
MODULE FOUR

STUDENTS IN ACTION

BUILDING PRO-LIFE LEADERS

HISTORY OF ABORTION AND PRO-LIFE MOVEMENTS

This module includes key historical events surrounding both the abortion and pro-life movements in America. It is hoped that the churches and schools that use this curriculum will partner with a pregnancy center and use a representative from the center to help present this module. The national information included here can be combined with local information about that organization's work in your area. That can include when the center began and what services it provides.

History of abortion and right-to-life issues in America:

- **1821** - Connecticut passes the first law in the United States barring abortions after “quickening” (*when a woman first feels the baby moving inside her*) which were usually performed by administering poison to the woman after the fourth month of pregnancy.
 - **1856** - Dr. Horatio Storer establishes a national drive through the American Medical Association to make all abortions illegal. Prior to this, first trimester abortions were legal or a misdemeanor in most states.
 - **1860** - Twenty states have laws limiting abortion.
 - **1873** - Supported by the American Medical Association (AMA), the Comstock Act bans the dissemination by mail of information on abortion or artificial contraceptives.
 - **1875** - In a speech called “Social Purity,” suffragist and feminist Susan B. Anthony spoke out against abortion, joining many other feminist fore-mothers who decried abortion in the late 19th century.
 - **1890** - Statutes, advocated by the AMA, outlaw abortion unless necessary to save the life of the mother.
 - **1920s** - Rise of the birth control movement, headed by Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood and a proponent of eugenics, *an effort to improve the “quality” of a country’s people by selectively breeding “favorable” races and getting rid of the “less favorable”*.
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- **World War II** - Germany’s I.G. Farben Chemical Company created the gas used to kill millions of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps. After the war, a subsidiary of Farben controlled the French company Roussel Uclaf that developed the RU-486 chemical abortion drug mifepristone.

- **1962** - Sherri Finkbine provided an emotional face in the media in the quest to legalize abortion. While pregnant, she took thalidomide, not knowing that the drug is known to hinder the development of limbs in the preborn child. She requested a “therapeutic” abortion and was denied in America, before later getting an abortion in Sweden.
- **1963** - The Society for Human Abortion is established in San Francisco and challenges the law by openly providing information on abortion and contraception.
- **1965** - *Griswold v. Connecticut* was a landmark case in which the Supreme Court ruled that the Constitution protected a right to privacy. The case involved a Connecticut law that prohibited the use of contraceptives.

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- **1967** - Colorado is the first state to liberalize its abortion laws. At a point when abortion is classified as felony in 49 states, Dr. Leon Belous is convicted for referring a woman to an illegal abortionist, which leads to a 1969 California Supreme Court decision in favor of a right to choose abortion.
 - **1969** - Abortionists Lawrence Lader and Dr. Bernard Nathanson help found the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws, now called NARAL Pro-Choice America. Nathanson later renounced his abortion stance and admitted to falsifying statistics in order to garner sympathy for the pro-abortion cause.
 - **1970s** - Harvey Karnen, who committed illegal abortions despite not being a physician, developed a flexible curette that made the vacuum aspiration method safer for the woman, causing it to proliferate in the U.S. as the method of choice for early abortions.
 - **1970** - Alaska, Hawaii, New York, and Washington repeal bans on abortion after viability, making abortion available at the request of a woman and her doctor up to 24 weeks. Dr. Jane Hodgson is convicted in Minnesota for committing an abortion on a 23-year-old woman, a felony at the time. The case was appealed, but not ruled on by the state supreme court until after *Roe v. Wade*.
 - **1971** - The portions of the Comstock Act dealing with abortion and contraception are repealed.
 - **1972** - *Eisenstadt v. Baird* extended the *Griswold* decision to include unmarried couples since the “right to privacy” in *Griswold* only applied to marital relationships. Both the *Eisenstadt* and *Griswold* decisions were cited in *Roe*.

