

## Activities

The struggle for equal rights in the United States and internationally is not over. It took organized effort and many years for women to get the vote in America. It takes continued effort to secure other rights such as equal pay or equal opportunity. What does it take to make changes like these in our society?

Are the efforts toward progress in women's rights similar to other examples in the history of the world that have led to progress in human liberation and freedom? Are there some common themes in these struggles? Are there lessons to be learned from what women have achieved and how they have achieved it? Can these lessons be applied to future struggles that you or others might engage in?

There is a common pattern that emerges in the steps necessary for progress in human rights struggles. The first step is a change in consciousness. Then comes a gathering with other like-minded individuals to learn and plan. Third is a growing understanding of how power works and what is needed in order to effect a change. Finally, these steps take form in bringing about a change in the law which allows more freedom or rights for you and your group, and a change in the society as a whole.

Our aim is to help you understand these four ideas about movements for human emancipation and liberation:

- » A Change in consciousness about yourself and the world around. (Listen to Ashrawi, Karekezi, Dellums, Hollis.)
- » Joining up with like-minded people from whom you learn things about the issues that concern you and with whom you organize your group. (Listen to Gradin, Kritaya, Boulding, Herman.)
- » Understanding how power works in the world, what it is, how you use it, and how you change the world with it. (Listen to Anderson.)
- » Using these steps to make a change in the law. (Listen to Castells.)

## 1. The way to make a change

Look at the timeline and listen to the quotes, and see how these different elements play a role in the history of women's rights.

### A. Consciousness :

It took organized effort and many years for women to get the vote in America. The struggle for equal rights in the United States and internationally is not over. In which ways do women have equal rights? In which ways do they not? What were some of the impediments to women getting the right to vote? What are some of the obstacles now?

*Read what Brenda Hollis says:*

"...Any human being acts differently, depending upon the kind of center that they have within them. If you have a center that says you have strengths and abilities and should be allowed to develop those, then I think it's easier to move into situations that are non-traditional areas, because you, yourself, feel that you have a right to be there, you have a right to make a contribution. "

Can you think of an example of this in your own life or in someone's life whom you know?

### B. Moving from consciousness to action:

*Read what Ron Dellums says:*

"Assuming the responsibility for the knowledge you have once you see injustice, once you understand pain, you cannot walk away from that responsibility. Once you see the harm that's being done, you no longer can have the excuse of ignorance. And once you know, it seems to me that you then have to assume the responsibility of that knowledge. "

What is that responsibility that he is talking about?

Identify five people from the time line who took on that responsibility. If you were going to do one thing for women's rights, what might that be? How would it help?

C. Organizing:

Find examples in the time line of one woman acting.

Find examples of when women form groups.

Are these examples found in the same categories in the time line or different categories? Why do you think this is true?

Which way would you want to influence a movement: individually, as part of a group or both? Why?

Which people in the feature act individually, as part of a group or both?

*Read Elise Boulding:*

"I think the one important early achievement was the cessation of testing in the atmosphere. And that was a wonderful example of a mobilization, on the one hand, of mothers with their concern for babies, and scientists who tested the babies' teeth to identify levels of strontium-90; you had a coalition of people who, one way and another, have stayed active. The women never really returned to business as usual since those early demonstrations in the sixties. You've had a growing participation of women in peace movements."

What types of mobilization do you think she is referring to?

D. Power:

*Read Laura Tyson:*

"In general, women are less adept or less willing to just jump into conversations. I think they're more likely to do better in structured conversations. So that's an example of a negative. I think that it's still the case today that if you look at the press and look at how many times women are quoted versus men, that there is a tendency still to perceive power and wisdom more with men than women."

How does the current power structure support discrimination? How can people change this? Why is it important for women to be involved in politics?

E. Law:

*Read Manuel Castells:*

"In the last thirty years there has been the most extraordinary cultural revolution in history. Women have changed the way they think about themselves. Once women in industrialized countries, but also in most developing countries, decided that the patriarchal family (the institutional domination of men over women and children in the family) is not correct, that men and women are equal and women have to develop their own interests and culture, have their own relationship to work, to everything – once women have changed that, everything changes. "

*Read Anita Gradin:*

"...It's strong women's organizations that make the difference. In countries where you have that, then you also have more women in politics, and they are able to influence. And that's not only the experience I have from Sweden. It's also in international organizations or in the European Union."

Find four examples in the time line which resulted in securing women's rights by changing the law in the United States? Find one example which changed international law to secure women's rights?

Choose six quotes out of the speakers section and identify where you might place the featured quotes in the time line categories (consciousness, social movements or groups, power, and law).

## 2. In your day life

- » Identify or imagine a situation, rule or behavior that you think is unfair. (For example, a biased dress code or unequal sports opportunities for girls.) Start to keep a record documenting this. Check what the situation is like at other schools. See if your friends agree with you. (Remember what Dellums said. Remember what Ashrawi said.)
- » Start talking to others about this. Speak to fellow students. Are they also frustrated by the situation? Meet as a group. Should you organize? Do you need more participants? Should you tell others about the problem by distributing flyers? (Remember what Gradin said, what Herman said.)
- » In the context of this issue, what is power? Who is in charge of this? Have there been stories in the newspaper about this issue? Interview people—parents—to find out what they think. (Read up on the suffragettes.)
- » What rules or laws have to be changed? For example, does the School Board need to do something about this? Should federal authorities be notified? (Look at the timeline, find a book on the civil rights movement, read Howard Zinn interview.)

What have you learned from this exercise?

What were the greatest challenges?

Were any parts easier than you thought?

Do you think this would work for other situations?

### 3. Interview people

Interview two women and two men about the issue of women's rights today:

*Read the How to Interview site.*

Write down 5-7 questions that you would ask someone about how the quest for women's rights has affected their life.

You can ask about how things have changed since they were young.

Ask the individual about his/her mother and what rights she had or didn't have. What was different then?

You can ask about what they would changes they would like to see.

You can ask about the steps they see are necessary in order to make those changes.

### New York Times Lesson Plans

Mother's Nature

An Exploration of the Million Mom March and Other Women's Movements

[http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20000508monday.html?searchpv=learning\\_lessons](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20000508monday.html?searchpv=learning_lessons)

The Right to Remain Resilient

Exploring the Role of Legislation in the Fight for Civil Rights

[http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20000114friday.html?searchpv=learning\\_lessons](http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/20000114friday.html?searchpv=learning_lessons)