

The Personal Is Political

The Second World War marked a major change in the understanding that many women had of their citizenship and especially their economic rights. In response to patriotic appeals, some six million women, three-fourths of them married, entered the paid labor force, joining those who had been there throughout the difficult Depression decade. Wartime exigencies made practices differentiating between married and single women in job assignments appear inefficient or retrograde. Because the emerging civil rights movement lobbied for and won new non-discrimination rules in hiring and pay, African American women and Latinas found new economic opportunities. For the first time, women wore the uniforms of the (racially segregated) armed forces and served under military discipline. Chinese-born women benefited from Congress's 1943 ending of exclusion laws, designed to reward China for its wartime alliance with the United States. Along with Chinese-born men, they could now become citizens. Japanese American women and men living on the West Coast, on the other hand, even if they were American citizens, suffered forcible removal from their homes and internment in remote, hastily built camps. As in earlier times, the war and its aftermath brought new pressures for equal rights and prompted fresh ideas about what those who sacrificed for the common good had earned. But, as with earlier wars, the question remained whether women's patriotic service would spark changes that were permanent or temporary.

For many women, wartime gains provided a yardstick against which they measured the post-war world, and they found it wanting. With the

return of veterans to civilian life, three-fourths of women workers planned to remain in the labor force but faced policies that relegated them anew to low-paying "women's" jobs with few opportunities for advancement. The contrast between wartime opportunity and post-war discrimination sharpened their awareness of women's rights issues. During the 1950s, however, overt discussion of women's rights remained muted, in part because a Cold War-inspired anticommunist Red Scare targeted progressive causes and people, in part because popular culture tied women and femininity closely to domestic roles. What Betty Friedan termed a "feminine mystique" created a surface appearance of feminine conformity and quiescence. But beneath that surface, a great deal was changing. Activist women whose commitments included labor union membership, civil rights advocacy, grassroots political and community organizing, critiques of conventional heterosexuality, antinuclear agitation, and peace protests formed key constituencies for a women's rights feminism that coalesced during the early 1960s around questions of women's legal "status" and economic and educational opportunities. Younger women, many of them deeply engaged in the civil rights, student protest, and antiwar movements, came together in the late 1960s under the banner of "women's liberation." Women's rights and women's liberation groups often disagreed, especially over how to define and achieve the elusive goal of "equality," and indeed whether equality should be their central goal at all. But together, they created new feminisms that challenged existing legal, social, cultural, and economic institutions and exerted a transformative influence on American life.

Women's Rights in the Eras of Wartime and the "Feminine Mystique"

The U.S. entry into the Second World War opened new opportunities for women workers. Even before the War Labor Board in September 1942 issued an opinion providing that women doing "men's jobs" would get "men's pay," women workers pressed for equitable compensation and won. An article from the Federated Press bureau in May of that year summarized the results of one such case.

"Back wages totaling \$55,690 were awarded . . . under the Michigan law requiring equal pay for equal work without discrimination 'on the basis of sex only.' The ruling was made on May 28, 1942.

This is the first court action carried through to a verdict under the law which had been previously been upheld by the state supreme

court. Many settlements out of court had been made in such cases however.

The back pay is shared by 29 women employees [sic] of Olds Motor Works, a General Motors plant in Lansing. They had done men's work in the paint shop, small-press work and on inspection for six years. . . .

Attorney Jack Tucker, . . . general counsel of the UAW-CIO, said in December that the decision would stimulate unions to press for equal rates for women members in revising their contracts."

Wartime contingencies also led women to challenge long-standing practices differentiating between married and single women in employment. The *Boston Herald*, February 18, 1944, covered a school board meeting at which a married Boston teacher sought to overturn a policy requiring women to resign upon marriage.

"Appeals for recognition of merit, rather than marital status, as the basis for retention of teachers and pleas for maintenance of a sixty-year-old ban on married women teachers, based on the charge that 'working wives are a menace to public health, morals and general welfare,' were heard last night by the Boston School Committee.

The occasion was a noisy, frequently heckled public hearing granted [to] the Boston Citizens' Committee for Teachers' Rights, formed recently following the automatic resignation of Grace Lonergan Lorch, a teacher in the second grade, because of her marriage to Pvt. Lee Lorch of the Army Air Forces.

Three [male] members of the committee . . . announced themselves in favor of the retention of the ban. . . .

Pleading her own case as president of the Boston Teachers' Union, . . . Mrs. Lorch was booed when she cautioned several hundred women jammed into the hearing room that the City Council was on record as intending to 'fire every married woman from every city job when the war is over.'

"That means," she added, 'they intend to rule out marriage, they intend to make marriage a class privilege for the upper classes. They may get away with it for teachers, but not for other women.'

Representative Florence E. Cook, as chairman of the Citizens' Committee, presented representatives of labor, religious, civic and women's organizations [who] supported the appeal for discontinuance of the ban. Most labor leaders asked for suspension of the ban for the duration of the war. . . .

Thomas H. Mahoney, legal adviser for the Citizens' Committee . . . cited the Lorch case. As Grace Lonergan, he said, she had

After the war, **Grace Lonergan Lorch** (1904–1974) and her husband, Lee, moved to New York City, where they became active in the effort to desegregate the city's public housing. When Lee Lorch lost his position teaching math as a result of the controversy surrounding their civil rights advocacy, the couple and their daughter moved (eventually) to Little Rock, Arkansas, where Lee taught math at the historically black Philander Smith College and Grace worked with the local NAACP to help integrate Little Rock High School in 1957. In Massachusetts, the legislature ended the ban on married women teachers in 1953. A historical marker at the Charles Taylor School in Dorchester, Massachusetts, honors Grace Lorch's memory.

In 1940, the Republican Party became the first major party to endorse an ERA in its party platform. The Democratic Party followed suit in 1944. The 1980 Republican platform withdrew the endorsement.

been earning \$2,300 a year, was enjoying tenure and pension privileges, then because she married she was automatically retired from the school system, yet permitted to do the same classroom work on a temporary basis at the rate of \$5.00 for every working day."

During the war, the National Woman's Party (NWP) continued to focus on the goal of securing an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution. Writing in the organization's periodical, *Equal Rights*, in 1944, Alice Paul invoked the wartime context to make the case for an ERA.

"At this moment when the United States is engaged in a war with the avowed purpose of establishing freedom and equality for the whole world, the United States should hasten to set its own house in order by granting freedom and equality to its own women. For the sake of a new and better world, as well as justice to women themselves, [we] ask for the immediate adoption of the Equal Rights Amendment."

In her breezy 1943 book on women and war work, *Why Women Cry, or Wenches with Wrenches*, the clothing designer and fashion critic Elizabeth Hawes summed up the common contemporary view of feminists belonging to the National Woman's Party. She was not alone in depicting them as "Equal-Righters" with little concern for working women.

"A couple of generations or more ago, there was a fanatical group of females known as Feminists. Due to their well-organized and tireless efforts, or at least partially so, we women of the USA have the right to vote.

Once I met six Feminists and it was only then, at the age of 26, that I heard there was a fight between men and women. Later I discovered the Feminists, in their headlong rush for feminine equality, had denied there was any difference between the male and the female. And I mean any difference at all.

They carried this idea to extreme lengths. . . . Today the little group of earnest thinkers who most closely follow the Feminists are now all-out for making women equal with men, not by denying there is a basic difference, but by having the Constitution changed to say women are equal with men. . . .

Instead of helping the Nation concentrate on getting equality and better working conditions for everyone, male and female, the Equal-Righters make a loud noise about removing special privileges for women. This is a sure-fire method of losing some of women's present better working conditions and making it harder to get them back for both sexes.

Equality is equality regardless of sex, color, nationality, or religion."

In 1943, at a *New York Times* symposium on "The World after the War," Dorothy Kenyon took an expansive view in answer to the question "What Kind of World Do We Want?"

