

Chapter 20: Culture and Community in the Global Age: 20-1c Women's Rights
Book Title: The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History 7th Edition Update, AP® Edition
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20-1c Women's Rights

The women's rights movement, which began on both sides of the North Atlantic in the nineteenth century, became an important human rights issue in the twentieth century. Rights for women became accepted in Western countries and were enshrined in the

constitutions of many nations newly freed from colonial rule. In 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and in 1985 the first international conference on the status of women, sponsored by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, was held in Nairobi, Kenya. A second conference in Beijing ten years later added momentum to the movement. By 2012, all but seven UN member countries—Iran, Palau, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Tonga, and the United States—had failed to ratify the convention, though the United States and Palau had signed it without ratification. Besides highlighting the problems women face around the world, international conferences have also revealed great variety in the views and concerns of women. Feminists from the West, who had been accustomed to dictating the agenda and who had pushed for the liberation of women in other parts of the world, sometimes found themselves accused of having narrow concerns and condescending attitudes. Some non-Western women warned against Western feminists' endorsement of sexual liberation and the deterioration of family life in the West. They found Western feminists' concern with matters such as comfortable clothing misplaced and trivial compared to the issues of poverty and disease.

AP® Exam Tip

Explain gender dynamics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Section Review

- Universal standards of human rights have gained wider acceptance.
- Concepts of human rights have expanded to address genocide and environmental protection.
- There has been a general worldwide trend toward democracy, especially in Asian countries.
- Global debates on women's rights have addressed a variety of economic, political, and social problems but have also involved clashes over cultural values.

Other cultures came in for their share of criticism. Western women and many secular leaders in Muslim countries protested Islam's requirement that a woman cover her head and wear loose-fitting garments to conceal the shape of her body, practices enforced by law in countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, many outspoken Muslim women voluntarily donned concealing garments as expressions of personal belief, resistance to secular dictatorship, or defense against coarse male behavior.

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