THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THE
SOCIAL, ECONOMIC, AND POLITICAL SPHERES
OF THE UNITED STATES: A HISTORY

An Honors Thesis
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INTRODUCTION

The struggle for women's equality in the social, economic, and political spheres of the United States has been long and difficult. This struggle is seldom studied in the American public school system and is seldom fully understood by the American public. Why should this be when women form more than half of the United States' population?

Until very recent times, history books have virtually ignored women's contributions to our society. However, leaders of the women's movement for social and legal equality have included many of the bravest and most intelligent women of their times. These women ranged from ex-slaves to politicians, from ministers to scientists, from teachers to physicians. The demands made by these women were considered extremely radical. The issues were the subject of hot debates in lecture halls and churches. These issues formed banner headlines because of their controversial nature.

To understand the reasons why women were not provided the right to vote, to equal educational opportunities, to equal wages for equal work, and to many employment opportunities, one need only examine the history of women in the United States.

The most fundamental roadblock to women's advancements stems from the Judaic-Christian heritage (Christianity being
the predominant religion in the United States). Our nation was Christian from the time of its conception. The American colonies were populated by religious dissidents escaping the religious control of Britain. The Bible, which was often considered the only book worthy of reading (and often the only book available), became the reading primer of school children. Religion was a dominant part of life in the colonies.

The story of the creation in the book of Genesis places women in a subordinate role from the beginning of time. First of all, God creates the man, Adam. Then, as an afterthought, God creates Eve so that Adam will have a companion. As punishment for disobeying God's command, Eve and all of her female descendants are "cursed" with the pain of childbirth.¹

Mosaic law states that man shall leave his parents to "cleave unto his wife." Moses' order was "he shall rule over thee."²

Female sexuality was mysterious and sinful. In the Old Testament menstruation was seen as unclean. During the period of a woman's menstruation, everything she touched was considered defiled. Childbirth was also punished. A woman bearing a male child was restricted forty days from touching hallowed objects. A woman bearing a female child was restricted eighty days. Following menstruation and childbirth, women were required to make sacrifices as atonement for their sins.³
In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul preached that the souls of males and females were indistinguishable in the eyes of God. However, Paul also made distinctions between male and female roles in the church and in the family. Within the church, women were not allowed into the priesthood. Within the family, women were still subordinate to their husbands. Although marriage made husband and wife "one flesh," Paul clearly defined that "one flesh" as the husband's. Divorce was not permitted under any circumstances, and remarriage was only permitted in the case of the death of a spouse.

In the newly forming America, and up to and including the present, these ideas, as set forth by the Bible, have greatly influenced woman's place in society.

WOMEN IN COLONIAL AMERICA

During the settlement of the American colonies, women performed not only female chores (upkeep of homes, provisions of meals and clothing for the family), but often male chores as well. Women often worked side-by-side with men at such jobs as hunting, trapping, fishing, farming, shopkeeping, and running businesses. However, women were still limited by the same laws that had restricted them in Britain. This was so because the settlers brought with them the social customs and laws of their previous homeland.

Within the colonies, suffrage rights were only extended to land owners. This ruled out most females. However, there
were a few women who did have voting rights and who did, indeed, sometimes vote. Yet, gradually they were disfranchised colony by colony as laws were passed prohibiting women from voting: "Virginia 1699, New York 1777, Massachusetts 1780, New Hampshire 1784, and New Jersey 1807."  

 Basically, a woman needed a man as a source of her own livelihood and in order to have a "place" in society. In the marriage relationship, a woman's well-being was not protected by law. A woman's property became her husband's upon marriage in early America. Any income or inheritance a woman had became her husband's. Men were entitled to restrain and correct their wives pretty much as they saw fit. Some states even allowed men to beat their wives with a stick (as long as the stick was no broader than his thumb). A woman's children also became the legal property of their father who could sell them, give them away, or adopt them out without the consent of their mother.  

 Yet, a woman's lot did not improve upon the death of her husband. A woman could become destitute following her husband's death if the husband decided to will his earthly possessions to another beneficiary.  

 Even after the American Revolution, the laws of the newly formed American states were based upon the Common Law of England. Thus, women's lot remained unchanged. Businesses were predominantly run by men. Medicine, law, and religion were exclusively male professions.
Divorce under any circumstances almost never occurred. For starters, it was difficult to get a divorce. More importantly, divorce often resulted in the social ruin of a woman. (Divorce did not necessarily affect a man's social standing.) Early American ideas about divorce were the direct result of the people's beliefs in the Bible teachings and, of course, tradition.\textsuperscript{10}

Colleges in the colonies and in the early American states were open exclusively to males. Women were not viewed as needing much education because a woman's duties were to care for husband, children, and household.\textsuperscript{11}

Social conventions deemed it improper for a woman to make public speeches or to travel alone. Furthermore, women were not to live alone. Relatives were expected to house spinsters and widows.\textsuperscript{12}

In order to be fashionable, women wore long, heavy skirts and tight corsets. Both hindered movement and were undoubtedly uncomfortable. Long hair was a symbol of beauty—the longer the better. Yet, the hair was "difficult to keep clean, time-consuming to arrange, and often by its weight and bulk was the cause of headaches."\textsuperscript{13}

Woman's work of the Colonial period was essential to the running of a household. "Woman's work" was of such importance that a man could have been considered greatly handicapped if he did not have a wife. Colonial women were basically responsible for their family's production of cloth and clothing, family doctoring, preparation of medicines, child
care, tending farm animals, gardening, preparation and preservation of food, education of the children, midwifing for neighbors, bartering or selling produce, and preparation of the dead for burial. The Colonial home was the heart of economic production.14

Some early American women did not accept their subservient political and social positions quietly. Abigail Smith Adams was a proponent of legislation to improve the lot of American women. In a 1776 letter to Mercy Ottis Warren, Abigail Adams wrote:

He [John Adams] is very saucy to me, in return for a list of female grievances which I transmitted to him. I think I will get you to join me in a petition to Congress. I thought it was very probable our wise statesmen would erect a new government and form a new code of laws, I ventured to speak a word in behalf of our sex who are rather hardly dealt with by the laws of England which give such unlimited power to the husband to use his wife ill. I requested that our legislation would consider our case and as all men of delicacy and sentiment are averse to exercising the power they posses, yet as there is a natural propensity in human nature to domination I thought the most generous plan was to put it out of the power of the arbitrary and tyrannick to injure us with impunity by establishing some laws in our favor upon just and liberal principles.

I believe I even threatened fomenting a rebellion in case we were not considered and insured him [John Adams] we would not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we had neither a voice nor representation.15

Other early American female activists included Frances Wright, Ernestine Rose, and Margaret Fuller. Frances Wright, a Scottish noblewoman, came to the United States in 1827 and lectured widely on the issues of women's rights and abolition of slavery. She met much criticism, but undaunted,
she continued to bring these burning issues to public attention. From Poland, Ernestine Rose ventured to America in 1836. Throughout her life she lectured for the rights of women. She swayed many audiences to the cause. In 1840, Bostonian Margaret Fuller published an essay entitled "The Great Lawsuit, or Men vs. Women: Women vs. Men" in her magazine *The Dial*. She later expanded this essay into the book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*.  

Fuller demanded that women be given equal opportunity in education, politics, and industry. She writes, "I think women need a much greater range of occupation to rouse their latent powers. . . Let them be sea captains, if you will."  

**WOMEN AND THE ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENT**

The year 1840 saw the first World's Anti-Slavery Convention (held in London). This convention was the catalyst for uniting women in the fight for equal rights.

