

WOMEN'S DYNAMIC ROLE IN THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES

by

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PREFACE

At the outset of my studies, my goal was to look at women's role in the United States Federal Government. The study was to span from the inception of the United States Government to the present. The purpose of the study was to highlight the large gender gap in the United States Government. However, I soon found there to be an overwhelming amount of material to discuss. Realizing the limited amount of space I had to fit my findings, I narrowed the topic to women's role in the United States House of Representatives. Even with this narrowed scope, the gender gap in representation is obvious, and highlights the fact that America, even in the 21st Century, is not truly equal.

The reason I mention the gender gap in the United States House of Representatives is not simply to dwell on the fact that one exists, but to discuss *how* and *why* it has remained a structural characteristic of the legislative body that is intended to be the closest to the people. In order to find answers to the questions aforementioned, it is necessary to discuss the evolution of ideals, principles, and beliefs possessed by the American population from 1776 to today.

Even if there are no definitive answers to the questions posed above, it is my hope that the discussion will highlight the pivotal role of women in all stages of the United States' existence, and underline the importance of women's participation in the United States House of Representatives.

Time Frame

In order to reach a point where it is possible to discuss women's role in the United States House of Representatives, it is necessary to analyze women's position throughout America's past and show the journey that has led them to the attainment of their current representation in the House of Representatives. After discussing women's struggle to gain a place in the United States Government and the ways in which their beliefs have changed in the years they have held seats in the House, I hope to be able to draw inferences regarding women's future participation in the United States House of Representatives.

Shifting Spheres

While the discussion in the text will seem to shift away from discussing women's role in government, this shift will highlight the many different spheres filled by women throughout American history. After all, the differences between men and women are not solely based solely on biological makeup, but also on social constructs.

The text will also shift from an examination of the opinion of women's population in a general sense to the viewpoints of specific women. This will allow for a comparison of general popular opinion and the specific views held by women who have served in the House of Representatives. This will allow the text to examine the ways both have evolved over time.

Structural Foundations

Chapter one will pose the questions for which answers are sought throughout the text. This chapter will also explain the underlying themes of the text and how they hold an important place in the discussion of women's role in the United States House of Representatives. The

chapter will conclude by noting why it is necessary to find a solution to the problem of gender polarization in the United States House of Representatives.

Chapter two will serve as a discussion of women's general role in American Society from 1776 to 1910. While no women serve in the House of Representatives during this period, the dynamic behavior of women and the spheres they filled during this period served as precursors for their future political activity. Analysis of this period also highlights the beliefs held by Americans before women attained representation in the House of Representatives. In discussing this period, the chapter will also note the explicit and implicit social and political restraints women faced from America's roots.

Chapter three will discuss the period during which women began to acquire a position in the United States government. It will go into detail about individual women who have served in the United States House of Representatives. These case studies will highlight women's dynamic ideological beliefs from their political beginnings to their current representation in the United States House of Representatives.

Chapter four of this text will be an accumulation and summarization of each idea presented in chapters one through five. It will attempt to apply discussion accrued in previous chapters to an inferential analysis of women's future participation in the United States House of Representatives and the ways in which their position might see expansion. From an ideological standpoint, this chapter will also note the ideals that must be abandoned by society for women to gain greater representation in the United States House of Representatives.

Final Note

It is my hope that readers, after reading the following text, will leave behind certain prejudice or misconceptions regarding women's ability to handle politics, a practice that has long been considered a man's job.

CHAPTER ONE: WOMEN'S PLIGHT

The United States Legislature was established by Article 1, Section 1 of the United States Constitution, which states: "All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives."¹ The House of Representatives, the governing body upon which the following text focuses, is further defined by Section 2 of Article 1, which states:

The House of Representatives shall be composed of Members chosen every second Year by the People of the several States, and the Electors in each State shall have the Qualifications requisite for Electors of the most numerous Branch of the State Legislature.²

Article 1, Section 2 also discusses the stipulations for membership in the United States House of Representatives.

No Person shall be a Representative who shall not have attained to the Age of twenty-five Years, and been seven Years a Citizen of the United States, and who shall not, when elected, be an Inhabitant of that State in which he shall be chosen.³

As noted earlier, the following text will focus *only on* the House of Representatives because of its proximal relation to constituents. Not only do members of the House of Representatives answer to a smaller number of constituents than their counterparts in the Senate, but also have shorter terms of service, lasting only two years. In essence, the constituents of Representatives are able to scrutinize their representative's behavior much more than can constituents of Senators. Also, with the high number of districts, elections can highlight political thought on a more molecular level than can a Presidential or Senatorial Election. It is my hope that examining

¹ U.S. Constitution, art.1, sec. 1.

² U.S. Constitution, art.1, sec. 2.

³ Ibid.

elections on this level will reflect the pattern of thought held by and about women during the evolution of women's rights and throughout their progressive ascent within the United States House of Representatives.

Equality, Freedom, and Opportunity

Equality, freedom, and opportunity are three ideals for which women have continually fought throughout American history. In order to implement these terms in discussion, it is important to define them and discuss the ways in which they are interrelated.

According to *Black's Law Dictionary*, equality is: "The quality or state of being equal; especially, likeness in power or political status."⁴ *Black's Law Dictionary* defines freedom as: "The state of being free or liberated."⁵ While not defined by *Black's Law Dictionary*, *Oxford Dictionary* defines opportunity as, "a set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something,"⁶ or, "a chance for employment or promotion."⁷

A lack of equality and freedom in the United States is visible throughout most of American history. The lack of these ideals has been the foundation for many controversies including the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, the Abolitionist Movement, and the movements for Women's and Civil Rights.

When breaking the bonds of certain institutions in America, including both slavery and domesticity, freedom seems to always serve as a precursor for equality. Just as African Americans had to gain freedom from the institution of slavery, women had to gain freedom from

⁴ Bryan A. Garner, Ed. *Black's Law Dictionary, Ninth Edition*. (St. Paul: Thomson Reuters, 2009), 616.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 735.

⁶ *Concise Oxford American Dictionary*, (New York: Oxford University, 2006), 621.

⁷ *Ibid.*

the institution of domesticity. While equality and freedom have come a long way from where they stood in 1776, it would be an oversimplified fallacy to discuss America as a land of freedom and equality. Opportunity can be interwoven with equality and freedom, but in the case of the following text, the opportunity for women to serve in the House of Representatives came only after they attained the foundations of freedom and equality. At this point, it is important to note that domesticity, while it is not practiced in the same way it was earlier in America's existence, *is still* alive and sometimes still defines the social and political sphere allotted American women. This inequality creates barriers in its infinite assumptions, through which few women are ever able to pass.

Women's Current Stake in Government

Even though the following text focuses on the United States House of Representatives, it is still important to highlight the noticeably gender polarized representation in each branch of the United States Federal Government, something shown in Chart A.

Chart A

Branch of Federal Government	Number of Members	Number of Women	Percent of Women
Legislative (Total)	535	90	17
House of Representatives ⁸	435	73	17
Senate ⁹	100	17	17
Executive ¹⁰	21	7	33
Judicial ¹¹	9	3	33

Of course, it is clear that polarization exists in each of the three branches that make up the United States Federal Government, but the subject of women in every branch would be too much to cover in too short a time. Only having 73 women in the United States House of Representatives out of 435 total members carries a greater significance because of the relation of the House of Representatives to the people. Voters choose individuals from their districts to run for the United States House of Representatives. While the details of why women have not been elected will be discussed later, all that needs to be noted now is that they are not, at least as often as men.

Discussion in a Global Context

In many instances, America likes to portray itself of the land of equality. Although it is difficult to admit, America's legislative representation is not as equal as that in European countries. Chart B shows the number of women who have seats in European legislatures, and the percent to which that number corresponds.