"[I hope for] the freedom for women, or for anybody, to decide for themselves what they shall do in the world, to exercise freedom of choice in the disposition of their lives, to enjoy the same kind and degree of opportunity to exercise their diverse talents, whether in rocking the cradle or ruling the world, that every other human being has.

A world which freely utilizes the brains and capacities of its women is a complete and rounded world in the sense that a world which keeps its women in **purdah** [seclusion] and swathed in veils up to the eyes can never be.

All this seems fairly clear to us, I think, and in our complacent way we American women think we have it. . . . But . . . freedom for ourselves is not enough. We know now that the basic freedoms must be worldwide."

Once the war ended, the contrast between women's wartime experiences and the post-war work world seemed striking indeed. In 1946, the Congress of American Women drew attention to those contrasts. The group, which grew out of an international gathering of some eight hundred women leaders from forty-one countries, brought together a coalition of women's organizations, to develop a women's rights agenda. Its manifesto, "The Position of the American Woman Today," set out the group's view of where post-war women stood in terms of economic, political, social, and individual rights, and envisioned a future of equal citizenship for women regardless of race, class, or marital status.

"The American woman entered World War II hardened and tempered by her experiences during the Great Depression. . . . The terrible manpower needs of the Second World War . . . opened the doors of basic industry . . . wide to women for the first time. . . . Yet it is significant that none of the 'Fair Employment Practices' legislation which came into being during the war included discrimination because of sex. . . .

[I]n the immediate cut-back of war production following V-J day women workers suffered lay-offs more serious than that of any other groups. . . . Of all women the American Negro women have been hit hardest. Job opportunities opened to women during the war were not available to them, except in the dirtiest and

By the time she participated in the symposium, **Dorothy Kenyon** (1888–1972) was widely known for her skills as a lawyer and judge and for her women's rights activism. A consistent opponent of employment discrimination on the basis of sex and race, she advocated for the rights of married women workers and for military commissions for female physicians during World War II. Despite having opposed an ERA in the 1930s because of its potentially destructive effects on working-class women, by 1970 she had come to agree that it was necessary to end legal sex discrimination. In her later career, she was a global advocate for women's rights, serving as a delegate to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and actively opposing the U.S. war in Vietnam.

lowest-paying groups. Now many of these Negro women have been forced back into domestic service. . . .

The problem of the working woman . . . does not end with equal pay, equal upgrading or the end of discrimination in employment. Freedom to work means freedom to do two full-time jobs[,] . . . a full shift in industry or office and . . . then . . . another full day's work, cooking, cleaning, washing, mending. . . . [T]he American woman has been found capable of doing most jobs as well as men, but her difficulties arise when she tries to do two jobs as well as the man does only one.

Politically, . . . twenty-six years after the American woman secured the right to vote, with a numerical voting superiority, . . . only seven women are in the House of Representatives and four in the Senate. . . . Women are now becoming aware of the necessity of united political action, and for the election of more women to office. The Congress of American Women plans to fight for '48 Women in Congress in '48.'

Legally, too, the American woman is only 'half free.' . . . For example, in . . . 15 states a woman can become the natural guardian of her child only if it is born out of wedlock, but in three of those states she can go to jail if she does not reveal the name of the father. . . . In six states she is not entitled to her wages—they belong to her husband as part of the marriage property. In three states a married woman's will is automatically revoked by her marriage. . . .

Until the day when the American woman is free to develop her mind and abilities to their fullest extent, without discrimination because of her sex, is free to work without neglecting her children, to live with her husband on an equal level, with adequate provision made for the care [of] that home without injury to her health; until she takes her full responsibilities as citizen and individual, supporting herself if necessary and her family where she has a family, at a decent wage, paid equally with men for the work she does; until she is freed from the terror of war, and lives in a world of peaceful friendship between nations, in a society without prejudice against Negro, Jew, national groups or women—her long struggle for emancipation must continue."

Calling attention to the specific challenges facing African American women, as the Congress of American Women did, was unusual in post-war America. Even more unusual was the approach taken by writer and activist Claudia Jones, who singled out for comment the multiple,

overlapping forms of discrimination they faced. Her essay, published in the Communist Party journal *Political Affairs* in 1949, was entitled "An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman!"

"Negro women—as workers, as Negroes, and as women—are the most oppressed stratum of the whole population.

In 1940, two out of every five Negro women, in contrast to two out of every eight white women, worked for a living. By virtue of their majority status among the Negro people, Negro women not only constitute the largest percentage of women heads of families, but are the main breadwinners of the Negro family. The large proportion of Negro women in the labor market is primarily a result of the low-scale earnings of Negro Men. This disproportion also has roots in the treatment and position of Negro women over the centuries.

Following emancipation, and persisting to the present day, a large percentage of Negro women—married as well as single—were forced to work for a living. But despite the shift in employment of Negro women from rural to urban areas, Negro women are still generally confined to the lowest-paying jobs.... [W]hite women workers [have] median earnings more than twice as high as those of non-white women, and non-white women workers (mainly Negro women) [earn] less than \$500 a year! In the rural South, the earnings of women are even less.... The super-exploitation of the Negro woman worker is thus revealed not only in that she receives, as woman, less than equal pay for equal work with men, but in that the majority of Negro women get less than half the pay of white women. Little wonder, then, that in Negro communities the conditions of ghetto-living—low salaries, high rents, high prices, etc.—virtually become an iron curtain hemming in the lives of Negro children and undermining their health and spirit! Little wonder that the maternity death rate for Negro women is triple that of white women! Little wonder that one out of every ten Negro children born in the United States does not grow to manhood or womanhood!...

During the anti-Axis war, Negro women for the first time in history had an opportunity to utilize their skills and talents in occupations other than domestic and personal service. They became trail blazers in many fields. Since the end of the war, however, this has given way to growing unemployment, to the wholesale firing of Negro women, particularly in basic industry....

The anticommunist Red Scare of the post-war years silenced the voices of women like Claudia Jones and decimated the ranks of progressive groups like the Congress of American Women. When the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) claimed that the Congress's purpose was "not to deal primarily with women's problems . . . but rather to serve as a specialized arm of Soviet political warfare in the current 'peace' campaign to disarm and demobilize the United States," the Department of Justice demanded that the group register as "foreign agents." Rather than fight a lengthy legal battle, the group disbanded in 1950.

Inherently connected with the question of job opportunities where the Negro woman is concerned, is the special oppression she faces as Negro, as woman, and as worker. . . .

A developing consciousness on the woman question today, therefore, must not fail to recognize that the Negro question in the United States is *prior* to, and not equal to, the woman question; that only to the extent that we fight all chauvinist expressions and actions as regards the Negro people, and fight for the full equality of Negro people, can women as a whole advance their struggle for equal rights. For the progressive women's movement, the Negro woman, who combines in her status the worker, the Negro, and the woman, is the vital link to this heightened political consciousness."

Despite the repressive political climate of the late 1940s and 1950s, labor activists and working-class women in progressive unions were strong advocates for women's rights. In 1952, the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America issued a pamphlet entitled "UE Fights for Women Workers," written by Betty Goldstein, who later gained fame under her married name, Betty Friedan.

"In advertisements across the land, industry glorifies the American woman—in her gleaming GE kitchen, at her Westinghouse Laundromat, before her Sylvania television set. Nothing is too good for her—unless she works for GE, or Westinghouse, or Sylvania or thousands of other corporations throughout the U.S.A.

As an employee, regardless of her skill she is rated lower common labor (male). She is assigned to jobs which, according to government studies, involve greater physical strain and skill than many jobs done by men—but she is paid less than the underpaid sweeper, the least skilled men in the plant. She is speeded up until she may faint at her machine, to barely earn her daily bread.

Wage discrimination against women workers exists in every industry where women are employed. . . . It is no accident that big business all over the world fought the movement for votes and equal rights for women. For in their factories, the public acceptance of women's equality would mean the loss of a huge source of labor they could segregate and exploit for extra profits, and as a means to hold down the wages of all workers. . . .

