

Now: Me Too Movement

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about what has been the most recent wave in the history of the recognition of women's rights: the Me Too movement. While this movement has been the latest movement in the struggle for equality/justice, it is, in many ways, one of the most basic movements in that struggle. It has been a movement for something as basic as fundamental respect. It would have made sense for this part of the struggle for equality/justice to have come first -- even before the right to vote. The fact that it is happening now and is still incomplete, should help us to remember that the struggle for equality/justice is not over yet. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Introduction
2. Women And Political Power
3. The Women's March
4. The Me Too Movement

"I'm marching so my daughter doesn't have to."

Jess Kiesa, Women's March Participant, Virginia



BEFORE YOU START

In what ways are women still fighting for equality?

1. Introduction

So far in this course, we have discussed how to identify credible sources of information to further develop your **problem solving skill**. We've also examined economic changes and challenges in U.S. history, focusing on how people in the past dealt with them—and how we can apply those skills from the past to address problems in the present and future.

In this unit, we will examine the history of **civil rights** in the United States. The fight to gain and maintain rights for all people has been a significant part of the American story. In this challenge, we'll focus on the history of women's rights in the United States. In the next challenge, we will learn about African Americans' long struggle to first achieve freedom from slavery, and then to win equal rights and freedom from discrimination. In the last challenge of this unit, we will focus on immigrants in the United States, looking at the country's long history of controversy over immigration.

The United States was founded with the ideal of representative government—a system in which citizens play

a role in choosing their leaders. In practice, however, only white men (specifically those who owned property) were given the right to participate in the new republic. It took more than a century for all Americans, regardless of their race or sex, to gain full access to voting rights. In fact, 144 years passed between the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the **ratification** of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote. Many generations of activists fought hard to secure this and other civil rights. Their stories are full of lessons that we can apply to problems of discrimination, inequality, and injustice that still exist today.

In this challenge, we will learn about women's struggle for equality. We'll focus on strategies they used to overcome adversity and explore how they saw changes in society as opportunities to secure more rights. We'll also connect these historical struggles to women's current challenges and potential strategies for addressing them.



TERMS TO KNOW

Civil Rights

The rights of citizens to freedom and equality under the law.

Ratification

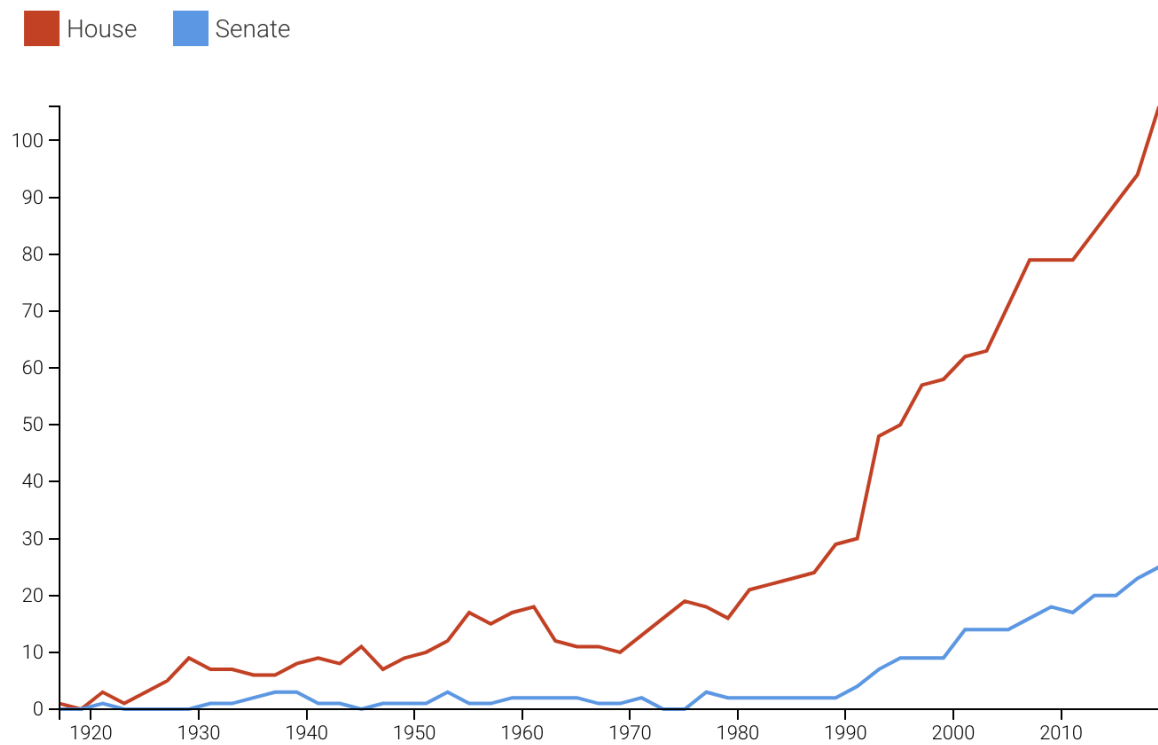
The act of signing or giving formal consent to a treaty, contract, or agreement, making it officially valid.

