

# Women's Rights Newscast

**Class Procedure:** The class will be graded together on the flow of the newscast and the organization between groups along with the final segment the group creates. Each class will choose an anchor and a co-anchor who will set the order of the presentation and handle the leads to the subtopics, writes and reads off the lead story. In addition, an Executive Producer and editor will work with this group.

**Preparation:** Read your section interactively noting some statistics and ideas you'd like to include in the newscast. Consider these questions for your topic:

*What were the chief frustrations of the women's movement on your topic?*

*What were the most prominent successes of the women's movement in your topic area?*

*What obstacles and failures did feminists experience in fighting for change?*

*In what significant ways did the reforms change American society?*

*Did the women achieve full equity in your area?*

*What remains to be done to earn equality?*

Bring some costumes and props to class that you might use for your story.

**Day of:** Write the script of your story, find appropriate attire and for your presentation, rehearse it, film it (2-4 minutes) and edit it. Yes, in literally one period so get to work.

**Work: Key Concerns of the Women's Movement** A prominent focus of the women's movement was the fight against sex discrimination and inequality in the paid workforce. By 1960, 38 percent of American women were in the workforce, a majority of them in low-status, low-paying jobs that offered little opportunity for advancement. Feminists fought for equal pay for women, an end to sex discrimination, and more job opportunities, both in terms of advancement in their current fields and access to fields traditionally closed to women.

**Equal Pay** The 1960s women's movement demanded equal pay for women workers. On average, in 1960 women made only 60 cents for each dollar men earned, and women of color often made even less. Many employers openly discriminated against women in their pay practices, paying women less than men for the same, or similar, jobs. According to one study conducted by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), 10 out of 14 male office workers were paid more than their female counterparts for performing the exact same job. The women's movement pressured government agencies to investigate equal-pay violations, and brought lawsuits against employers that practiced wage discrimination. In *In the Company of Women*, Vivian Jenkins Nelson describes the inequalities women faced:

One day the phone rang at the college and it was one of the banks. It was a woman who said she was checking on a credit application for "Bill." ... [S]he said, "And I want to verify? his salary. He's making \$12,000?" I said, "I hope to God not," and hung up the phone. When I was hired...I ended up taking \$9,000. And this jerk, with the same rank, hired the same day, was making \$3,000 more!... [Another woman and I] went in and grabbed our boss, who was actually a sweetheart, and said, "Tom! What do you mean?" He said, "But he's head of household." "It isn't fair," we said, "we're heads of households too," but we were told it was just the way it had always been.

**Sex Discrimination** The women's movement brought attention to other forms of discrimination against women in the workplace. It criticized companies who refused to hire women, saying their customers preferred to interact with men, and demanded that women be judged on their performance rather than their gender. They also protested against company policies of firing recently married women because the employer believed they were going to "get pregnant and leave anyway," firing women before less-experienced men during company lay offs, and firing pregnant women. Finally, feminists argued that male workers should be penalized for harrasing women sexually on the job.

**Equal Opportunities** Feminists further believed that women, like men, should be able to choose any type of work they wanted. They argued that most women in the paid workforce were clustered into jobs that male employers considered appropriate "women's work." These were typically service-oriented jobs that reinforced women's role as caretakers or assistants to others. They included domestic workers (housekeepers and nannies), nurses, elementary school teachers, office clerks, secretaries, and waitresses. African-American women had even fewer job opportunities. Through the 1960s, they were mostly banned from peacetime factory work, and secretarial and sales jobs. Not uncoincidentally, female-dominated positions tended to be low paid and held little prestige (high respect). The women's movement pressed for legislation that would guarantee women's entry into new fields of work and open up advancement opportunities in the fields in which they already worked.

**Changes in Women's Work** The women's movement led to significant improvements for women workers. In particular, feminists' efforts were key in the passing of two pieces of employment legislation. The first was the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which stated that women should be paid the same as men for jobs "requiring equal skill, responsibility, and effort." By 1970, over 50,000 women had used the Equal Pay Act to sue for equal pay. Between 1965 and 1975, women received over 30 million dollars in back pay. However, although women continued to make small, hard-won gains toward equal pay, by the late 1970s they were still being paid much less than men on average.

The second key piece of legislation was Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Title VII made it illegal for employers to discriminate against job applicants because of "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." Furthermore, in 1967 President Lyndon B. Johnson expanded affirmative action—which required employers to show a "good faith effort" toward correcting workplace discrimination—to include women. As a result, women were hired in fields from which they had traditionally been excluded (left out). A woman bank vice president stated: "Equal opportunity laws [such as affirmative action] have made a big difference....I don't think the bank or many other companies would have [hired women] if it hadn't been that they...had to show some activity....[The laws] opened doors that I don't think would have opened for a long time."

By 1984, 52 percent of women worked outside the home, and more were working as lawyers, architects, construction workers, scientists, and aviators than ever before. Yet, women still were underpaid for the exact same job and could not sue under Title VII after 180 days. In addition, while many women made great gains, some women of color continued to face barriers because of racial discrimination. One African-American activist put it this way: "On the job, [black women are] low women on the totem pole. White women have their problems. They're interviewed for

secretarial instead of the executive thing. But we're interviewed for mopping floors and stuff like that."

**Recent** : Women still place hurdles in the workplace compared to their male counterparts. Apples to apples (same jobs) women make about 93 cents on the dollar. Apples to oranges, (jobs overall) women make about 80 cents on the dollar. There are a variety of factors which cause this including jobs associated with women pay less. For instance, parking lot attendees which is a position largely taken by men generally pays higher than that of a child care worker which is a job traditionally over represented by women.

Yet there have been some positive steps. The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act was the first bill signed into law by US President Barack Obama on January 29, 2009. The act amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and stated that the 180-day statute of limitations for filing an equal-pay lawsuit regarding pay discrimination resets with each new paycheck affected by that discriminatory action. This allowed women to work in conjunction with the EEOC to sue employers abusing equal pay laws easier.

But there still are many issues. Women earn the majority of college degrees and make up roughly half the workforce, but still today women only lead 167 of the top 3000 companies. Many companies do not even have one woman on their executive board. The problem doesn't seem to be improving. In the past year 307 companies in the top 3000 have appointed new CEOs, yet only 26 were women. The glass ceiling concept has been an issue for decades. The term references the barriers faced by women and they try and career ladder. For many, the barrier isn't only a glass ceiling at the very top, but also an invisible wall that sidelines them from the kind of roles that have traditionally been stepping stones to the CEO position. The Wall Street Journal concluded that the reasons include early professional tradeoffs, entrenched attitudes concerning women in power and the "traits needed to be a leader" and work life constraints. WSJ's study showed that more men have a strategic support from the company and sponsors who championed them in the organizations. In a way, its a new kind of old boys club.

When women step out of the work force to have children, companies do not pay them. Women are expected to adjust their schedules and make compromises when the needs of children and other family members collide with work. Pew Research Center data found that mothers were much more likely than fathers to report experiencing significant career interruptions in order to attend to their families' needs. Part of this is due to the fact that gender roles are lagging behind labor force trends. In addition, America provides zero weeks of required paid family leave and is alone in the industrialized world in that respect. This comes at a financial cost to women longterm.