



**GENDER EQUALITY**

**THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL:**

**Women's Liberation in New York, 1960-1982**



**OVERVIEW**

By analyzing photographs and documents drawn from the 1970s women's liberation movement, students will learn about the generations of women—from the suffragists of the early 1900s to the activists of the civil rights and labor movements at mid-century to the leaders of the feminist movement—who fought for gender equality. Students will also learn about the diverse array of New Yorkers who made up the women's liberation movement and consider their challenges and goals—both those central in the 1970s and for today's fight for gender equality.

**STUDENT GOALS**

- Students will learn about the history of the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality and its legacy within the women's liberation movement.
- Students will consider the specific challenges faced by marginalized members of the women's liberation movement and how those activists influenced the contemporary intersectional movement for gender equality.
- Students will draft their own Women's Equality Day proclamation, highlighting significant accomplishments of activists to date and their own goals for ensuring gender equality.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.3

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.  
(Grade 4)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts  
(Grades 6-8)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience  
(Grades 11-12)



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## KEY TERMS/VOCABULARY

- Equal Rights Amendment
- Equality
- Discrimination
- Feminist
- Gender
- Identity
- Intersectionality
- Liberation
- Racism
- Sexism
- Strike
- Suffrage
- Third World

## PEOPLE

- Bella Abzug
- Frances Beale
- Ivy Bottini
- Shirley Chisholm
- Betty Friedan
- Eleanor Holmes Norton
- Elizabeth Holtzman
- Florynce Kennedy
- Kate Millett
- Kathie Sarachild
- Gloria Steinem

## ORGANIZATIONS

- National Black Feminist Organization
- National Organization for Women
- National Women's Political Caucus
- New York Radical Women
- Radicalesbians
- Redstockings
- Third World Women's Alliance


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### TIMELINE

#### 1917

- New York women win the right to vote; the 19th Amendment enfranchises women nationally three years later, but certain state and federal laws block many women of color from the polls

#### 1923

- Suffragists Alice Paul and Crystal Eastman write the Equal Rights Amendment, which is introduced in Congress

#### 1929

- Republican Ruth Sears Baker Pratt becomes the first New York woman to win a seat in Congress

#### 1960

- The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approves the first oral contraceptive, Enovid

#### 1963

- The President's Commission on the Status of Women, led by Eleanor Roosevelt, releases its first report

#### 1964

- The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is enacted, barring discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; lawyer and activist Pauli Murray is instrumental in ensuring "sex" is added to the list of protected categories

#### 1966

- National Organization for Women founded by Betty Friedan, Pauli Murray, and 26 additional women

#### 1968

- Democrat Shirley Chisholm becomes the first black woman elected to Congress; she runs for President four years later

#### 1970

- Democrat Bella Abzug is elected to the House of Representatives; she is one of twelve women and the first Jewish woman from New York to serve in Congress
- Women's Equality Day march in New York City

#### 1973

- The Supreme Court establishes the right to abortion in *Roe v. Wade*

#### 1982

- The Equal Rights Amendment fails to be ratified

#### 2017

- Women's March in Washington, DC; New York City; and around the world



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## INTRODUCING RESOURCE 1:

### Photograph of Women's Strike for Equality March, 1970

"*We're a movement now,*" proclaimed feminist Kate Millett to tens of thousands of women who marched through the streets of New York on August 26, 1970 to demand full gender equality. It was the 50th anniversary of the passage of woman suffrage, and the Women's Strike for Equality March, led by the National Organization for Women (NOW), was calling for new rights: free childcare, equal opportunities in education and employment, and access to abortion. Among the activists who spoke alongside Millett were Betty Friedan, Eleanor Holmes Norton, and Bella Abzug. The women's movement had long roots, but by 1970 it had arrived.

Though city officials initially reserved only one lane of Fifth Avenue for the march, participants quickly overtook the entire street as they made their way south to Bryant Park; news reports called it the largest women's rights protest since the suffrage demonstrations of the early 20th century sought voting rights for women. Marchers began gathering at 5pm, a start time chosen in part so that working women could attend but one that also highlighted how participants were on strike from their unpaid household labor. "Don't iron while the strike is hot" became one of the day's most memorable slogans. *The New York Times* covered the march on its front page, and noted the crowd included both high school students and former suffragists, as well as participants from groups including NOW, the city's Commission on Human Rights, and the Third World Women's Alliance. City, state, and federal officials issued proclamations, and in 1973 Congress approved a resolution—initially proposed by Bella Abzug—designating August 26th as Women's Equality Day.