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- **1973** - The *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision strikes down all state laws that had previously made abortion illegal. *Doe v. Bolton*, the companion case to *Roe v. Wade*, makes abortion on demand legal through all nine months of pregnancy by opening up the definition of a woman’s health. The National Right to Life Committee, a non-religious group, is officially incorporated in response to *Roe v. Wade*, holding its first convention in Detroit.
 - **1974** - Nellie Gray organized the first National Pro-Life March in Washington, D.C., which continues annually, and began garnering support for a Human Life Amendment, which had been introduced in Congress the previous year. Federally-funded research using fetal tissue is banned by the National Science Foundation Authorization Act.

- **1975** - *Bigelow v. Virginia* invalidates Virginia's ban that prohibited advertising abortion.
- **1976** - *Singleton v. Wulff* gives abortion facilities and abortionists the ability to challenge abortion laws. Previously, only women seeking an abortion had standing to challenge abortion laws. *Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth* changes some of the abortion laws, invalidating spousal and parental consent before an abortion. Congress adopts the first Hyde Amendment barring the use of federal Medicaid funds to sell abortions to low-income women; the provision is upheld by the Supreme Court in 1980.



- **1977** - A revised Hyde Amendment is passed allowing states to deny Medicaid funding except in cases of rape, incest, or "severe and long-lasting" damage to the woman's physical health. *Maier v. Roe*, *Beal v. Doe*, and *Poelker v. Doe* uphold prohibition of abortions using public funding or in public hospitals, unless "medically necessary."
- **1979** - The *Bellotti v. Baird* Supreme Court decision ruled that teenagers do not have to obtain parental consent to obtain an abortion. *Colautti v. Franklin* strikes down the Pennsylvania statute that required abortion techniques to give the best opportunity for the fetus to be born alive after viability.
- **1980s** - The pro-life movement turns to the grassroots level, opening Pregnancy Help Centers (PHCs) and Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) to help women facing unplanned pregnancies choose life.
- **1980** - *Harris v. McRae* upholds limits on funding abortion. States participating in Medicaid are not required to fund "medically necessary" abortions (*Williams v. Zbaraz*, companion).
- **1983** - *Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health* removes requirements that doctors provide patients with information on alternatives to abortion, fetal development, and medical risks of abortion, in addition to other regulations. *Planned Parenthood Association of Kansas City, Missouri v. Ashcroft* invalidates a Missouri statute that required some abortions to be in a hospital. *Simopoulos v. Virginia* upholds conviction of a doctor who committed an abortion during the second trimester outside of a licensed hospital.



- **1984** - Following the election, pro-lifers controlled the White House and Congress. They worked to pass a Human Life Amendment and Human Life Bill (in case the amendment was rejected by the states). Pro-life advocates divided their support between the amendment and bill, lobbying against each other and causing both to fail.
- **1986** - *Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists* invalidates Pennsylvania statute that required informed consent and other abortion regulations.
- **1988** - American Collegians for Life is founded. In 2006, the group is renamed Students for Life of America.
- **1989** - *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* upholds the prohibition of public facilities or personnel to commit abortions and the requirement of ultrasounds after 20 weeks.

- **1990s** - Pregnancy resource centers continue to spring up, allowing pro-lifers to support pregnant women in their communities.
- **1990** - *Hodgson v. Minnesota* invalidates Minnesota requirement for two-parent notification for minors. *Ohio v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health (Akron II)* upholds Ohio statute requiring a minor to notify one parent or obtain a judicial waiver.
- **1991** - *Rust v. Sullivan* upholds the constitutionality of the 1988 HHS regulation, which prohibits doctors and counselors at clinics which receive federal funding from providing their patients with information about and referrals for abortion.

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- **1992** - *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* reaffirms Roe principle that women have a “right” to abortion before fetal viability, but allows states to restrict abortion access so long as these restrictions do not impose an “undue burden” on women seeking abortions. Such restrictions make up the incremental approach to reducing abortions.
 - **1993** - Colorado enacts the first state “buffer zone” law, which restricts where pro-life demonstrators and sidewalk counselors can be outside abortion facilities.
 - **1994** - Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (F.A.C.E.) Act is passed by Congress. The F.A.C.E. Act forbids the use of “force, threat of force or physical obstruction” to prevent someone from providing or receiving abortions. This was brought on by “Operation Rescue,” in which individuals peacefully linked arms to block access to an abortion facility while sidewalk counselors directed women to PHCs.