⁸ *Representative Offices*. House.gov. Retrieved: July 11, 2010. <http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW.shtml>

⁹ *Senators of the 111th Congress*. Senate.gov. Retrieved: July 11, 2010. http://www.senate.gov/general/contact_information/senators_cfm.cfm

¹⁰ *The Cabinet*. WhiteHouse.gov. Retrieved: July 11, 2010. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/cabinet>

¹¹ *Members of the Supreme Court of the United States*. SupremeCourt.gov. Retrieved: July 11, 2010. <http://www.supremecourt.gov/about/members.aspx>

Chart B

Country and Legislature	Number of Members	Number of Women	Percent of Women
England, House of Commons ¹²	646	126	19.5
Canada, House of Commons ¹³	308	65	21
France, National Assembly ¹⁴	577	105	18
Germany, Bundestag ¹⁵	613	194	31.6
Spain, Congress of Deputies ¹⁶	350	127	36.3

While France’s National Assembly is made up only of 2 percent more women than the United States House of Representatives, 37 percent of Spain’s legislature is composed of women.

Although these numbers cannot define unfair, or give the United States House of Representatives that title, they do highlight the way America’s House of Representatives has fewer women, at least with regard to percentage than a number of developed European nations.

Questions Posed

1. How has gender polarization remained a characteristic of the House of Representatives?
2. What is/are the cause(s) of gender polarization in the House of Representatives?
3. What must be done to overcome this polarization?
4. Why is gender polarization in the House of Representatives a problem?

¹² “Women in politics worldwide,” CBC News Interactive, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/interactives/map-world-womenpolitics/> (accessed April 8, 2011).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Answers to Questions Posed

It is difficult to dictate which conclusions will or should be drawn from the information presented throughout the following text. The conclusions, for the most part, will be left up to the reader to define. The goal of this text is not to draw a specific, explicit conclusion, but to highlight the reality of gender polarization in legislative representation and show why it is a necessary problem to solve.

CHAPTER TWO: FOUNDATIONS OF GENDER ROLES AND A HISTORY OF AMERICAN WOMEN: 1776-1910

WE hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed...¹⁷

The passage above, from the Declaration of Independence, is often cited as the foundation of the principles of freedom and equality that come with being an American citizen. However, this passage was penned almost one hundred years before the abolition of slavery and the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which granted African Americans the right to vote. It preceded women being granted the right to vote by almost 145 years. Furthermore, the author of the paragraph, Thomas Jefferson, owned slaves.

In a letter dated March 31, 1776, Abigail Adams wrote her husband to point out the apparent contradiction between the longing of many colonists to gain independence from England and the fact that many of them partook in practices that restricted others from gaining independence or, in many cases, freedom. She noted: “I have sometimes been ready to think that the passion for Liberty cannot be Equally [*sic*] Strong in the Breasts of those who have been accustomed to deprive their fellow Creatures of theirs.”¹⁸ Although both John and Abigail likely knew the repercussions that would be faced if the abolition of slavery were tacked onto a statement of independence, Mrs. Adams’s awareness of such a contradiction and willingness to explicate it, shows that even at the time of the founding, slavery was considered by many to be

¹⁷ Declaration of Independence. In *The Declaration of Independence & The Constitution of the United States* (New York: Bantam, 2008), 53.

¹⁸ John Rhodehamel, *The American Revolution: Writings from the War of Independence* (New York: The Library of America, 2001), 116.

morally wrong. However, in order to appease the colonies whose economy was built upon the institution of slavery, the issue was avoided.

After pointing out the contradiction above, Mrs. Adams shifts the focus of her letter from slavery to women's position in society.

--I long to hear you have declared an independency—and by the way in the new Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make I desire you would Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favourable [*sic*] to them than your ancestors. Do not put such unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could. If perticular [*sic*] care and attention is not paid to the Laidies [*sic*] we are determined to foment a Rebellion [*sic*], and will not hold ourselves bound by any Laws in which we have no voice, or Representation.

That your sex are Naturally Tyrannical is a Truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of Master for the more tender and endearing one of Friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and the Lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity. Men of sense in all Ages abhor those customs [*sic*] which treat us only as the vassals of your Sex. Regard us then as Beings placed by providence under your protection and in imitation of the Supream [*sic*] Being make use of that power only for our happiness.¹⁹

Mrs. Adams's ability to see the unequal position of women highlights her understanding of human nature, and the endless assumptions that come with being human. Slavery was a contrived practice, built and exercised by man. Male supremacy, on the other hand, was a conditioned principle. At the time, being a homemaker and bearing children were understood by many to be the purpose of women's existence.

From the letter above, one can infer that there was, at the very least, a budding awareness of both inequality and polarization in power. Where did this inequality and polarization come from? The answer to this question spans across institutions, patterns of thought, and principles adopted from Europe. Women would, shortly after the establishment of America, begin to

¹⁹ Ibid.,117.

understand that male supremacy was wrong and unfair, and that the purpose of women was not confined to being domestic servants and child-bearers.

Origin of Gender Spheres

As the colonies began to acquire a sense of independence from Great Britain, the founding fathers searched for a set of principles to define their new society. Many of the founding fathers were well educated, and had become familiar with philosophical writings. The ideas of philosophers, therefore, became engrained in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, and the principles adopted by the new nation.

In her book, *Women of the Republic*, Linda K. Kerber discusses the beliefs adopted from philosophers, and specifies the philosophers whose ideas made the largest contribution to the foundations of America.

Kerber notes that most philosophers reflected in the foundations of American society ignored women's existence, denounced their stake in politics and government, or stressed their feminine features; features they believed made women "unfit" for the political stage. This "republican ideology [adopted by the founding fathers] primarily concerned a single sex rather than an American community of both sexes."²⁰ In the 1770's, it would have been difficult to see the gender polarization in the writing of many of these philosophers, because it was accepted at the time. For instance, philosophers often use "he," which was considered a term that acknowledged both men and women. However, Kerber highlights that philosopher's use of the

²⁰ Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect & Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 7.

word man, “was in fact literal, not generic.”²¹ This generic word found its way into documents like the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. Although it is arguable whether the use of the word meant the same thing to the founding fathers, their behavior implies that it did. More important than the adoption of the generic use of the word “he” from philosophers, was the founding father’s adoption of the ideas, beliefs, and principles of these philosophers, which laid the foundation for a gender polarized American society.

The writings of John Locke were some of the most influential in the construction of American society. His views on equality in the government are widely known and revered, but his thoughts on women’s role in government are rarely discussed. While Locke only “highlight[s] the powers women should have in their domestic capacity”²² in his *First Treatise*, he makes it a point to reiterate his belief that women ought to be controlled by men through vows of matrimony. However, in his *Second Treatise*, Locke implicitly alludes to women’s equality.

Locke’s “proposed legislative body was composed of persons; the supreme power was placed in them by the people.”²³ As Kerber notes, this passage, by using “people,” was meant to include women. While this was revolutionary for a person living during Locke’s time, Condorcet, who would inhabit the latter half of the 18th Century, takes his discussion of women’s equality one step further.

²¹ Ibid., 15.

²² Ibid., 18.

²³ Ibid., 18.

“Condorcet came closest to inventing procedures as well as justifications for including women in politics.”²⁴ Condorcet discusses the role women are entitled to play in the sphere of politics.

Condorcet pointed out that although women had not exercised the right of citizenship in any ‘constitution called free,’ the right to political voice in a republic was generally claimed by men on grounds that might equally well be claimed by women—that they were ‘sensible beings, capable of reason, having moral ideas.’²⁵

While Locke and Condorcet’s beliefs expanded the role women might play in the future of politics, there were still philosophers who believed that women belonged nowhere near the spheres of politics or government.

