

## ISSUES OF THE GILDED AGE

**Issues Connector: Women in American Society**

In 1791, the young United States adopted a Constitution that set up a federal republic in which citizens elected their political leaders by voting. At that time, however, only white male citizens were granted the right to vote. Although the founding documents of the United States declared equality among men, women have struggled since the nation's birth to achieve legal equality with men.

**Seneca Falls Convention (1848)**

In 1840, Lucretia Mott attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London and met Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Both women were forced to listen to the proceedings from behind a curtain. At that time, women were excluded from many events and opportunities. They could not hold elective office or attend college. If they married, they could not enter into legal contracts. If they divorced, they gave up custody of their children. The discrimination that Mott and Stanton experienced spurred them to form a new society to work on behalf of women's rights. Eight years later, they led the nation's first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, during which the delegates adopted the Declaration of Sentiments. The declaration contained twelve resolutions demanding women's suffrage, equality of opportunity, and recognition of women's equal place in society.

**The National Woman Suffrage Association (1869)**

At the end of the Civil War, Stanton joined with Susan B. Anthony to form the American Equal Rights Association, dedicated to pursuing universal suffrage for all men and women. This group split in 1869: Stanton and Anthony organized the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA); and Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Julia Ward Howe started the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA). NWSA worked to achieve women's suffrage at the federal level by pursuing a constitutional amendment and by demanding women's equality in the home and workplace. AWSA focused on winning suffrage for women at the state and local levels. In 1878, NWSA succeeded in having the Woman Suffrage Amendment introduced in Congress. In 1890, AWSA and NWSA came together as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), which worked for suffrage at the national and state levels.

**The Nineteenth Amendment (1920)**

The Fifteenth Amendment extended voting rights to African American males in 1870. Susan B. Anthony interpreted the amendment as extending the vote to women and she, along with 12 other women, persuaded election inspectors in Rochester, New York, to let them register and vote. Two weeks later, the women were arrested. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, women were increasingly active in suffrage and other reform movements. Also, more and more women were pursuing higher education and entering the workforce as doctors, teachers, and journalists. The NAWSA split again and in 1916 Alice Paul and Lucy Burns formed a more radical group called the National Woman's Party (NWP). While NAWSA lobbied lawmakers, the NWP picketed the White House, held hunger strikes, and engaged in other acts of civil

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disobedience. Thousands of women also formed antisuffrage groups, believing that it would be upsetting to home and family life if women became politically involved. Nevertheless, in 1920, the work of NAWSA and NWP achieved the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Women had won the right to vote.

**Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964)**

During the First and Second World Wars, women were actively recruited for manufacturing jobs; but at the end of each war, they were encouraged to give up their jobs to returning soldiers. In 1963, a journalist-turned-housewife named Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*. The book spoke of deep dissatisfaction among women who had been conditioned by society to stay at home. The national mood reflected in *The Feminine Mystique* sparked a growing effort on the part of women in the civil rights movement. One of the greatest achievements of that movement was the passage of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. The act prohibited employers from refusing to hire or from dismissing a worker because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. With some exceptions, the act made it illegal to pay women less than men for the same jobs. The act also established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to enforce Title VII.

**Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972)**

In 1972, women won another victory in Title IX of the Higher Education Act. Title IX prohibited sex discrimination in federally funded educational facilities. Schools that had previously refused to admit women had to open their enrollment or lose their funding. Colleges and universities were required to spend equal amounts of money on men and women, both in the classroom and in athletics. Before Title IX, female athletic programs did not receive funding equal to that received by male athletic programs. Opponents of the measure sued the government, and in 1984, a court ruled that Title IX applied to programs that receive federal funding, excluding athletics. Then, in 1988, the Civil Rights Restoration Act passed, stating that all programs within federally funded educational institutions must comply with Title IX, including athletic programs.

**Equal Rights Amendment (1972)**

In 1923, the NWP proposed the Equal Rights Amendment, which states 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 Senate did not approve the amendment until 1972, and the ERA incited fierce debate among women as well as men. Phyllis Schlafly led a grassroots conservative movement called Stop ERA. Through the efforts of Schlafly and others, the ERA was not ratified by three-fourths of the states and was never added to the U.S. Constitution.

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"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. . ."

—*Declaration of Sentiments, 1848*

"A woman is handicapped by her sex, and handicaps society, either by slavishly copying the pattern of man's advance in the professions, or by refusing to compete with man at all."

—*Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, 1963*

"They who say that women do not desire the right of suffrage, that they prefer masculine domination to self-government, falsify every page of history, every fact in human experience. It has taken the whole power of the civil and canon law to hold woman in the subordinate position. . ."

—*Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1884*

"It shall be an unlawful employment practice for an employer . . . to discriminate against any individual with respect to . . . compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual's race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. . ."

—*Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, 1964*

**Women in American Society**

"[W]omen realize that when they become voters they will . . . have to serve as jurors, and be compelled to hear all the repugnant details incident to murder trials and trials for other crimes. . . Jury service is abhorrent to every normal woman."

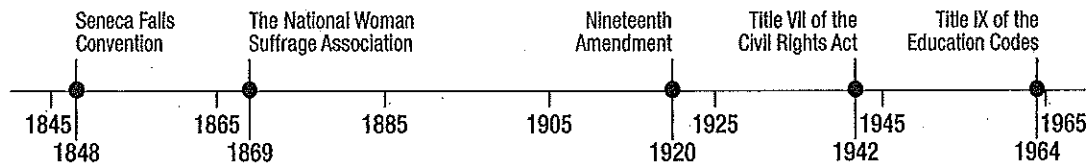
—*Nebraska Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, 1914*

"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. . ."

—*Title IX of the Education Codes, 1972*

"The [ERA] would force us to pretend that there are no differences between men and women at any time, anywhere. The first thing that would happen would be registration for the draft."

—*Phyllis Schlafly, 1972*



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**Directions:** Read the quotes on the previous page. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions.

1. In what ways are women described in the Declaration of Sentiments?
2. In what ways does Betty Friedan say that women handicap society?
3. **Draw Conclusions** What contradiction does Elizabeth Cady Stanton see in the arguments of opponents of women's suffrage?
4. **Apply Information** In one company, women receive two weeks of paid vacation per year and men receive three. Is this legal? Explain your answer.
5. **Apply Information** A college receiving federal funding finances a male basketball team but requires the women's basketball team to raise its own funds. Is this legal? Explain your answer.
6. **Make Connections** In what ways are the concerns of the Nebraska Association Opposed to Women Suffrage similar to those of Phyllis Schlafly?
7. **Link Past to Present** What signs of progress for political equality can be seen in the quotes above? Do you think that the American public is comfortable with women holding high state and federal offices such as governor, senator, or president? Explain your answer.