Delegates from many countries, including the United States, went to the convention. The Massachusetts and Pennsylvania abolitionist societies sent delegations that included eight women. Most notable among these women were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Ann Green Phillips.

When first notified of the upcoming convention, the United States' anti-slavery societies were not informed of a sex restriction on delegates. However, when they sent word back to England that American women would be attending
the convention, the British replied that absolutely no females would be permitted. These Victorian Englishmen thought it preposterous that women could intelligently debate with men on political issues.19

Yet, the American women took no heed of the British objections. The unwelcome females met with the other delegates at the Free Masons' Hall on June 12th for the commencement of the convention.20

A debate ensued over whether or not to admit the American women to the convention's proceedings. Several American men argued in favor of their admittance. The debate went on for hours.21

Those opposing women's attendance proposed dissolving the convention entirely rather than allowing women to take part in a discussion of political matters on an equal basis with their male counterparts. The majority ruled against the women's involvement. However, the women were informed that they could attend the proceedings as passive listeners only as long as they sat behind a curtained enclosure.22

Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton viewed the convention's ruling as an outrage. Back at their hotel they discussed the hypocrisy of the men gathering to discuss the dilemma of the black man, while failing to see the near-slave status of women.23

Mott and Stanton lost touch for an eight-year interval following their return to the United States. During this
time, Stanton became immersed in the chores of caring for her husband and children. Of this period, she writes:

I now fully understood the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, and the impossibility of woman's best development if in contact, the chief part of her life, with servants and children. . . The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic condition into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied anxious look of the majority of women, impressed me with a strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general and of women in particular.

EARLY WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONVENTIONS

In July 1848, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and several other women met again to discuss the prospects of holding a women's rights convention. Finally, on July 19th and 20th, the Seneca Falls Convention, the first convention to address women's rights, took place in Seneca Falls, New York.25

Out of this convention came the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions. It is based upon the U.S. Declaration of Independence. Instead of declaring independence of the thirteen colonies from Britain, however, the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions declares the independence of women and the rights they expect to enjoy.26

Interestingly enough, all but one of the proposed resolutions were passed by a unanimous vote of the men and women at the Seneca Falls Convention. The one resolution of hot debate and controversy concerned women's suffrage. This
resolution, proposed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, reads, "It is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."

Finally, this resolution was passed, but only by a narrow majority of those present at the convention.27

The idea of women voting in political elections was considered so radical in 1848 that even Lucretia Mott declared, "Oh, Lizzie! If thee demands that, thee will make us ridiculous!"28

The resolutions called for

The recognition of woman as man's equal, the enlightenment of women regarding laws, and the encouragement of women to speak in public, to move into a larger sphere, to participate in reform movements and the church, and to enter various trades and the professions.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton had long been a proponent of "radical" legislation to improve the lives of women. In 1836, she actively had supported a New York bill calling for women's rights of property. The passage of this bill to law in 1848 gave Stanton increased encouragement to fight for women's franchise.30

Stanton was not alone in her conviction that women must have the right to vote. In 1837, Harriet Martineau wrote in Society in America:

One of the fundamental principles announced in the Declaration of Independence is that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. How can the political condition of women be reconciled with this?
Even in the churches some voices had been raised in favor of women's enfranchisement. During a sermon in 1845, the Reverend Samuel Joseph May stated that women should not expect "to have their wrongs fully redressed until they themselves have a voice and a hand in the enactment and administration of the laws."32

Many other women's rights conventions succeeded the one held in Seneca Falls. On August 2, 1848, a women's rights convention was held in Rochester, New York. More conventions followed in other parts of New York, then in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Indiana. The movement continued to spread. By 1850, it had spread into the West to places such as Wisconsin and Kansas.33

These conventions and their supporters were considered radical indeed. In reference to the first National Women's Rights Convention held in Worcester, Massachusetts in October of 1850, a New York Herald headline stated: "Awful Combination of Socialism, Abolitionism, and Infidelity. Bible and Constitution Repudiated."34 The article went on to say,

There is not a lunatic asylum in the country wherein, if the inmates were called together to sit in convention, they would not exhibit more sense, reason, decency and delicacy, and less lunacy, blasphemy and horrible sentiment, than this hybrid, mongrel, piebald, crack-brained, pitiful, disgusting and ridiculous assemblage.35
EARLY LEADERS OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS MOVEMENT

A man once described the following experience to his friend:

He had had a dreary time with the Friends [Quakers] that day, but at last a woman stood up he had not seen before, whose appearance touched him with strange, new expectations. She looked, he said, as if she had no great hold on life, and began to speak in low tones, with just a touch of hesitation as one who is feeling after her thought, and there was a tremor as if she felt the burden of the Spirit. But she found her way out of all this, and then he began to hold his breath. He had not heard such speaking in all his life. It was so born of all conviction, so surely out of the inner heart of the truth, and so radiant with the inward light for which he had been waiting, that he went home feeling as he supposed they must have felt in the old time who thought they had heard an angel.

The "angel" described above was Lucretia Mott. Mott was raised in a Quaker community in which women did not hold a secondary position to men (for the Quakers view men and women as spiritual equals). In this atmosphere, Lucretia Mott became a Quaker minister, as well as being a wife and mother of six children.37

Mott believed herself to be not just an activist of women's liberation, but a proponent of human liberation. She was an active participant in many human rights activities. Mott was an early abolitionist, a women's rights activist, a firm believer in non-resistance, a defender of Indians and immigrants, and a supporter of the temperance movement.38

In 1837, Mott assisted in organizing the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. She conducted a similar convention the next year in Philadelphia.39
Her primary concern for many years was the ending of slavery. Being the most famous female abolitionist of her time, she was referred to as the "Black Man's Goddess." 40

In a speech delivered before a women's rights convention (Philadelphia, 1849) Mott said,

We deny that the present position of woman is her true sphere of usefulness; nor will she attain to this sphere, until the disabilities and disadvantages, religious, civil, and social, which impede her progress, are removed out of her way. These have enervated her mind and paralyzed her powers. 41

Two other strong leaders of the early women's rights movement were Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Susan B. Anthony, a former Quaker school teacher, attended her first women's rights convention in 1851. It was here that she first met Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The two quickly became friends. Anthony and Stanton teamed together in the fight for women's rights. While Stanton was busy caring for her family, Anthony would deliver speeches written by Stanton to further the cause of women's rights. "It was said that Mrs. Stanton forged the thunderbolts and Miss Anthony discharged them." 42

Stanton's achievements included her aiding in the passage of an expanded women's property law. She had addressed the New York state legislature on two occasions: first in 1854 and then again in 1860. Her second attempt proved successful. 43

Many strong, courageous, and independent women joined the struggle to gain women's rights. They included veteran speakers Frances Wright, Ernestine Rose, and Lucy Stone;
Antoinette Brown, the first American woman to become an ordained minister; and Harriet K. Hunt, one of the first female medical doctors. 44

Strong abolitionist women lent their strength to the women's movement. They included Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimke. Tubman, a runaway slave, had led more than three hundred slaves north to freedom along the underground railroad. Ex-slave Sojourner Truth became famous for her simple yet forceful speeches. Angelina and Sarah Grimke, after freeing all their slaves, went north to preach abolition of slavery and expanded rights for women. 45

Although the women's rights movement actually sprang from the abolitionist movement, articles and editorials from abolitionist presses fell short in their discussions of the women's movement. Naturally, feminists began writing their views for themselves. Early feminist papers included The Una; Woman's Advocate, which was produced entirely by women; and The Lily, Amelia Bloomer's publication whose masthead read "Devoted Entirely to the Interests of Women." Susan B. Anthony produced the most distinguished paper of them all: Revolution. The masthead of Anthony's Revolution proudly announced "Men their rights and nothing more; Women their rights and nothing less." 46

