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Vivienne Sanders



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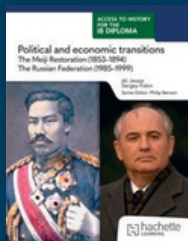
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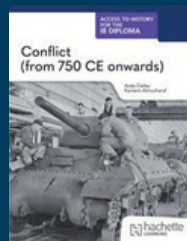
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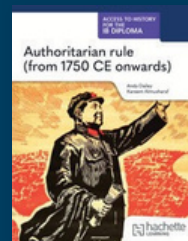
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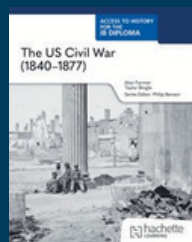
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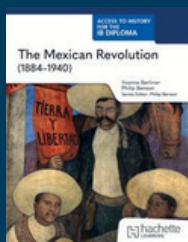
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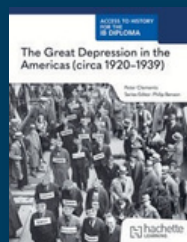
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ACCESS TO HISTORY
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Social movements in the Americas (1945–2020)

Vivienne Sanders
Series editor: Philip Benson

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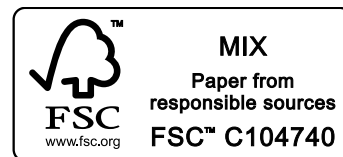
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Online extras

Glossary
Further reading
Internal assessment

Reasons for the emergence of the US Women's Movement

This chapter investigates why a Women's Movement emerged in the 1960s. You need to consider the following questions throughout this chapter:

- ★ What political factors lay behind the emergence of the 1960s Women's Movement?
- ★ What social factors lay behind the emergence of the 1960s Women's Movement?
- ★ What economic factors lay behind the emergence of the 1960s Women's Movement?
- ★ What role did ideas play in the emergence of a Women's Movement in the 1960s?

KEY DATES

c.1848–1920 First wave feminism

1920 Nineteenth Amendment gives women the vote

1933–45 Eleanor Roosevelt becomes First Lady

1933 First female Cabinet member in the USA

1941–5 Women work in the defence industries during Second World War

1961 Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW)

1963 Second wave feminism begins

The Feminine Mystique is published

Equal Pay Act

PCSW report

1964 Title VII of Civil Rights Act bans gender discrimination in employment

1965 'Jane Crow' article

1966 National Organization for Women (NOW) is established

1 Women's rights before 1960

► **Key question:** In what ways had women campaigned for equality before 1960?

The Declaration of Independence (1776) said it was 'self-evident' that 'all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights', but it was equally 'self-evident' to the author of the document that 'all men' did not mean women or people of colour.

The signing of a **Declaration of Sentiments** by 68 women at Seneca Falls in 1848 is often considered the beginning of the first mass mobilization of women, also known as the first wave of feminism. It culminated in 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment guaranteed white women the vote. The second mass mobilization, or 'second wave feminism', began in the early 1960s, ended in the late 1970s and brought about considerable change.

KEY TERM

Declaration of Sentiments Signed in Seneca Falls, New York, at the first women's rights convention organized by women. It demanded equality in citizenship, property rights, employment and education.



To what extent can you ascertain the author's perspective on women's rights through the content and the tone of the language in this extract?

Research skills

The opening lines of Clara Bingham's book (see Source A) are an excellent example of an author using a 'hook' to draw in the reader. In a group, research her assertions and find out whether the facts in this dramatic 'hook' are accurate, taking care to distinguish between statistical claims and generalized assertions.