The demands made at the Women's Strike for Equality would become central to the women's movement of the 1970s: equality under the law; financial independence; gender parity in work, school, and the home; as well as issues of sexual politics; motherhood and marriage; and intersectional identity. The participants' diverse identities, goals, and anger over their treatment as women sometimes produced conflict and dissent, but they also created a more multifaceted women's movement than is often remembered—one that has paved the way for the surge in women's activism today.

In this photograph, a diverse array of participants carry signs in English and Spanish that speak to a few of the demands called for by event organizers: free abortion on demand and equality of opportunity in employment and education.

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*Women Strike for Equality Day, August 26, 1970, courtesy New-York Historical Society*

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe what you see in this photograph. What's happening?
2. What expressions can you see on the faces of these marchers? How would you describe the mood of this march?
3. What specific demands are these marchers calling for? Why might they have chosen to focus on these issues?
4. Why might marchers have chosen to carry signs in both English and Spanish?
5. In the back right corner, a marcher is pictured carrying a sign that protests the ongoing Vietnam war. Why might participants in the Women's Strike for Equality March have protested U.S. involvement in Vietnam?



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## INTRODUCING RESOURCE 2:

### Photograph of Alice Paul at the 1970 Women's Strike for Equality March

The August 26, 1970 Women's Strike for Equality March highlighted the many generations of women who comprised the struggle for gender equality in the United States. While the feminists of 1960s and '70s often invoked the suffrage generation, they also built on the continuous work of New York women active in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s.

Among them were women like Betty Friedan, the lead organizer of the march and the president of NOW, who reported on the labor movement of the 1930s and 1940s before publishing her groundbreaking book, *The Feminine Mystique*. Representative Bella Abzug, a fellow New Yorker shaped by her involvement in pre-1960s left-wing activism, spoke alongside Friedan on August 26. NOW co-founder Pauli Murray served as a union organizer before beginning her career as a civil rights lawyer in the 1950s.

On August 26, Friedan and Abzug were joined by a diverse generation of younger activists inspired by the civil rights movement and energized by an openly feminist agenda, from Gloria Steinem of *Ms.* magazine, Frances Beale of the Third World Women's Alliance, and Kathie Sarachild of the Redstockings to Elizabeth Holtzman, the youngest woman ever elected to Congress.

Alice Paul, the suffragist who organized the 1913 Women's Suffrage Procession in Washington, DC, also participated in the Women's Strike for Equality March in New York City. Influenced by her time among British suffragists, Paul utilized an array of radical tactics, including hunger strikes and the first recorded picket of the White House, to pressure President Woodrow Wilson to support women's suffrage—though Paul, like many white suffragists, did not advocate equally for black women's voting rights. In 1923, Paul helped to draft the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), believing that a constitutional guarantee was needed not only for women's right to vote, but for their full equality under the law. When Paul was photographed holding her "ERA YES" sign at the march, ratification seemed within reach, but by 1982 the ERA's passage had once again stalled.

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*Alice Paul at the Women's Strike for Equality March on Fifth Avenue, Joan Roth, August 26, 1970, Museum of the City of New York, gift of Joan Roth in memory of Leonard Sanders*

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**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe what you see in this photograph. What's happening?
2. How would you describe Paul's mood in this photograph? What emotions might she be feeling—and why?
3. How might other marchers, who spanned many generations of women's activism, have felt about Paul's presence at the march?
4. Why might Paul, pictured here carrying a sign that reads "ERA YES," have felt that a constitutional amendment ensuring women's equality under the law was necessary?



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### INTRODUCING RESOURCE 3:


#### “Black Woman’s Manifesto,” early 1970s

Black women participated in all facets of the women’s movement, but they also formed their own groups that explicitly joined issues of race and gender. By calling for a feminist movement that would challenge the interrelated oppressions of racism and sexism, black women of the 1970s not only built upon the work begun decades earlier by civil rights lawyers like Pauli Murray and Florynce “Flo” Kennedy, but also followed in the footsteps of black suffragists like Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and Sarah Tompkins Garnet. Young black feminists took the organizing skills and personal empowerment as well as frustrations they gained from participating in Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) campaigns in the South and turned them toward the fight for gender equality.