Many of the leaders of the women's movement believed in and practiced civil disobedience when they believed their cause justified unlawful actions. For instance, Susan B.
Anthony believed so strongly in the right of women to have the vote that she defiantly cast a ballot in the 1872 presidential election. As a result, she was arrested and fined one hundred dollars. Anthony, however, refused to pay. In the end, the fine was dropped.\(^{47}\)

Anthony had also gone out on a limb in the early 1860's. During this time, she had faced charges of kidnapping for harboring a runaway wife and her child. The child's father was a Massachusetts state senator. (This fact made the "kidnapping" even hotter news.) Justice may have in actuality been on the mother's side, but by law all rights belonged to the father. (At this time in history, the wife and child of a man were his legal property.\(^{48}\)

**WOMEN IN ANTEBELLUM AMERICA AND THE CIVIL WAR**

With the coming of the industrial revolution in the 1800's, women's roles greatly changed. Many of the items formerly produced by women in the home were now being produced by factories. Urban living was becoming more and more common. Urban women did not have the farm chores which were common to colonial women. Medical doctors were becoming more and more prevalent. Furthermore, these new doctors were receiving more medical training than ever before. Schools became more common and frequently replaced home tutoring.\(^{49}\)

Many people went to work in the factories of the cities. Single and lower-class women followed this trend.\(^{50}\)
These women generally went to work out of necessity. Urban living was expensive. For instance, in 1860 the average family of five needed five hundred dollars annually to make ends meet. However, the average earnings of a male factory worker were only two hundred seventy dollars per year. Thus, it was imperative that other family members must work also—either the wife, the children, or both.\(^5\)

Before the Civil War, the women's movement had become well established. Women's conventions were becoming more and more common. Proponents of the movement were demanding that women have equal suffrage, broader educational opportunities, reformed inheritance and divorce laws, and a change in child guardianship rights, property rights, and in the Victorian view of women's role in society.\(^5\)

During the Civil War, a lull occurred in the women's movement. Women's energies instead were expended toward the war effort—establishment of hospitals, nursing corps, and supply depots for the collection and distribution of food, medical supplies, and other necessities for the soldiers.\(^5\)

Following the Civil War, the abolitionists tasted sweet success with the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment. This amendment abolished slavery.

A year later came the proposal of a Fourteenth Amendment to make all those born or naturalized in the U.S. citizens of the country. Yet, this proposal contained the word "male"
three times (women were not included in the amendment's provisions). 54

Of course, this outraged many feminists. Elizabeth Cady Stanton angrily wrote to Wendell Phillips, "May I ask...just one question based on the apparent opposition in which you place the Negro and woman. My question is this: Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males." 55

VICTORIAN VIEWS OF NINETEENTH CENTURY WOMEN

In nineteenth century America, motherhood took on great importance. Women were seen as the guardians of their families' morality. "Children were viewed as 'blank slates' upon which a mother must write character, virtue, and patriotism." 56

Lydia Sigourney sums up a commonly held view of nineteenth century motherhood in the following excerpt from Letters to Mothers (NY 1838):

My Friend, if in becoming a mother, you have reached the climax of your happiness, you have also taken a higher place in the scale of being. A most important part is allotted you, in the economy of the great human family. Look at the gradations of your way onward--your doll, your playmates, your lessons--perhaps to decorate a beautiful person--to study the art of pleasing--to exult in your own attractions--to feed on adulation--to wear the garland of love--and then to introduce into existence a being never to die; and to feel your highest, holiest energies enlisted to fit it for this world and the next.

No longer will you now live for self--no longer be noteless and unrecorded, passing away without name or memorial among the people...In bequeathing your own likeness to the world, you will naturally be anxious to array it in that
beauty of virtue, which fades not at the touch of time. What a scope for your exertions, to render your representative, an honour to its parentage, and a blessing to its country.

The following Victorian views appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper in the mid-1800's:

Our ladies...soar to rule the hearts of their worshippers, and secure obedience by the sceptor of affection. Is not everything managed by female influences? A woman is nobody. A wife is everything. A pretty girl is equal to ten thousand men, and a mother is, next to God, all powerful. The ladies of Philadelphia, therefore, under the influence of the most serious 'sober second thoughts,' are resolved to maintain their rights as wives, belles, virgins, and mothers, and not as women.

According to Victorian thought, a woman was nothing if she was not a lady. She was to be placed on a pedestal as an inherently moral creature. Her job was to care for her family and always be the perfect model of purity of thought and manner.

Yet, back-breaking, never-ceasing household chores were a part of these women's everyday lives. During an average week, these women performed an estimated forty hours of housework, plus an additional twenty hours of child care.

Feminists were eager to change society's Victorian views of women. The word "obey" in the traditional woman's wedding vows angered many feminists who urged it be stricken from the wedding ceremony. The famous feminist Lucy Stone thought it important that a woman retain her maiden name. Stone herself retained her maiden name throughout her long marriage to Henry Blackwell.
Following the Civil War, more women than ever were in the job market. Many women simply could not afford to stay at home. By 1865 in Boston alone, twenty-five thousand war widows were in need of work. 

Acceptable jobs for women included unskilled work in factories and work as domestic servants. However, wages for these jobs were poor and the hours were long.

With so many women competing for the same kinds of work, employers lowered their wages. Women who got sixteen cents for sewing a shirt before the Civil War were now offered ten cents. If they refused to work for such low wages, the employers could always find other, more desperate women who would agree to ten cents a shirt, or eight cents, or even six cents. From their earnings the women had to buy their own thread and pay for any shirt that was damaged. Even at these starvation wages, many women could not collect their money. Their employers would give them credit instead of cash and tell them to return the next day for their money. The next day the employer would find fault with their work and charge them for it, or would miscount the number of shirts they had sewn and charge them for the "lost" one. In order to make enough money to buy bread and tea, they worked fifteen to eighteen hours a day, every day, and sent their daughters to work as soon as they could hold a needle.

Between 1890 and 1920, more than half of all working women in America were servants. For years factory work had been viewed as superior to work as a domestic servant. (Servants were often on call twenty-four hours a day and worked for an average of one to two-and-a-half dollars a week.) However, by the late nineteenth century, factory work was losing its appeal. Increased mechanization in the textile
mills required less and less skill to operate the looms. Textile factories began hiring younger and younger children and paying lower and lower wages. 64

Wages also suffered due to an increasing number of immigrants. New immigrants to the United States were desperate for jobs. Thus, they would work for starvation wages. 65

The Irish potato blight of 1845 caused many Irish to flee to the United States. By 1860, nearly half of all American textile workers were Irish immigrant women. 66

One-fifth of all Caucasian women in America were working for pay by 1900. At the same time, four-fifths of all black women were working for pay. The breakdown of jobs for black women was as follows: about one-third worked in cotton fields, another one-third were domestic servants, and another one-third worked in factories. 67

From her book We Were There, author Barbara Wetheimer sets the scene of the American woman's work-place:

By 1900, one-fifth of America's twenty-five million women were in the work-force. At least half of all workers in textile mills and tobacco factories were women, while in the garment (clothing) industries women outnumbered men. Women worked in the shoe industry, in food processing and canning, and in heavy industries such as foundries and tin-place mills. In every case, they held "women's jobs," for the most part unskilled, offering little chance to learn a trade or move up the job or pay ladder. Even where women held jobs requiring considerable skills, . . . they earned just one-half the wages of non-union men doing the same work and one-third those of union men. 68