The situation of Negro women workers today is even more shocking. Even more than white women, Negro women have to work to live. For the discrimination that keeps Negro men at the bottom of the pay scale forces their wives to work to supplement the pitifully inadequate income of the family.

But Negro women are barred from almost all jobs except low-paying domestic service in private homes, or menial outside jobs as janitresses and scrubwomen. . . .

UE's fair practices committees in many local unions have been fighting the discrimination against hiring the Negro women in the electrical and machine industry, and the discriminatory practices that restrict Negro women to the most menial, lowest-paid jobs. . . . Negro women workers have a real stake in the UE's fight to end rate exploitation of women in industry, but their problems also require a special fight to lift the double bars against hiring of Negro women."

Recalling her work with women farmworkers, organizer Jessie Lopez de la Cruz told an interviewer in the late 1970s.

"When I became involved in the [farmworkers'] union, I felt I had to get other women involved. Women have been behind men all the time, always. . . . Then some women I spoke to started attending the union meetings, and later they were out on the picket lines. . . . I told them about how we . . . had no benefits, no minimum wage, nothing out in the fields—no restrooms, nothing. . . . I said, 'Well! Do you think we should be putting up with this in this modern age?'"

Speaking to an interviewer in 1986, Packinghouse Workers Union official Addie Wyatt recalled how her union's cross-race and cross-gender alliances facilitated activism for women's economic rights.

"[I]n 1953, I think it was, I went to . . . an anti-discrimination and women's conference held by our union, the United Packinghouse Workers. At that conference I saw women and men, black, white, and brown, take a leadership role. I also heard appeals to other blacks, Hispanics, and women like myself to run for positions in our local unions. . . . The union embraced the practice and the policies of equal pay for equal work. . . . The union really did an effective job of helping workers to understand that 'an injury to one is an injury to all.' The Packinghouse Workers Union was the strongest force and the strongest voice for minorities and for women and for wage earners. . . . We were pioneers in the equal rights movement. We were winning equal rights for women before the movement of the '60s and '70s really took off."

Women's rights advocates participated in the formation of the new United Nations in 1945 and served actively to shape its agenda. One result was the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; its provisions reflected the inclusion of women's rights as human rights, as well as the optimism for a better future that the UN's creation sparked.

The 1954 film *Salt of the Earth*, based on a successful strike at a zinc mine in New Mexico, dramatized women's rights in labor struggles. In the film, when the men are enjoined by a judge from picketing, the women take their places while the men assume their wives' family labor, trying to cook and care for children without indoor plumbing or hot water. As a result, the strike settlement includes both higher wages and improved sanitation and utility services in company-owned housing. Few Americans saw the film in the 1950s, however. Because of anticommunist hysteria, it was banned from distribution, many of the participants were blacklisted, and the female lead, Rosaura Revueeltas, was deported to her native Mexico.

"Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world . . .

Whereas, the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women . . .

Now, Therefore, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. . . .

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. . . .

Article 16. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and its dissolution."

Eleanor Roosevelt devoted much of the last two decades of her life to service as an American delegate to the United Nations. In that capacity, she helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a 1951 statement on a subsequent "Convention on the Political Rights of Women," she stressed the need to move beyond suffrage to full inclusion of women in countries' policy-making bodies.

"As most of you know, the subject of this convention—equal suffrage for women—is very close to my heart. I believe in active citizenship, for men and women equally, as a simple matter of right and justice. I believe we will have better government in all of our countries when men and women discuss public issues together and make their decisions on the basis of their differing areas of experience and their common concern for the welfare of their families and the world.

In the United States, and in most countries today, women have equal suffrage. Some may feel for that reason this convention is of little importance to them. I do not agree with this view. It is true, of course, that the first objective of this convention is to encourage equal political rights for women in all countries. But its significance reaches far deeper into the real issue of whether in fact women are recognized fully in setting the policies of our governments.

While it is true that women in 45 of our 50 member nations vote on the same terms as men, and in 7 [additional member nations women] have partial voting rights, too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men, or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression. Even in countries where for many years women have voted and been eligible for public office, there are still too few women serving in positions of real leadership. I am not talking now in terms of paper parliaments and honorary appointments. . . . What I am talking about is whether women are sharing in the direction of the policy making in their countries; whether they have opportunities to serve as chairmen of important committees and as cabinet ministers and delegates to the United Nations."

During the post-war era, women and girls received a variety of mixed messages about womanhood, women's rights, and those who advocated for change. In their best-selling 1947 book, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex*, the journalist Ferdinand Lundberg and the psychiatrist Marynia Farnham employed a crude version of Freudian theory to represent feminists as neurotic, needy, and unfulfilled, and to suggest that agitation for rights was unnecessary.

"[I]t is our view, based on historic utterances of feminists, contemporary clinical data relating to women and psychiatric insight, that the entire feminist campaign was fundamentally about something quite other than it appeared to be about on the surface: woman's suffrage, woman's property laws and woman's education. . . .

It was fundamentally about something much deeper, of greater social and psychological consequence. . . . Unconsciously, the feminists were more interested in what we term the 'feminist ideology' than in the program of women's rights and privileges. And although the rights have since been won, the ideology lingers on and is frequently encountered today in the psychoanalysis of women. It is an intellectual construction growing out of deep emotional maladjustment and bewilderment.

This ideology . . . bespoke fierce hatred of the male. . . . The feminists, in brief, were out to get rid of their femaleness and to limit male privileges. It was their femaleness, they concluded, that was at the root of their many tribulations—political, economic, social and sexual. . . . Most of the social and political program of feminism . . . was an ego-prop, sought by the most articulate and



Sculptor Penelope Jencks's statue of Eleanor Roosevelt, dedicated in 1996, stands in Riverside Park, New York City.

Wedding rings: "There was a time when it was considered odd in the U.S. for males to wear wedding rings. But those who indulge in the practice can now be assured of being perfectly acceptable. Since 1939, the percentage of double-ring—as against single-ring—marriages has increased from 15 to at least 80 per cent."—"Ring Twice," *Fortune Magazine*, November, 1947. Historically, only women wore wedding rings. The symbolism was profound: the wife's encirclement in the bonds of matrimony signaled to other men that she was "taken"—not sexually available. The post-war change to double-ring weddings represented new gender ideals by which men as well as women were to commit themselves to marriage and family life.

1 1950s *Working Mothers*: Popular images of "typical" 1950s women as housewives conflicted with a striking increase in the workforce presence of wives and mothers during the decade. The contradiction between image and reality was evident in the lives of working mothers such as Barbara Billingsley (June Cleaver on "Leave It to Beaver") and Lucille Ball ("I Love Lucy") who played stay-at-home mothers on TV. Ball not only starred as Lucy Ricardo, she was also the show's co-producer and co-owner of Desilu Studios. In the 1950s, Phyllis Schlafly raised six children, ran for Congress, published several books, served in state and national offices with the Daughters of the American Revolution, and was president of the Illinois Federation of Republican Women. In 1978, she completed her law degree. Working mother Betty Friedan had an active career as a journalist for labor and popular magazines during the 1950s.



A 1957 cover of *The Ladder* encouraged lesbians to "take off the mask" and be themselves.

emotionally deprived women as a way of restoring their self-esteem and self-confidence. . . . In the woman of feminist orientation (masculinity complex), the penis-envy defect has succeeded . . . in showing itself more or less clearly. Such a woman lives out her neurosis, expresses it for all to see by celebrating whatever is peculiarly male and deprecating whatever is peculiarly female. . . . She is almost certain to have 'man trouble' of one kind or another."

Table 7.1 The Female Labor Force, 1940–1956

In the midst of mixed messages about women's roles, in 1957, the National Manpower Council published a report, *Womanpower*, that called attention to "a revolution in women's employment." A particularly striking table demonstrated clearly that in the post-war era, the proportion of women in the paid labor force had risen consistently.