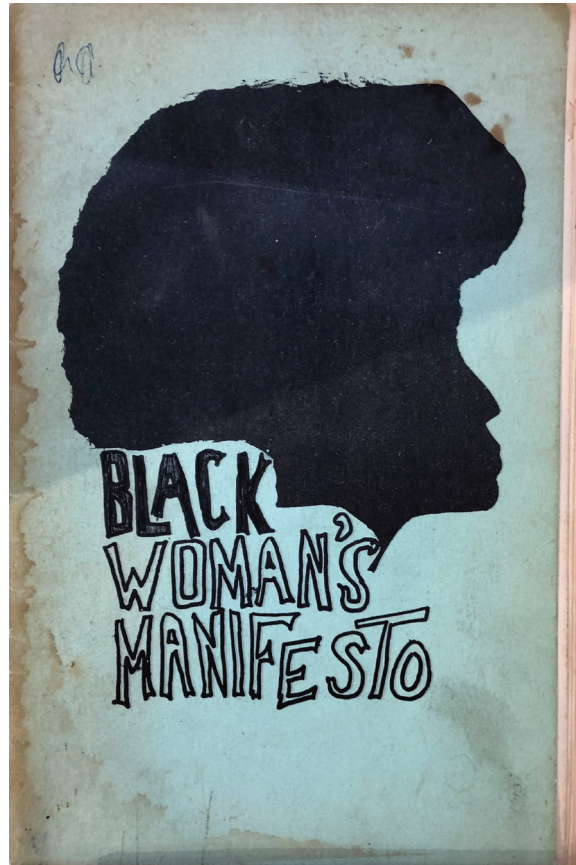
The Third World Women’s Alliance (TWWA) was an outgrowth of the Black Woman’s Liberation Committee of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) organized by Frances Beal in New York in 1968. “Third World” was a term used to describe countries in Asia, Africa, and South America that were not allied with the United States or the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Many of these nations were former colonies that declared independence in the mid-20th century and sought autonomy from continued intervention or influence, as well as nationally-minded political and economic growth. TWWA aimed to address poverty, welfare rights, and reproductive justice for all women—issues they critiqued white feminists for excluding.

In 1971 TWWA launched *Triple Jeopardy*, a newspaper addressing what it called the “triple oppression” of third-world women: racism, sexism, and imperialism, all rooted in capitalism. This booklet, published around the same time as the launch of *Triple Jeopardy*, includes Beale’s writing on this topic. It also features poetry and other essays.



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"Black Woman's Manifesto," Third World Women's Alliance, early 1970s, courtesy Interference Archive

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the cover of this booklet.
2. Does this booklet have a particular mood or tone? What reaction does the cover elicit from readers?
3. The silhouetted figure on the cover of this booklet wears their hair in an afro, a natural style often associated with the young black activists who participated in the civil rights movement. Why might it be important for the TWWA to showcase a woman with an afro on the cover of this booklet?
4. Why might the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) have chosen to call this collection of essays and poetry the "Black Woman's Manifesto"?
5. This booklet features an essay by TWWA founder Frances Beal exploring three central oppressions—racism, sexism, and imperialism—experienced by women of color globally. Why might the activists of the TWWA have seen racism, sexism, and imperialism (a policy where a nation extends its influence through diplomacy or military force) as related issues?

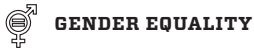


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**INTRODUCING RESOURCE 4:****Linda Rhodes, Arlene Kushner, and Ellen Broidy of Radicalesbians, 1970**

Lesbians sometimes struggled to find a home in the mainstream women's movement, which could be hostile to their participation. At a 1969 NOW meeting, Betty Friedan characterized a group of lesbians as a "lavender menace" that could derail the broader goals of feminism, and many lesbian members, including NOW New York City president Ivy Bottini, were expelled the following year.

A contingent from the New York organization Radicalesbians responded by forming a group that appropriated the name "Lavendar Menace." Wearing t-shirts like the ones shown here, they interrupted the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York City in 1970 to argue that lesbianism was central to feminist politics. They were greeted with cheers from allies in the audience. By 1971 Friedan and NOW reversed course on lesbians, but transgender women continued to be excluded and ostracized.



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Linda Rhodes, Arlene Kushner, and Ellen Broidy, Diana Davies, 1970, courtesy Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library

## DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. Describe what you see in this photograph. What's happening?
2. What's the mood of the people pictured?
3. What arguments might activist Ivy Bottini have made for the inclusion of lesbian rights in NOW's agenda?
4. In this photo, members of Radicalesbians wear t-shirts with the phrase, "Lavendar Menace." This term was originally coined by NOW president Betty Friedan, who used it as a pejorative to characterize activists who sought to include the concerns of lesbians within the NOW's mission. Why would lesbian activists create these t-shirts featuring Friedan's phrase?
5. Can you think of other terms that women activists have reclaimed? What are some of the pros and cons of reclaiming words?




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**INTRODUCING RESOURCE 5:****Photograph from International Women's Day, 2017**

New Yorkers' fight for gender inequality did not end in the 1970s. Photographer Cindy Trinh captured this participant in an International Women's Day gathering at Washington Square Park on March 8, 2017. International Women's Day arose originally from a New York protest in 1908, but it grew in size in 2017, reflecting the increased wave of activism in the city during the candidacy and presidency of Donald Trump that included, most notably, the Women's March first held on January 21, 2017.