"Genteel" women's jobs at the turn of the century included teaching, nursing, typing, telephone switchboard
operating, and clerking in stores. Often the hours of these jobs were as long as the hours of factory workers. Wages for genteel work was only slightly better than factory wages. Yet the work was safer, cleaner, and thus, more respectable. 69

In 1898, Brooklyn female teachers earned no more than six hundred dollars per year with an annual forty dollar raise. Male teachers, however, never earned less than nine hundred dollars per year with an annual one hundred five dollar raise. 70

Furthermore, teachers were responsible for building the strong moral character of their students. Therefore, school boards often set certain standards for their teachers to live by.71

A 1915 list of rules for female teachers from a small Massachusetts town prohibited marriage, leaving town without the school board's permission, "keeping company with men," smoking, "loitering downtown in ice cream stores," dying hair, wearing bright colors, and wearing dresses more than two inches above the ankle. 72

FORMATION OF WOMEN'S CLUBS

With rapid industrialization of the country after the Civil War, new problems arose. Crime rates increased, poverty spread, and crooked political machines thrived. Child labor and unsafe, inhumane working conditions coupled with poor wages were part of the urban experience. 73
Many people began seeing a need for great change in the system. Our great American democracy simply was not working to the benefit of the masses. By 1890, many Americans sought increased government intervention in business and daily life.  

Lincoln had called America "the last, best hope on earth." Had the American system failed its people? The progressives did not think so. They believed "the cure for the evils of democracy is more democracy." In other words, more people needed to get involved in politics and fight for the passage of laws to secure better lives for the masses.

Belief in "rugged individualism" was changing. Progressives wanted government to aid in controlling political machines, regulating businesses, protecting the health of its citizens, and providing free, compulsory education.

Women were at the forefront of the progressive movement. Women, such as Ida Tarbell, made great contributions. Tarbell wrote *History of the Standard Oil Company*, which shed light on the crooked dealings between the mighty Rockefellers and railroad companies.

By the late 1800's women were beginning to gain more leisure time--not in their day-to-day lives, but in the total number of years devoted to motherhood. In his book *Her, Self: Sex Roles in Modern America*, Peter Gabriel Filene explains:
Whereas in the mid-eighteenth century the median age at which a woman gave birth to her last child was thirty-eight or older, in 1900 it was less than thirty-three. Correspondingly, the median age of an eighteenth century woman when her last child married was sixty, as compared to fifty-five in 1900. (Meanwhile, the median age at marriage remained almost unchanged.) Over the century, she had "gained" almost five years.

With their newfound leisure time, women in progressive America (1890-1920) began joining civic women's groups. According to the General Federation of Women's Clubs, more than one million females had joined some sort of women's club by 1915. The goals of these clubs were widely varied. However, each was devoted to the betterment of its members and to society in general. In some clubs, women studied the classics of literature and poetry. Other clubs sought to reform the morals of an ailing society. For instance, the Female Moral Reform Society aimed to save prostitutes from their lives of sin.

Black women also formed social clubs. The social ills experienced by blacks included inferior, segregated housing and segregated schools. The schools for the blacks met for an average of only four months a year, as compared to a common ten-month school term for white children. Most colleges were closed to black women. By 1890, only thirty American black women had earned college degrees.

The black women's clubs implemented many community programs. They bought land for schools, built kindergartens and day care centers, trained teachers, provided technical
training, built homes for the elderly, provided information about nutrition and child development to young mothers, taught cooking and sewing classes, and opened small libraries. 82

Although many white women's groups were working toward the same goals as the black women's groups, the white groups often refused to unite with the black groups. Racial tensions outweighed these groups' desires to reach their goals. 83

VIEWS OF WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

At the start of the twentieth century, traditional views of women's roles met many new challenges. Three of the most influential individuals to challenge traditional female roles were Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Sigmund Freud, and Margaret Sanger.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman

Gilman was most interested in gaining women's economic equality. In her book Women and Economics (1898), Gilman spoke out against women's economic dependence upon men. Gilman stated that humankind was "the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation." A woman's work in the home allows her husband extended free-time to devote to his career. Yet, between two women married to men earning equal income, the diligent, skilled homemaker fares no better than the lazy, unskilled homemaker. Gilman believed that women's restricted role would in the end cost
society "in limiting her ideas, her information, her thought-processes, and power of judgment. . . But this is innocent in action compared with her restricted expression, the denial of the freedom to act." For a society to continue to thrive and grow, its women must be given the opportunity to better themselves economically.84

Gilman, however, stood fast to traditional views of marriage, motherhood, and sex. She believed wifehood and motherhood to be "the normal status of women, and whatever is right in women's new position must not militate against these essentials." She spoke of motherhood as "the common duty and the common glory of womanhood." Gilman viewed sex as only appropriate for procreation, not recreation.83

The Nation terms Gilman's Women and Economics "the most significant utterance on the subject [of women] since Mills' Subjection of Women." For the succeeding two decades, Gilman remained a leading intellectual of the women's movement. Her activities included wide lecturing, writing articles, authoring nine books, and editing and publishing The Forerunner. The Forerunner dealt with women's role in industrialized society.86

Sigmund Freud

Sigmund Freud shocked many with his views of sexuality and its underlying pervasiveness in nearly all human activity. Among his works on this topic are Civilized Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness, Interpretation of Dreams, and Three
Contributions to the Theory of Sex. Freud advocated increased sexual freedom as a means of attaining improved mental health. 87

The following excerpt by Robert L. Daniel sheds light on some of Freud's influence:

The popular press began to present him [Freud] as "a wizard, a surgeon of the soul who had a secret formula for ending mental disease and restoring social efficiency overnight. . . ." But his most receptive audience consisted of the "Young Intellectuals," avant-garde literati and bohemians such as Mabel Dodge Luhan, Lincoln Steffens, and Max Eastman who used his ideas as a "spearhead in the onslaught against Puritanism."

With a revolt against the genteel tradition in literature already underway, Floyd Dell, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, Edgar Lee Masters, and Eugene O'Neill exploited the repression of the sex drive by parental authority and social convention.

Freud believed in inherent differences in ability between men and women. In his "The Psychology of Women" (1933), he airs his view that women are biophysically inferior to men and less intelligent. He suggests that men can be aided by an analyst to fulfill their potential. Yet, women must accept their inferiority and resign themselves to their lot. Freud was positive that anatomy was destiny. 89

Freud was sure there was a direct link between sexuality and mental health. Uninhibited expression of sexuality was necessary for stable mental health. 90

Margaret Sanger

Margaret Sanger was the sixth child in her family. As a child, she often played with the children of the wealthier parents in her Corning, New York, neighborhood. At an early
age, she saw a difference between the upper-class families and the families of the middle and lower-classes. 91

For instance, the upper-class mothers rarely had more than two or three children, as compared to five or six children in lower-class households. These upper-class women had time to play with their children. Furthermore, these women seemed healthier at age forty than the middle and lower-class women at age thirty. 92

Margaret taught first grade before gaining an interest in medicine. She then studied nursing at White Plains Hospital, north of New York City. 93

After her marriage to William Sanger in 1902, Margaret Sanger devoted more and more of her time to nursing. On New York's lower east side, her work was in high demand. She delivered many babies in run-down, over-crowded tenements. Often the women would come to Sanger for advice on how to prevent future pregnancies. Sanger knew little on the subject and few birth control methods were available. 94

To Sanger's horror, many of these women underwent crude abortions and often died. Sanger was determined to end this cycle of poverty and pregnancy. 95