Year	Thousands	Percent of Women Aged 14 and Over	Percent of All Workers
1940	13,840	27.6	25.4
1941	13,930	27.4	25.3
1942	15,460	30.1	27.7
1943	18,100	34.9	33.0
1944	18,450	35.2	34.0
1945	19,570	37.0	36.1
1946	16,590	30.9	29.4
1947	16,320	30.0	27.6
1948	17,155	31.2	28.3
1949	17,167	30.9	28.2
1950	18,063	32.1	29.0
1951	16,607	32.7	30.1
1952	18,798	32.7	30.4
1953	19,296	33.1	30.6
1954	19,726	33.4	30.8
1955	20,154	33.8	31.2
1956	21,194	35.1	31.8

Despite the repressive political climate of the 1950s, when homosexuality was routinely described as an illness, in 1955 four San Francisco lesbian couples founded a lesbian civil rights organization, the Daughters of Bilitis. The group listed its goals in a 1957 issue of its publication, *The Ladder*.

"A Women's Organization for the Purpose of Promoting the Integration of the Homosexual into Society by:

1. Education of the variant, with particular emphasis on the psychological, physiological and sociological aspects, to

enable her to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic and economic implications. . . .

2. Education of the public at large through acceptance first of the individual, leading to an eventual breakdown of erroneous conceptions, taboos and prejudices; through public discussion meetings aforementioned; through dissemination of educational literature on the homosexual theme.
3. Participation in research projects by duly authorized and responsible psychology, sociology and other such experts directed toward further knowledge of the homosexual.
4. Investigation of the penal code as it pertains to the homosexual, proposal of changes to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group, and promotion of these changes through due process of law in the state legislatures."

SCIENCE

Lyon

THE VICE PRESIDENT

WASHINGTON

March 15, 1962

Dear Jim:

I have conferred with Mrs. Philip Hart and Miss Jerrie Cobb concerning their effort to get women utilized as astronauts. I'm sure you agree that sex should not be a reason for disqualifying a candidate for orbital flight.

Could you advise me whether NASA has disqualified anyone because of being a woman?

As I understand it, two principal requirements for orbital flight at this stage are: 1) that the individual be experienced at high speed military test flying; and 2) that the individual have an engineering background enabling him to take over controls in the event it became necessary.

Would you advise me whether there are any women who meet these qualifications?

If not, could you estimate for me the time when orbital flight will have become sufficiently safe that these two requirements are no longer necessary and a larger number of individuals may qualify?

I know we both are grateful for the desire to serve on the part of these women, and look forward to the time when they can.

Sincerely,

Let's stop this now!

Lyndon B. Johnson

Mr. James E. Webb
Administrator
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Washington, D. C.

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Feminism: Women's Rights

Post-war women's rights activists achieved an important victory when in 1961, as a result of the pressure they brought to bear upon him, President John F. Kennedy created the President's Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), led by longtime labor feminist Esther Peterson and chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. The commission's twenty-six core members, many of them with lengthy histories in grassroots women's organizations, issued a landmark report in 1963. In it, the commissioners mentioned the considerations that shaped their approach. The commission's three-hundred-page report, plus additional supporting volumes, replete with charts, tables, and statistics detailing widespread sex and race discrimination, laid out in detail a variety of areas in which women's

Vice-President Lyndon Johnson refused to sign a 1962 letter drafted by his assistant, Liz Carpenter, approving the training of women astronauts. His peremptory order, "Let's stop this now!" dashed the hopes of the thirteen women pilots who had expected to pioneer in space. Not until 1983 did astrophysicist Sally Ride become the first American woman in space.

legal and civil status was unequal to that of men, giving particular attention to the disabilities married women still faced under coverture.

"Throughout its deliberations, the Commission has kept in mind certain women who have special disadvantages. Among heads of families in the United States, 1 in 10 is a woman. At least half of them are carrying responsibility for both earning the family's living and making the family's home. . . .

Seven million nonwhite women and girls belong to minority racial groups. Discrimination based on color is morally wrong and a source of national weakness. Such discrimination currently places an oppressive dual burden on millions of Negro women. . . .

Hundreds of thousands of other women face somewhat similar situations: American Indians, for instance; and Spanish-Americans, many of whom live in urban centers but are new to urban life and burdened with language problems. . . .

The Commission strongly urges that in the carrying out of its recommendations, special attention be given to difficulties that are wholly or largely the products of this kind of discrimination.

[Recommendations:]

PERSONAL AND PROPERTY RIGHTS. . . . In the [42] separate property states [that follow English common law practices], a wife has no legal rights to any part of her husband's earnings or property during the existence of the marriage, aside from the right to be properly supported. Hence, if she does not have earnings or property of her own, she is completely dependent upon his largesse for anything above and beyond the money she needs for support. On the other hand, under [the 8 state] community-property systems, a wife has an interest in the commonly owned property, but a husband generally has exclusive authority to manage and control that property. . . . A number of states limit [a married woman's] right to sue or be sued in her own name A few states still restrict the right of a wife to engage in a separate business. . . .

DOMICILE. A person's domicile or legal residence is important because it may determine many personal rights and obligations, . . . [such as where] the right to vote may be exercised, where an individual may run for public office, . . . where a divorce may be filed, . . . where one may receive welfare benefits, and where one may be eligible for admission to . . . state institutions [such as universities]. A person's domicile generally is the place which he intends to be his permanent home. However, this rule does not

normally apply to married women . . . [because] her domicile . . . is her husband's, without regard to her intent or actual residence.

GUARDIANSHIP OF CHILDREN. . . . 6 states . . . still provide by statute that the father is the preferred natural guardian of a minor child.

[An invitation to action:]

HOME AND COMMUNITY: For the benefit of children, mothers, and society, child-care services should be available for children of families at all economic levels. . . .

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT: Equal opportunity for women in hiring, training, and promotion should be the governing principle in private employment. . . .

LABOR STANDARDS: . . . State laws should establish the principle of equal pay for comparable work. State laws should protect the rights of workers to join unions of their own choosing and to bargain collectively.

SECURITY OF BASIC INCOME: A widow's benefit under the federal old-age insurance system [Social Security] should be equal to the amount that her husband would have received at the same age had he lived. . . . Paid maternity leave or comparable insurance benefits should be provided for women workers. . . .

WOMEN UNDER THE LAW: Early and definitive court pronouncement, particularly by the United States Supreme Court, is urgently needed with regard to the validity under the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments of laws and official practices discriminating against women, to the end that the principle of equality become firmly established in constitutional doctrine. . . . State legislatures . . . concerned with the improvement of state statutes affecting family law and personal and property rights of married women, . . . should move to eliminate laws which impose legal disabilities on women.

WOMEN AS CITIZENS: Women should be encouraged to seek elective and appointive posts at local, state, and national levels. . . ."

The year 1963 also marked the publication of *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan's best-selling book detailing the discontents of educated middle-class suburban women. Despite her own background as a labor journalist and advocate for working women's economic rights, Friedan focused the book on the concerns of women coping with what she termed "the problem that has no name" and issued a call to action.

"On the ERA question, we ultimately settled on a carefully worded compromise. . . . The report stated first that equal rights for all persons is basic to democracy and must be reflected in the law of the land. But we argued that the principle of equality was embodied in the Fifth and 14th Amendments to the Constitution and that a separate Equal Rights Amendment was not necessary. . . . I strongly believed that specific legislation targeting specific problems—specific bills for specific ills—was a far more effective way of getting focused results and reforms than a one-sentence addition to the Constitution."

—Esther Peterson on why the Commission report refused to endorse an ERA

"Gradually, without seeing it clearly for quite a while, I came to realize that something is very wrong with the way American women are trying to live their lives today. I sensed it first as a question mark in my own life, as a wife and mother of three small children, half-guiltily, and therefore half-heartedly, almost in spite of myself, using my abilities and education in work that took me away from home. . . . The problems and satisfactions of [my Smith College classmates'] lives, and mine, and the way our education had contributed to them, simply did not fit the image of the modern American woman as she was written about in women's magazines, studied and analyzed in classrooms and clinics, praised and damned in a ceaseless barrage of words ever since the end of World War II. There was a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image to which we were trying to conform, the image that I came to call the feminine mystique. . . .