ATL

SOURCE A

Extract from Clara Bingham's *How Women's Liberation Transformed America 1963–1973*, published in 2024

In 1963, a twenty-year-old American woman could not expect to run a marathon or play varsity sports in college. She could only dream of becoming a doctor, scientist, news reporter, lawyer, labor leader, factory foreman, college professor, or elected official. She couldn't get a prescription for birth control, have a legal abortion, come out as a lesbian, or prosecute her rapist... She could not get a credit card, let alone a mortgage, without the imprimatur [approval] of her husband or father. By 1973, the doors to these options and opportunities had cracked open, and a woman turning twenty in 1973 faced a future of possibilities that no generation before had ever experienced.

TOK

In *How Women's Liberation Transformed America 1963–73*, award-winning journalist Clara Bingham tells how she interviewed many women for the book and 'Where my interviews didn't suffice, or the subject had died, I searched for their first-person voices in articles, essays, memoirs, archived oral histories, and speeches.'

In terms of reliability and usefulness for the historian, in what order would you rank 'first-person voices in articles, essays, memoirs, archived oral histories, and speeches' and why? (Methods and tools.)

Was the New Deal a turning point?

Impact of the 1930s New Deal

Women's organizations lost dynamism and direction after gaining the vote in federal elections in 1920, so that the number and variety of leaders and training grounds had somewhat decreased. Opportunities for activism and involvement in seeking women's rights were dependent on political parties dominated by men. However, women gained greater political prominence during the presidency of Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1930s. First Lady **Eleanor Roosevelt**'s interest in contemporary issues empowered more women to get involved in politics and government. Many women were given posts in President Roosevelt's New Deal (see page 000), which increased women's influence in government and the Democratic Party. Roosevelt also appointed the first woman Cabinet member, Frances Perkins, although she was ignored by journalists and instead of being sat with other Cabinet members on formal occasions, was usually placed with their wives.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884–1962)

Born into an upper-class New York family, Eleanor Roosevelt's marriage to her distant cousin Franklin D Roosevelt (FDR) gained her political prominence.

During the 1920s, she fundraised for a women's labour organization that sought a 48-hour week, a minimum wage and the abolition of child labour. When FDR was governor of New York State (1929–32), she gained influence in the Democratic Party.

As FDR was repeatedly re-elected, Eleanor Roosevelt was an exceptionally long-serving First Lady (1933–45) with unprecedented opportunities to influence politics and society through her regular press conferences, weekly radio programmes, and daily newspaper (*My Day*) and monthly magazine columns. She also addressed the 1940 Democratic National Convention.

She banned male reporters from her 348 press conferences, thereby forcing newspapers to employ and retain female reporters. During the war she suggested giving women factory jobs before it became common

practice and urged upper-class women to work in factories 'and be useful'. The high rate of absenteeism among women factory workers prompted her campaign for government-sponsored daycare.

She remained politically active after FDR died. As the US delegate to the UN General Assembly (1945–52) she helped design and promote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which included women's right to equality as a basic human right. She chaired President Kennedy's Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (1961, see page 000), the report of which concluded that female equality would best be gained by recognizing gender differences and needs rather than by an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) (see page 000).

In polls taken between 1948 and 1961, she was frequently the 'most admired woman'. Historians polled in 2014 considered her the greatest First Lady for supporting women's issues. Feminist Marilyn Webb, born in 1942, said that when she was at university, Eleanor Roosevelt was the sole woman role model.

Impact of the Second World War (1941–5)

There was little talk of women's rights during the war, but the number of men fighting overseas led to changed roles. Some single women experienced greater independence in their personal lives, and many married women had to raise their families without their partners. With federal government encouragement, the proportion of women in the workforce rose from under 25% in 1942 to 36% in 1945. Married women constituted the majority of women workers for the first time. Women had new and/or better job opportunities. Over 2 million new women workers were employed as office workers and protective laws were removed due to the labour shortage so that by January 1942, 2.8 million women were employed in well-paid jobs in defence plants. Women volunteers were also given unprecedented opportunities. They ran the Red Cross boards and took responsibility for civil defence.

Was the war a turning point for women's rights?



What was the US Government hoping to achieve by using Rosie the Riveter's image in war drive campaigns?