In his *Social Contract*, Rousseau discusses women as a group of people who should submit to men. He also discusses politics as a sphere for men; one that should remain off limits to women. “Repeatedly Rousseau insisted that the woman who seeks to be a politician or philosopher does violence to her own character and sexual identity.”²⁶ In this statement, Rousseau discusses how women should be seen as gentle, frail, and uncorrupted by politics, a pattern of thought that foreshadows femininity and domesticity. He also highlights that women, much like children, remain dependent on their husbands, allowing them to suffer any of the repercussions from their actions. Although this reflection of women seems outlandish, it still defines their social and political roles in today’s society.

Although the above examples are just a few that highlight the ways philosophers viewed women’s position in society, they show that there were those who believed in extending and

²⁴ Ibid., 21.

²⁵ Ibid., 21.

²⁶ Ibid., 26.

those who believed in repressing women's position in the social and political spheres. The problem, however, was that Americans adopted the views that repressed women. Of course, the views of philosophers were not the only vehicle for the repression of women's equality. Some institutions, like marriage, also reiterated women's inferiority to men.

While the colonists were attempting to break apart from Great Britain, they concurrently adopted many of their institutions. Common law was one of these institutions. Common law is defined by *Black's Law Dictionary* as, "The body of law based on the English legal system, as distinct from a civil-law system; the general Anglo-American system of legal concepts, together with the techniques of applying them, that form the basis of the law in jurisdictions where the system applies."²⁷ While the adoption of the common law system served as a reiteration of the spheres defining gender roles, it is more likely that practices and institutions associated with common law, like marriage, reiterated women's inferiority.

Although *Black's Law Dictionary* defines marriage as, "The legal union of a couple as spouses,"²⁸ this definition only breaches the surface of what marriage really means.

According to Nancy F. Cott in *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation*, through marriage, "Men and women take up the public roles of husbands and wives along with the private roles and duties. These roles have been powerful, historically, in shaping both male and female citizens' entitlements and obligations."²⁹ Cott delves further into this argument noting, "The whole system of attribution and meaning that we call *gender* relies on and to a great

²⁷ Garner, 313.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 1059.

²⁹ Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 36.

extent derives from the structuring provided by marriage.”³⁰ Particular laws were applicable to married couples that did not apply to others. Although the laws typically extended the rights of male citizens, they reduced those of married women. This included the acquisition of land and capital held by the woman before she was married. In turn, marriage named men as the representative of their household. Men were considered the citizens of the family, because many believed vows of matrimony to be synonymous with an agreement to agree. Regarding women’s citizenship, Cott writes:

Wives and children did not represent themselves but looked to the male head of household to represent and support them, in return for which they owed their obedience and service. A man’s headship of a family, his taking responsibility for dependent wife and children, qualified him to be a participating member of a state.³¹

Equating women with children concerning citizenship, women’s input was reduced to a level of insignificance. Cott notes that, “Although most American states supplanted the common law with their own legal codes by the early 1800s—central assumptions about marriage, such as essential unity of the married pair, continued to orient the minds of lawyers and statesmen and to flow into legal decisions and the culture at large.”³² Even as common law was substituted, the principles it carried regarding gender equality remained as cornerstones of American society. The gender role assumptions developed from common law laid foundation for the development of a cult of domesticity and the principles of femininity.

The cult of domesticity is a product of assumptions and stereotypes acquired from past ideals, and has become commonplace in America’s social structure. Thomas Dew, who would

³⁰ Ibid., 36.

³¹ Ibid., 84.

³² Ibid., 89.

eventually become the President of the College of William and Mary and is remembered for his strong views in support of the institution of slavery, was not afraid to explicitly define the roles of men and women. Of men's sphere, Dew writes,

He leaves the domestic scenes; he plunges into the turmoil and bustle of an active, selfish world; in his journey through life, he has to encounter innumerable difficulties, hardships and labors which constantly beset him. His mind must be nerved against them. Hence courage and boldness are his attributes.³³

Regarding women's sphere, Dew writes:

Her attributes are rather of a passive than active character. Her power is more emblematic of divinity.... Woman we behold dependent and weak...but out of that very weakness and dependence springs an irresistible power.³⁴

While many consider Thomas Dew's views extremely radical, they give clear shape to the sphere that would later come to be known as the "cult of domesticity." This sphere would place barriers on women's participation in many American institutions for years to come.

In their text, *A History of Women in America*, Carol Hymowitz and Michael Weissman discuss Dew's definition of women's sphere in terms of a "bargain,"³⁵ which, if not agreed to, turned into a "threat."³⁶

Implicit in the sphere theory was a kind of bargain –so long as a woman acted the part of piety, purity, submission, and domesticity, she was guaranteed the respect of her society. The bargain, however, contained a threat. If she stepped out of her sphere and sought a place for herself in the world, she was despised as an 'unsexed' woman.³⁷

³³ Carol Hymowitz and Michael Weissman, *A History of Women in America* (New York: Bantam Books, 1978), 66.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

If the bargain described above is an accurate depiction of gender spheres in the 18th and 19th centuries, women are not only lead into the “cult of domesticity” by principle, but are also coerced into it by the threat of becoming “unsexed.”

While Dew’s statements foreshadowed what the cult of domesticity would one day become, many women would also be vocal in their opinions of women’s rightful place in the American social structure.

Sarah Hale, “the publisher of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, throughout which the discussion focused on, what Hale believed to be women’s proper role in American society.”³⁸ Hymowitz and Weissman go on to write, “[She] had very definite ideas about woman’s place and characteristics. A true woman, she wrote, was ‘delicate and timid’; ‘required protection’; ‘possessed a sweet dependency’; ‘was above all things modest’; and had ‘charming and insinuating manners.’”³⁹

Hale’s views define a stay at home wife, which reflects common stereotypes about women’s role in American society. Hale, “counseled women to devote themselves to their housekeeping as if it were a fine art.”⁴⁰ Of course, Ms. Hale would not be the only woman to attempt to define women’s rightful place in American society, nor would her views be the most repressive.

Mrs. A.J. Graves, the author of, *Woman in America; Being An Examination Into The Moral and Intellectual Condition of American Female Society*, discusses women’s role in a more straightforward and repressive manner.

³⁸ Ibid., 67.

³⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 67.

Woman's empire is *Home* [sic]; and by adding spirituality to its happiness, dignity to its dominion, and power to its influences, it becomes the best security for *individual integrity*, and the surest safeguard for *national virtue*.⁴¹

Throughout her life, Mrs. Graves discussed women as the gender meant to serve in the domestic sphere. She would, later in her life, protest the idea of girls attending public schools, pointing to the way it was detrimental to their development in the domestic spheres.

Although Dew, Hale, and Graves's views seem to fall outside the scope of discussion, they are relevant in the way they highlight how both men *and* women had developed opinions of women that confined them to the domestic sphere. Certainly, there were also those who believed women should be treated the same, or at least similar to, men.

For many, Dew, Hale, and Graves's views have never been left behind. Some voters still trust men more with the execution of governmental functions. However, as can be seen in America's fight for Independence, to call women's role in the foundations of American society less than pivotal would be a fallacy.

American Revolution-The Constitution

While one typically views the American Revolution as a war won by men, in all likelihood, the war would not have been successful without the help of women. In a way, women served as a base, allowing the army to pivot more freely. Without women, men had no support on their respective home fronts. If not for this strong base, many men would have seen their

⁴¹ A.J. Graves, *Woman in America; Being An Examination Into The Moral and Intellectual Condition of American Female Society* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishing, 1843), 1.

decisions greatly restricted, in turn, greatly depleting the army and making the Revolution unwinnable.

While men fought on the battlefield and in political debates, women fought from their homes in any way they could. Many women replaced tea with coffee, seeing coffee as a more American beverage, symbolizing an ideological separation from the mother country. Many women also refused to wear British made clothing believing that, with the purchase of such goods, they were giving aid to the enemy.⁴² Women were also seen as extremely important in the production of clothing for soldiers.

The generic phrase *he* was still used in the language of statutes passed by states, but those dealing with commodity production for the war made it very clear that women were specifically regarded as sources of clothing and blankets the army needed.⁴³

Some women even served as collection agents. These collection agents were in charge of finding supplies for American troops including blankets, clothing, and shoes. In certain instances, women found themselves fighting to obtain these goods from greedy entrepreneurs.

