

“The strong nineteenth-century linkage between gender and culture, separating the lives and duties of men and women . . . , threw women into the company of other women and created new bonds of sisterhood between them. . . .

“In terms of sisterhood the religious movements added substantially to American women’s collective identity. . . . They offered groups of women unprecedented prestige and significance in activities that extended the . . . definitions of their sphere. . . .

“Numerous women [by] the 1840s . . . shared a . . . preoccupation with the needs and influence of women. . . . Increasingly aware of the importance of what they were doing, many of these women grew frustrated with limitations that seemed artificial. The experience of autonomy [within reform movements] . . . encouraged proponents of women to organize their strength and take the offensive against limiting attitudes and conditions. In so doing they established the woman’s rights movement.”

Source: Keith E. Melder, historian, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman’s Rights Movement, 1800–1850*, published in 1977

“By 1840 . . . the [American] Revolution had substituted an egalitarian ideology for the hierarchical concepts of colonial life . . . for men, that is; women were, by tacit¹ consensus, excluded from the new democracy. Indeed . . . women’s political status, while legally unchanged, had deteriorated relative to the advances made by men. . . .

“. . . [A] result of industrialization was . . . increasing differences in life styles between women of different classes. . . . In the urbanized and industrialized Northeast the life experience of middle-class women was different in almost every respect from that of the lower-class women. But there was one thing [these women] had in common—they were equally . . . isolated from the vital centers of power. . . . Propertied women felt this deprivation more keenly. . . . They were bitterly conscious of a relative lowering of status and a loss of position. This sense of frustration led them to action. [While lower-class women] . . . tended to join men in their struggle for economic advancement, . . . the concerns of middle-class women . . . [dominated] the women’s rights movement.”

Source: Gerda Lerner, historian, “Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson,” *Midcontinent American Studies Journal*, 1969

¹ unspoken

1. Using the excerpts, respond to **parts a, b, and c**.

- a. Briefly describe one major difference between Melder’s and Lerner’s interpretations of the origins of the women’s rights movement in the early nineteenth century.
- b. Briefly explain how one historical event or development from 1800 to 1848 not directly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support Melder’s interpretation.
- c. Briefly explain how one historical event or development from 1800 to 1848 not directly mentioned in the excerpts could be used to support Lerner’s interpretation.

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Source: Poster promoting Social Security, a federally funded social insurance program to reduce poverty for people over the age of sixty-five, 1936

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