ACTIVITY

Significance

Research the *Yank Army Weekly* magazine feature on women war workers, which contained a photograph of teenager Norma Jeane Dougherty working in a munitions factory (1944). She later gained fame under the name of Marilyn Monroe. Suggest reasons why the magazine included photographs such as this. Organize your findings under the headings 'Propaganda purpose' and 'Impact on perceptions of women'.

The federal government Chamber of Commerce's monthly publication *Nation's Business* opined in 1942 that women were ideally suited to industrial work because they had less initiative, were 'creatures of habit' and 'don't get bored as easily'. Discuss with a study partner what might account for the publication's promotion of this perspective. Is the source more useful for understanding women's wartime roles or beliefs about gender in the 1940s? (Perspectives, Methods and tools.)

**T
O
K**

SOURCE B

A popular 1942 song introduced the character 'Rosie the Riveter', an assembly-line worker helping the US war effort. Rosie became a cultural icon and symbol of women's empowerment, and the federal government frequently used the character in war drive campaign posters



Wartime work and problematic issues

While women's work was valued as an essential contribution to the war effort, family responsibilities presented difficulties. One study discovered 100,000 women work hours per month being lost in Detroit defence plants so that women could do their family laundry, and while Congress provided childcare facilities for workers in defence plants, some mothers did not want to enter the workforce.

Another difficulty was that majority attitudes about gender inequality remained conservative. Mary Anderson of the Women's Bureau complained that the Bureau's expertise was ignored and it was never consulted about women's employment policies. Although the National War Labor Board approved equal pay for equal work, the principle was never enforced. In 1945, women working in manufacturing still earned only 65% of what men earned and government propaganda reinforced the idea that women's war work was a temporary response to an emergency.

In 1945, a survey of defence industries found that 75% of women who had jobs for the first time wished to remain in them, especially older women who had already raised families, but one poll found 86% of Americans

opposed to hiring married women. The Labor Department issued recommendations to end women's wartime jobs in order to provide work for returning veterans. Managers in the auto and electric industries released women, took on men and paid them more. 'Let's keep the single girl on the job and put the married woman back in the kitchen,' said one electrical workers' union leaflet. The head of the National Association of Manufacturers said, 'Too many women should not stay in the labor force. The Home is the basic American institution.' Sexist attitudes and opinions were commonplace and there was increased anxiety about women rejecting domesticity and neglecting children, which contributed to the idealization of the housewife in the 1950s.

By late 1946, 2 million women had left the labour force, another million were laid off and the proportion of working women fell from 36% in 1945 to 28% in 1947. Women's Bureau head Frieda Miller argued that the war had proved women's abilities and that they should not be forced to return to the kitchen, but she noted 'doubts and uneasiness' about a 'developing attitude of militancy or a crusading spirit on the part of women leaders' and carefully reassured the public that, 'Women workers do not want to get ahead at the expense of the veterans. In fact, they have never regarded their own work as a substitute for that of men.'

Overall then, the war had not proved a great turning point for women.

Political, social and economic status of women in the 1950s

Inequality in politics

The lack of female influence over government was evident. Women's organizations and labour unions supported an equal pay bill in 1946, but the predominantly male US Congress was unenthusiastic. Women were not encouraged to participate in politics at the highest level. In her influential book *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan (see page 000) recalled how women had been 'taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women' who wanted political rights or even dreamt of becoming president. US Senator **Margaret Chase Smith** only got into politics as a substitute for her ailing office-holding husband.

ACTIVITY

Continuity and change

Thinking about what women did between 1941 and 1945 and what happened to women workers when the war ended, how would you explain Frieda Miller's seemingly contradictory ideas?

What was the status of women in the 1950s?

