

# 7 Ways that Studying U.S. History 1877 to Modern Times History Changes the Way You Think About Feminism and Gender Equality

1. The shifting of conceptions around women's sexuality through exploration and research.

The "Modern" 20's (Feb. 11) & Feminism and Women's Movements (Mar. 27 + Mar. 29)



Kim Vintage Stock/Corbis, 1928. "Two flapper women — with their dates — sit on a bed in Chicago." Accessed 5/2/19. <https://www.npr.org/sections/npr-history-dept/2015/05/26/409126557/when-petting-parties-scandalized-the-nation>

The two couples in this image are at a petting party, which was very controversial at the time due to the sexual nature of these gatherings. Petting is a premarital sexual ritual of sorts and dating is unlike courting in the sense that there is no intention of marrying, both of which were started by many of the young women of the 1920's exploring sexuality like no time before in U.S. (Fass, *Sex and Youth in the Jazz Age*). The more conservative fundamentalists were in shock of all the behavior of the era that they found immoral (Larson, *Fundamentalists Battle Modernism in the Roaring 20s*). Contradictory to previous research, there was no default for female enjoyment in the bedroom (*The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm*). Therefore, with more research support in the late twentieth century, there was another emergence of women's exploration of sexuality.

## 2. Women's achievement of gaining the right to vote on equal grounds as men.

**Women's Suffrage (Feb. 13 + Feb. 15)**



Silent Sentinels, picketing the White House, 1917. Courtesy the Library of Congress. Accessed 5/2/19, available at <https://www.thefrickpittsburgh.org/Story-Notable-Women-of-the-Suffrage-Movement-Alice-Paul>

This is a picture of one of Alice Paul's protests for women's suffrage that was held directly in front of the White House during war time. Women's suffrage's history started long before this point. The Suffragettes were primarily a group of women that would send lobbyists to D.C. ([Crash Course #31: Women's Suffrage](#)), quietly, but diligently working towards changing the minds of men. When Alice Paul stepped onto the scene, she felt like the movement had gotten nowhere, so she took matters into her own hands and used her own tactics. When the Suffragettes disapproved of Alice Paul's actions, she took her followers and made her own suffragist group. She was associated with holding her daily protests in front of the White House. When arrests failed to spark any changes, Alice Paul decided to protest and get arrested herself ([Iron Jawed Angels](#)). From within her jail cell, Alice Paul continued to take charge and passed along notes and messages of command for peaceful protest to her fellow imprisoned suffragists ([Alice Paul Inspires Her Fellow Suffragists \(1917-1918\)](#)). A hunger strike forced the government's hands into force-feeding to deny any protestor martyrdom, which garnered a lot of public attention. The Suffragettes used the opportunity to help move women's suffrage to a vote ([Iron Jawed Angels](#)).

## 3. Women gaining a spot in the workplace and climbing from the ground up.

**Industrialization (Jan. 25) & World War II (Feb. 22)**



Norman Rockwell, 1943. "Rosie the Riveter." Accessed 5/2/19, available at <http://www.washington.edu/news/2015/02/02/documents-that-changed-the-world-rosie-the-riveter-poster-1943/>

Rosie the Riveter is perhaps the most iconic figure of working women, made popular during World War II, though women were first given a spot in the workplace decades earlier due to industrialization. There was a very small number of women hired because there was a preference for men. Some single women felt it was unfair that married women even be offered jobs, they seemed to feel that the married women had husbands paying for all their expenses and married women were using their wages for frivolous luxuries while single women were struggling to make ends meet ([Shall Married Women Work? \(1879\)](#)). Later on, the workplace was absolutely flooded by women during World War II because of the home front war efforts ([Crash Course #36: World War II Part 2- The Homefront](#)). Propaganda was everywhere, the women were heavily encouraged to enter any job listing that could to help with war efforts. After the war, the propaganda changed to encourage women to give up their jobs and return to a domestic lifestyle ([World War II, Feb. 22, 2019](#)).

