Campaign for the rights and emancipation (freedom) of women, including social, political, and economic equality with men. Early campaigners of the 17th–19th centuries fought for women's rights to own property, to have access to higher education, and to vote. The suffragists campaigned for women's voting rights; in the UK they formed two groups, the suffragists, who pursued reform by purely peaceful means, and the suffragettes, who were willing to take militant action. Once women's suffrage (the right to vote) was achieved in the 20th century, the emphasis of the movement shifted to the goals of equal social and economic opportunities for women, including employment. A continuing area of concern in industrialized countries is the contradiction between the now generally accepted principle of equality and the actual inequalities that remain between the sexes in state policies and in everyday life.

General history Pioneering feminists (see feminism) of the 19th and early 20th centuries, considered radical for their belief in the equality of the sexes, included Mary Wollstonecraft and Emmeline Pankhurst in the UK, and Susan B Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the USA. The women's movement was also supported in principle by progressives, such as the English philosopher John Stuart Mill in his essay *On the Subjection of Women* (1869), although he also believed that the political advocacy of the women's cause was not possible in the climate of opinion prevailing at that time.

The work of women during World War I, turned opinion in their favour; women's suffrage was achieved in the UK (1918) and the USA (1920). In the USSR, following the Russian Revolution (1917), women's social and economic equality was promoted with decrees on equal pay for equal work, liberal divorce and abortion laws, and the setting up of childcare systems. However, the women's movement first gained a worldwide impetus after World War II, with the work of such theorists as Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Kate Millett, Gloria Steinem, and Germaine Greer, and the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in Washington, DC in 1966. From the late 1960s the movement argued that women were oppressed by the male-dominated social structure as a whole, which they saw as pervaded by sexism, despite legal concessions towards equality of the sexes. In this period the women's movement was critical of the use of women as sex objects in advertising, and also opposed the social indoctrination of women into passive and accommodating roles within the family and society in general.

UK statistics In 2010 women made up almost 50% of the UK workforce (12.7 million men and 12.3 million women). However, only about 20% of judges (in England and Wales), 22% of MPs, and 12.5% of board members of the largest 100 British companies were women. Work patterns were different between the sexes: 88% of men worked full-time in 2010, as opposed to 58% of women. The average female worker earned considerably less than the average male earner, although the gender pay gap narrowed to 10.2% in 2010. Girls routinely outperformed boys at every level of education.

UK legislation In the early 19th century women were still legally the possessions of their husbands;
they had no rights of divorce or even, until 1839, the right to custody of their children. Middle-class women were expected to stay at home and be a support for their husbands; working-class women were obliged to go out to work, often in low-paid sweated trades (working long hours under poor conditions), or to work as domestic servants. Some women, such as Mrs Humphry Ward, the founder of the Women's Anti-Suffrage League, opposed women's political rights on the grounds that political involvement would distract them from the home. However, women's rights saw a number of significant advances in England in the 19th century. After 1834 women ratepayers could vote for poor-law guardians, and after 1839 an 'innocent' woman could keep her children after divorce. The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 allowed a woman to obtain a divorce if her husband beat her or committed adultery. After the 1870 Education Act, women were allowed to vote for and serve on school boards; after 1875 they could be elected as poor-law guardians; and after 1894 they could vote in local elections. Josephine Butler was one of those who campaigned for the Married Woman's Property Act of 1882, which gave a married woman the right to keep her own property and her own earnings, and after 1891 a man could not compel a woman to stay in the marital home.

Women obtained increased educational opportunity to go to school and university. Florence Nightingale established a school for nurses in 1860, and in 1865 Elizabeth Garrett Anderson became the first woman licensed to practise medicine. Women were able to become teachers, typists, and shop assistants. However, women were still excluded from the franchise. During World War I women worked as nurses, ambulance drivers, firefighters, road layers, and bus ‘clippies’ (ticket collectors). Many men, such as the Liberal politician Herbert Asquith, considered that women had earned the right to the vote, and the franchise was extended to women in 1918 and 1928 (see women's suffrage). During the 1920s, young British women (the ‘flappers’) had greater personal freedom than ever before. The Scottish birth-control campaigner Marie Stopes set up the first birth-control clinic in 1921.

During World War II, women again occupied a wide variety of jobs, for instance in the armaments factories, in the armed forces, and as spies, but after the war they were expected to go back to the kitchen. However, legislation was soon passed in the UK – the Equal Pay Act (1970) and the Sex Discrimination Act (1975) – which made it illegal to discriminate against women in employment, education, housing, and provision of goods, facilities, and services to the public. The Equal Opportunities Commission was established in 1975 to oversee the implementation of the legislation. This body was superseded in 2007 by the Equality and Human Rights Commission, a non-governmental public body, and in 2010 the Equality Act consolidated the array of anti-discrimination legislation in Great Britain. (See also sexual harassment.)

US legislation In the USA, early members of the women's movement were also associated with abolitionism and the temperance movement. The first organized women's rights movement was launched by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Coffin Mott at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. During and just after the Civil War, suffrage became secondary to the cause of abolition. Suffragists formed two organizations: the National Woman Suffrage Association, and the less militant American Woman Suffrage Association. The two groups merged in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Initially women's suffrage was adopted by a number of states: in 1869, the territory of Wyoming gave women the vote, the state of Colorado followed suit in 1893, and was followed in turn by Utah, Idaho, and Washington. However, when the state-by-state approach to national suffrage failed, Alice Paul, who was involved in the more militant efforts in the UK, organized marches in Washington, DC and

https://search.credoreference.com/content/topic/womens_movement
helped bring the suffrage issue to a national level. After the Nineteenth Amendment (ratified in 1920) gave the vote to women in federal and state elections (see Amendment, Nineteenth), women began to press for equal rights to men, especially in the workplace, as well as social reforms. In more recent times, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, a government agency, was established in 1964 to end discrimination (including sex discrimination) in hiring workers. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a proposed constitutional amendment prohibiting sex discrimination, was passed by Congress in 1972, but failed to be ratified by the necessary 38 states. The Education Act Amendments, however, passed during this year, guaranteed equal access to any educational institution that received public funds. This resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of women pursuing traditionally male-dominated professions such as engineering, medicine, and law. Following a US circuit-court decision in 1992, women may be granted asylum in the USA if they are persecuted because of their sex or feminist views.

**World development** Women are underrepresented in the parliaments of virtually all nations; at the end of 2010 Rwanda the highest proportion, with 56%, followed by Sweden, with 45%, and South Africa, with 44.5%; the UK had 22% and the USA 17%.

Over many decades, the United Nations has made significant progress in advancing gender equality, including through landmark agreements such as the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In 2010 the UN General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which merged existing UN organizations promoting the status of women (including the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women and the UN Development Fund for Women). Its main roles are to: support inter-governmental bodies in their formulation of policies and global standards; help UN member states to implement these standards and forge effective partnerships with civil society; and hold the UN system accountable for its own commitments on gender equality, including regular monitoring of system-wide progress.

**essays**

Ordination of Women Priests

Gender issues

**documents**

Anthony, Susan B: Are Women Persons?

Catt, Carrie Chapman: Address to the United States Congress

Chisholm, Shirley: For the Equal Rights Amendment

Du Bois, W E B: Address to the Convention of the National Women's Suffrage Association

Nation, Carry: Prohibition or Abolition – What It Means

Pearson, Allan C: Emmeline Pankhurst's imprisonment

Steinem, Gloria: Tufts University Commencement Address

Truth, Sojourner: Ain't I a Woman?
APA

Chicago

Harvard

MLA