KEY FIGURE

Margaret Chase Smith (1897–1995) In 1940, her dying husband insisted she was the best candidate to succeed him in the House of Representatives, where (1940–9) she greatly influenced the passage of legislation allowing women to serve in the military in peacetime (1948). She became a respected Republican senator (1949–73). She was widely mentioned as a possible vice presidential candidate in 1952. Tired of being told that she could not do it, she declared her candidacy for the presidency in 1964. She lost in every primary but won 25% of the vote in Illinois. The first woman nominated for the presidency at a national political convention, she left politics in 1972.



What can the historian infer about the status of women from these statistics? What can they not infer? How far can the data alone represent women's political status in the 1950s?



Judging by the provenance and the extract from President Eisenhower's words, to what extent did Eisenhower and the Republican Party take women's rights seriously?

ACTIVITY

Research

Research First Ladies Bess Truman and Mamie Eisenhower.

- 1 What does Mamie Eisenhower's life reveal about contemporary attitudes to women and the role of the First Lady?
- 2 What evidence suggests change and/or continuity when compared to earlier First Ladies?

SOURCE C

The number of women in the US Senate and House of Representatives, 1943–61

Years	Number of women in the Senate	Number of women in the House
1943–5	1 (out of 96)	8 (out of 435)
1945–7	0	11
1947–9	1	7
1949–51	1	9
1951–3	1	10
1953–5	2	11
1955–7	1	16
1957–9	1	15
1959–61	2	17

The desire to break down the barriers against women in politics and to gain a say in the policy-making that affected their lives motivated some exceptionally determined and able women to attempt to carve out political careers. Shirley Chisholm joined the Bedford Stuyvesant Political League in 1953, left in 1958 because it refused to give women more input in decision-making, but was subsequently elected to Congress (see page 000).

SOURCE D

The Republican Party included support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) (see page 000) in every platform from 1940. At a 1957 press conference, Republican President Eisenhower (see page 000) was asked about the ERA. He laughed and gave the following reply, but in 1958 became the first president to ask Congress to pass the ERA. Quoted in Cynthia Harrison's *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945–1958, 1988*

Well, it's hard for a mere man to believe that a woman doesn't have equal rights. But, actually, this is the first time that this has come to my specific attention now, since, oh, I think a year or so... I just probably haven't been active enough in doing something about it.

Reproductive rights

The male-dominated society had legal control over women's reproductive rights. Some states such as Massachusetts and Connecticut prohibited doctors from making contraception available to married couples and doctors could refuse birth control to unmarried adults for 'moral reasons'. Many women experienced unwanted pregnancies but abortion was illegal. There were always people, sometimes not medically trained, willing to perform illegal abortions. Some cared only about

profit, although others, reportedly including Frank Sinatra's mother Dolly Sinatra, aimed to provide safe abortions for compassionate reasons.

The domesticity ideal in the 1950s

Many thought a woman's role was to be a homemaker. By 1951, 33% of American women were married by the age of 19, the birth rate rocketed and families averaged at least three children. Paediatrician Dr Spock's books on childcare emphasized the need for a mother's presence and love and sold over a million copies annually from 1946 to 1960.

The homemaker ideal was promoted in movies, women's magazines, television and advertisements in the 1950s. Several popular television series such as *Leave it to Beaver*, *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best* and *I Love Lucy* depicted idyllic middle-class suburban family life. Sociologists pointed out how girls were trained to play with dolls and later felt under pressure to emphasize their femininity and hide their intelligence.

However, while the media usually promoted the 'ideal' woman, alternatives were shown:

- *Ladies' Home Journal* was a typical women's magazine with articles on cooking, fashion, home care and how to keep a husband happy, but its series entitled 'How America Lives' showed the lives of women of various social classes and ethnic backgrounds.
- In 1960, *Redbook* magazine invited readers to write in about 'Why You Feel Trapped' and received 24,000 entries for its competition, either because of the USD 500 prize on offer, or because many housewives felt trapped, or both.
- Hollywood often depicted passive and vulnerable women. *The Tender Trap* (1955) suggested that the most fulfilling role for a woman was that of homemaker and mother, while in *Bus Stop* (1956), Marilyn Monroe was roped by her cowboy admirer just as he would rope cattle. However, some movies had strong women characters. *Johnny Guitar* (1954) featured two assertive women struggling for dominance.

