

Women's Rights TIMELINE

Women Have Limited Property Rights

1769

The colonies adopt the English system of property ownership for married women, meaning women cannot own property in their own name or keep their own earnings. By 1900, every state will have passed legislation modeled after New York's Married Women's Property Act (1848), which grants married women the right to keep their own wages and to own property in their own name.

First Women's Rights Convention Held

1848

About 300 activists gather in Seneca Falls, N.Y., to strategize on how to achieve women's suffrage nationwide. Participants, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, sign the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, modeled on the Declaration of Independence, which calls for equal treatment of women and men under the law and voting rights for women.

National Labor Union Backs Equal Pay for Equal Work

1868

The National Labor Union, one of the nation's first organized labor advocacy groups, pushes for equal pay for equal work, the concept that a woman must be paid the same as a man for doing the same or equivalent job with the same qualifications.



Postage stamp featuring Elizabeth Stanton, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Lucretia Mott

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Racial Equality Issue Splits Two Suffrage Associations

1869

Disagreements over the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments and the relationship between women's suffrage and the movement for racial equality divide the women's rights movement between two organizations: the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association. The rivals will merge in 1890 to form the National American Women's Suffrage Association.



Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Territory of Wyoming Gives Women the Right to Vote

1869

The Territory of Wyoming passes the first law in the nation giving women over age 21 the right to vote. After joining the Union in 1890, Wyoming becomes the first state to permit women the right to vote in all elections, although in 1887, Kansas allowed women to vote in municipal elections.

Congress Requires Federal Equal Pay for Equal Work

1872

A federal law that grants female federal employees equal pay for equal work is enacted. This right was not extended to the majority of female employees who work for private companies or state and local governments until the adoption of the Equal Pay Act in 1963.



"The age of brass. or the triumphs of Woman's rights," a satirical print published in 1869

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Dollar Coin Honoring Susan B. Anthony

Photo: Wikimedia Commons



First Woman Nominated for President

1872

Nominated by the Equal Rights Party, Victoria Chafin Woodhull is the first woman to run for president of the United States. But neither she nor any other woman is allowed to vote.



Victoria Chafin Woodhull

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Susan B. Anthony Arrested for Attempting to Vote

1872

Susan B. Anthony casts her first vote to test whether the 14th Amendment would be interpreted broadly to guarantee women the right to vote. She was arrested and tried on June 17-18, 1873, in Canandaigua, N.Y., and convicted of “unlawful voting.”

Supreme Court Denies Voting Right to Women

1874

The Supreme Court decides in *Minor v. Happersett* that a Missouri law limiting the right to vote to male citizens is constitutional. The Court rejects the claim by Virginia Minor that the state law deprives her of one of the “privileges or immunities” of citizenship in violation of the 14th Amendment. While women are “persons” under the 14th Amendment, the Court says, they are a special category of “non-voting” citizens, and states may grant or deny them the right to vote.

National Association of Colored Women Organized

1896

Leaders of more than 100 African American women’s clubs unite to form an organization to promote equality for women, raise funds for projects that benefit women and children and oppose segregation and racial violence. In 1935, Mary McLeod Bethune will organize the National Council of Negro Women, a coalition of black women’s groups that lobbies against job discrimination, racism and sexism.

Women’s Trade Union League Is Established

1903

This national labor group is created to unionize working women and advocate for improved wages and working conditions for women. Its leaders will go on to form the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union.

The 19th Amendment Is Ratified

1920

Seventy-two years after the Seneca Falls Convention, the 19th Amendment, which gives women the right to vote, is ratified. Only one person who had signed the convention’s Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions, Charlotte Woodward, is alive and able to exercise her right to vote. The amendment reads: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex.”



The Nineteenth Amendment

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

League of Women Voters Created

1920

After ratification of the 19th Amendment, the League of Women Voters is founded to educate women about their right to vote and encourage them to exercise it. Today, the league promotes greater participation in the democratic process and advocates on a wide range of public policy issues.



