

What Was Part Of The Second Wave Of The Women's Movement? A) Passage Of The Equal Rights Amendment. B)

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The second wave of the women's movement, spanning roughly from the early 1960s to the early 1980s, marked a pivotal period in the ongoing struggle for gender equality in the United States and around the world. This era built upon the foundational achievements of the first wave — primarily suffrage — and expanded the scope of activism to include a broad range of social, political, and cultural issues affecting women. Central to this movement was the push for legislative reforms, social change, and the challenging of deep-seated gender norms. Among the most notable legislative efforts was the pursuit of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), which aimed to enshrine gender equality into the U.S. Constitution.

This article explores what was part of the second wave of the women's movement, with a specific focus on the passage of the ERA, its significance, and the broader context of the movement's objectives and achievements.

Context of the Second Wave of the Women's Movement

The second wave of feminism emerged against a backdrop of significant social upheaval and transformation. The post-World War II era saw women entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers, challenging traditional gender roles. The 1950s were characterized by a cultural emphasis on domesticity for women, but this was quickly challenged by the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s.

Key factors that fueled the second wave included:

- Civil Rights Movement: The fight against racial discrimination inspired many women of color and allied activists to advocate for gender equality.
- The Civil Rights Act of 1964: Although primarily aimed at ending racial discrimination, it also brought attention to gender discrimination, especially with Title VII, which prohibited employment discrimination based on sex.
- Publication of Influential Works: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) questioned the societal expectations placed on women and is often credited with sparking the second wave.
- Legal and Social Challenges: Women faced widespread discrimination in employment, education, and reproductive rights, prompting activism and legislative efforts.
- Formation of Feminist Organizations: Groups like the National Organization for Women (NOW), founded in 1966, became instrumental in advocating for women's rights.

The Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

What Was the ERA?

The Equal Rights Amendment was a proposed amendment to the United States Constitution designed to guarantee equal rights under the law regardless of sex. The language of the ERA was straightforward:

> "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

Introduced in Congress in 1923, the ERA gained momentum during the second wave as a core legislative goal. Its primary aim was to eliminate legal distinctions between men and women in terms of employment, education, property rights, and other areas of public life.

The Legislative Journey of the ERA

- Initial Introduction: The ERA was first introduced in Congress in 1923 but faced resistance and limited support.
- Rise During the 1960s: The feminist movement of the 1960s and organizations like NOW prioritized the ERA as a central goal.
- Congressional Approval: The amendment was passed by both houses of Congress in 1972, with a seven-year deadline for ratification by the states.
- State Ratification: The ERA needed three-fourths of the states (at least 38 states) to ratify it. By the original deadline in 1979, 35 states had ratified, falling short of the required number.

Why Was the ERA Significant?

The ERA symbolized the movement's quest for comprehensive legal equality. Its passage would have:

- Guaranteed women's equal treatment under the law.
- Stripped away legal barriers to women's economic independence.
- Affirmed gender equality as a constitutional right, providing a strong legal foundation for future challenges.

Challenges and Opposition

Despite widespread support, the ERA faced opposition from:

- Conservative groups: Concerned that the ERA would undermine traditional family structures and lead to unintended consequences such as women being subject to the draft or losing certain protections.
- Religious organizations: Some argued that the ERA threatened traditional gender roles rooted in religious beliefs.
- Counter-campaigns: The "Stop ERA" movement mobilized to oppose ratification, arguing that the amendment was unnecessary or harmful.

The Legacy of the ERA

Although the ERA was not ratified within the original timeframe, it experienced renewed interest and activism in subsequent decades. Some states have ratified the ERA after the deadline, leading to ongoing debates about its legal status. The ERA remains a potent symbol of the second wave's push for formal legal equality and continues to inspire feminist advocacy today.

Other Key Aspects of the Second Wave Women's Movement

While the passage of the ERA was a significant legislative milestone, the second wave encompassed a broad spectrum of issues and achievements:

Reproductive Rights and Birth Control

- The movement advocated for women's control over their reproductive health.
- The landmark Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade* (1973) legalized abortion nationwide, marking a critical victory for reproductive rights.
- Contraceptive access expanded, with the approval of birth control pills and other methods.

Workplace Equality and Title VII

- Efforts to combat employment discrimination led to the enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, prohibiting sex discrimination in employment.
- Women entered professional fields previously dominated by men, though wage gaps persisted.
- The movement fought for equal pay, maternity leave, and workplace protections.

