

## Document 2

### Women's Rights Movement

Directions: Read the following documents and record the information in your chart.

#### The Women's Movement

Women's groups had worked for equal rights since before the Civil War. Women at last gained the right to vote in 1920. But then the women's movement had gone into a long sleep. In the 1960s, many women became active in the civil rights movement. They noticed that they were mostly given second-class status behind the men. Working women began to resent the status quo. They didn't like the ways in which the mass media treated the housewife as the ideal woman. They also resented the many forms of job discrimination they had to deal with. They were fed up with lower wages, closed jobs, and little chance for promotion.

In 1966, a group of activists formed NOW, the National Organization for Women. It lobbied strongly for equal employment rights. In 1967, President Johnson agreed. He added women to people covered in federal affirmative action programs. NOW also sponsored an Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The ERA would ban all discrimination based on gender. The Amendment sailed through Congress in 1972. But then it bogged down in the state legislatures. It was never ratified.

The ERA failed for a number of reasons. One was a backlash against the more radical women's rights figures. This backlash was led by Phyllis Schlafly. She was a working woman who promoted the time-honored role of women as homemakers. Another cause of the ERA's failure was a new split in the women's movement. This split was caused by the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. *Roe* said that women had a right under the U.S. constitution to abortion in the early months of pregnancy. Many women hailed the decision as upholding a woman's right to control of her own body. Others, though, were appalled. In their view, abortion was murder of an unborn child, at any stage of pregnancy. Women (and men) who felt this way mounted a strong right-to-life movement. The fight between pro- and anti-abortion forces continues today.

The following document explains why work is so important. **What arguments are made for why work is so important for women?**

Answer in your notebook.

#### Excerpts from "The Importance of Work"

(From Gloria Steinem, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983, pp. 171-172.)

A job as a human right is a principle that applies to men as well as women. But women have more cause to fight for it. The phenomenon of the "working woman" has been held responsible for everything from an increase in male impotence (which turned out, incidentally, to be attributable to medication for high blood pressure) to the rising cost of steak (which was due to high energy costs and beef import restrictions, not women's refusal to prepare the cheaper, slower-cooking cuts). Unless we see a job as part of every citizen's right to autonomy and personal fulfillment, we will continue to be vulnerable to someone else's idea of what "need" is, and whose "need" counts the most.

In many ways, women who do not have to work for simple survival, but who choose to do so nonetheless, are on the frontier of asserting this right for all women. Those with well-to-do husbands are dangerously easy for us to resent and put down. It's easier still to resent women from families of inherited wealth, even though men generally control and benefit from that wealth. There is no Rockefeller Sister Fund, no J. P. Morgan and Daughters, and sons-in-law may be the ones who really sleep their way to power. But to prevent a woman whose husband or father is wealthy from earning her own living, and from gaining the self-confidence that comes with that ability, is to keep her needful of that unearned power and less willing to disperse it. Moreover, it is to lose forever her unique talent. . . .

For most of us, however, “women work because we have to” is just true enough to be seductive as a personal defense.

If we use it without also staking out the larger human right to a job, however, we will never achieve that right. And we will always be subject to the false argument that independence for women is a luxury affordable only in good economic times. Alternatives to layoffs will not be explored, acceptable unemployment will always be used to frighten those with jobs into accepting low wages, and we will never remedy the real cost, both to families and to the country, of dependent women and a massive loss of talent.

Worst of all, we may never learn to find productive, honored work as a natural part of ourselves and as one of life’s basic pleasures.

## Women’s Rights Activists

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Gloria Steinem, and Shirley Chisholm played prominent roles in the women’s movement that began in 1848. Their willingness to overcome obstacles and pay the price of participation helped generate awareness of women’s rights as well as legislative action. ♦ *Read the following biographies. As you read, think about the experiences that motivated these activists. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) believed women should be full participants in society. In 1840, she attended an international anti-slavery convention, but event



Elizabeth Cady Stanton,  
Library of Congress

organizers banned Stanton and other female delegates from the convention floor. Eight years later, she and four other women planned the first women’s rights convention. Stanton helped organize and drive the women’s

suffrage movement despite her husband’s opposition. She also advocated coeducation, liberal divorce laws, and dress reform. Stanton toured the nation promoting her views until she died in 1902.

As a journalist, Gloria Steinem (born 1934) had trouble getting serious reporting assignments and earning wages comparable to male reporters. She assumed she just wasn’t good enough until she attended her first feminist meeting in 1968. After hearing stories about other women’s experiences, Steinem concluded that society systematically discriminated against women. She decided to use her writing skills to advance the feminist movement. Her first feminist article appeared in 1969 in

*New York Magazine*. Because male-dominated news establishments did not support her



Gloria Steinem,  
Library of Congress

reporting interests, Steinem helped found *Ms.* magazine in the early 1970s so she could continue to report on the women’s movement.

As an educator, Shirley Chisholm (1924–2005) observed daily the effects of poverty. These observations led her to run for the New York State legislature, where she served from 1964 to 1968. In 1968, Chisholm became the first African American woman elected to Congress. She considered the distinction



Shirley Chisholm,  
Library of Congress

foolish because it reflected the views of a society that was neither just nor free. From 1969 to 1983, she served in the House of Representatives, where she advocated for the poor, opposed the Vietnam War, and supported women’s

rights. In 1972, she competed for the Democratic nomination for president.

### Questions to Think About

Answer in your notebook.

1. What examples of discrimination did Stanton and Steinem experience?
2. Why did Gloria Steinem help found *Ms.* magazine?

3. **Draw Conclusions** How successful do you believe Stanton, Steinem, and Chisholm were in achieving their goals? Explain your answer.