

Modern Feminism

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Patricia Burnett, Detroit's chapter president of the National Organization for Women, shows off large signs bearing the group's message in 1970. AP Images

"Motherhood is joy." "Your first concern is to care for your husband and children."

"Homemaking can be exciting and fulfilling."

During the 1950s, women heard advice like this throughout their lives. The lifestyle then led many women to leave college early so they could get married and have children.

Magazines and television shows reinforced this idea.

However, not every woman wanted to wear pearls and bring her husband his slippers when he came home from work. Some women wanted careers of their own.

Being a housewife was not for everyone

In 1963, Betty Friedan published a book called "The Feminine Mystique" that identified "the problem that has no name." While women were making breakfast, driving their children to activities and entertaining guests, Friedan had the courage to ask: "Is this all there is? Is this really all a woman is capable of doing?" In short, the problem was that many women did not like the traditional role of a housewife.

Friedan's book struck a nerve. Within three years of its publication, a new feminist movement was born. Feminists wanted women to have the same rights as men. Nothing like this had been seen since women fought for the right to vote in the early 1900s. In 1966, Friedan and others formed a group called the National Organization for Women. NOW was dedicated to the "full participation of women in mainstream American society."

NOW demanded equal pay

They demanded equal pay for equal work. They pressured the government to pass laws that prohibited discrimination based on whether someone was male or female. In 1964, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. It banned discrimination based on race, but also mentioned gender. Groups such as NOW became dedicated to making sure the law was followed.

By the end of the 1960s, some feminists became more extreme. Women held "consciousness raising" sessions where groups of females shared experiences. This often led to their feelings of struggling with a common problem.

In 1968, feminists demonstrated outside the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They crowned a live sheep as a way of protesting the pageant. "Freedom trash cans" were built where women could throw away symbols of their mistreatment. These included false eyelashes, hair curlers, bras and high-heeled shoes.

Feminists helped to empower women

Some Americans began to use the word "sexism." It means discrimination based on a person's gender. Some single and married women started using the title Ms. as an alternative to Miss or Mrs. They did not want their names to be based upon their relationships with men. In 1972, Gloria Steinem started a feminist magazine called Ms.

Authors like the feminist Germaine Greer prompted many women to speak out. She urged women to oppose barriers to their advancement. In 1960, women made up less than 40 percent of the nation's college classes. Far fewer women received graduate-school degrees, like masters degrees. In 1961, only 19 women were lawmakers in Congress. For every dollar that was earned by an American male, each working American female earned just 59 cents. By educating the country, changes began to occur. By 1980, women made up a majority of undergraduate students at colleges.

More and more women began to choose careers over housework. As a result, women waited longer to get married and have children. Women were now making their own money. This gave them the freedom to leave unhappy marriages. Because of that the divorce rate went up.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg thought about her mother while remembering the mood of the women's rights movement. Ginsburg says she hopes her mother would have been proud of her.

Quiz

- 1 What was the MAIN goal of Betty Friedan's book?
- (A) to praise the traditional role of a housewife
 - (B) to convince women to join her new feminist group
 - (C) to suggest that women could do more with their lives
 - (D) to describe advice that was given to women in the past
- 2 Which two of the following are central ideas of the article?
- 1. *Many women in the 1950s left college early to get married and have children.*
 - 2. *Many women in the 1960s began joining groups to demand equality.*
 - 3. *Feminists did not want their names to be based on their relationships with men.*
 - 4. *Feminists were able to win more rights for women over time.*
- (A) 1 and 3
 - (B) 1 and 4
 - (C) 2 and 3
 - (D) 2 and 4
- 3 Overall, the article is organized around:
- (A) a book and a law
 - (B) a time and a place
 - (C) a book and an author
 - (D) a time and a movement
- 4 Which paragraph in the section "Feminists helped to empower women" uses compare and contrast in its structure?