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—'Is this all?' . . .

[T]here was no word of this yearning in the millions of words written about women, for women, . . . telling women that their role was to seek fulfillment as wives and mothers. Over and over women heard in voices of tradition and of Freudian sophistication that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their own femininity. . . . They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights—the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for. . . . [They learned that] all they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children. . . . Nobody argued whether women were inferior or superior to men; they were simply different. Words like 'emancipation' and 'career' sounded strange and embarrassing; no one had used them for years. . . . The 'woman problem' in America no longer existed.

If a woman had a problem in the 1950s and 1960s she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. Other women were satisfied with their lives, she thought. What kind of a woman was she if she did not feel this mysterious fulfillment waxing the kitchen floor? She was so ashamed to admit her dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it. . . . But . . . suddenly they realized they all shared the same problem, the problem that has no name. They began, hesitantly, to talk about it. . . .

[E]very woman . . . must create, out of her own needs and abilities, a new life plan, . . . Not until a great many women move out of the fringes into the mainstream will society itself provide the arrangements for their new life plan. But every girl who manages to stick it out through law school or medical school, who finishes her M.A. or Ph.D. and goes on to use it, helps others to move on. Every woman who fights the remaining barriers to full equality which are masked by the feminine mystique makes it easier for the next woman. The very existence of the President's Commission on the Status of Women, under Eleanor Roosevelt's leadership, creates a climate where it is possible to recognize and do something about discrimination against women, in terms not only of pay but of the subtle barriers to opportunity. Even in politics, women must make their contribution not as 'housewives' but as citizens."

Between 1963 and 1965, Congress passed three laws with significant consequences for women's rights.

1963 Equal Pay Act: "No employer having employees subject to any provisions of this section shall discriminate, within any establishment in which such employees are employed, between employees on the basis of sex by paying wages to employees in such establishment at a rate less than the rate at which he pays wages to employees of the opposite sex in such establishment for equal work on jobs the performance of which requires equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions, . . ."

1964 Civil Rights Act: [Title VII] "It shall be unlawful employment practice for any employer—

1. to fail or refuse to hire or to discharge any individual or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges

Long before Title VII became part of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, lawyer and human rights activist **Pauli Murray** (1910–1985) had coined the term “Jane Crow,” to refer to discriminatory practices based on race and sex. By pressing for an interpretation of civil rights laws that linked the two intersecting forms of exclusion, she suggested a new legal strategy to bring together two movements—civil rights and women’s rights—that had largely operated separately since the early 20th century. Murray spent her adult life challenging restrictive policies based on race and gender. Turned down for admittance to the University of North Carolina Law School because of her race, she attended Howard University, and upon graduation was refused admittance to Harvard University Law School’s graduate program because of her sex. She went to the University of California, writing her 1945 graduate thesis on “The Right to Equal Opportunity in Employment.” As a practicing lawyer, she made important contributions to constitutional legal theory on race and sex discrimination, serving on the President’s Commission on the Status of Women and helping to found the National Organization for Women in 1966. Responding to a deeply spiritual sense of calling, she shifted careers in the 1970s, attending divinity school and pressing the Episcopal Church to change its policy on the ordination of women. In 1977, she became one of the first women to be ordained by the church, and its first African American female priest. Until her final illness, Rev. Murray served churches in Washington, D.C., and Baltimore, Maryland.

- of employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin; or,
2. to limit, segregate, or classify his employees in any way which would deprive or tend to deprive any individual of employment opportunities or otherwise adversely affect his status as an employee, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”

1965 Voting Rights Act: “No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.”

Dissatisfaction with the slow pace at which the President’s Commission’s recommendations were being implemented boiled over at a 1966 meeting of state Commissions on the Status of Women. Twenty-eight attendees became the founding group for a new National Organization for Women (NOW). The group set out its goals in a 1968 “Bill of Rights for 1969.”

“We demand:

- I. That the United States Congress immediately pass the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution . . . and that such then be immediately ratified by the several states.
- II. That equal employment opportunity be guaranteed to all women, as well as men, by insisting that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces the prohibitions against sex discrimination in employment under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with the same vigor as it enforces the prohibitions against racial discrimination.
- III. That women be protected by law to ensure their rights to return to their jobs within a reasonable time after childbirth without loss of seniority or other accrued benefits, and be paid maternity leave as a form of social security and/or employee benefits.
- IV. Immediate revision of tax laws to permit the deduction of home and child care expenses for working parents.
- V. That child care facilities be established by law on the same basis as parks, libraries, and public schools, adequate to the needs of children from the preschool years through adolescence, as a community resource to be used by all citizens from all income levels.

- VI. That the right of women to be educated to their full potential equally with men be secured by Federal and State legislation, eliminating all discrimination and segregation by sex, written and unwritten, at all levels of education. . . .
- VII. That the right of women in poverty to secure job training, housing, and family allowances on equal terms with men, but without prejudice to a parent's right to remain at home to care for his or her children; revision of welfare legislation and poverty programs which deny women dignity, privacy and self-respect.
- VIII. The right of women to control their own reproductive lives by removing from penal codes laws limiting access to contraceptive information and devices and laws governing abortion."

Like the founders of NOW, those who created the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) defined welfare as a women's rights issue. In a 1972 article, the group's chairperson, Johnnie Tillmon, explained the connection.

"Welfare's like a traffic accident. It can happen to anybody, but especially it happens to women. And that is why welfare is a women's issue. . . .

Forty-four per cent of all poor families are headed by women. . . . [But] 99 per cent of [families on welfare] are headed by women. That means there is no man around. In half the states there really can't be men around because A.F.D.C. [Aid to Families with Dependent Children] says if there is an 'able-bodied' man around, then you can't be on welfare. If the kids are going to eat, and the man can't get a job, then he's got to go . . . So his kids can eat. . . .

On A.F.D.C., . . . you give up control of your own body. It's a condition of aid. You may even have to agree to get your tubes tied so you can never have more children just to avoid being cut off welfare. . . .

The truth is a job doesn't necessarily mean an adequate income. A woman with three kids—not twelve kids, mind you, just three kids—that woman earning the full Federal minimum wage of \$1.60 an hour, is still stuck in poverty. She is below the Government's own official poverty

"We, men and women who hereby constitute ourselves as the National Organization for Women, believe that the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes, as part of the world-wide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders. The purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now. . . ."

—NOW Statement of Purpose, 1966

Some founders of NOW. They are, from left, Michigan's Dorothy Haener of the United Auto Workers; Sister Mary Joel Read, a member of the School Sisters of St. Francis and later president of Alverno College in Wisconsin; Anna Arnold Hedgeman, an African American civil rights activist and Methodist churchwoman; Betty Friedan; Brooklyn-born Inez Casiano, who worked for the Puerto Rican Community Development Project and later was an advisor to the U.S. Secretary of Labor; Richard Graham, an EEOC commissioner and later president of Goddard College; and Inka O'Hanrahan of the California Commission on the Status of Women. Absent from the photograph was Pauli Murray, who stepped out of camera range in order to push Anna Hedgeman forward.



line. There are some ten million jobs that now pay less than the minimum wage, and if you're a woman, you've got the best chance of getting one. . . .

Maybe it is we poor welfare women who will really liberate women in this country. We've already started on our own welfare plan.

Along with other welfare recipients, we have organized together so we can have some voice. Our group is called the National Welfare Rights Organization (N.W.R.O.). We put together our own welfare plan, called Guaranteed Adequate Income (G.A.I.) which would eliminate sexism from welfare. . . .

If I were president, I would solve this so-called welfare crisis in a minute and go a long way toward liberating every woman. I'd just issue a proclamation that 'women's' work is real work.

