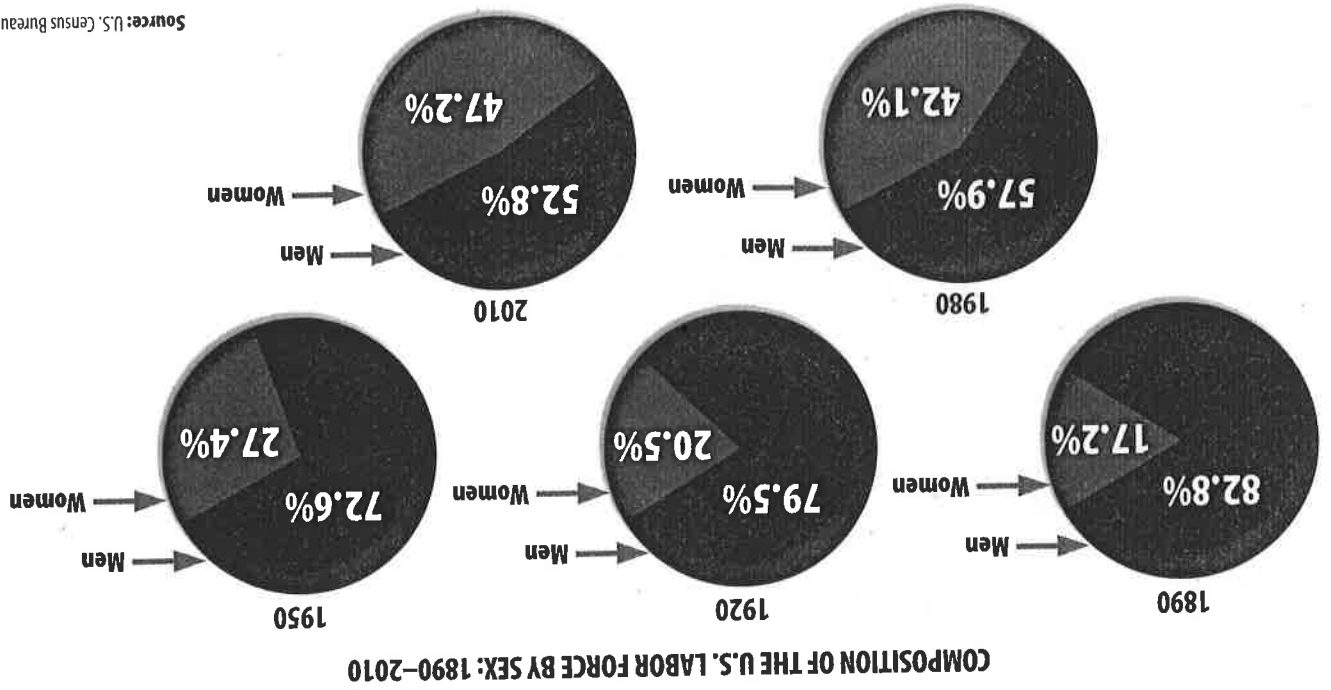


Source: U.S. Census Bureau



COMPOSITION OF THE U.S. LABOR FORCE BY SEX: 1890-2010

Occupational and Economic Inequality

GUIDING QUESTION What is occupational sex segregation, and how does it affect earnings?

By far the most important labor development in the United States in recent decades has been the dramatic increase in the number and proportion of women in the workforce. In 2010, nearly 59 percent of women worked outside the home, compared with more than 71 percent of men. That year, women represented just over 47 percent of the overall American labor force. That is a significantly greater share of women working outside the home than at any time in the past. As the charts show, nearly a hundred years ago, only a fifth of women worked outside the home. Three decades later, the proportion had increased only to a quarter. Today, it is nearly half.

The greatest change in patterns of work involves married women with children under six years of age. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the proportion of women in this group who work outside the home soared from 19 percent in 1960 to 37 percent in 1975 to 64 percent in 2008.

Making Connections Do you think there is discrimination against girls in schools?

READING PROGRESS CHECK

In a few years, in fact, women are likely to exceed men in educational attainment. According to *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2012*, a higher share of recent female high school graduates (nearly 74 percent) than recent male high school graduates (about 66 percent) were in college in 2009. In fact, women outnumbered men in college with some 11.7 million women enrolled compared to not quite 8.8 million men. Since 1990, more women than men have been enrolled in graduate school, and nearly as many women as men now attend professional school. Despite these advances, a careful examination reveals many gaps in social rights, privileges, and rewards for women in the United States. These gaps, although they have closed **somewhat** in recent years, are reflected in the continuing inequality experienced by American women.

- 1. Analyzing** What do you think is the most important societal consequence of this change?
- 2. Hypothesizing** Do you think the percentage of female workers will continue to grow? Why or why not?

CRITICAL THINKING

The number and percentage of women in the U.S. labor force have been growing steadily for more than 100 years.

GRAPHS

sexism a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, and values used to justify sexual inequality

sphere a defined area or subject

somewhat partially; in a limited way