2. Women And Political Power

Today, men and women in American society experience life on more equal footing than they did in the past. Women have many career options, economic and legal protections similar to those of men, and a meaningful voice in public conversation. But equality hasn't fully reached all areas of life yet. Changes to laws and ideals don't immediately alter the ways people interact in areas like politics, the family, and the workplace. Let's explore some of the areas where women are still fighting for equality.

The 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, guaranteed American women the right to vote—but that didn't mean that women came to fill half the seats of power. Redistribution of political power and representation has happened slowly over the past one hundred years.

Number of Women in Congress



Data from the Pew Research Center, “A Record Number of Women Will Be Serving in the New Congress” (DeSilver, 2020)

While women still made up only 24 percent of the U.S. Congress in 2019, their numbers in Congress have been increasing more sharply since the 1990s (Geiger, Bialik, & Gramlich, 2019). There has also been a rise in grassroots social and political movements that have been led by women or centered around women’s rights. Let’s return to the practice of critical thinking—what can we learn from this rise in women participating in politics?

3. The Women’s March

The Women’s March was an international protest that took place on January 21, 2017, the day after the inauguration of President Donald Trump. Participants marched not only for women’s rights and gender equality, but also to support issues like immigration reform, civil rights for people of color, environmental protections, and health care reform (Dwyer, Penman, Del Barco, & Langfitt, 2017). It was the largest political protest in U.S. history (Waddell, 2017).

The Women’s March and the protests that have taken place in the years since are a sign that women are seeking more than just a voice in issues involving civil rights for women. Political advocacy groups founded by women are speaking out on a broader platform of human rights issues, signaling that women’s voices have become central to conversations about not only gender equality, but many other issues as well.



The 4th Annual Women's March gathered at Columbus Circle in NYC, January 18, 2020.

4. The Me Too Movement

Focused on fighting sexual harassment and abuse, the Me Too movement is an example of women-led social activism. Activist Tarana Burke first established the Me Too movement in 2006 to help women and girls of color who were survivors of sexual violence (Me Too Movement, n.d.). The phrase “me too” transformed into a bigger movement when #MeToo went viral on social media in October 2017, in the wake of accusations of sexual harassment, coercion, and violence against women in Hollywood. Women around the world shared their stories on social media or simply used #MeToo to indicate that they, too, had experienced sexual harassment or assault.

Thanks to the reach of social media, these stories found a wide audience. People began to take note of the prevalence of such experiences and to talk about solutions. The Me Too movement led to a renewed focus on policy and legal changes related to sexual harassment and assault. In addition to directly leading to the resignations of at least 32 lawmakers accused of sexual harassment, the movement has also prompted states to enact limits on the ability of nondisclosure agreements (NDAs) to coerce victims of sexual harassment or abuse into silence. State lawmakers and justice officials have also been working to clear the backlog of rape kits, or physical evidence collected after sexual assault cases (although in some states, thousands of rape kits still remain untested due to lack of funding) (Beitsch, 2018). Despite this progress, more work remains for today’s activists and lawmakers who are fighting for change.

In the upcoming challenges, as you’re reading about strategies women have used to work for civil rights in U.S. history, you’ll practice the critical thinking process by using information to consider questions about the past. Pause for a moment to consider the following question.



THINK ABOUT IT

What are some strategies women today are using to address ongoing inequality and civil rights issues? Think of the information you've just read on this page. How could it help you find an answer?



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about some of the more recent events in the movement for women's civil rights in the United States. You read an **introduction** to the history of this struggle, as well as an overview of **women and political power** from a historical perspective. While women's political power and representation has grown over the 20th century, **the Women's March** on January 21, 2017, was the largest political protest in U.S. history and signaled a renewed energy among women seeking a still louder voice. Finally, you learned how activists are seeking an end to sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence through **the Me Too movement**.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Strategic Education, Inc. 2020. Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future.

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ATTRIBUTIONS

- [The 4th Annual Women's March gathered at Columbus Circle in NYC, January 18, 2020](#). | Author: Barbara Alper / Getty Images | License: Rights-managed

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