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International Women's Day, Cindy Trinh, March 8, 2017 ©Cindy Trinh

**DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. Describe what you see in this photograph. What's happening?
2. What message is this activist conveying? How are they communicating that message to the viewer?
3. Why might this activist be standing up for these specific groups of women?
4. Are there any challenges these groups of women might have in common? Are there challenges they face that are unique to them?
5. If you were to attend International Women's Day, what groups would you be showing up to support and why?



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**ACTIVITY**

Drawing upon the 1973 proclamation declaring August 26 “Women’s Equality Day”—a resolution first proposed by Representative Bella Abzug one year after the Women’s Strike for Equality March—students will draft their own Women’s Equality Day Proclamation marking the legacy and impact of women’s activism over the last 100 years and calling attention to continued efforts to ensure full gender equality today. Students may work independently or form small groups to brainstorm both historical accomplishments they wish to honor and the concrete changes they believe can ensure gender equality for all.

In 1971, Representative Abzug proposed a joint resolution of Congress designating August 26 as “Women’s Equality Day.” The choice of August 26 honored both the 1970 Women’s Strike for Equality and the certification on August 26, 1920 of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women’s right to vote. Two years after it was first proposed, the resolution was passed; in the first proclamation issued, President Richard Nixon called out women’s progress toward achieving “equal economic opportunity” and also the “myriad forms of discrimination” they continued to face since gaining the vote. He also reaffirmed his support for the Equal Rights Amendment.

**Teachers should first have students read the text of the original 1973 Women’s Equality Day Proclamation (found at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-87/pdf/STATUTE-87-Pg1238.pdf>). As they read, students should notice what achievements in gender equality are noted in this proclamation, what remains to be achieved, and what laws or policies are proposed to ensure progress.**

**Then, students should draft their own proclamations. As they craft their statements, teachers should ask students to reflect on the following questions:**

- In what ways have we advanced gender equality in the workplace, in education, and in family structures in the last 100 years?
- What kinds of discrimination still persist when it comes to ensuring gender equality?
- What specific demands would you make to ensure full gender equality?


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### SOURCES

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- "Proclamation 4236 - Women's Equality Day," August 16, 1973, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-87/pdf/STATUTE-87-Pg1238.pdf>
- Carmody, Deirdre. "General Strike by U.S. Women Urged to Mark 19th Amendment," *New York Times*, March 21, 1970, p.20.
- Charlton, Linda. "Women March Down Fifth in Equality Drive," *New York Times*, August 27, 1970, p.1.
- Dismore, David M. "When Women Went on Strike: Remembering Equality Day, 1970," *Ms.*, August 26, 2010, <https://msmagazine.com/2010/08/26/when-women-went-on-strike-remembering-equality-day-1970/>
- Morgan, Robin, ed. *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*. New York: Random House, 1970.
- Weinman Lear, Martha. "The Second Feminist Wave," *New York Times Magazine*, March 10, 1968, p.97.

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### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Civil rights lawyer and UCLA professor Kimberlé W. Crenshaw, who developed intersectional theory in a ground-breaking 1989 *Chicago Legal Forum* article, lays out the importance of intersectional feminism in a one-minute video on August 11, 2017 at the Netroots Nation Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. [twitter.com/PPNYCAction/status/896032277062443009](https://twitter.com/PPNYCAction/status/896032277062443009)
- Morgan, Robin, ed. *Sisterhood is Forever: The Women's Anthology for a New Millenium*. New York: Washington Square Press, 2003.
- Seidman, Sarah. "Reconsidering Feminist Waves through the Strike for Women's Equality March," *MCNY Stories*, August 26, 2019, [www.mcny.org/story/reconsidering-feminist-waves-through-strike-womens-equality-march](http://www.mcny.org/story/reconsidering-feminist-waves-through-strike-womens-equality-march)
- Women's March, [womensmarch.com](http://womensmarch.com) (Created in the wake of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, the Women's March is a grassroots organization aimed at providing tools for intersectional education and activism focused on issues ranging from reproductive justice to LGBTQ rights to immigrants' rights. Women's March is best known for their annual marches begun in January 2017.)
- For additional lesson plans covering topics from women's suffrage to the Equal Rights Amendment to intersectionality in feminist activism all drawing upon MCNY's 2017-2018 exhibition *Beyond Suffrage: A Century of New York Women in Politics*, please visit <http://www.mcny.org/lesson-plans>