbers were growing, however, working women experienced widespread job and wage discrimination. Many occupations were considered "men's work" and were closed to women. The jobs available to women -- mostly clerical work, domestic service, retail sales, social work, teaching, and nursing -- paid poorly.

The country largely ignored the discrimination women faced in the workplace, until President Kennedy appointed the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. In 1963, the commission reported that women were paid far less than men, even when doing the same jobs. Furthermore, women were seldom promoted to management positions, regardless of their education, experience, and ability. The discrimination that women faced in the workplace awakened many women to their unequal status in society.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM INSPIRES WOMEN. Other sources of discontent for women stemmed from their involvement in the civil rights and antiwar movements. Although both movements inspired many women to take action on behalf of their beliefs, the discrimination they faced within the movements made them acutely aware of their inferior social status.

In these organizations, men led most of the activities, while women were assigned lesser roles. When women protested, the men usually brushed them aside. When activist Shulamith Firestone tried to raise the issue of women's rights with antiwar activists, one man told her, "Move on little girl; we have more important issues to talk about here than women's liberation."

Such experiences led some women to organize small groups to discuss their concerns. During these discussions, or "consciousness-raising" sessions, women shared their lives with each other and discovered that their experiences were not unique. Rather, they reflected a much larger pattern of sexism, or discrimination against women. As author Robin Morgan recalled later,

A PERSONAL VOICE

It makes you very sensitive -- raw, even, this consciousness. Everything, from the verbal assault on the street, to a "well-meant" sexist joke your husband tells, to the lower pay you get at work (for doing the same job a man would be paid more for), to television commercials, to rock-song lyrics, to the pink or blue blanket they put on your infant in the hospital nursery, to speeches by male "revolutionaries" that reek of male supremacy -- everything seems to barrage your aching brain. You begin to see how all-pervasive a thing is sexism.

ROBIN MORGAN, *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY. A. Recognizing Effects. What effects did the civil rights and antiwar movements have on many women?

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT EMERGES. In 1963, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which captured the very discontent that many women were feeling. The book quickly became a bestseller. From across the country, women wrote to Friedan to thank her for exposing "the problem that has no name" and to tell her their own painful stories. "Thank God someone had the insight and courage to write it," an Iowa woman wrote.

Friedan's book helped galvanize a number of women throughout the nation. By the late 1960s, women across the country were coming together to work for change. "This is not a movement one 'joins,'" observed Robin Morgan. "The Women's Liberation movement exists where three or four friends or neighbors decide to meet regularly... on the welfare lines, in the supermarket, the factory, the convent, the farm, the maternity ward...."

(photo) Betty Friedan

(photo) "WOMEN MAKE POLICY NOT COFFEE." A button displays women's displeasure with their treatment in the workplace.

(graph) Women in the Workplace, 1950-1993. **SKILLBUILDER: INTERPRETING CHARTS:** For each year shown, what percentage of men's income did women make? [930-932]

The Movement Experiences Gains and Losses

As the women's movement grew, it achieved remarkable political and social gains for women. Along the way, however, the movement also suffered setbacks, most notably in its attempt to ensure women's equality in the Constitution.

THE CREATION OF NOW. Due in part to a backfired strategy by opponents of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, women had won the legal tools with which to fight discrimination. Opponents of the civil rights bill -- which prohibited discrimination based on race, religion, and national origin -- had added a provision outlawing discrimination based on gender, in an attempt to weaken support for the bill. Much to the dismay of its opponents, however, the bill passed with the gender provision included. One result of the provision was that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) -- an organization set up by the act to investigate discrimination claims by African Americans -- also addressed women's job complaints.

By 1966, however, some women voiced dissatisfaction with the EEOC. They argued that the commission showed an overall lack of attention toward the flood of women's grievances. That year, several women, including Betty Friedan, created the National Organization for Women (NOW) to pursue more actively women's goals. "The time has come," the founders of NOW declared, "to confront with concrete action the conditions which now prevent women from enjoying the equality of opportunity... which is their right as individual Americans and as human beings."

NOW moved into action quickly. Its members pushed for the creation of more child care facilities and for improved educational opportunities for women. NOW also pressured the EEOC to enforce more vigorously the ban on gender discrimination in hiring. NOW's efforts prompted the EEOC to declare sex-segregated job ads illegal and issue guidelines to employers, stating that they could no longer refuse to hire women for traditionally male jobs.

THINK THROUGH HISTORY. B. Analyzing Causes. What prompted women to establish NOW?

A DIVERSE MOVEMENT. In its first three years, NOW's ranks swelled from 300 to 175,000 members. Outside of NOW, a number of other women's groups sprang up around the country. In 1968 a militant group known as the New York Radical Women

staged a well-publicized demonstration at the annual Miss America Pageant. To protest the concept of judging women's beauty, the women threw bras, girdles, wigs, and other "women's garbage" into a "Freedom Trash Can." They then crowned a sheep as "Miss America." In 1971, Journalist Gloria Steinem helped found the National Women's Political Caucus, a moderate group which encouraged women to seek political office.

The radicals and moderates within the movement often quarreled over strategy. However, these diverse factions put aside their differences in August 1970 to join in the largest women's rights demonstration ever. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of woman suffrage, tens of thousands of women gathered from around the country and marched through New York City to promote women's equality.

By the early 1970s, the women's movement had scored several victories on the political and social fronts. In 1972, Congress passed a ban on gender discrimination in "any education program or activities receiving federal financial assistance," as part of the Higher Education Act. As a result, several all-male colleges opened their doors to women. That same year, Congress expanded the enforcement powers of the EEOC and gave working parents a tax break for child care expenses.

