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Paper 4

‘The feminist movement had little impact on the lives of Americans during the 1960s and 1970s.’ How far do you agree?

Did have impact: Rights for women – contraceptive, roe v. wade, Title 7 outlawed discrimination, Higher Education Act

Did have impact: Raised awareness of issues – consciousness raising groups, League of Women Voters, Miss American Protest, Ms. Magazine

Didn’t have impact: Still lots of discrimination – unequal pay, might not be hired if pregnant, violence against women, Lady’s Home Journal

Didn’t have impact: Many women still excluded – consciousness raising excluded lesbians and black women, Gay Manifesto

The feminist movement was largely carried out through the 1960s and 1970s. As the peak of the Civil Rights Movement came to a close, many other minorities saw an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of figures such as Dr. King by taking a stand for themselves. Women were one such group, holding protests and appearing in court to fight for their rights. While many great strides were made, how truly impactful was the feminist movement on Americans during this time? It can be argued that the movement had little impact due to recurring discrimination and the exclusion of certain types of women. However, the lives of women in

America were changed by the rights they won during the movement, and the awareness raised for their issues.

Perhaps the most important indicator that the feminist movement had a large impact on the lives of Americans was the rights women won during the 1960s and 70s. The most notable instance was that of *Roe v. Wade*, a Supreme Court case that struck down laws criminalizing abortion in states such as Texas. Beforehand, it had been nearly impossible to get an abortion if you lived in a state where it was illegal, as most women did not have the financial means to travel to another state. It was unfair to the privacy and entitlement of women to their own bodies, effecting not only mothers but their children, families, and friends. The court allowing women to receive abortions in any state made a drastic impact on the lives of Americans, by altering situations which could have ended in the death of a mother or a child. A similar case was that of the pill, in which oral contraceptives were made readily accessible to all women. This shows another example of women gaining autonomy over their own bodies, demonstrating the impact that the feminist movement had on Americans. Furthermore, women were given more equality in the workplace as well. Title 7 and the Higher Education Act both worked to eradicate discrimination at school and at work based on a number of factors, including gender. Beforehand, gender was not frequently included in discrimination acts, leaving many Americans to feel as though they were unequal. Including women in legislation had a large impact moving forward both in how Congress considered its laws, and how women were treated in the world. Overall, the feminist movement had great impact on Americans by providing women with autonomy over themselves, and equality in everyday life.

However, it can be argued that discrimination continued to persist after the feminist movement. Despite acts outlawing discrimination, women still receive less pay than men in

several areas of work. While a man could make \$1 an hour, a woman could perform the same task and make only 59 cents. This can still be seen in the modern era with the debate overpay for men and women's sports teams. It demonstrates that while discrimination may have been made illegal on paper, the impact this statement had on the real world was very little. Additionally, women continue to be violated against when hired for a job. In the 1970s, many companies would choose a man over a woman when hiring workers because a woman was likely to get pregnant and miss work. Furthermore, women were not promoted at the same level as men. For example, the Lady's Home Journal was a magazine for women that was run by a man. This shows the lack of trust the country had in women and the impact that this had on their lives. While the feminist movement was successful in giving women more rights, this was not enough to produce meaningful change. Women were still considered inferior to men and were not treated as fairly, demonstrating how little was changed.

On the other hand, the feminist movement was successful in raising awareness and changing the mindsets of many Americans. Women were working to change the stereotype against them and get others to understand their true interests and capabilities. For example, Ms. Magazine was a paper that originally started as a column segment in a large New York paper. The segment defied stereotypes of women as materialistic and beauty obsessed, by addressing real political issues and concerns of women. The article was so popular that it became its own magazine and sold 300,000 copies in 8 days. This shows how eager Americans were to see a change in their lives, and the impact of writing for women instead of about them. It demonstrated to the country that women were more than household caretakers or items for their husbands, raising awareness through the feminist movement. Another example of this is the Miss America Protest, in which 150 women rallied against the beauty pageant. Women threw away high heels,

makeup, bras, and other feminine items while crowning a sheep as Miss America, to create a statement about the perception of women. They wanted to show the world that they were not simply cattle to be auctioned, but real, beautiful women with ideas and personalities. This protest, and others like it, impacted the way Americans viewed women and such events. The feminist movement left a profound statement upon the people of America that would not be forgotten. Moreover, consciousness groups were formed to continue raising awareness about women's issues, showing how feminist ideas persisted and impacted lives.

While many great accomplishments were made for women and the lives of Americans, there were many women that continued to be excluded from the movement. Lesbian and black women were often overlooked when fighting for rights during the 1960s and 70s. Lesbians were not often acknowledged, as the focus for LGBTQ+ rights was more on gay men. The "Gay Manifesto," cast light on the struggles of lesbians, saying that it was more difficult for them to stand up for themselves than gay men. Not many people in the 1960s even knew that lesbians existed because their representation was so lacking. Additionally, any lesbian women that did make themselves public often were judged and discriminated against. As a result, the feminist movement did not want to be associated with the additional issues of LGBTQ+ women. The case for black women was much the same, as the Civil Rights movement had just occurred. Feminists found that it was hard enough to fight for the rights of straight white women, so they did not want to take on the extra weight of fighting for black women as well. This unfortunate reality shows that the feminist movement truly only impacted the majority of white women and did not impact the lives of lesbian or black American women.

The feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s saw many successes over its course. It aimed to get equal rights for women while raising awareness of their issues. On one hand, it did

impact the lives of Americans by passing equal rights legislation. All people in America were required to treat women equally based on cases such as Roe v. Wade and Title 7. Additionally, the movement changed the mindsets of many Americans who previously had objectified and discriminated against women through rallies such as the Miss America Protest. However, discrimination persisted in the workplace through unfair hiring and unequal pay. Moreover, not all women were included in the movement, and it had little impact on their lives. Overall, the feminist movement had a strong impact on some Americans, but not all. It did create some change and progress while laying the foundation for more to come, but also left out many people. Regardless, the movement left a lasting impact on Americans of the 60s and 70s that will not be forgotten.