In other words, I'd start paying women a living wage for doing the work we are already doing—childraising and housekeeping. And the welfare crisis would be over, just like that. Housewives would be getting wages, too—a legally determined percentage of their husband's salary—instead of having to ask for and account for money they've already earned. . . .

No woman in this country can feel dignified, no woman can be liberated, until all women get off their knees. That's what N.W.R.O. is all about—women standing together, on their feet."

With the support of organizations such as NOW, women's rights activists challenged women's unequal legal, political, economic, and personal status in both legislative halls and courts. In the arena of reproductive rights, they sought an end to the practice of involuntarily sterilizing poor women, and championed repeal of laws restricting women's right to acquire contraceptives and to seek abortions. In the 1965 case of *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Supreme Court overturned one of the last vestiges of the old Comstock laws, a Connecticut statute dating to 1879 making it illegal for married couples to use contraceptives.

"[Mr. Justice Douglas]: The present case, then, concerns a relationship lying within the zone of privacy created by several fundamental constitutional guarantees. And it concerns a law which, in forbidding the use of contraceptives, rather than regulating their manufacture or sale, seeks to achieve its goals by means having a maximum destructive impact upon that relationship. Such a law cannot stand in light of the familiar principle, so often applied by this Court, that a 'governmental purpose to control or prevent activities constitutionally subject to state regulation may not be achieved by means

which sweep unnecessarily broadly and thereby invade the area of protected freedoms.' . . . Would we allow the police to search the sacred precincts of marital bedrooms for telltale signs of the use of contraceptives? The very idea is repulsive to the notions of privacy surrounding the marriage relationship. We deal with a right of privacy older than the Bill of Rights—older than our political parties, older than our school system. . . ."

Women's obligations as citizens remained different from men's in the area of jury service, where a few states still systematically exempted them from jury duty. A 1961 Supreme Court decision had permitted the practice on the grounds that, whereas for male citizens, jury service was a duty, for female citizens, it was a privilege because "woman is still regarded as the center of home and family life." Arguing that equal legal status included equal obligations, lawyers working with the Women's Rights Law Project of the American Civil Liberties Union, founded by Ruth Bader Ginsburg in 1972, won a reversal of that decision in the 1975 case of *Taylor v. Louisiana*.

"[Mr. Justice Byron White]: [When this case was tried], . . . the Louisiana Code of Criminal Procedure provided that a woman should not be selected for jury service unless she had previously filed a written declaration of her desire to be subject to jury service. The constitutionality of these provisions is the issue in this case. . . . The Louisiana jury selection system does not disqualify women from jury service, but in operation its conceded systematic impact is that only a very few women . . . are called for jury service. . . . The issue we have, therefore, is whether a jury selection system

January 12, 1960

Forty-one

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Advertisement: "Help Wanted—Female." Until women's rights activists won a ruling from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1969, women's economic opportunities were restricted by race- and sex-specific advertising, such as this 1960 employment ad from the *Wilmington (Delaware) Every Evening*. In 1960, it was legal to advertise jobs restricted to "women" or "white" women.

which operates to exclude from jury service an identifiable class of citizens constituting 53% of eligible jurors in the community comports with the Sixth and Fourteenth Amendments. . . . [As the Court held in *Ballard v. United States*], 'if the shoe were on the other foot, who would claim that a jury was truly representative of the community if all men were intentionally and systematically excluded from the panel? The truth is that the two sexes are not fungible; a community made up exclusively of one is different from a community composed of both' If the fair cross-section rule is to govern the selection of juries . . . women cannot be systematically excluded from jury panels. . . ."

Feminism: Women's Liberation

Believing that the fundamental causes of women's inequality lay deeper than law and public policy could reach, younger women began to talk about "women's liberation." Rejecting what they saw as the gradualist approach of women's rights feminists and organizations like NOW, they traced their new-found feminism to their personal experiences in the civil rights and New Left student protest groups ("the Movement"), and connected their struggle to liberation movements around the world. A 1967 "Statement of Principles" created by a group of Chicago women summing up some of their views echoed earlier calls for women's "emancipation."

"Our political awareness of our oppression has developed . . . as we sought to apply the principles of justice, equality, mutual respect and dignity which we learned from the Movement . . . only to come up against the solid wall of **male chauvinism**. Realizing that this is a social problem of national significance not at all confined to our struggle for personal liberation, within the Movement we must approach it in a political manner. Therefore it is incumbent on us, as women, to organize a movement for woman's liberation. . . . The liberation of women cannot be divorced from the larger revolutionary struggle. . . . [W]e identify with those groups now in revolutionary struggle within our country and abroad. Until the movement recognizes the necessity that women be free and women recognize the necessity for all struggles of liberation, there can be no revolution."

Male chauvinism: The term referred to male assumptions of the superiority of their sex, and the continuing power of gender hierarchy in American society. Its use by women's liberation feminists reflected their familiarity with the terms and concepts used earlier in the century by members of left-wing political groups.

Women's Liberation feminists burst into public awareness when New York Radical Women mounted a protest against the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1968. One of the organizers, journalist Carol Hanisch, explained the rationale for the protest in a document entitled "A Critique of the Miss America Protest."

"The protest of the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City in September told the nation that a new feminist movement is afoot in the land. Due to the tremendous coverage in the mass media, millions of Americans now know there is a Women's Liberation Movement. The action brought many new members into our group and many requests from women outside the city for literature and information. A recurrent theme was, 'I've been waiting so long for something like this.' . . . The idea for the protest came out of the method used first in New York Radical Women of analyzing women's oppression by analyzing our own experiences, called consciousness-raising. . . . We decided to go around the room with each woman telling how she felt about the pageant. We discovered that many of us who had always put down the contest still watched it. Others had consciously identified with it. . . .

[We] agreed that the main point in the demonstration would be that all women are hurt by beauty competition—Miss America as well as ourselves. . . . We tried to carry the democratic means we used in planning the action into the actual doing of it. We didn't want leaders or spokesmen. It makes the movement not only *seem* stronger and larger if everyone is a leader, but it actually *is* stronger if not dependent on a few. And of course, many voices are more powerful than one."

The slogan "the personal is political" became a shorthand way to say that changing power relationships in both women's personal lives and within social institutions was the key to women's liberation. The technique of "consciousness raising" was widely used by women's liberation feminist groups to make the slogan an actuality. In a 1970 pamphlet entitled "What We Do at Meetings," the members of the Gainesville, Florida, Women's Liberation group explained the technique.

"[Our meetings center] around a question that each woman can answer by giving her own experiences. Sometimes we decide on a question that has been used successfully in other groups, but most often we think up our own . . . , ask[ing] how we feel about something, not just what happened. . . . In answering the question we sit in a circle (of sorts) and go around the room. Each woman answers the question from her personal experiences, instead of what she read in a book somewhere, or what she heard somebody else say about it. . . . We need to change what causes our problems, not just adjust to those bad conditions. One of the first things we discovered in the [consciousness-raising] group is that personal problems are really political problems. That is, there is no way out by ourselves.

Although protesters simply threw various "instruments of torture," such as hair curlers, false eyelashes, girdles, and bras into a "Freedom Trash Can," the media epithet that they were "bra-burners" stuck.

We need collective action for a collective solution. This is not to deny that these sessions make us feel better about ourselves. When we hear other women have the same problems we say, 'Wow! It's not my fault. There's nothing wrong with ME.'"

In her 1970 essay on "The Politics of Housework," Pat Mainardi echoed themes first articulated by early 20th-century feminists and provided a concrete example of how personal experience with something as ordinary as housework could reveal broader societal ideas about women's work and men's work. Using humor and wit, she dissected the assumptions underlying the allocation of tasks at home, assumptions that permitted men to enjoy leisure time while women performed unpaid labor.

"Liberated women—very different from women's liberation! The first signals all kinds of goodies, to warm the hearts (not to mention other parts) of the most radical men. The other signals—*housework*. The first brings sex without marriage, sex before marriage, cozy housekeeping arrangements... and the self-content of knowing that you're not the kind of man who wants a doormat instead of a woman....