Sanger's first series of newspaper articles, "What Every Girl Should Know," was published in November 1912. This series discussed changes undergone by women's bodies during maturation, what little was known about venereal disease, and the female reproductive system. Furthermore, Sanger's articles promoted a healthy view toward sex and sexuality. 96
Sanger ran into trouble with the Comstock Act of 1873. The Comstock Act was created to prohibit the mailing of obscene and indecent materials. The newspaper which ran Sanger's articles was warned that its mailing permit would be revoked if it continued to run the Sanger material.97

To challenge the Comstock Act, which she believed to be unjust, Sanger defiantly began publishing her own pamphlets.98

In her search for information on birth control, Sanger went to France. In France contraception was not taboo. The French had better and more abundant contraceptive devices available than did the U.S. Sanger found the information she needed.99

In March 1914, Sanger's monthly newspaper, Woman Rebel, appeared. This paper promoted the notion that a woman's body is her property. Birth control was supported on principle. However, nothing was said about contraceptive methods. Although it was a great success, the paper was found to be unmailable.100

Thus, Sanger created a pamphlet entitled "Family Limitation." In this, she discussed modern birth control methods.101

A short time later, Sanger fled to England to give herself time to rally support against the Comstock Act which interpreted contraception information as obscene material. While in Europe, Sanger continued to research their birth control methods.102
In January 1916, she went to court in the U.S. to challenge the Comstock Act. Sanger's supporters packed the courtroom. Finally, the government dropped its case due to the mounting public support for Sanger. 103

During a three-month campaign, Sanger lectured nationwide and organized birth control leagues across the country. She met many obstacles, including her arrest. However, these difficulties merely provided Sanger with more publicity for her cause. 104

Upon her return to New York, Sanger and her sister Ethel Byrne established America's first birth control clinic (in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn). Here Sanger and Byrne were arrested after advising an undercover policewoman. They were convicted for breaking a section of the state penal code which prohibited the offering of contraceptive information by anyone for any reason. 105

Finally [in 1916] Margaret's appeal was decided. While she was still held guilty, the appellate judge made a landmark decision that changed the entire application of the laws from then on. The section that permitted doctors to prescribe contraceptives to prevent "disease" was expanded to include any sickness or disorder or condition that might affect health, in addition to its original purpose of protecting against venereal disease. Doctors, at least, were now allowed to give birth control advice to married women in order to protect their health. The way was now open for the creation of birth control clinics. 106
WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR SUFFRAGE

In 1869, two major women's suffrage groups came into existence. One was headed by Stanton and Anthony, the other by Lucy Stone. 107

Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). This group supported anyone whom they believed could help them get the vote for women. The group supported rights for female prostitutes and helped women's labor unions. They even became involved in various divorce proceedings. 108

The dealings of the National Woman Suffrage Association did not go over well with the more conservative suffragettes. These women joined the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) led by Lucy Stone. 109

Finally, in 1890, the two groups settled their differences and combined to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). By this time, however, several powerful forces arose to oppose the suffrage movement. Between 1890 and 1914, this opposition increased dramatically. 110

Four sources composed most of this opposition. First, opposition came from brewers and sellers of liquor. They were afraid that if women got the vote the saloons would be shut down. (Many women had become involved in the temperance movement.) 111
Second, owners of big business opposed women's suffrage. They did not want women to influence the passage of child labor laws or fair competition laws.\textsuperscript{112}

Third, white southerners opposed women's suffrage. They did not want to double the votes of blacks by allowing black women to vote.\textsuperscript{113}

Fourth, opposition came from female anti-suffragists. These women did not want female roles to change. They were happy with the status quo.\textsuperscript{114}

Because of her increasing age, Susan B. Anthony recruited two younger women to lead the National American Woman Suffrage Association: Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw. Catt led successful campaigns for women's suffrage in Colorado and Idaho.\textsuperscript{115}

Carrie Catt, a woman with remarkable organizing skills, resigned the leadership of the NAWSA in 1905 to care for her fatally ill husband. Her successor, Anna Howard Shaw, though a magnificent speaker, was not a good organizer and was more interested in securing the suffrage state-by-state rather than by a federal amendment, so that the NAWSA failed to capitalize on the reform spirit of the progressive movement. Between 1896 and 1910, the suffrage movement, afflicted by lack-luster leadership and an aging membership, passed through "the doldrums."\textsuperscript{116}

In 1914, the Congressional Union came into existence under the leadership of Alice Paul. Alice Paul, Harriet Stanton Blatch, and Lucy Burns were the organizers of the Congressional Union. All three of these women had been active in the militant English women's suffrage movement.\textsuperscript{117}

Alice Paul had initially been appointed by Anna Howard Shaw to lobby in Washington, D.C. for the National American
Woman Suffrage Association and its cause. However, Paul broke away from NAWSA and formed her own more militant suffrage group in Washington, D.C.--the Congressional Union.  

Suffragists were very serious about their cause. They held demonstrations and marches. They spoke on street corners to gain support for women's suffrage. Ultimately over two million women participated in the suffrage movement.

"We believed you had to get to the people who weren't in the least interested in suffrage," stated a suffragette. "For instance, we spoke on street corners every night of the week. I remember the little soapboxes with candles on them, which every suffragette carried out and plunked down on the curbstone."

Another suffragette recalled, "that was the day of the soapbox. Every evening when you went downtown every corner was occupied."

In 1914, Carrie Chapman Catt again gained control of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She drafted her "Winning Plan." Catt believed the fight for women's suffrage would be won by campaigning in both state and national legislatures simultaneously.

Catt set up intensive campaigning in what she believed to be strategic states. She also commanded a group of suffragists who went around Washington, D.C., knocking on the doors of state representatives and senators to plead their case for women's suffrage. "Catt acknowledged that she
did not know whether the vote was a right, a duty, or a privilege, but that 'whatever it is, women want it.'"\textsuperscript{124}

In 1916, Alice Paul's Congressional Union formed the National Woman's Party (NWP). In January 1917, the NWP started silent pickets in front of the White House. The picketers carried signs such as "Mr. President, What Will You Do for Woman Suffrage? How Long Must We Wait for Liberty."\textsuperscript{125}

Just as Congress was about to begin debates on the issue of women's suffrage, the news came to Washington that the Lusitania had been sunk. President Wilson declared war on Germany. The issue of women's suffrage took a back seat to the war effort.\textsuperscript{126}

Many women joined the war effort. Nearly three million new female workers were employed by the end of 1918. They worked in food, textile, and war industries. Furthermore, women were employed as streetcar conductors, radio operators, and as workers in steel mills and logging camps.\textsuperscript{127}

Still other Americans did not want the United States to become involved in the war. Leading female anti-war activists were framed, jailed, and sometimes deported.

Eighteen-year-old Molly Steimer was sentenced to twenty years for distributing anti-war leaflets. Socialist orator Kate Richards O'Hare was given five years in state prison for "discouraging enlistment."\textsuperscript{128}

When the nation entered World War I, the suffragists' picket line in front of the White House continued. The picketers' fight became more intense. One sign referred to
President Wilson as "Kaiser Wilson." As the picketing continued, hostile crowds would collect to taunt and harass the female picketers. To avoid violence, the police intervened. However, instead of dismissing the crowds, the police arrested the picketers. In total, one hundred fourteen women were arrested, and sixty-six served terms in Virginia's Occoquan Workhouse or in the District of Columbia Jail. Those who were imprisoned served a standard thirty day term.129

Shortly after each arrest, more women always came in to take their place in the White House picket line. The leaders of the National Woman's Party insisted on being treated as political prisoners. They went on hunger strikes in protest of their being incarcerated. Consequently, these women were force-fed.130

Immediately, news of the force-feedings spread. Dora Lewis, a wealthy Philadelphia woman, wrote to her family, "Miss Paul and Rose Winslow are being forcibly fed--inhuman and abominable." Alice Paul was promptly taken to a psychiatric hospital for examination. In his report, the examining psychiatrist declared Paul to be sane but stubborn with a will of iron. He wrote of Paul, "She would die for her cause, but she would never give up."131

Many of the incarcerated women were from wealthy and prominent families. For this reason, their imprisonment was big news. The repercussions from public protest were felt in the White House. To ease tensions, President Wilson
pardoned all of the incarcerated National Woman's Party members. The women, however, refused to accept the pardon. Finally, in November 1917, all of the prisoners were unconditionally released. A week later, the House of Representatives declared January 10, 1918 as the date to vote on the women's suffrage amendment.