When women were not helping to produce or procure supplies for the military, they were attempting to raise their children, maintain their homes, and in many cases, serve as their family's breadwinner in their husband's absence. In wearing all these different hats, women, even if only implicitly, became involved in politics. One woman who was especially embroiled in the political sphere was Mercy Otis Warren. Carol Hymowitz and Michael Weissman note that, "politics rather than her family was at the center of Mercy Otis Warren's life."⁴⁴ While she was the exception to the rule during the Revolutionary period, Mrs. Warren, perhaps,

⁴² Kerber, 38-39.

⁴³ Ibid., 42.

⁴⁴ Hymowitz and Weissman, 28.

foreshadowed women's political involvement even more than did Abigail Adams. Warren was so enveloped and well versed in the language and ideology of politics that she, "spoke out in favor of independence before the Continental Congress was ready to take such a stand."⁴⁵ Mercy Otis Warren demonstrated the tremendous foresight of which women were capable. She seemed to see America's problems and solutions with a great deal of clairvoyance, and was not afraid to discuss taboo topics before they were even acknowledged by her male counterparts.

To call the women's roles discussed above anything less than heroic would be just as much a fallacy as denying the significance of women's role in the foundations of American society. However, there were also women who became legends on the battlefield. These are the stories we are often told.

Three well renowned women of the Revolution, notable for their service either as soldiers or spies, were Deborah Sampson, Margaret Corbin, and Lydia Darragh. While the annals of history show great affection and respect for these women, their stories differ greatly from one another, but their pivotal roles in the American Revolution, respectively, give these women something in common. Deborah Sampson served in the army "until 1783, during which time, she was stabbed at least twice."⁴⁶ She eventually "received an honorable discharge from Henry Knox at West Point in 1783."⁴⁷ Sampson took an interesting approach to joining the army, entering under the false pretenses of a disguise. This was an entry technique rarely used, but highlights the great amount of drive she had to fight for the new nation. Margaret Corbin, on the other hand, took a less risky path to fighting in the continental army.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁶ Kay Bailey Hutchison, *Leading Ladies* (New York: Harper, 2007), 6.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 8.

Corbin became involved in the war when,

...her husband's company, the First Pennsylvania Artillery, was surrounded by British and Hessian troops in the battle of Fort Mifflin in September 1776, Margaret assisted her husband in loading his cannon. He was killed early in the fighting, and she took over as cannoneer [*sic*]. Wounded during the battle, Margaret became a prisoner of the British when the Americans finally surrendered on November 16.⁴⁸

Although she came out of the Revolution with no use of one of her arm and without her husband, Corbin highlighted that women, like men, were willing to give whatever it took to establish their new nation.

Some women were lucky in that they were able to serve their country without suffering great bodily harm. Their risk, however, was equal to that assumed by women who were actually harmed during the war. One person who assumed this immense risk was Lydia Darragh, who served as a spy during the Revolution, relaying messages she had obtained from General Howe (who had taken over her house for his meetings, but allowed her to stay inside) to George Washington.⁴⁹ Although she was never harmed, she took on a great deal of risk, but ultimately may have been one of the most significant factors in America's victory in the Revolution.

Women's role in the American Revolution, as highlighted above, was much more than preserving the domestic sphere. They were soldiers, spies, domestic managers, entrepreneurs, and farmers. By breaking out of their assigned spheres during the American Revolution, many women were able to see that they were more than capable of filling a man's shoes.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

The Constitution-The Beginning of the 19th Century

The Articles of Confederation is remembered as a document that weakened the central government. What is not often noted about the Articles of Confederation is its lack of language acknowledging women's role in the new government. It, much like common law, assumed wives to be components of their husbands. While the Articles of Confederation were replaced by the United States Constitution, the latter did little to quell the issue of gender inequality.

The ratification of the United States Constitution was not dependent upon the question of women's rights or women's equality. Much like in the past, the generic phrase *he* was widely used. Not only was this an implicit recognition of male dominance in late 18th Century America, but also implicitly acknowledged the idea that, upon recitation of the vows of marriage, a husband and wife became a single entity, or political being. In this relationship, women were overlooked, and their fight for equality would be shelved for almost half a century, filed right beside the questionable practice of slavery.

The Constitution of the United States was not created to liberate a specific group of individuals, and in fact did the opposite for slaves, but was intended to be a document designed to implement a strong central government in America. The failure of the Articles of Confederation showed Americans that a central government, even though it made them uneasy, would be necessary to preserve and protect the new nation from anarchy and other nations. While establishing the country's sovereignty, however, the framers of the Constitution implicitly established men's position as one of superiority compared to that of women. The Constitution substituted the words women and children both black and white for "persons."

The Preamble of the United States Constitution reads:

WE THE People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence [*sic*], promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.⁵⁰

Riveted with implicit ideals and justifications of slavery and white-male supremacy, the Constitution, at the time of its ratification, did little to promise liberty to *most* Americans.

The debate leading to the ultimate ratification of the Constitution was arduous, and encompassed a broad range of questions, many of which pertained to the best form of governance for the young nation. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the main issue during the Constitution's ratification was whether a central government should have power over state governments, or vice versa.

The ratification debate pitted Federalists against Anti-Federalists. The former believed that the central government ought to be granted more power than the states, while the latter believed the states should be given more power. The question of women's rights would barely be acknowledged. Once again, it is difficult to say whether this was a form of sexism, symbolism, or ignorance. What is undeniably true, however, is that the Constitutional Convention was composed entirely of men, a characteristic inherited from the Continental Congresses.

Between the ratification of the United States Constitution and that of the Fourteenth and Nineteenth Amendments, women would make great gains, moving closer to equality with men, expanding the sphere of domesticity and working their way into the sphere of American politics and toward independence from their male counterparts.

⁵⁰ U.S. Constitution, Preamble.

Beginning of 19th Century-Movement for Women's Rights

While women made small gains in 18th Century America, their full strength would not become known until the middle of the 19th Century. At the beginning of the 19th century, the issue of gender equality was packed away and overshadowed by issues of governmental structure and slavery.

The 18th Century would lay the foundation for American society and government for years to come, but did not set permanent social or political boundaries for American women, and in fact strengthened principles like gender polarization and institutions like slavery by justifying or ignoring them. After independence was attained and America recognized as a sovereign nation, both women and the black population in America began to realize the gender and race gaps in America, and began to question them.

The inherent irony of the Declaration of Independence's commonly quoted passage, "All men are created equal," as women found, lies in the fact that for the statement to be true, "All men" would have to mean *white men*.

Although they remained chiefly employed in the domestic sphere as housekeepers and mothers, women's behavior, when conducted with painstaking correctness, became synonymous with the word, "lady." Even Harriet Beecher Stowe, the future author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* knew how difficult it could be to earn the title and reputation of a "lady," which she discusses in her essay, *The Lady Who Does Her Own Work*.

Mrs. Stowe noted that in no other country in the world could a woman without much money, forced to do her own housework, be considered a lady. While Mrs. Stowe thought it a very fine thing that middle-class women in America were honored as ladies,

she also understood that the role was often a burden. To be always good and kind and gentle and concerned for others sometimes felt, in her words, ‘like a daily death.’⁵¹

While this title was difficult to obtain and maintain, it served as women’s ticket to a position of success, especially those who were not born or did not marry into wealth. While detrimental in the way it reinforced the idea that women belonged in the domestic sphere, it began to dignify the domestic sphere and in many cases, make it a goal of American women.

Many women enjoyed the domestic sphere, but while its image was long left untarnished, the sphere’s appeal would begin to deteriorate in the eyes of women by the middle of the 19th Century with the beginning of the Women’s Rights Movement.