ROE V. WADE. One of the more controversial issues that NOW and other feminist groups supported was a woman's right to have an abortion. Both men and women were deeply divided over the issue. In 1973, the Supreme Court ruled in the case *Roe v. Wade* that women had the right to choose an abortion during the first three months of pregnancy. In an editorial on the decision, the *New York Times* expressed hope that the ruling might "bring to an end the emotional and divisive public argument." However, this did not happen. Americans today remain divided over both the abortion issue and the Supreme Court's ruling.

THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT. In what seemed at first to be another triumph for the women's movement, Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) in 1972. The amendment then needed ratification by 38 states -- three-quarters of the 50 states -- to become part of the Constitution. The ERA, which had first been introduced to Congress in 1923, would have guaranteed that "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." The ERA's supporters argued that the amendment was needed to make sure that men and women could not be treated differently under the law solely because of their gender. It was, they said, a matter of "simple justice."

Simple or not, the amendment sparked fierce opposition from conservative religious groups, political organizations, and many women who opposed the feminist movement. These groups raised fears that the ERA would lead to "a parade of horrors," such as the drafting of women, the end of laws protecting homemakers, and same-sex marriages.

One prominent ERA opponent was Phyllis Schlafly. In 1972, Schlafly founded and became national chairman of the Stop-ERA campaign. Schlafly characterized the ERA as the work of radical feminists who "hate men, marriage, and children" and whose oppression existed "only in their distorted minds."

A PERSONAL VOICE

The U.S. Constitution is not the place for symbols or slogans, it is not the proper device to alleviate psychological problems of personal inferiority. Symbols and slogans belong on bumper strips -- not in the Constitution. It would be a tragic mistake for our nation to succumb to the tirades and demands of a few women who are seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems.

PHYLLIS SCHLAFLY, quoted in *The Equal Rights Amendment: The History and the Movement*.

The Stop-ERA campaign also attracted support from women who feared its impact on families. Many worried that the amendment would end a husband's responsibility to provide support to his wife and children. In Florida, anti-ERA homemakers sent

lawmakers jars of homemade jam labeled "Preserve the family unit." There and in other states where the ERA was being debated, their message was the same: Don't change our lives.

By 1977, the ERA had won approval from 35 of the 38 states needed to ratify the amendment. At that point, however, the amendment stalled, as opposition to the ERA gained strength. By the end of 1982 (the deadline for ratification), no other states had approved the amendment. The ERA went down in defeat. The amendment, announced Schlafly, "is dead now and forever in this century."

THINK THROUGH HISTORY. C. Analyzing Motives. What concerns motivated those who opposed the ERA?

ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE: AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN. The women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s was largely a white, middle class movement. By the 1960s, many African-American women expressed greater concern with racism and the attainment of civil rights than with sexism and inequality in the workplace. Ida Lewis, editor of the African-American magazine *Essence*, advised, "The Women's Liberation Movement is basically a family quarrel between white women and white men... And on general principles, it's not too good to get involved in family disputes."

(photo) **KEY PLAYER: GLORIA STEINEM, 1934-** Gloria Steinem became one of the more prominent figures of the women's movement after she and several other women founded *Ms.* magazine in 1972. The magazine soon became a major voice of the women's movement.

Steinem said that she decided to start the feminist magazine after editors in the mainstream media continually rejected her stories about the women's movement: "Editors who had assumed I had some valuable biological insight into food, male movie stars, and textured stockings now questioned whether I or other women writers were biologically capable of writing objectively about feminism. That was the beginning."

Within a year of its first issue, *Ms.* had nearly 200,000 subscribers and kept many readers informed about events of the women's movement.

(photo) Thousands of women march through the streets of New York City during the summer of 1970 to promote women's equality.

(photo) Phyllis Schlafly

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The Movement's Legacy

Despite the defeat of the ERA, the women's movement made progress in achieving several of its aims. From college campuses to Capitol Hill, the women's movement opened up new opportunities for American women and dramatically altered their roles in society.

The movement left its mark on society by creating new opportunities for women, particularly in the fields of education, employment, and politics. In 1970, 8 percent of all medical school graduates and 5 percent of all law school graduates were women. By 1992, those proportions had risen to 36 and 43 percent, respectively. The movement also created a new demand for women's studies programs. By 1980, American colleges were offering 30,000 courses about women.

The women's movement also changed the way women looked at work and careers. In the 1950s, most women who took jobs had done so mainly to "help out" by earning a little extra money. By the 1970s, many women were preparing themselves for lifetime careers. As these women moved into traditionally male occupations, the gap between men's and women's earnings slowly began to shrink. Still, many women ran into a "glass ceiling" -- an invisible, but very real, resistance to promoting women into top positions -- as they tried to move upward in the workplace.

The women's movement brought women into the political arena in growing numbers. Women held only 3.5 percent of elected state offices in 1969. By 1996, 25 percent of elected state officeholders were women. The number of women in Congress also has

generally increased. In 1975, there were 19 women in Congress. By 1997, 60 women occupied elected offices on Capitol Hill.

Most of all, the women's movement helped countless women open their lives to new possibilities. "We have lived the second American revolution," wrote Betty Friedan in 1976, "and our very anger said a 'new YES' to life."

THINK THROUGH HISTORY. D. Forming Opinions. In what ways did the women's movement help women progress in society?

(photo) "A WOMEN'S PLACE IS IN THE HOUSE... AND ALSO IN THE SENATE!" Women have made significant strides politically, as they have increased their presence in the U.S. Congress.