

A Select Timeline of Women’s Rights in the U.S.

Check one of the provided boxes after each event on the timeline. Indicate whether you feel the event is an “advance” or a “setback” in the history of women’s rights.

1777 – With the United States only one year old, all states pass laws that take away women’s right to vote.*

Advance Setback

1820s – The Women’s Suffrage Movement begins, focusing on getting women the right to vote.*

Advance Setback

1848 – The Seneca Falls Convention takes place. Abolitionists gather, seeking to address women’s rights and challenge what historians call the “Cult of True Womanhood.” The “Cult of True Womanhood” understands femininity as a thing defined by the virtues of piety, purity, submission and domesticity. At the convention, more than three hundred men and women gather to sign the “Declaration of Sentiments,” seeking autonomy for women, a true citizenship that takes women beyond the home and into public life. The language they propose says that, “. . . all men and women are created equal.”

Advance Setback



Illustration of the Seneca Falls Convention

*It is important to note that women of color in the United States faced hurdles beyond those affecting their white counterparts. The dates on this timeline reflect milestones in the history of women’s rights for white women.

1870 – The 15th Amendment prohibits the federal government or any state from denying a citizen the right to vote based on “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Susan B. Anthony and others associated with the Suffrage movement see this as an opportunity for the women’s movement.

Advance Setback

1873 – Susan B. Anthony is arrested for attempting to vote in a Rochester, New York election. This leads to the criminal trial of the United States v. Susan B. Anthony in which Anthony argues that the recently adopted 15th Amendment provides women with the right to vote. Anthony is found guilty of violating state laws and is sentenced to pay a fine of \$100. Although Anthony refuses to pay the fine, Judge Ward Hunt elects not to have her jailed in order to prevent the case from moving to the Supreme Court, which would potentially lead to increased awareness around the issue of women’s rights.

Advance Setback

1920 – 19th Amendment gives women the right to vote. That same year eight million women exercise their right.

Advance Setback

1932 – The National Recovery Act forbids more than one family member from holding a government job, resulting in many women losing their jobs.

Advance Setback



Suffragists campaigning for the right to vote, 1920

1961 – Hoyt vs. Florida. U.S. Supreme Court upholds Florida rule that more men will necessarily be called for jury service because the “woman is still regarded as the center of home and family life.”

Advance Setback

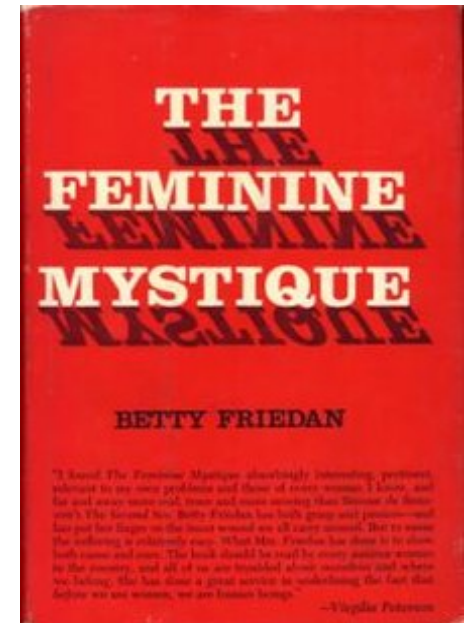
1963 – Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* is published, raising awareness around issues of gender discrimination. Excerpt:

“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 ask even of herself the silent question — ‘Is this all?’ For over fifteen years there was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, in all the columns, books and articles by experts telling women their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers.”

Advance Setback

1972 – Title IX of the Educational Amendments, a follow-up to 1964’s Civil Rights Act, prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity. Title IX legislation brought about significant changes in school sports, increasing opportunities and support for female athletes. Girls Softball leagues grew exponentially in the wake of Title IX.

Advance Setback



Questions:

1. The Declaration of Independence, written in 1776, includes the phrase “All men are created equal.” Why were these words a problem for some Americans in the nation’s first century?
2. Women did not have the right to vote in 1776. Based on this, where do you think women fit in relation to the nation’s founding philosophies, which are centered around ideas of freedom and equality?
3. What was the “Women’s Suffrage Movement”?
4. The Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 was a gathering of abolitionists. Why do you think those parties interested in women’s suffrage would gather together with those seeking the abolition of slavery? What similarities do you see between the two movements?
5. What was the “Cult of True Womanhood” and how might the values it promotes ultimately limit the possibilities for women in the 19th century?
6. How could the signing of the 15th Amendment be a step towards women’s suffrage?
7. What is the Supreme Court?
8. Do you think Susan B. Anthony might have wanted her criminal trial to go to the Supreme Court? How would her political efforts benefit from the national attention of a Supreme Court case?

9. In 1920, women gained the right to vote. Why do you think this was such an important moment for women's rights?
10. Why would the National Recovery Act of 1932 result in women losing jobs?
11. How does the idea that women are the "center of home and family life" serve as an argument *against* more women serving on juries in Florida in 1961?
12. In your own words, how does Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, describe the lives of suburban housewives in the middle of the 20th century?
13. Title IX required equal funding in schools for men's and women's programs, increasing the presence of women's sports programs. How might this have affected young women looking to play team sports? How do you think this might have affected the rise of softball as a sport?