In order to break down the barrier that kept a movement for women’s rights from happening, women had to increase their involvement in the public sector. This involvement would come with their entry into the factories of early 19th Century America. After encountering discrimination in the workplace, including worse working conditions than men along with lower wages, “Women workers were beginning to make connections: between their oppression as women and as workers, between their own oppression and that of African-American slaves.”⁵² The connections these workers were making would become pivotal not only in women’s fight for equality, but also aid in the fight for the abolition of slavery. Not only were women becoming more involved in the public sector as workers, but were also raising their collective awareness of women’s position in society. While the 18th Century bred only a handful of women who would

⁵¹ Hymowitz and Weissman, 68.

⁵² Nancy F. Cott, *No Small Courage: A History of Women in the United States*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 223.

be considered moderate-feminists, the 19th Century found them flooding into the public domain and would serve as the stage for the movement for women's rights.

Women's Rights Movement-Beginning of Civil War

Directly after her marriage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was not as bound to the cult of domesticity as were most women. However, after she moved with her husband to Seneca Falls, New York, she became confined to the execution of domestic chores and, "...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."⁵³ This realization would be the driving force behind a movement for the rights of women. As Nancy Cott notes, Stanton began to "search for 'active measures... to remedy the wrongs of society in general and of women in particular.'"⁵⁴ This led to a meeting held by Stanton with Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Jane Hunt, and Mary Ann McClintock. After the meeting, "she wrote in her autobiography, 'the torrent of my long accumulating discontent, with such vehemence and indignation that I stirred myself, as well as the rest of the party, to do and dare something.'"⁵⁵ This laid the foundation for the Seneca Falls Convention.

An ad in the *Seneca County Courier* pointed out the convention:

Woman's Rights Convention—A convention to discuss the social, civil and religious rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, Seneca Falls, New York, the nineteenth and twentieth of July current...During the first day the meeting will be held exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend... Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention.⁵⁶

⁵³ Ibid., 235.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

The organizers of the convention were nervous about whether anyone would turn out, a fear that would be quelled on July 19th, 1848, the opening day of the convention. “From fifty miles around people came by cart, by horse, and on foot—more than three hundred in all—to take part in this first official step toward liberation.”⁵⁷

While the organization of such a convention was revolutionary, there was still the visible contradiction of Lucretia Mott’s husband serving as leader of the meeting. The meeting was organized to break the bonds that constricted women to a deferential disposition and negate the idea that women needed men to maintain order. Mott’s husband would also serve as an opponent of “Resolution No. 9—the resolution calling for women’s enfranchisement.”⁵⁸

At the foundation of the Seneca Falls Convention is the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. The document starts with a passage from the Declaration of Independence, but leads into a discussion of the treatment of women throughout history noting, “The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.”⁵⁹ The document was followed by, “twelve resolutions. While the audience agreed quickly to the first eleven—including demands that women gain rights to own property and control wages; to exercise free speech; to obtain divorce; and to achieve equal opportunities in commerce, trade, the professions, and education.”⁶⁰ However, the resolution demanding that women be granted the right to vote came

⁵⁷ Ibid., 236.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Hymowitz and Weissman, 95.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

under a great deal of scrutiny. After a long argument, the resolution passed, but it would be more than 70 years until *all* women would be granted the right to vote.

After the convention, it was called “the most shocking and unnatural incident ever recorded in the history of womanity”⁶¹ and a vehicle for, “neglect [of] women’s duties[,]...unwomanly behavior[,]...and demoraliz[ation] and degrad[ation]”⁶² of women. Although some withdrew because of the disagreement of their communities, the Seneca Falls Convention served as a platform upon which women were able to base their battle for equality. Nancy Cott notes that it “became a road map for the path they hoped to travel toward equality and self-determination,”⁶³ and laid a foundation for a fight for women’s future advancement.

The movement for women’s rights would have one more major victory before the Civil War, which came in the form of the New York State Women’s Property Act of 1848. This amendment allowed women to keep their earnings, invest their money, sign contracts, and initiate lawsuits.⁶⁴ In a domino effect, “by 1860 other states, including Indiana, Maine, Missouri, and Ohio, had also passed laws to allow married women to keep their own earnings.”⁶⁵ After this, however, many proponents of the rights of women saw the degradation and trampled rights of slaves in the United States, and turned their attention toward abolition. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one of these, and focused her attention away from women’s rights and on the rights of slaves. With both the abolitionist cause and the Civil War’s looming imminence, the fight for women’s rights would have to be postponed.

⁶¹ Cott, *No Small Courage*, 237.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

The Civil War-Turn of the Century

Women's involvement in the Civil War would be more extensive than their role in the American Revolution. "Throughout the North, women organized soldiers' aid societies to sew uniforms, assemble medical supplies, and knit scarves, socks, mittens, and other items for Union soldiers."⁶⁶ In fact, women organized some of the most helpful institutions established during the Civil War. "In New York City, about sixty women met at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children, the hospital founded by physicians Elizabeth and Emily Blackwell, to organize the relief efforts of New York City's women." This group of women formed the Woman's Central Association of Relief (WCAR) to carry out "relief work for soldiers."⁶⁷ Emma Willard "became president of her newly organized society...to sew soldiers' uniforms and give soldiers' wives paid unemployment."⁶⁸ During the Civil War, women were given their first opportunity to work in "government offices...to replace male clerks who had enlisted in the Union army."⁶⁹ This would establish women's propensity to handle the type of work that makes the American government *work*.

In the south, "white Confederate women were immersed in soldiers' relief efforts as well." They, much like their counterparts in the north, sewed soldiers' uniforms and raised money to care for the care of soldiers.

Women in both the north and south also dusted off the roles they had played during the American Revolution. They preserved the livelihood of their families in the domestic sphere and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 279.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 281.

nursed injured or sick soldiers back to health, both of which established them as a foundation of preserving their respective societies.

The end of the Civil War left the North and South weakened, which left room for improvisation. This improvisation would lead to immense legal changes, which laid the foundation for future social change.

While it would take until December of 1865, seven months after General Lee's surrender, to ratify the 13th Amendment of the United States Constitution, it remains one of the greatest victories of the Civil War. The amendment states, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."⁷⁰ This sentence put to rest the question that tore at the seams of America since its inception, the taboo contradiction that negated everything for which the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution stood.

Many women believed that, through their participation in the Civil War, they would earn the right to vote. However, "Reconstructionists cared little about the equal rights of women" and "never seriously considered woman suffrage."⁷¹ Hymowitz and Weissman also go on to note the implementation of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the way it placed restrictions on women's right to vote. "This bias was clearly revealed in section two of the Fourteenth Amendment, which specifically referred to 'male inhabitants' and 'male citizens' in the section dealing with

⁷⁰ U.S. Constitution, amend.13, sec. 1.

⁷¹ Hymowitz and Weissman, 156.

the right to vote.”⁷² In this sense, the generic *he* was replaced with *male*, which echoed and explicated gender polarization and sexism on a federal level.

Even with the Fourteenth Amendment’s step backward, the abolition of slavery allowed the women’s rights movement to gain some of the strongest voices from the abolitionist movement. Harriet Tubman, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Sojourner Truth were three of the women who turned their attention toward the issue of women’s rights. Even with these voices, equality for women, black or white, rested in the fact that freed slaves were still unequal because they lacked the ability to vote. Many abolitionists actually “opposed a movement for woman suffrage.”⁷³ These abolitionists believed, and rightfully so, that just because black men were granted freedom did not grant them equality. Women were not explicitly prisoners, they just were not citizens, and knew that in order to become citizens, they had to gain suffrage. They could not, however, attain suffrage without black men getting the right to vote.

In 1870, black men were granted the right to vote by the Fifteenth Amendment, which states: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”⁷⁴ As we now know, there would still be barriers through which ex-slaves would be forced to pass. Some of these would not be entirely removed until the middle of the 1950s. Many believe that women suffragists overestimated the implications of suffrage. While abolitionists still believed it was important to solidify the rights of black men, women, both black and white, saw the

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 158.

