In March 1857, a group of female garment workers assembled in New York City to protest their poor pay and working conditions. The date of that social protest, March 8, has become International Women's Day, while the month of March is recognized as National Women's History Month in the United States and other countries. Encyclopædia Britannica's "300 Women Who Changed the World" highlights women who have distinguished themselves over the course of centuries. They include activists who helped women win the right to vote—among them Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in the United Kingdom, Kate Sheppard in New Zealand, and Susan B. Anthony in the United States. They are also represented by ancient rulers, contemporary politicians, scientists, religious leaders, novelists, artists such as the lyric poet Sappho (shown above), actresses, and other women who left their mark on the world.

Development of women's rights through the centuries

The women's movement that began in the 1960s launched new opportunities for women on a scale never before seen. The works of author Betty Friedan and the activism of feminist Gloria Steinem challenged stereotypes about women's roles at work, at home, and in society. Yet the influence of women has been felt since antiquity. Warriors such as Aethelflaed, Boudicca, Deng Yingchao, and Fredegund took charge in areas commonly reserved for men. Mary Wollstonecraft published some of the earliest ideals of feminism. Artists and performers—including dancers Okuni and Martha Graham, singer Edith Piaf, and entertainer Oprah Winfrey—expressed new ways to think about art and life.

Take a detailed look at how 300 women have changed the world: browse through our timeline to discover significant dates and accomplishments through the centuries; read excerpts from important historical documents and speeches; and view video clips of the people and events that helped shape the women's movement.