Fifty-six men who had said "nay" to suffrage three years earlier changed their stand. Thus, on January 10, 1918, by a vote of two hundred seventy-four to one hundred thirty-six—exactly the necessary two-thirds margin—the House of Representatives endorsed the Anthony Amendment.

Next, the amendment had to be approved by the Senate. Yet, this did not occur. The amendment lost by two votes.

Carrie Chapman Catt was highly disappointed by the Senate's lack of support for women's suffrage. Thus, she decided to act. Of the senators who had voted "nay" to women's suffrage, four were up for re-election in November 1918. Catt sent her orders out. These senators were to be defeated in the election. Through the determination of suffragists in these senators' states, two of the four senators were defeated. Meanwhile in state politics, women had won the right to vote in South Dakota, Michigan, and Oklahoma.

Nevertheless, the National Woman's Party would not rest until Wilson himself used his influence to cause Congress to vote in favor of the amendment. The women kept up their demonstrations, including burning the president in effigy and burning his words publicly, and they were arrested time after time until the passage of the amendment was at last assured.
A former suffragist declared, "It was the day after they [suffragists] burned Woodrow Wilson in effigy that he decided to go up to the capitol and ask for women's suffrage."\textsuperscript{137}

Another suffragist claims,

There is no doubt about it that that precipitated the president's decision to bring the matter before Congress. I'm very sure that if Alice Paul had not carried on those demonstrations, it would have gone on years more before it ever got to Congress.\textsuperscript{138}

Now it was only a matter of time before the Nineteenth Amendment would be passed. On June 4, 1919, the Senate passed the amendment. All that was needed now was the ratification of the amendment by thirty-six states. This occurred on August 26, 1920.\textsuperscript{139}

Alice Paul must be credited for bringing the techniques of nonviolence, peaceful protest, and the acceptance of prison terms and suffering to play on the issue of women's rights for the first time since experiments with nonresistance in the days of Lucretia Mott, and to an extent never attempted before.\textsuperscript{140}

One hundred forty-four years after the Declaration of Independence, one hundred years after the birth of Susan B. Anthony, and fifty-seven years after the Emancipation Proclamation, the dream had become reality--women's suffrage was law.\textsuperscript{141}

WOMEN'S STRUGGLE FOR EQUALITY (1920-1960)

After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Alice Paul wasted no time before introducing an equal rights amendment (ERA). She was convinced that only through such an amendment could equality of the sexes ever become reality.
In 1920, she began efforts to form a women's coalition to work with the National Woman's Party on ERA.\textsuperscript{142}

In July 1923, Paul re-enacted the 1848 convention at Seneca Falls. Here she publicly introduced her equal rights amendment. Paul called it the "Lucretia Mott Amendment." In the fall of 1923, this amendment was introduced to Congress. From 1923 to 1972, Paul struggled tirelessly for Congressional approval of ERA. Year after year, Paul and her supporters lobbied for ERA at every Congressional session.\textsuperscript{143}

In an interview at the age of ninety-one, Alice Paul spoke of her singlemindedness in the struggle for female equality:

> Women are still voiceless. We have to wait until complete equality becomes a reality. I grew up in a Quaker family and the Quakers believe in the equality of the sexes. It is hard to grow up in such a family and never hear about anything else. When you put your hand to the plow, you can't put it down until you reach the end of the row.\textsuperscript{144}

Soon after women won the right to vote in 1920, it appeared that they may be actually headed toward equality in economics as well. Women had proven they were capable of doing men's work during World War I. Many factory safety laws and minimum wage laws had been passed by state legislatures.\textsuperscript{145}

Eight million American women were working for wages by 1920 in four hundred thirty-seven different jobs. By all outward appearances, women seemed to have gained economic equality.\textsuperscript{146}
However, things were not exactly as they seemed. In his book *The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970*, historian William H. Chafe declares, "World War I produced no substantial changes in . . . women's . . . status." 147

He cites several facts to support this statement. First of all, most women who worked in nontraditional women's jobs during World War I were forced to give up these jobs at the war's end. Second, only 9 percent of female workers actually earned pay equal to that of men performing the same jobs--even though laws requiring equal pay for equal work existed. Third, approximately 47 percent of all college students in 1920 were women. In 1930, women composed only about 44 percent of all college students. However, 75 percent of the women who worked at professional jobs worked in traditionally female occupations, such as teaching and nursing. Fourth, the percentage of female workers dropped during the Depression from 14 percent to 12 percent. Finally, women working in industry worked for half to two-thirds the wages earned by men. 148

During the Great Depression of the 1930's, the number of women in the labor force was greatly reduced. An effort to exclude married women from the labor force was attempted. White middle-class women--in particular school teachers--highly objected to this. Consequently, the National Business and Professional Women's Clubs endorsed the ERA in 1937. 149
The ERA gained support quickly. In 1940, the Republican National Convention voted in favor of the principles of an equal rights amendment.150

Then on December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Overnight the United States was once again thrust into war. World War II caused a huge shift in the labor force. Women were again needed to replace men in the workplace.

Hiring women to work in war industries became highly glamourized by the government and the media. A newspaper advertisement read:

Women who have already responded to the call will tell you that their job in a war plant gives them a deep sense of satisfaction—that grand feeling that they are doing their full part to help speed the day of victory.151

A radio script urged "treat a woman who takes a factory job as an important person, honor her as we honor a soldier."152

An article in the American Magazine entitled "Girl on the Midnight Shift" read, "...working in war industry has made her a new, more self-reliant person. She has more to spend on clothes and cosmetics...has more dates and more friends."153 An Office of War Industries (OWI) fact sheet declared, "Every idle machine may mean a dead soldier."154

During the war, two million two hundred thousand women joined the labor force by taking office jobs. Manufacturing jobs attracted another two-and-a-half million women to join the workforce.155
Although the War Manpower Commission repeatedly urged employers to pay women wages equal to that of men's wages for the same work, many businesses avoided this. 156

One company paid less for the same work because they gave women an extra rest period. Some companies had one pay scale for "light" work and another for "heavy" work. Whatever work women did was automatically called "light" and was paid less. 157

Once again a strong demand for an ERA resurfaced:

Along with a demand for an equal-pay law, feminists renewed discussion of an ERA. The efforts of employers during the thirties to limit women's employment led many businesses and professional women to support an ERA. In 1943 a new formula—"Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex"—was introduced to Congress with the endorsement of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, the National Association of Women Lawyers, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and the American Medical Women's Association. Borrowing language from the fifteenth amendment, this new version of an ERA focused on legal rights rather than rights in general. It aimed at securing "equal protection of the laws." 158

Alma Lutz, an activist for the adoption of the ERA, asked sarcastically, "Are women an integral part of a democratic government or are they a class apart unfit for the rights and freedoms that apply to men?" 159

In 1943, the House Judiciary Committee stopped the ERA in committee. In the November 1943 issue of Independent Woman, Alice Manning called the vote "a sort of Pearl Harbor of the Equal Rights Amendment" 160 (from the article "We Buckle on Our Armour and Return to the Fray," p. 22).