⁷⁴ U.S. Constitution, amend. 1, sec. 1.

enfranchisement of black men as something that served to render them “politically invisible.”⁷⁵ This invisibility, however, would be mitigated by a few states in the far west whose legislatures passed measures giving women the vote. Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho, perhaps because of the help women provided in their establishment, passed these measures and set a precedent for gender equality with regard to voting rights.⁷⁶ Women, “through reconstruction, had changed their aim from equality to suffrage,” something that many women’s rights proponents felt to be detrimental to the movement itself. While the eastern states did not follow suit, they began employing women in factories during the American Industrial Revolution, unknowingly strengthening the credibility in the argument of women that they were just as much citizens of the United States as were men. However,

Assumptions about woman’s domestic nature and responsibilities [which were previously middle class in origin] had come to transcend class boundaries and regional differences. Disseminated across the United States in schoolrooms, sermons, women’s magazines, household manuals, and etiquette books, the domestic ideal of American womanhood was almost universally accepted by both men and women.⁷⁷

This stereotype, which at its essence was domesticity, would prove to be the most difficult opponent for women in their fight for equality and suffrage. Women had started to accept their position as politically inferior, but morally superior⁷⁸ to men, and were comfortable with this distinction. Although this moral superiority would cling to the reputation of women, the beginning of the 1900s and the inception of the Industrial Revolution would force many of them out of the domestic sphere and into factories.

⁷⁵ Cott, *No Small Courage*, 304.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 309.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 366.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN'S ROLE FROM 1910-2010, CASE STUDIES OF WOMEN IN CONGRESS

Even at the turn of the 20th century, “women who filled their lives with public activity...were in a minority.”⁷⁹ While domesticity was no longer seen as the only career that could be had by women, it ended up being, in many cases, a second job.⁸⁰ In order to sustain a family, many women were pressed to work both inside and outside of the home, which opened their eyes to new experiences and points of view, but also exhausted them. However, the work of women in the public sector coupled with woman suffrage being passed in some western states gave them a collective belief that, because they had established a niche in the public sector, they earned a right to become political representatives of themselves.

After being denied the right to explicit equality in suffrage, women began to take stances on issues plaguing women's propensity to attain equality. There were two prominent groups on opposing ends of the spectrum for the rights of women. One group of these women believed it would be necessary for women to fight for their equality. Of course, this does not mean real fighting, but legislating and ratifying their equality. On the other hand, some believed that equality would come only with the hard work of women to attain it. The former group believed that, in order for equality to exist, it must be the law of the land. This opinion would infer that individuals follow the Constitution word for word, which the latter group viewed as a false assumption. The group against the legislation of equality believed that legislating equality left gaps for that equality to be removed or omitted. They also believed that stressing femininity was regressive in the search for equality. While one cannot point to the approach that is correct, it

⁷⁹ Ibid., 364.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 375.

was likely that both of them served to establish women's current position in the United States House of Representatives.

Congressional Representation

Since Jeannette Rankin served in the United States House of Representatives in 1917, the number of non-incumbent Congresswomen has grown at a consistent rate. The number of non-incumbent Congresswomen elected to the House has especially risen since the turn of the 21st Century. The purpose of the following chapter is to take a closer look at each decade during which women served in the United States House of Representatives, and analyze the ways in which their individual and collective views have changed throughout their almost 93 years of participation in the branch of Congress most subject to the discretion of *the people*. It is important to remember Congress's close proximity to the people throughout the following Chapter, because the people elect Representatives in Congress. At first, only men, and women in a select number of western states were allowed to vote. Because women could vote in Montana, they were given the opportunity to aid in the election of Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to the United States House of Representatives.

Women in Congress, 1917-1919

Perhaps one of the most diluted events in American history was the election of the first woman to the United States House of Representatives. This event's lack of notoriety comes from the fact that World War I was brewing at the same time Jeannette Rankin, a Republican from Montana, was seeking election.

While Rankin's election often goes unnoted, the fact remains that it happened, and whether cause or correlation, preceded the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution by two years. The 19th Amendment finally gave all women in the United States the right to vote. It also paved the way for more women to enter the sphere of politics and the United States House of Representatives.

It is important to highlight that, up and to this point, the women's rights movement was composed of symbolic protests that mirrored the Seneca Falls Convention. However, after women were granted the right to vote in certain states, and elected one of their own, they began to think that their actions outweighed their words.

Jeannette Rankin⁸¹

State: Montana

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 1916

Committee Assignments:

⁸¹ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Jeannette Rankin," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=202> (accessed March 27, 2011).

- Public Lands
- Woman Suffrage

Summary

Rankin was the first woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives, but noted upon her election that she “would not be the last.”⁸² A great deal of Rankin’s time during her first nonconsecutive term was spent dealing with World War I and various problems in her home state of Montana. Rankin established her own niche by taking a strong stance against the United States’ involvement in World War I. In fact, Rankin was “the only member of Congress to vote against World War I,”⁸³ and would, in her second term, vote against World War II.

While she was persistent in her anti-war sentiments, she became equally persistent in her sentiments regarding suffrage for women. In late 1917, Rankin “advocated the creation of a committee on women suffrage,”⁸⁴ and was appointed to it upon its creation. The committee proposed a bill for women’s suffrage in 1918, and on the opening day of floor debate, Rankin confronted Congress and asked: “How shall we answer the challenge, gentlemen? How shall we explain to them the meaning of democracy if the same Congress that voted to make the world safe for democracy refuses to give this small measure of democracy to the women of our country?”⁸⁵ While the bill passed the House, the Senate voted it down. Rankin left her first term

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

in Congress with women still lacking the ability to vote. In her acceptance speech after her victorious campaign for a second term, she noted: “No one will pay attention to me this time. There is nothing unusual about a woman being elected.”⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1920-1929

Probably the most interesting thing about women elected during the 1920s was that many of them were against a contrived, mandated movement for women's rights. Drawing from the election of Jeanette Rankin, they believed that stressing their feminine features weakened them in the eyes of men. They also understood that passing a bill through the two houses of Congress, both of which were dominated by men, was not the same as trying to implement the bill in American society. Nevertheless, the 20s saw the birth of Alice Paul's fight for an Equal Rights Amendment. Paul wanted the amendment to say, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States on account of sex."⁸⁷ This amendment would find itself tabled until 1970 partly because of Congress's unsure attitude about such an amendment, and partially because of the stock market crash in 1929, placing any movement for women's rights on hold.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1920-1929

1920-1929	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1920	1	1	
	1921	1	1	
	1922	1	1	
	1923			
	1924	3	2	1
	1925			
	1926	1	1	
	1927			
	1928	4	2	2
	1929			
	Total	11	8	3

⁸⁷ Gail Collins, *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines*, (New York: Harper-Perennial, 2007), 443.

Alice Mary Robertson⁸⁸

State: Oklahoma

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 1920

Committee Assignments:

- Indian Affairs
- Expenditures
- Woman Suffrage

Summary

Robertson, the second woman to serve in Congress, was almost a “polar opposite of Jeanette Rankin.”⁸⁹ Her views did not correlate with the views held by members of the Women’s Rights Movement, a separation in ideology she made clear. Robertson believed that the best interests of women were served by allowing their actions to speak louder than their words, protests, or mechanized legislation, each of which she felt were vehicles for contrived equality.

Robertson was once quoted saying, “I came to Congress to represent my district...not women.”⁹⁰ Although her voting behavior seemed to be in opposition to women’s equality, it was meant to establish her strength, and that of all women. In Robertson’s eyes, to gain equality, one must get it not through statutes, laws, or protests, but through independence. She pushed for

⁸⁸ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Alice Mary Robertson,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=208> (accessed March 27, 2011).

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

women to enter politics from, “the bottom and not the top,”⁹¹ meaning women should work with men instead of against them in the fight for their equality. This outlook was common, especially during the 1920s.