Sociologists found that blue-collar (see page 000) and lower-middle-class wives were less convinced than upper-middle-class women 'that life ought to be more than raising a family'. It was more usual for middle-class women to react against the 'ideal'. Some took refuge in tranquilizers (the quantity taken more than doubled between 1958 and 1959) and/or alcohol. Some became activists.

The 'American woman's dilemma'

In 1947, *Life* magazine opined that the conflict between traditional roles and paid employment was the 'American woman's dilemma'.

Frieda Miller (see page 000) defended paid employment for women, saying that some found working in offices, stores, factories, schools or hospitals more satisfying than work at home because, 'Intermingled...

ACTIVITY

Perspectives

Working as a group, allocate different episodes of *Father Knows Best* (aired from 1954 to 1960 and available on YouTube) for each person to watch. Treat each episode as a *primary source* and identify evidence of:

- (i) assumptions about gender roles, (ii) what is shown as opposed to what is omitted, and (iii) how does this reflect the values of 1950s American suburban culture.

Support each claim with a specific scene or moment, and consider whether the programme is portraying an idealized reality or everyday life.

ACTIVITY

Research

Work in a group, with each group member focusing on a specific class, race or region. Investigate whether the 'American woman's dilemma' was experienced differently across class, race or region. Each member should find at least two additional sources beyond the textbook, for example, magazine excerpts, oral histories or photographs. When members present their findings to the group, discuss how those findings help to explain why the Women's Movement emerged in the 1960s.

SOURCE E

The percentage of working wives, 1940–80

Date	Percentage of working wives
1940	15%
1950	21%
1960	30%
1970	40%
1980	50%



Do the statistics in Source E suggest that the Women's Movement of the 1960s had a dramatic impact on the percentage of working wives and mothers?

with the necessity for self-support is the desire for self-expression, the need to make a contribution to society in a field adapted to one's individual personality... It may very well be that we are approaching a period when for women to work is an act of conformism.'

In contrast, psychiatrist Marynia Farnham wrote in 1947 that the conflict between home and career rendered women harassed, psychologically ill, 'hostile, aggressive, and perpetually at odds with their environment'. A career required 'a great deal of drive, self-assertion, competition and aggression,' but biological fulfilment through childbearing required qualities 'that can best be classified as protective or nurturing, passive and receptive.' Farnham and sociologist Ferdinand Lundberg's bestseller *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1947) branded feminism a neurotic reaction to natural male dominance. The true woman was characterized by self-acceptance, dependence on men and passive fulfilment in sex and motherhood. The home was described as being the 'proper domain' for feminine women. Early editions of Dr Spock's book (see page 000) advised mothers who wanted to leave young children for paid work to seek psychological or social counselling. He said best practice was to leave home only to visit a good friend, see a movie, buy a new hat or dress, or take a trip to the beauty parlour. In 1950, the female president of women-only Mills College said colleges should not treat women as 'men in disguise' but provide them with a 'distinctively feminine curriculum'.

In 1953, sociologist Mirra Komarovsky interviewed women at college and found opinion divided:

- 20% wanted to have both a career and family
- 30% anticipated working after 10–15 years as a homemaker
- 50% looked forward to a lifetime of domesticity and gave reasons such as a woman who worked 'cannot possibly be as good a mother as one who stays home' and men 'still want their wives to be feminine, domestic, dependent, and just a little inferior mentally'.

Some feared a successful career might affect their marriage prospects.

In 1967, sociologist Herbert Gans would observe that lower-middle-class and working-class women in his New Jersey suburb were still far more likely than other women to claim to enjoy the traditional domestic role.

