

# [How far did the position of women change from the end](https://assignbuster.com/how-far-did-the-position-of-women-change-from-the-end/)

[](https://assignbuster.com/)[History](https://assignbuster.com/essay-subjects/history/)

Since time immemorial, women have been considered as the 'weaker', domesticated sex, most memorably so in Victorian Times. Women of the Victorian era were idealized as the helpmate of man, the keeper of the home, and the " weaker sex." Heroines in popular fiction were expected to be frail and virtuous. For while the Victorian era was a time of national pride and belief in British superiority, it was also an age best-remembered for its emphasis on a strict code of morality, unequally applied to men and women.

The term Victorian has come to refer to any person or group with a narrow, uncompromising sense of right and wrong. Women were not only discriminated against by the moral code, but they were also discriminated against by the legal code of the day. Until the 1880s married women were unable to hold property in their own name; and the wages of rural workers would go directly to the husband, even if he failed to provide anything for his family.

Although this may have been possible in Victorian England, it is rather hard to believe that almost the same image applied to women in America in the 1930s. America was seen as being the home of equality, the wealthy country that offered limitations on no one. Yet in the 1930s, women were still the more domesticated gender, and of the few who worked, most were employed in childcare, as nurses, or other such non-professional occupations. They had no vote and were not welcome in the workplace. Even in 1940, only 35% of married women worked.

World War II brought big changes into women's employment structures. As men were enlisted into the armed forces, women had to be drafted into factories and industry. 14 million extra women joined industry, and 300, 000 even joined the armed forces. By 1944 33. 3% of all workers were women and 50% of married women worked. Although they received more wages and rights and were generally discriminated against substantially less, they still had fewer rights and lower wages than most men.

At the end of World War II, the wages which had risen fell back from two-thirds of that of men to just 53%. Much of the equality gained during the war gave way to the more traditional roles for men and women. As men returned to their jobs in factories, women were forced to return to their previous stereotyped 'women's occupations'.

However, some women held on to their jobs, and steadily women workers increased. In 1950, they made up 28. 8% of the workforce, but by 1960 they made up almost half of the workforce. Women and society in general started to accept that women in 'modern' society needed to go and work to bring income for the family and gadgets such as TVs and cars into the house. Many women therefore felt oppressed as 95% of company managers were men, 88% of technical workers were men, women workers earned only 50-60% of wages of men for the same work, and that they could still be dismissed when married.

At the same time, many women were regretting their rushes to get married after WWII fifteen years earlier and were bored and disillusioned. Many felt their only life consisted of being domestic servants, with no room to expand their own horizons or develop their careers. It was amidst this churning time, in 1963, that a woman, Betty Friedan, published her best seller 'The Feminine Mystique.' In it she described women's problems and said that married women should be helped in getting continued paid employment, without discrimination. The most important feature was her proclaiming that homes had become 'a comfortable concentration camp' for women. This was the light which set of the increasingly shortening fuse of many women, and led to the women's movement.

The women's movement was not a single organisation, and instead made up of thousands of different groups. Betty Friedan herself launched the National Organisation for Women (NOW) in 1966. The NOW was inspired by the black civil rights campaign's success, and borrowed tactics from it. They organised demonstrations in the streets and held court cases. Other, more radical groups held 'female consciousness' programs, telling other women that men and women were equal and deserved to be treated without discrimination. Some lesbian radicals argued that men were actually useless. Bra burnings took place as well, as bras were regarded as a symbol of male domination. Also, radical women crowned a sheep Miss World, claiming that the contest treated women like objects. Although these types of demonstrations increased their profile and raised consciousness (the media loved them) many critics felt that the protests were not taken seriously.

What was achieved? One quick look at the table below tells us a lot of what changed. Women in 1970 still had almost the same employment pattern as in 1950. However, it was at this time that the roots of change were planted, and by 1980 the whole structure changed considerably. Even in 1970, women were more conscious of their rights. They enforced laws for equal pay and ended employment discrimination. Increasingly, more and more women are pursuing careers and the future for women looks bright.