Mae Ella Nolan⁹²

State: California

Party Affiliation: Republican

Year Elected: 1922

Committee Assignments:

- Woman Suffrage
- Labor
- Expenditures, Post Office

Summary

Nolan was “the first woman to succeed her husband in Congress.”⁹³ Upon accepting the position, Nolan noted: “I owe it to the memory of my husband to carry on his work,”⁹⁴ which she did by implementing similar policies and taking similar stances on issues. Although she was initially appointed to the committee on women suffrage, she eventually stepped down from it,

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Mae Ella Nolan,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=184> (accessed March 27, 2011).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

“largely because her core labor constituency was unsupportive.”⁹⁵ This also played into her policy of, “minimizing gender differences.”⁹⁶ She once said, “A capable woman is a better representative than an incapable man, and vice versa.”⁹⁷ Politics, however, would leave a bad taste in Nolan’s mouth, reflected by the words she spoke after her term was up. “Politics is entirely too masculine to have any attraction for feminine responsibilities.”⁹⁸ While this reflected her disdain for the political sphere, it also seems to be a warning for women, laced with the ideals of domesticity and reiterating the dominance of men over women.

Nolan, much like many women who followed her, selected stressing politics over gender differences. In doing this, she took the same stance as Robertson, attempting to let her actions outweigh her words. However, Robertson was probably more guided by principle than her constituency, something that played a large role in Nolan’s decision to stand on politics and not gender.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1930-1939

During the 1930s, the United States faced the Great Depression. At this time, it was believed that “family solidarity”⁹⁹ could only be achieved during hard times. However, what was believed to be family solidarity was actually the molecular family structure collapsing in on itself. The women in these families counted on the women elected to Congress to preserve gender equality. In 1931, *The Star Spangled Banner* was named the national anthem of the United States of America. Its words, “the land of the free” highlight the idea that freedom was believed to be a reality. As the decade ended, World War II was just beginning, and served as another event to cloud the issue of women’s rights.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1930-1939

1930-1939	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1930	1		1
	1931			
	1932	4	1	3
	1933			
	1934	1		1
	1935			
	1936	2		2
	1937			
	1938	3	1	2
	1939	2	1	1
	Total	13	3	10

⁹⁹ Collins, 352.

Caroline O' Day¹⁰⁰

State: New York

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1934

Committee Assignments:

- Immigration and Naturalization
- Election of President, Vice President, and Representatives

Summary

As far as politics in 1930 go, O' Day was probably too progressive for her time. With a, "passion for world peace,"¹⁰¹ she exercised her power to combat sexism and racism, fight for civil rights, and attain equality. Although she was initially against the United States entering World War II, after she figured out, "the motives of Germany,"¹⁰² her outlook changed. She saw children as, "a national investment,"¹⁰³ and served as a proponent for child labor laws.

O' Day chose a more hands-on approach to equality, taking up the idea that inequality needed to be recognized for equality to be achieved. The problem, however, that dimmed her impact on Congress was World War II. The war outweighed her progressive policies of equality. Even though it served as a deterrent, O' Day's position on issues of equality foreshadow the position taken by many women currently serving in Congress.

¹⁰⁰ Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Caroline O' Day," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=189> (accessed April 1, 2011).

¹⁰¹ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Caroline O' Day," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=189> (accessed April 1, 2011).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Margaret Chase Smith¹⁰⁴

State: Maine

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 1939

Committee Assignments:

- War Claims
- Revision of the Laws
- Invalid Pensions
- Election of the President, Vice President, and Members of Congress

Summary

Smith was first elected to the House of Representatives, and later to the United States Senate, making her the first woman to do so.¹⁰⁵ She never stressed her gender, and once noted, “If we are to claim and win our rightful place in the sun on an equal basis with men, then we must not insist upon those privileges and prerogatives identified in the past as exclusively feminine.”¹⁰⁶ Smith was responsible for the “Women’s Armed Forces Integration Act,”¹⁰⁷ which, after a painstaking struggle, gave women regular status in the United States Armed Forces.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Margaret Chase Smith,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=230> (accessed April 1, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

The integration of women into different parts of the United States Military alleviated almost 180 years of their service without recognition in almost every American war including: the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, and World War II. Even if, in some cases they did not serve, as discussed in the first two chapters of this text, they were still heavily involved in sustaining the American army. Smith's work simply validated women's long-time dedication to America.

Women in Congress, 1940-1949

In the 1940s, the United States found itself fighting a war on two fronts, in both Japan and Germany. Although there were a number of women serving in Congress, most served on the home front, just like in previous wars. In a way, women gained a sense of political leadership while running the house while their husbands were away. However, after their spouses returned, so did the cult of domesticity and the role of the woman within the domestic sphere.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1940-1949

1940-1949	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1940	1		1
	1941	1		1
	1942	2	2	
	1943			
	1944	4		4
	1945	1		1
	1946	3	1	2
	1947			
	1948	3	1	2
	1949	1	1	
	Total	16	5	11

Clare Boothe Luce¹⁰⁹

State: Connecticut

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 1942

¹⁰⁹ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Clare Boothe Luce," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=147> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Committee Assignments:

- Committee on Military Affairs

Summary

Luce's passion for politics developed out of a mixture of liberal and conservative policy that effected America during the early 1930s. Luce as a politician was not glued behind the lines drawn by her party, but commuted between Republican and Democratic ideology, oftentimes picking what she liked from each and leaving behind what she disliked. She was also the first woman to, "with quick intelligence, a biting wit, and a knack for publicity,"¹¹⁰ utilize the press to her advantage, becoming a "media darling."¹¹¹ Luce's platform as a Representative was based on, "three goals: 'One, to win the war. Two, to prosecute that war as loyally and effectively as we can as Republicans. Three, to bring about a better world and a durable peace, with special attention to post-war security and employment here at home.'¹¹²

As noted earlier, although Luce ran as a Republican, she was not afraid to legislate as a Democrat. She supported many resolutions put forth by Democrats, including that which laid the foundation for America's membership in the United Nations.¹¹³

Chase Going Woodhouse¹¹⁴

State: Connecticut

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Chase Going Woodhouse," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=258> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1944

Committee Assignments:

- Committee on Banking and Currency

Summary

Woodhouse, a professor of economics, used her broad knowledge of the United States economic system and her abilities as both, a strong campaign manager and speaker¹¹⁵ to earn her seat in the United States House of Representatives. After being elected, Woodhouse noted that the men in the House, “made her feel more a colleague than part of a distinct minority.”¹¹⁶

During WWII, Woodhouse utilized her knowledge of economics to press for price controls.¹¹⁷ Throughout the last few years of the war, she continually reiterated the importance of economics to the reconstruction of Europe to the global economy and as a tool for protection against Communism. To alleviate the financial strain and promote a global economy, she supported creating a World Bank and IMF.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1950-1959

The 1950s served as a decade for the reimplementation of domesticity. After returning from World War II, families settled down. Men went to work, and many women were left to tend to the home. However, the number of newly elected women to Congress stayed the same as it was in the 1940s. But there were some marginalized groups, like black women, who would have to wait another fifteen years to gain a seat in the United States House of Representatives. During the 50s, segregation was ruled illegal, serving as a benchmark for equal rights for African Americans. These rights had been promised since the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, but had never been enforced. As the decade ended, the Vietnam War took hold, focusing public awareness away from woman equality.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1950-1959

1950-1959	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1950	3	1	2
	1951			
	1952	3	1	2
	1953			
	1954	4		4
	1955	1		1
	1956	1	1	
	1957			
	1958	3	3	
	1959	1		1
	Total	16	6	10

Coya Knutson¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Coya Knutson,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=135> (accessed April 1, 2011).