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- **1995** - The U.S. Congress passed the first nationwide ban on “partial birth” abortion, which was vetoed by President Clinton in 1996. Norma McCorvey (“Jane Roe” of *Roe v. Wade*, who did not have an abortion because the ruling came too late) is befriended by pro-life activists. She declares that she is pro-life and regrets her role in the landmark case.
 - **1997** - Congress passed a slightly amended version of the “partial birth” abortion ban law, which was again immediately vetoed by President Clinton. *Mazurek v. Armstrong* upholds “physician-only” requirement to commit an abortion in Montana.
 - **1999** - The Senate and House passed the 1997 version of the abortion ban, but the bill died at the end of the Congressional session.
 - **2000’s** - Massachusetts and Montana implement their own buffer zone laws, further restricting sidewalk counselors. States continue to pass laws restricting abortion, such as parental notification, waiting periods, and ultrasound requirements. The nation’s largest abortion vendor, Planned Parenthood, reacts to the economic hardships of small neighborhood facilities by building “mega-center” abortion facilities in Illinois, Texas, Colorado, and Massachusetts.

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- **2000** - *Stenberg v. Carhart* strikes down Nebraska’s ban on partial-birth abortion as unconstitutional. This effectively invalidated 29 of 31 similar statewide bans. Food and Drug Administration approves mifepristone (RU-486), the chemical abortion drug.

- **2003** - Congress passed and President George W. Bush signed into law the “Partial-Birth Abortion” ban. *Scheidler v. National Organization for Women (NOW)* determines that abortion protesters are not extorting abortion providers by protesting in hopes of shutting down the facility.
 - **2004** - U.S. District Courts in California, New York, and Nebraska declare the federal “partial-birth abortion” ban unconstitutional.
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- **2006** - *Ayotte v. Planned Parenthood of Northern New England* invalidates New Hampshire’s parental notice law in its entirety, and remands the case for future consideration. *NOW (National Organization for Women) v. Scheidler*, after 21 years of litigation, affirms the free speech of pro-life activists and sidewalk counselors, ruling against NOW’s claim that all pro-lifers were responsible for the criminal activity of a few people. SFLA hires its first full-time staff and launches its Field Program, leading to over 500 new pro-life student organizations in 6 years.
 - **2007** - The U.S. Supreme Court upholds the federal “partial-birth abortion” ban (passed in 1993) in *Gonzales v. Carhart*. This ban restricts one type of late-term abortion (D&X). The first nationwide 40 Days for Life campaign launches. This semi-annual grassroots effort has succeeded in mobilizing new pro-life activists and shutting down abortion facilities through continual presence and prayer.
 - **2009** - Gallup releases poll results indicating that, for the first time, a majority of Americans (51%) identify themselves as pro-life. Despite massive pro-life efforts, Congress narrowly passes healthcare reform with the potential for tax-payer funded abortions.
 - **2011** - The U.S. House of Representatives votes to remove federal funding of Planned Parenthood, but the Democrat-controlled Senate blocks the measure.
 - **2013** - The state of Texas bans abortions after 20 weeks (TX HB2).
 - **2016** - The Supreme Court rules in *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt* that states are restricted in their ability to regulate the health and safety standards of abortion facilities if it leads to closure of abortion facilities, even though this is a byproduct if abortion facilities cannot meet basic requirements.
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- **2017** - President Trump fulfills a campaign promise by appointing pro-life Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court.
 - **2018** - President Trump appoints Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court, replacing retired Justice Anthony Kennedy and establishing a 5-4 pro-life majority.
 - **2020** - President Trump appoints Amy Coney Barrett, a pro-life Catholic mother of seven, to the Supreme Court. The Court’s pro-life majority now stands at 6-3.
 - **2022** - The Supreme Court rules in *Dobbs v. Women’s Health Organization* that the U.S. Constitution “does not confer a right to abortion.” In a 6-3 majority decision, the Court reverses both *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, thereby returning the issue of abortion back to the states.

- **2023** - The U.S. Food and Drug Administration issues guidance declaring that chemical abortion pills “can be dispensed by certified pharmacies,” even in states that have outlawed abortion.