On the other hand is women's liberation—and housework. What? You say this is all trivial. Wonderful! That's what I thought. It seemed perfectly reasonable. We both had careers,... so why shouldn't we share the housework? So I suggested it to my mate and he agreed—most men are too hip to turn you down flat. 'You're right,' he said. 'It's only fair.'

Then an interesting thing happened. I can only explain it by stating that we women have been brainwashed more than even we can imagine. Probably too many years of seeing television women in ecstasy over their shiny waxed floors or breaking down over their dirty shirt collars. Men have no such conditioning.... All of us have to do [dirty chores], or get someone else to do them for us. The longer my husband contemplated these chores the more repulsed he became, and so proceeded the change from the normally sweet considerate Dr. Jekyll into the crafty Mr. Hyde, who would stop at nothing to avoid the horrors of—*housework*.... Housework trivial? Not on your life! Just try to share the burden.

So ensued a dialogue that's been going on for several years. Here are some of the high points:

'I don't mind sharing the housework, but I don't do it very well. We should each do the things we're best at.'

Meaning: Unfortunately I'm no good at things like washing dishes or cooking. What I do best is a little light carpentry,

changing light bulbs, moving furniture (how often do you move furniture?) ...

'I hate it more than you. You don't mind it so much.'

Meaning: Housework is ... the worst crap I've ever done. It's degrading and humiliating for someone of *my* intelligence to do it. But for someone of *your* intelligence. ...

'Housework is too trivial to even talk about.'

Meaning: It's even more trivial to do. Housework is beneath my status. My purpose in life is to deal with matters of significance. ... You should do the housework. ...

'Man's accomplishments have always depended on getting help from other people, mostly women. What great man would have accomplished what he did if he had to do his own housework?'

Meaning: Oppression is built into the System and I as the white American male receive the benefits of this system. I don't want to give them up. ...

I was just finishing this when my husband came in and asked what I was doing. Writing a paper on housework. *Housework?* Oh my god how trivial can you get. A paper on housework."

The group Redstockings staked out a radical feminist position on male-female relations in its 1969 "Manifesto" identifying "male supremacy" (or gender hierarchy) as the root cause of women's historical and contemporary condition.

"I. After centuries of individual and preliminary political struggle, women are uniting to achieve their final liberation from male supremacy. Redstockings is dedicated to building this unity and winning our freedom.

II. 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. Our humanity is denied. Our prescribed behavior is enforced by the threat of physical violence.

Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition. This creates the illusion that a woman's relationship with her man is a matter of interplay between two unique personalities, and can be worked out. In reality, every such relationship is a *class* relationship, and the conflicts

between individual women and men are *political* conflicts that can only be solved collectively.

III. We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy; men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented. Men have controlled all political, economic and cultural institutions and back up this control with physical force. They have used their power to keep women in an inferior position. *All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women.

IV. Attempts have been made to shift the burden of responsibility from men to institutions or to women themselves. We condemn these arguments as evasions. Institutions alone do not oppress; they are merely tools of the oppressor. To blame institutions implies that men and women are equally victimized, obscures the fact that men benefit from the subordination of women, and gives men the excuse that they are forced to be oppressors. On the contrary, any man is free to renounce his superior position, provided that he is willing to be treated like a woman by other men.

We also reject the idea that women consent to or are to blame for their own oppression. Women's submission is not the result of brain-washing, stupidity or mental illness but of continual, daily pressure from men. We do not need to change ourselves, but to change men.

The most slanderous evasion of all is that women can oppress men. The basis for this illusion is the isolation of individual relationships from their political context and the tendency of men to see any legitimate challenge to their privileges as persecution.

V. We regard our personal experience, and our feelings about that experience, as the basis for an analysis of our common situation. We cannot rely on existing ideologies as they are all products of male supremacist culture. We question every generalization and accept none that are not confirmed by our experience.

Our chief task at present is to develop female class consciousness through sharing experience and publicly exposing the sexist foundation of all our institutions. Consciousness-raising is not 'therapy,' which implies the existence of individual solutions and falsely assumes that the male-female relationship is purely personal, but the only method by which we can ensure that our program for liberation is based on the concrete realities of our lives.

The first requirement for raising class consciousness is honesty, in private and in public, with ourselves and other women.

- VI. We identify with all women. We define our best interest as that of the poorest, most brutally exploited women.

We repudiate all economic, racial, educational or status privileges that divide us from other women. We are determined to recognize and eliminate any prejudices we may hold against other women.

We are committed to achieving internal democracy. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that every woman in our movement has an equal chance to participate, assume responsibility, and develop her political potential.

- VII. We call on all our sisters to unite with us in struggle.

We call on all men to give up their male privilege and support women's liberation in the interest of our humanity and their own.

In fighting for our liberation we will always take the side of women against their oppressors. We will not ask what is 'revolutionary' or 'reformist,' only what is good for women.

The time for individual skirmishes has passed. This time we are going all the way."

Members of the group Radicalesbians, in their 1970 manifesto, embraced the term "lesbian," challenged readers to do the same, and claimed the radical feminist mantle for themselves.

"What is a lesbian? A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion. She is the woman who . . . acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society . . . cares to allow her. . . . But lesbianism is also different from male homosexuality, and serves a different function in the society. . . . Lesbian is the word, the label, the

Redstockings" chose a name that rejected the old slur that intellectual women were unfeminine "blue-stockings"; the "red" in the group's name signaled their self-identification as Marxist feminists.

"It's hard to convey to people who didn't go through that experience how radical, how unpopular and difficult and scary it was just to get up and say, 'Men oppress women. Men have oppressed me. . . .' We were laughed at, patronized, called frigid, emotionally disturbed man-haters."

—Ellen Willis, a founder of Redstockings, 1992

In 1973, responding to challenges from lesbian and gay rights groups, and acknowledging the lack of any evidence for its categorization as a "mental disorder," the American Psychiatric Association removed homosexuality from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*.

condition that holds women in line. When a woman hears this word tossed her way, she knows she is stepping out of line. She knows that she has crossed the terrible boundary of her sex role. She recoils, she protests, she reshapes her actions to gain approval. Lesbian is a label invented by the man to throw at any woman who dares to be his equal, who dares to challenge his prerogatives, . . . who dares to assert the primacy of her own needs. . . . For in this sexist society, for a woman to be independent means she *can't* be a woman—she must be a *dyke*."

In a 1969 essay, black feminist Frances Beal, whose personal experience had been shaped by her activism within the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the black power movement, analyzed the "double jeopardy" or intersecting oppressions that African American women faced and the pressure they felt to defer to male leadership.

"[I]t is idle dreaming to think of black women simply caring for their homes and children like the middle class white model. Most black women have to work to help house, feed, and clothe their families. Black women make up a substantial percentage of the black working force and this is true for the poorest black family as well as the so-called 'middle-class' family. . . . [B]lack women are not resentful of the rise to power of black men. We welcome it. We see in it the eventual liberation of all black people from this oppressive System of capitalism. Nevertheless, this does not mean that you have to negate one for the other. This kind of thinking is a product of miseducation; that it's either X or it's Y. It is fallacious reasoning that in order for the black man to be strong, the black woman has to be weak. . . . [W]e must begin talking about the elimination of all kinds of oppression. . . . We need our whole army out there dealing with the enemy and not half an army. . . . It becomes essential . . . to realize that the exploitation of black people and women works to everyone's disadvantage and that the liberation of these two groups is a stepping stone to the liberation of all oppressed people in this country and around the world."

Emphasizing women's personal freedom, women's liberation feminists created alternative, woman-oriented institutions that emphasized self-help. The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, deeply critical of how the existing health care system treated women, produced a major work in 1970 entitled *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Its explicit discussion of issues ranging from abortion to lesbian sex was both shocking and empowering. The group explained its approach in the work's first edition.