Education and Title IX

- Title IX (1972) prohibited sex discrimination in federally funded education programs.
- It opened doors for women and girls in sports, academics, and extracurricular activities.

Challenging Cultural Norms and Gender Roles

- The second wave questioned traditional notions of femininity, marriage, and family life.
- Feminist literature, art, and activism challenged societal expectations.
- Movements for women's liberation emphasized personal autonomy and empowerment.

Intersectionality and Inclusion

- Increasing awareness of issues faced by women of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those from diverse backgrounds.
- The movement grew more inclusive, recognizing that gender equality must also encompass racial and social justice.

Conclusion

The second wave of the women's movement was a multifaceted, transformative era that sought to redefine women's roles in society, secure legal protections, and promote social justice. The passage of the Equal Rights Amendment was among the movement's most ambitious legislative efforts, symbolizing the push for comprehensive gender equality enshrined in the Constitution. Although the ERA was not ratified within the initial timeframe, its legacy endures as a rallying point for ongoing activism.

Beyond the ERA, the movement achieved significant victories in reproductive rights, workplace equality, education, and cultural norms. It laid the groundwork for contemporary feminist activism and continues to influence efforts toward achieving full gender equality today.

Keywords: second wave feminism, Equal Rights Amendment, ERA, women's rights, gender equality, reproductive rights, Title IX, civil rights, feminist movement, women's movement history

Frequently Asked Questions

What was a key legislative achievement during the second wave of the women's movement?

The passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was a significant legislative goal aimed at guaranteeing equal rights regardless of sex.

How did the second wave of the women's movement differ from the first?

While the first wave focused on legal rights like suffrage, the second wave addressed broader issues such as gender roles, workplace inequality, and reproductive rights.

What role did the feminist movement play in advocating for the Equal Rights Amendment?

Feminists actively campaigned for the ERA to eliminate gender discrimination and promote equality in all aspects of life.

Was the Equal Rights Amendment successfully ratified during the second wave?

No, the ERA was passed by Congress in 1972 but failed to be ratified by enough states, and thus was not adopted into the Constitution.

What social issues were highlighted during the second wave

of the women's movement?

Issues such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, domestic violence, and gender roles were central topics of the movement.

Which prominent figures were involved in the second wave of the women's movement?

Leaders like Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Shirley Chisholm played influential roles in advancing women's rights during this period.

How did the second wave of the women's movement influence legislation?

It led to numerous laws promoting gender equality, including Title IX, the Equal Pay Act, and increased awareness and activism around reproductive rights.

What were some criticisms of the second wave of the women's movement?

Critics argued that it often focused on the experiences of middle-class white women, neglecting issues faced by women of color and lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Did the second wave of the women's movement achieve its goals?

While it made significant progress in raising awareness and enacting laws, some goals like the ratification of the ERA remained unachieved, and ongoing activism continues.

What was the significance of the second wave of the women's movement in history?

It fundamentally reshaped societal attitudes towards gender equality, expanded women's rights, and laid the groundwork for future feminist activism.

Additional Resources

Second Wave of the Women's Movement: Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment

The Second Wave of the Women's Movement, which emerged prominently in the 1960s and continued into the 1980s, marked a significant expansion of women's rights activism beyond suffrage and legal barriers. It sought to challenge societal norms, address gender inequalities in various spheres, and push for comprehensive legal reforms. Among the most ambitious legislative efforts during this period was the push for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), a constitutional amendment aimed at guaranteeing equal rights regardless of sex. This piece delves into what was part of the second wave of the women's movement, with a particular focus on the passage and significance of

the ERA.

The Second Wave of the Women's Movement: An Overview

Before exploring the ERA in detail, it's essential to understand the broader context of the second wave. This movement built upon the achievements of the first wave, which primarily centered on suffrage, and expanded its focus to include issues like reproductive rights, workplace equality, education, and social norms.

Key Characteristics of the Second Wave:

- Broad Social Focus: Addressed a wide range of issues, including gender discrimination, sexuality, family roles, and cultural stereotypes.
- Legal and Policy Advocacy: Pushed for legislative reforms such as anti-discrimination laws, reproductive rights, and equal pay.
- Grassroots Mobilization: Utilized protests, consciousness-raising groups, and advocacy campaigns to galvanize widespread support.
- Feminist Ideology: Embraced various feminist theories, including liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist feminism, influencing strategies and goals.

The Passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA): An Overview

What Was the ERA?

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was a proposed constitutional amendment intended to guarantee equal rights under the law regardless of sex. Its core language was simple yet powerful:

"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

Goals of the ERA:

- To eliminate legal distinctions between men and women in civil rights contexts.
- To prevent sex discrimination in employment, education, and other areas.
- To enshrine gender equality as a fundamental constitutional principle.

Historical Context:

- Drafted in 1923 by Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party.
- The modern push for ratification gained momentum during the 1960s and 1970s, aligning with the

broader second wave feminist agenda.

Legislative Journey and Ratification Process

The ERA was introduced into Congress multiple times, with the most significant push happening in the 1970s.

Key Milestones:

- 1972: Congress passed the ERA with bipartisan support, sending it to the states for ratification.
- Deadline for Ratification: Originally set for 1979, later extended to 1982.
- Ratification Status: By the deadline, only 35 of the necessary 38 states had ratified the amendment, and it ultimately fell short.

States That Ratified the ERA:

- The initial wave of support came from states like California, Illinois, and Nevada.
- Key opposition emerged from states with traditional conservative views on gender roles.

Reasons for the Shortfall:

- Opposition from conservative groups who believed the ERA threatened traditional family values.
- Concerns over unintended consequences, such as the potential for women to be drafted into the military or to be subject to draft registration.
- Counter-movements that argued the ERA was unnecessary or that it would undermine existing protections.

Key Figures and Organizations in the ERA Movement

- Alice Paul: A pioneering feminist leader who drafted the ERA and campaigned tirelessly for its ratification.
- National Organization for Women (NOW): Played a significant role in mobilizing support and lobbying for the amendment.
- Phyllis Schlafly: A conservative activist who opposed the ERA, arguing it would harm women's traditional roles and family structures.

Impact of the ERA Campaign

Despite not achieving ratification, the ERA had a profound impact on the women's movement:

- It sharpened the debate on gender equality and legal rights.
- Inspired state-level legislation promoting gender equality.
- Led to court decisions that advanced women's rights even before the ERA's ratification.
- Elevated the issue of constitutional gender equality to national prominence.

Significance and Legacy of the ERA in the Second Wave

While the ERA was not ratified during the second wave, its advocacy shaped the feminist agenda and legal landscape in several ways:

Legal Achievements Spurred by ERA Advocacy:

- The U.S. Supreme Court, in cases like *Reed v. Reed* (1971), began applying equal protection principles to gender discrimination.
- The Title IX Education Amendments (1972), prohibiting sex discrimination in federally funded education programs, became a landmark victory for gender equality.
- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (1978), which prohibited discrimination based on pregnancy, further advanced women's rights.

Cultural and Social Influence:

- The ERA movement galvanized women across the country to think critically about gender roles.
- It provided a unifying symbol and goal for feminist activism.
- The campaign mobilized women from diverse backgrounds, fostering a sense of collective purpose.

The Ongoing Fight for the ERA:

- The push for ratification persisted beyond the second wave, with advocates continuing to call for the amendment's adoption.
- In recent years, there has been renewed interest, including efforts to ratify the ERA as the 28th Amendment, reflecting its enduring importance.

Challenges and Criticisms Surrounding the ERA

Despite widespread support within the feminist movement, the ERA faced considerable opposition and challenges:

- Concerns over Draft and Military Service: Opponents argued that the ERA could lead to women being subject to military conscription.
- Impact on Traditional Family Roles: Critics feared it would undermine laws related to family and marriage, such as alimony and child custody.
- Legal and Political Hurdles: The initial deadline for ratification lapsed, leading to debates over whether the ERA could still be ratified or if new political efforts are needed.

Conclusion: The Legacy of the Second Wave and the ERA

The second wave of the women's movement marked a transformative period in American history, broadening the scope of gender equality and challenging societal norms. The passage of the ERA

epitomized this struggle—an ambitious constitutional effort to enshrine equal rights for women and men. Although it was not ratified during the second wave, the ERA's advocacy significantly influenced subsequent legal and social advances in gender equality. It remains a powerful symbol of the ongoing fight to secure comprehensive and constitutional guarantees of equality for all genders.

The ERA's story underscores the importance of persistent activism, the power of legal reform, and the capacity of social movements to shape constitutional principles. As debates around gender rights continue, the legacy of the second wave—and the fight for the ERA—serves as a reminder of the enduring quest for equality embedded within the fabric of American democracy.

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