#### 4. Women as the often-unrecognized critical players in other activist groups.

**The New South and Lynching (Jan. 23) & Social Movements of The Late 20th C. (Mar. 20 + Mar. 22) & Feminism and Women's Movements (Mar. 27 + Mar. 29)**



Nancy Lobb, 2007. 16 Extraordinary African Americans, 2nd Edition, p 18. Accessed 5/2/19, available at <https://login.proxy.longwood.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=iqv&AN=6283183&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

This is an image of the well-known Ida B. Wells, and she is one of the most influential women in another activist group. She was a journalist. In one of her works, she wrote about the injustice and unfairness of the lynch law (Excerpt from “Lynch Law in Georgia” by Ida B. Wells, 1899). Even when they weren’t renowned, women were the backbone of their activist groups. Digger women could barter sexual favors for supply and would be held responsible for the normal housework or cleanup (DeGroot, *Incivility and Self-Destruction: The Real Sixties*). A lot of these lesser-known women would attend activist group meetings because they believed in the cause, but began to realize their opinions were often quieted and never taken into serious consideration (Feminism and Women’s Movements, Mar. 29, 2019). So, they decided to do something about it.

##### 5. Feminist and women’s movements start protesting women’s oppression and gender discrimination.

**Feminism and Women’s Movements (Mar. 27 + Mar. 29)**



Eugene Gordon—The New York Historical Society / Getty Images. “Women’s Strike for Peace and Equality,” New York City, Aug. 26, 1970. Accessed 5/2/19. Available at <http://time.com/4008060/women-strike-equality-1970/>

This is a picture of one of the many women’s groups protesting for peace and equality. Equality was a common goal strived for by many women’s groups, many of which were initially created by women because they wanted a place where they could share political ideas ([Feminism and Women’s Movements, Mar. 29, 2019](#)). However, the groups also included a surprising number of housewives who had not participated in any activist groups before. One day, things began to click into place, and Friedan wrote about the subtle system she’d noticed ([Friedan, \*The Feminine Mystique\* \(excerpt\) \(1963\)](#)). Many women resonated with the discrimination and oppression described in the text and decided to join the movement ([She’s Beautiful When She’s Angry](#))

## 6. Women working to break down traditional household division of labor.

**Women’s Suffrage (Feb. 13 + Feb. 15) & The Postwar Boom (Mar. 13) & Feminism and Women’s Movements (Mar. 27 + Mar. 29)**



Susan Strasser, 1982. "Never done: a history of American housework." p 270. Accessed 5/2/19

The image is of a woman doing the everyday chores. The inclusion of a more diverse group of women called to attention there were more concerns to address, like the unchanged division of household chores despite the introduction of more women in the workplace. Men were expected to do their jobs while women were expected to do their jobs, as well as the housework ([Feminism and Women's Movements, Mar. 29, 2019](#)). Women started making explicit guides for each other on what to do to protest this unfair division in their own homes ([The Politics of Housework](#)). The overlap of the movement with the Cold War created a lot of tension because it was deemed a woman's patriotic duty to perfectly conform to what society expected her to be: orderly, obedient to her husband, and happy with the way the country is ([May, Men and Women: Life in the Nuclear Cocoon](#)).

7. The long-lasting negative stereotypes made by the opposing conservative media sources that feminists are still fighting today. **The New Right (Apr. 8 + Apr. 12)**



Diane Dimassa, Panels from Hothead Paisan, 1993. Reprinted in *The Complete Hothead Paisan* (San Francisco: Cleis Press), 1999. Accessed 5/1/19, available at <https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/12/11/rise-queer-comics/>

This political cartoon is depicting the stereotype of the crude, rude, overly aggressive lesbian feminist that hates men. This wasn't always the case; the Vietnam War left a lot of people discontent with the government's actions. This made social movements like feminism more commonly accepted or, at the very least, tolerated. However, this changed when the tensions of the Cold War started up again ([Brands, Liberalism: A Passing Phenomenon](#)). Nixon ran his campaign calling for what he called the "Silent Majority" to take a stand against the allegedly immoral social movements that were running rampant. The "Silent Majority" being the conservatives remaining uninvolved in these groups ([Crash Course #41: The Rise of Conservatism](#)). Conservative women and opposing jumped on the opportunity adding to the stereotypes while setting their own high standards. The perfect woman or "Total Woman" was expected to be poised and obedient, and any knee jerk reactions to that statement were just considered proof of a feminist's immaturity to the "Total Woman" ([Morgan, "The Total Woman" \(1973\)](#)). The negative stereotype was so effective that it still impacts the feminist and gender equality groups today.