"A year ago, a group of us . . . got together to work on a laywoman's course on health, women and our bodies. . . . [S]everal of us developed a questionnaire about women's feelings about their bodies and their relationship to doctors. We discovered there were no 'good' doctors and we had to learn for ourselves. We talked about our own experiences and we shared our own knowledge. We went to books and to medically trained people for more information. We decided on the topics collectively. (Originally, they included: Patient as Victim; Sexuality; Anatomy; Birth Control; Abortion; Pregnancy; Prepared Childbirth; Postpartum and Childcare; Medical Institutions; Medical Laws; and Organizing for Change.) . . .

It was exciting to learn new facts about our bodies, but it was even more exciting to talk about how we felt about our bodies, how we felt about ourselves, how we could become more autonomous human beings, how we could act together on our collective knowledge to change the health care system for women and for all people."

As women's rights feminists worked through the courts and legal system to legalize abortion, women's liberation feminists in Chicago created a women's healthcare center and established a network to assist women seeking safe (illegal) abortions. They called their service "Jane." Laura Kaplan, a founding member of Jane, recalled its work and foundational principles in her 1995 book *The Story of Jane*.

"Jane was the contact name for a group in Chicago officially known as The Abortion Counseling Service of Women's Liberation. Every week desperate women of every class, race and ethnicity telephoned Jane. . . .

As members of the women's liberation movement, the women in Jane viewed reproductive control as fundamental to women's freedom. The power to act had to be in the hands of each woman. Her decision about an abortion needed to be underscored as an active choice about her life. . . .

When a woman came to Jane for an abortion, the experience she had was markedly different from what she encountered in standard medical settings. She was included. She was in control. Rather than being a passive recipient, a patient, she was expected to participate. . . . By letting each woman know beforehand what to expect during the abortion and the recovery stage, and then talking with her step by step through the abortion itself, group members attempted to give each woman a sense of her own personal power in a situation in which most women felt powerless. Jane tried

to create an environment in which women could take back their bodies, and by doing so, take back their lives. . . .

Jane developed at a time when blind obedience to medical authority was the rule. There were no patient advocates or hospital ombudsmen, no such person as a health consumer. Few women understood their reproductive physiology or had any idea where to get the information they needed. The special knowledge doctors had was deliberately made inaccessible, couched in language incomprehensible to the lay person. We did not have a right to it. . . .

Now many of us know that we can get the medical information we need in a library or bookstore, but this was unheard of twenty-five years ago. . . .

Women's liberation groups organized speak-outs at which women testified to their own illegal abortions. They marched and demonstrated and disrupted legislative hearings on abortion that excluded women. They demanded that women, the true experts on abortion, be heard and recognized. They brought abortion out of the closet, where it had been shrouded in secrecy and shame. . . . [They] framed the issue, not in terms of privacy in sexual relations, and not in the neutral language of choice, but in terms of a woman's freedom to determine her own destiny as she defined it, not as others defined it. Abortion was a touchstone. If she did not have the right to control her own body, which included freedom from forced sterilizations and unnecessary hysterectomies, gains in other areas were meaningless. . . .

While the public struggle was underway, every day women who tried to find abortions put their lives at risk. Their suffering could not be ignored. Women's groups and networks of the clergy organized to meet these women's immediate needs. Based on a moral imperative, Howard Moody, a Baptist minister, founded the first clergy group, the New York Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion [in 1967]. He encouraged clergymen throughout the country to set up similar networks to help women get safe abortions. . . .

Both the clergy and women's liberation groups sought out competent abortionists, negotiated the price, raised money to pay for abortions and counseled thousands of distraught women. Not only did they help women but, by breaking the law, they also undermined it. They followed the tradition of the Underground Railroad which defied another immoral law, the Fugitive Slave Act, and helped to undermine the institution of chattel slavery. Like the

scores of people who were part of the Underground Railroad, the stories of those who participated in these referral services are part of our hidden history."

On the fiftieth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment, August 26, 1970, the National Organization for Women sponsored Women's Strike for Equality. In her draft message calling on women to participate, Betty Friedan made clear her view that women had not yet achieved full citizenship.

"Our movement toward true equality for all women in America in fully equal partnership with men has reached this year a point of critical mass. The chain reaction of events and breakthroughs against sex discrimination and the denigration of women as we begin this new decade is unmistakable evidence that the unfinished revolution of women towards full human freedom, dignity, self determination and full participation in the mainstream of society has exploded into the consciousness, into the actions of millions of women across the lines of generation, across the lines of nation, of color, of man-made politics.

It is only three years since employers and even government commissioners empowered to enforce the civil rights act's ban on sex discrimination in employment were treating it as a slightly dirty joke. . . . It is only two years ago that we dared to say that the right of a woman to control her own body's reproductive process should be an inalienable human right for the time—women's voice was heard on the question of abortion, up until then, completely decided by men. I still remember the courage it took for us to dare to confront this question in terms of the basic principle involved and how even the abortion reformers laughed when we changed the terms of the debate from reform to repeal. . . .

All of us this past year have learned in our gut that sisterhood is powerful. The awesome power of women united, the awesome political power of 53% of the population, is visible now and is being taken seriously, as all of us who define ourselves as people now take the actions that need to be taken in every city and state, and together make our voices heard. . . .

And so we face now the awesome responsibility of this beautiful miracle of our own power as women to change society, to change the conditions that oppress us in government, industry, the professions, the churches, the political parties, the unions, in education, in medicine and in our own homes, in the very images that confine us. I think it is urgent that we confront in all seriousness the power

we have to make this revolution happen now, not in some abstract future, . . . but in our own lives, in the mainstream of our own society. We have the power to restructure the institutions and conditions that oppress all women now, and it is our responsibility to history, to ourselves, to all who will come after us, to use this power NOW. . . .

We must use our power to end the war between the sexes by confronting politically the conditions, the institutions that keep women in this impotent state. If we confront the real conditions that oppress men now as well as women and translate our rage into action, then and only then will sex really be liberated to be an active joy and a receiving joy for women and for men, when we are both really free to be all we can be. This is not a war to be fought in the bedroom, but in the city, in the political arena. . . .

I propose that on Wednesday, August 26, we call a 24-hour general strike, a resistance both passive and active, of all women in America against the concrete conditions of their oppression. On that day, 50 years after the amendment that gave women the vote became part of the Constitution, I propose we use our power to declare an ultimatum on all who would keep us from using our rights as Americans. I propose that the women who are doing menial chores in the offices cover their typewriters and close their notebooks and the telephone operators unplug their switchboards, the waitresses stop waiting, cleaning women stop cleaning, and everyone who is doing a job for which a man would be paid more—stop; every woman pegged forever as “assistant-to,” doing jobs for which men get the credit, stop. In every office, every laboratory, every school, all the women to whom we get word will spend the day discussing, analyzing the conditions which keep us from being all we might be. And if the condition that keeps us down is the lack of a child care center, we will bring our babies to the office that day and sit them on our bosses’ laps. We do not know how many will join our day of abstention from so-called women’s work, but I expect it will be millions. We will then present concrete demands to those who so far have made all the decisions.

And when it begins to get dark, instead of cooking dinner or making love, we will assemble, and we will carry candles symbolic of that flame of the passionate journey down through history—relit anew in every city—to converge the visible power of women at city hall—at the political arena where the larger options of our life

are decided. If men want to join us, fine. If politicians, if political bosses, if mayors and governors wish to discuss our demands, fine, but we will define the terms of the dialogue. And we will send our most skillful scouts to track down senators one by one, until we have his commitment to the equal rights of women. And by the time these 24 hours are ended, our revolution will be a fact."



Native Women's Reproductive Rights Agenda

"Empowerment Through Dialogue", a historical three-day meeting was held in Pierre, South Dakota, on May 16, 17, and 18, 1990. More than 30 Native Women, representing over eleven (11) Nations from the Northern Plains came together in a collective decision making process to form a Reproductive Rights Coalition. Their efforts resulted in an Agenda for Native Women's Reproductive Rights.