In 1944, the ERA was once again "killed" by the House Judiciary Committee. The ERA was again an issue in 1950.
Yet, again it was defeated. Throughout the fifties, the ERA surfaced over and over. Alice Paul continued to promote it. Eleanor Roosevelt fought against discriminatory state laws.161

On average, women in 1945 were still only earning 65 percent of the wages that men received for performing the same jobs.162 For this reason, equal-pay bills were introduced into Congress by Mary Norton, Wayne Morse, and Claude Pepper in 1945. Many industrial employers were still refusing to pay women wages equal to that of men. A common belief that women could only do "light" work perpetuated this inequality. The belief was that women really did not perform at the same high level as men. Congress failed to enact the equal pay bills.163

After the war, women were expected to relinquish their jobs to the men returning home from war. However, many women stayed in the workforce. The war years can be viewed as the turning point in acceptable work roles of women.

The 1950's, however, brought a reglorification of the housewife. In their book Modern Women: The Lost Sex (1947), psychoanalyst Marynia Farnham and sociologist Ferdinand Lundberg discussed the dilemma of the proper role of women. They declared that for women to be truly happy and fulfilled they should have more children and play a bigger role in their early education.164 The following is an excerpt from the book:
While fertility is not necessarily proof of happiness, childlessness does appear to indicate sufficient unhappiness to lead to divorce in the great majority of cases. Whatever the reasons, advanced, careful study shows that the real cause of the decline is to be found in the attitude and disposition of women. The birth rate is falling because many women are disposed to have no children or to have very few. At the basis of their refusal, as analysis reveals, are various emotional disorders provoked by factors in the environment. People who voluntarily refrain from having children are deviating from normal behavior.

Of course, books such as this greatly angered feminists. In response to Farnham and Lundberg's book, feminist Betty Friedan wrote her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Her powerful feminist beliefs helped cultivate overt feminism in the 1960's. In the following excerpt from her book, Friedan attacks a commonly held belief of woman's role:

For the very able women, who has the ability to create culturally as well as biologically, the only possible rationalization is to convince herself—as the new mystique tries so hard to convince her—that the minute physical details of child care are indeed mystically created; that her children will be tragically deprived if she is not there every minute; that the dinner she gives the boss' wife is as crucial to her husband's career as the case he fights in court or the problem he solves in the laboratory. And because husband and children are soon out of the house most of the day, she must keep on having new babies, or somehow make the minutiae of housework itself important enough, necessary enough, hard enough, creative enough to justify her very existence.

Of course, many feminists kept fighting for the ERA. When in 1953, the ERA once again came before Congress, it contained a serious drawback—the Hayden rider. The Hayden rider's "purpose" was to "safeguard protective legislation for women." In reality, it counteracted the ERA's basic principle.
The ERA came before Congress again in 1954, 1956, and 1957. Each time it was soundly defeated—even in 1957 with President Eisenhower's endorsement.168

In 1960, the Kennedy administration unwittingly "focused national attention on questions of women's rights and the need for an ERA." In the hope of proving an ERA unnecessary, Congreeman Emanuel Cellar proposed a Presidential Commission on the Legal Status of Women. To head this study, Eleanor Roosevelt was appointed chairperson.169

Roosevelt had long been a powerful force in the United States. As well as being a writer and lecturer, she was a U.S. delegate to the United Nations from 1945-1952. She also served in 1961.170

In 1963, the commission's report, "American Woman," was published (the same year of Friedan's The Feminine Mystique). The facts disclosed were as follows:

Most women who worked did so to earn a living; the status of women in the labor market was low; the educational level of women was low; the law discriminated against women at many points.

However, the commission argued that women needed no equal rights amendment because their rights were actually protected by the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.171

Roosevelt's committee urged Congress to act. Congress did by approving an equal-pay-for-equal-work law. However, in reality, this law did little.172

Meanwhile, several states set up state commissions to investigate women's status. These states met together once
a year in Washington, D.C. Yet, in 1966, many women were angry and discouraged with what little practical use the committees were. The laws to help women were virtually ineffective and ignored by many businesses. 173

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE BLACKS' CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The revival of a radical feminist liberation movement came about in the 1960's as a direct result of the blacks' civil rights movement. Many of the women involved in the blacks' civil rights movement became active feminists. 174

Out of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) sprang the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The SNCC's first major action was the formation of the "Freedom Rides." Freedom riders, both black and white, boarded buses in Washington, D.C. The integrated buses were to travel throughout the South. 175

However, the freedom riders soon faced angry, violent mobs. They were badly beaten in Rock Hill, South Carolina; Anniston, Alabama; and Birmingham, Alabama. Women, as well as men, were active in the freedom rides. Black and white women courageously endured their beatings. Their's were some of the first voices to insist upon the continuation of the rides despite the violence. Women were also heavily involved in the sit-ins and other demonstrations for the rights of blacks. 176

The SNCC's largest effort for civil rights occurred in 1964. The task was to register as many blacks as possible
for the vote. During 1964 and 1965, many white women (about four hundred fifty in all) from northern universities went south to join in this undertaking. 177

From these experiences in the blacks' civil rights movement, foundations for a women's liberation movement were laid. First, women realized that they were not the weak, docile creatures that society declared them to be. Second, women discovered that their organizational abilities were as strong and as useful to the movement as that of men. Third, women volunteers became acquainted with truly strong, independent women. 178

One of these women was Anne Braden. Braden had been an activist for the rights of blacks for years. In the mid-1950's, she had sold her house to a black family (only to find it later bombed). Furthermore, she was arrested for sedition. 179

Despite the set-backs, Braden remained a fighter for civil rights. In 1964, she worked ten to twelve hours daily for civil rights while at the same time raising three children and running her household. 180

Other valiant women were the "mamas" of the movement. These were older black women who housed and fed volunteers at the risk of losing their own lives. 181

Yet even in the civil rights organizations, women were treated as second-class. They were expected to type up important decisions, keep and file records, but to have no say in the formulation of decisions. 182
Women volunteers practically ran the central office in Atlanta and proved to be just as brave as men, but they were allowed almost no positions of leadership. It was the men's job to make all the decisions at "democratic" meetings; it was the women's job to type up the decisions, file them, and obey them. In larger cities where volunteers lived together in "freedom houses," the men automatically expected the women to do all the cooking, cleaning, and washing. One woman stated her view: "We didn't come down here to work as a maid this summer, we came down to work in the field of civil right." 183

Many women felt that somehow they had caused the men to treat them unfairly. One white female volunteer recalled:

I always dreaded Saturday nights, because we'd all meet in our apartment and drink wine and then when the black guys got a little drunk they'd pour out all their hatred--racial hatred--at us. But the white guys never got it--sometimes they'd join them--it was always directed at us "white bitches." I couldn't deal with it. It was just so painful. It tore me up inside. 184

The following came from the writings of another volunteer:

One thing I'm finding very difficult in Mississippi is being a northern white girl. . .first of all, the men are mad because you're a white girl, because white men have been messing around with Negro women for so long that blacks don't really know how to react. . .they feel as if they can run roughshod over you. . .One of the things they do is they put her behind a desk and then get angry at her, because she's trying to organize, or trying to do something. And they tell her she's no good, because they can't cope with the black-white problem. . .I find I have to do twice as much to prove myself, you know, first, just as a person, to get them to stop thinking about my being white. It's very difficult. I find a lot of white people coming down sort of cower under these Negroes and they get stepped on. Somebody was stepping over me, and somebody pointed it out to me that I should act like a person and not like a coward, you know. I did. . .I just stood up and said, "Cut this out! You can't boss me
around just because I'm a woman!" And I stood up and was a person. I'm me. And people started accepting me, but it's very difficult. 185