Working women in the 1950s

The 1950s is usually seen as the peak era of the suburban housewife but married women constituted over half the female workforce by 1950.

It was increasingly common for middle-class women with children to join the workforce in order to maintain the family's status in the consumer society.

By 1960 more than one-third of women were in paid employment. One-third were employed in clerical work, a traditionally low-paid occupation and one which Kraft Foods said was particularly suited to

women because they had small fingers for the typewriter keys. Others were in traditionally 'female occupations' such as nursing and teaching, but most were in low-paid jobs such as waitstaff, cleaners and shop assistants.

SOURCE F

A 1951 advertisement for Schlitz beer



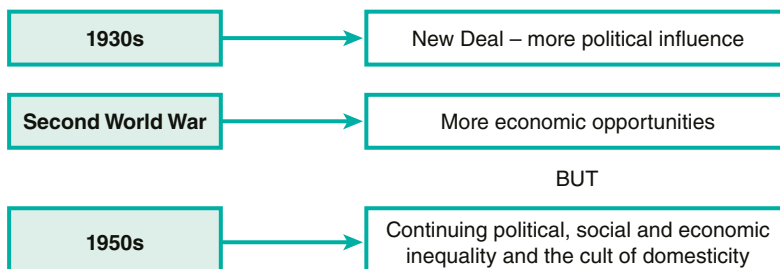
How useful is this image for an investigation of perspectives on the role of women in the USA in 1951?

?

ACTIVITY

Continuity and change

- 1 Identify one example of social continuity and one of social change between 1940 and 1960.
- 2 Do the same for economic continuity/change.
- 3 Think about whether there was more continuity or more change.
- 4 Make a plan for this exam-style essay: 'To what extent do you agree with the argument that women's lives and views were transformed by the Second World War?'



SUMMARY DIAGRAM

Women's rights before 1960

2 Emergence of a revitalized Women's Movement in the 1960s

► **Key question:** *Why did women's activism increase in the 1960s?*

What political factors lay behind the Women's Movement of the 1960s?

Political factors

Persistent political inequality

Changes to national policies or to the status of women depended greatly on a US Congress dominated by white men. In 1961, women could fold pamphlets and ring doorbells on behalf of the major political parties but while they constituted 50% of voters, only two of the 100 senators and 19 of the 437 representatives were women. Women constituted only 4% of members of Congress and state legislatures. When women rose to speak in favour of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the men in the House laughed at them, Representative **Martha Griffiths** stood and began by saying, 'I presume that if there had been any necessity to point out that women were a second-class sex, the laughter would have proved it.' The laughter stopped.

The difficulties facing women in politics were illustrated by Shirley Chisholm. She recalled that she had spent ten years helping men get elected: 'Starting as a cigar box decorator, I had compiled voter lists, carried petitions, rung doorbells, manned the telephone, stuffed envelopes, and helped voters get to the polls.' In 1964, she wanted to run for a seat in the New York State Assembly. She said that male domination in politics 'had to change someday, and I was resolved that it was going to start changing right then. I was the best-qualified nominee, and I was not going to be denied because of my sex.' She met hostility because of her sex from the first. A man asked her, 'Young woman, what are you doing out here in this cold? Did you get your husband's breakfast this morning? Did you straighten up your house? What are you doing running for office? This is something for men.' Some women greeted her similarly. In 1969, Chisholm recalled that 'in the political world I have been far oftener discriminated against because I am a woman than because I am black.'

KEY FIGURE



Martha Griffiths

(1912–2003) Lawyer who served in the Michigan House of Representatives (1949–53) and as a judge in Detroit (1953–4). She was repeatedly elected to the US House of Representatives (1955–74), vociferous about the flight attendants controversy (see page 000), and frequently described as 'the mother of the Equal Rights Amendment', which she sponsored in Congress. In 1966, she vehemently attacked the EEOC (see page 000) for approving sex-segregated newspaper job advertisements.

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