Sculptor Adelaide Johnson (left) in front of her memorial to women's suffrage at its unveiling in Washington, D.C., 1921

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

First Equal Rights Amendment Introduced

1923

Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party succeed in having a constitutional amendment introduced in Congress that says: "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction." In 1943, it is revised to what is known today as the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA was sent to the states for ratification in 1972 with a seven-year deadline and quickly won 22 of the necessary 38 ratifications. But the pace slowed as opposition began to organize. Although Congress granted an extension until June 30, 1982, the ERA fell short. It was reintroduced in Congress on July 14, 1982, and has been introduced before every session of Congress since.

Eleanor Roosevelt Leads Commission on the Status of Women

1961

President John F. Kennedy establishes the President's Commission on the Status of Women and appoints Eleanor Roosevelt as chairwoman. Although she dies in 1962, a report is issued in 1963 documenting substantial discrimination against women in the workplace. It makes recommendations for improvement, including fair hiring practices, paid maternity leave, and affordable child care.



Eleanor Roosevelt and President John F. Kennedy

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Equal Pay Act Becomes Federal Law

1963

First proposed 20 years earlier, the law says employers must give equal pay for men and women performing the same job duties regardless of the race, color, religion, national origin or sex of the worker.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Passed

1964

Title VII bars employment discrimination by private employers, employment agencies and unions based on race, sex, and other grounds. To enforce the law, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is created. In 1980, the commission will issue guidelines that define sexual harassment as illegal sex-based discrimination under Title VII.

Supreme Court Issues Landmark Ruling on Contraceptives

1965

In *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Supreme Court legalizes the use of contraceptives by married couples — five years after oral contraceptives became available to American women. The ruling will be extended to single women in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (1972). Margaret Sanger, a feminist and family planning activist, advocated legalization of contraceptives in 1914.



Margaret Sanger

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Civil Rights Protections Extended to Women

→ 1967 →

President Lyndon B. Johnson issues Executive Order 11375, which expands affirmative action policies of 1965 to cover discrimination based on sex. As a result, federal agencies and contractors must take active measures to ensure that women, as well as minorities, have the same employment and educational opportunities as men.



U.S. Rep. Donna F. Edwards speaks with Senior Chief Yeoman Dee Allen during the 12th Annual Women in the Military Wreath Laying Ceremony at the Women in Military Service for America Memorial.

Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Women-Only Branches in U.S. Military Eliminated

→ 1973 →

The male-only draft during the Vietnam War ends, and women are integrated into all branches of the U.S. military as they become all-volunteer forces. In 1976, U.S. military academies will be required to admit women. Over the years, military policy that prevented women from combat assignments will ease. In the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, women will become more fully involved on the battlefield.

Congress Passes Title IX of the Education Amendments

→ 1972 →

The law requires that schools receiving federal funds provide equal access to educational programs for men and women. Among other things, Title IX is credited with the explosive growth of sports for women and girls at the high school, collegiate and professional levels. The law will take effect in 1976 after withstanding repeated court challenges.



The passage of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978 made it illegal for employers to discriminate against women based on their plans to have children.

Photo: istockphoto/kirza

Employment Discrimination Against Pregnant Women Banned

→ 1978 →

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act ensures that employment discrimination on account of pregnancy is treated as unlawful sex-based discrimination. As a result, employers cannot question potential hires about their plans to have children and have to extend benefits equally.

Supreme Court Establishes Abortion Right

→ 1973 →

In *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court decides that a woman has a constitutional right to choose whether to have an abortion or carry her pregnancy to term, effectively nullifying anti-abortion laws in 46 states.

Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act Signed Into Law

→ 2009 →

The federal law expands workers' right to sue for pay discrimination and relaxes the statute of limitations on such suits. Ledbetter had sued her employer, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co., when she neared retirement and learned that she was paid much less than her male colleagues. But the Supreme Court threw out her case, saying she should have filed her suit within 180 days of the date that Goodyear first paid her less than her peers. Courts repeatedly had cited the decision as a reason for rejecting lawsuits claiming discrimination based on race, sex, age and disability. The new law changes Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which said discrimination complaints must be brought within 180 days of the discriminatory act.



President Obama signs Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act

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