Black women could more easily see that power was being withheld from women in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee due to sexual discrimination rather than racism. Thus, in 1964, black women held a sit-in to protest the SNCC's exclusion of women from important decision making. 186

Finally, several women in the SNCC banded together to write a paper discussing the sex discrimination by the organization. These women, Ruby Doris Smith, Casey Hayden, Mary King, and Mary Varela, listed eleven areas in which the SNCC gave women subordinate roles to men. For instance, typing was automatically a woman's job. Women were assigned to do typing before they were ever asked to discuss their other skills. 187 The paper stated: "Women are the crucial factor that keeps the movement running on a day-to-day basis. Yet they are not given equal say...when it comes to day-to-day decision making." 188

However, the general response to the women's statements was not positive. Stokely Carmichael summed up a prevalent male view when he said, "What is the position of women in the SNCC? The only position for women in the SNCC is prone." 189

The SNCC began to change in 1965. Blacks in the SNCC began resenting the whites' involvement in the organization. Many long-time white staffers were forced to leave. The
SNCC turned toward becoming a more militant, aggressive group emphasizing "black power." 190

Many veteran white staffers of the SNCC, such as Casey Hayden and Mary King, moved on to join other protest groups. They joined the liberal "New Left" and organizations such as Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). The SDS organized to fight racism, poverty, and U.S. involvement in Vietnam. 191

As in the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) women's roles were subordinate to men's in the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). At a 1965 SDS convention, no papers written by women were presented before the group. Women were rarely speakers at the meetings. However, women always prepared the food and cleaned up afterwards. When no women were nominated to hold office, Carol McEldowney threatened to form a protest group until she was "bought off" with a position on the National Council. 192

Yet, McEldowney did organize a meeting during the convention to have open discussion about women's roles in the SDS. One question raised was "Why are women always assigned to do the chore work: cooking, cleaning, and typing?" No answer to this question was ever given by the SDS leadership. 193

A National Conference for New Politics was organized in the summer of 1967 to unite the many leftist groups. At this conference a women's caucus met to discuss women's roles in protesting the Vietnam War. Some radical feminists
declared that women must first secure their own rights before concentrating their efforts into other causes. In this atmosphere, Jo Freeman, Shulamith Firestone, and other women met to write a militant resolution demanding that women be given 51 percent of the convention votes. Their reasoning: women composed 51 percent of the American population.194

At first the resolutions committee did not take these women seriously. Yet later, they said the women could present their ideas only after the reading of ten other "more important" resolutions.195 Finally, the women's turn came. As they approached the microphones, the following events, as described by a woman present, occurred:

This little kid, smaller than I am, rushes in front of me to the microphone, raises his hand, is recognized and the first thing he says is "ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to speak to you today about the most oppressed group in America, the American Indian." Shurlie Firestone and about three or four other people...were ready to pull the place apart. Then William Pepper patted Shurlie on the head and said, "Move along little girl; we have more important issues to talk about here than women's liberation." That was the genesis. We had a meeting the next week in Chicago.196

These women next published various articles stating their views on women's oppression. Word spread quickly. Within a year, each major city had one or more "women's liberation groups."197

One of the most active women's liberation groups is the National Organization of Women (NOW). Betty Friedan was elected NOW's first president in 1966. NOW was organized to fight against discrimination of women, sex-role
stereotypes, and exploitation of women by the mass media. By 1972, NOW had over fifty thousand members. However, some feminists believed NOW to be too conservative in its approach to women's problems. A more radical group in New York City, the Redstockings, published the following in Manifesto:

Women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives.

We identify the agents of our oppression as men. All men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. All men have oppressed women.

We do not need to change ourselves but to change men.


The struggle for passage of an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) continued into the 1970's. ERA activists encountered increasing difficulties in the mid-1970's. Within the first two years of the ERA's submission by Congress, thirty states had ratified the ERA bill. Then ratification by the states slowed down. In 1977, Indiana became the thirty-fifth and last state to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. No more states could be swayed to support the cause. In 1979, however, the bill for the ERA was granted a three-year extension to secure ratification.
Despite this, the ERA never gained enough support to become an actual amendment. The following excerpt from Robert L. Daniel's book *American Women in the Twentieth Century: The Festival of Life* explains more clearly the ERA's status from 1979-1982:

Despite action by Congress that extended the deadline for ratification of the ERA to June 30, 1982, the pro-ERA forces were unable to regain the initiative. NOW [National Organization of Women] focused its efforts on seven states--Georgia, Florida, Illinois, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Virginia--in which approval hinged on a few votes in the legislature. But to no avail. Preoccupied with budget cuts and legislative reapportionment, state legislators were leery of embracing a position that might provoke a voter backlash against them. Further, in 1980 the Republican national convention, at the behest of the Reagan faction, endorsed a plank that called for "equal rights and equal opportunities for women" while leaving the fate of the ERA to the states "without federal interference or pressure."

In the midst of campaigns to get the needed ratifications, U.S. District Judge Marion Callister--a one-time Mormon Church official--held that Congress had acted unconstitutionally in extending the deadline to ratify the ERA. He further ruled that Idaho, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Nebraska were within their rights in rescinding their acts of ratification of the ERA. The pro-ERA forces were stunned, and while they did not abandon the fight, for the most part they grasped for straws. NOW pressed the U.S. Department of Justice to appeal Judge Callister's decision, but the Reagan leadership declined to do so. As time ran out in June 1982, Mariwyn Heath for the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs recognized the realities of the moment: "I do not think a reintroduced ERA can pass the Senate as it is presently constituted." An ecstatic Phyllis Schlafly announced, "The ERA's dead for now and forever in this century."
WOMEN'S STATUS IN THE UNITED STATES

Much has changed in our country over its two hundred twelve-year history. The status of American women has changed also, but how much? To answer this question a brief review of women's historical status is necessary.

In colonial times and throughout the 1800's women were basically considered the property of their husbands. In colonial America and the early 1800's married women owned no property themselves (their husbands gained all of their wives' assets).

Wage-earning occupations were extremely limited for women of the 1700's to the mid-1800's. Voting rights for women were virtually nonexistent and did not exist for any kind of national election.

Women of the 1850's to the early 1900's could work in factories— that is as unskilled labor, for starvation wages, and possibly seventy hours a week in unsafe conditions. Women of the 1800's to the early 1900's were seen as the moral force of their families. These women were to always be virtuous, patient, and understanding. Furthermore, motherhood was viewed as the ultimate state of grandeur for a woman to attain.

After World War II, female workers were more widely accepted in non-traditional female occupations. However, they were still, more often than not, paid lower wages than men who performed the same jobs.
In the 1960's, women's discontent with their economic and social status led to a wide-spread revival of the feminist movement. Many women would no longer sit idle and accept the status quo.

So what exactly is women's status in the United States today? Socially, women are still often viewed as mindless sex-objects. They are not viewed as complete people by advertisers, television and movie producers, and, sadly, many average citizens (both male and female). Stokely Carmichael's statement about women's position in the SNCC pretty well sums up a prevalent view of women's role in society: "The only position for women. . .is prone."\(^{202}\)

Economically women today trail along behind men. Sex-role stereotypes still make it extremely difficult for women to attain positions of power in business. Equal wages for equal work are still nonexistent for many women. However, this is changing.

Politically women today share an equal voice with men in the voting booth. Women in politics, however, lag behind men. Again, women suffer from prevalent misconceptions about female capabilities and intelligence.

I believe I may not live to see a female United States president. I hope to live long enough to see and be a part of the passage of an equal rights amendment.
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