State: Minnesota

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1954

Committee Assignments:

- Agriculture

Summary

Knutson came from a background in agriculture. So, after she was elected to Congress, she “pressed for a position on the Agriculture Committee.”¹²⁰ Although she devoted a great deal of her time to the Agriculture Committee, she also helped make great strides in education, “creating a mechanism for a federal student financial aid program.”¹²¹

While there were many women in the first half of the 20th century who replaced their husbands in Congress, Coya Knutson’s story takes a different turn. After multiple terms in the House of Representatives, her husband “conspired”¹²² against her to deny her reelection to Congress, most probably because of a combination of his “jealousy”¹²³ of Ms. Knutson’s success and “bribes from Democratic leaders.”¹²⁴ He took the side of her opponent during the primary elections. While she would win the primary election, the lack of a stable family led to her defeat in the general election.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Catherine Dean May¹²⁵

State: Washington

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 1958

Committee Assignments:

- Agricultural Committee
- Republican Committee on Committees

Summary

May once noted that she felt she, “had a tremendous responsibility to all women.”¹²⁶ During her time in Congress, she focused on “congressional ethics and women’s rights.”¹²⁷ She also hoped to send funds back to her district through legislation concentrated on agriculture. She attained help from “Katharine St. George,”¹²⁸ who “secured May one of just three openings on the Agriculture Committee.”¹²⁹

May would go on to serve on the Republican Committee on Committees. She also aided in the implementation of a committee to review the conduct of members of Congress. While there had been certain measures in place before the House Select Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, they had not been solidified enough to deter adverse behavior.

¹²⁵ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Catherine Dean May,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=157> (accessed April 1, 2011).

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1960-1969

Although the 1960s served as the foundation for the Vietnam War, there was still a “free feel” to it. It saw the Civil Rights Movement and subsequent implementation of the Civil Rights Act. Although one must note that causation does not mean correlation, it may be more than a coincidence that the first African American woman and the first Asian American woman to the United States House of Representatives also occurred during this decade. Betty Friedan also released *The Feminine Mystique*, explicating the unequal position of women in American society. The first oral contraceptive was implemented in this decade.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1960-1969

1960-1969	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1960	2	1	1
	1961			
	1962	4	2	2
	1963	1	1	
	1964	1		1
	1965	1		1
	1966	2	2	
	1967			
	1968	1		1
	1969			
	Total	12	6	6

Patsy Mink¹³⁰

State: Hawaii

Political Party: Democrat

¹³⁰ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Patsy Mink,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=173> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Year Elected: 1964

Committee Assignments:

- Education and Labor
- Interior and Insular Affairs
- Budget

Summary

Mink was the first “woman of color”¹³¹ to serve in the United States House of Representatives. Her work spanned almost thirty years, and some of the greatest legislation she drafted dealt with and strengthened the American educational system. She was one of the first members of the House to bring up a bill on dual language education, a subject schools are still trying to fully implement. She also worked in creating student loans, which expanded the amount of money available to students.

She was an opponent of the Vietnam War, and voted down any tax increase, fearing the revenues from such an increase would be put into the war.¹³²

Mink was an advocate of Article IX, “which dealt with barring funds from federally funded institutions that practiced sexual discrimination.”¹³³ However, her greatest legislative victory, which also served as a significant victory for women was the “Women’s Education Equity Act, passes as part of a comprehensive education bill in 1974.”¹³⁴

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

Shirley Anita Chisholm¹³⁵

State: New York

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1968

Committee Assignments:

- Veterans' Affairs
- Education and Labor

Summary

Chisholm was the first African American woman to be elected to the United States House of Representatives. She was, “catapulted into the limelight because of her race, gender, and outspoken personality.”¹³⁶ She was elected from a newly apportioned district in Brooklyn, and would serve six consecutive terms.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Shirley Anita Chisholm,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=173> (accessed April 1, 2011).

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1970-1979

In the 1970s, abortion was legalized, giving women the right to choose whether they would give birth (with some restrictions). The ruling of Roe v. Wade was more symbolic than anything, noting that individual women, not a group constructed predominantly of men, were responsible for making their own decision. The Cold War would begin toward the end of this decade, but its effect on the rights of women was only negligible compared to World War I, II, and Vietnam.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1970-1979

1970-1979	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1970		4	4
	1971		1	1
	1972		7	1
	1973			6
	1974		7	3
	1975			4
	1976		1	1
	1977			
	1978		2	2
	1979			
	Total		22	4
				18

Helen Stevenson Meyner¹³⁸

State: New Jersey

Political Party: Democrat

¹³⁸ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Helen Stevenson Meyner," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=169> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Year Elected: 1974

Committee Assignments:

- District of Columbia
- Foreign Affairs
- Select Committee on Aging

Summary

Meyner is most notable for her position in the Foreign Affairs Committee, where she took part in opposition to the nuclear arms race.¹³⁹ She also “opposed attempts by nonaligned nations to suspend or expel Israel from the United Nations.” She went on to vote for a State Department Committee for “conflict resolution,” believing that resolving conflicts with civility to be much better than acting hastily and creating a new conflict.

Meyner was also a fervent supporter of women’s rights, and was quoted saying “A woman’s viewpoint is different, perhaps more intuitive and sensitive to people’s needs in the special areas like daycare, environment, and education.”¹⁴⁰ Although this comment shows hints of domesticity, it also highlights that women were finally able to have some control over the realm in which they chose to live their lives.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

Geraldine Anne Ferraro¹⁴¹

State: New York

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1978

Committee Assignments:

- Transportation
- Public Works
- Special Committee on Aging
- Post Office and Civil Service
- Budget

Summary

Ferraro, because her district was composed mainly of Republican constituents, had to “balance her liberal views with the conservative values of her constituents.”¹⁴² With this balance, Ferraro became popular among both Republicans and Democrats, which allowed her to “rise through the ranks of party leadership.”¹⁴³ After rising to a certain level of prestige, Ferraro was able to help women earn better positions within the House of Representatives instead of leaving them to fend for themselves. She also attempted to push legislation that had a positive effect on women outside of the House of Representatives.

¹⁴¹ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Geraldine Anne Ferraro,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=76> (accessed April 1, 2011).

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

Ferraro was passionate about equality for women, and during her time, the debate on abortion continually loomed in the distance. “Much to the dismay of her family,” Ferraro took, what we would today call, a Pro-Choice stance on abortion, which left women to choose whether they received one or not, at least under the right circumstances.

Even with her position on touchy issues, Ferraro was the first woman to be selected to run for Vice President. She did so in 1984,¹⁴⁴ and even though she lost, her selection proved to be another milestone for women nationwide.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1980-1989

In the 1980s, women established a greater foothold in the government with the first woman's appointment to the Supreme Court of the United States. Sandra Day O'Connor's ascent to the high court was unprecedented, and established women in each branch of government. The first woman who entered space also did so during this decade. The wars in the Middle East began to mitigate the attention paid to the equality of women, and it started to be taken for granted.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1980-1989

1980-1989	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1980	4	4	
	1981	2	1	1
	1982	5	2	3
	1983			
	1984	3	2	1
	1985			
	1986	4	2	2
	1987	1		1
	1988	4	1	3
	1989	2	1	1
	Total	25	13	12

Nancy Pelosi¹⁴⁵

State: California

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1986

¹⁴⁵ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, "Nancy Pelosi," House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=194> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Committees: Former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives

Summary

Nancy Pelosi's accomplishments highlight the new heights of women's representation in the United States House of Representatives. Pelosi came from California and rose to the position of Speaker of the House. Pelosi's social policy is extremely progressive, targeting social and political equality of *all* people. Her focus in the past few years has been on health care benefits for Americans. Of course, she also targets environmental protection, something that would have never been at issue in the earlier years of the 20th Century.

Pelosi's ascent to the position of Speaker of the House was monumental for women's equality, and somewhat symbolic of women finally overcoming one of the barriers by which they had been bound since the foundations of the United States in the 18th Century.

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen¹⁴⁶

State: Florida

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 1988

Committee Assignments:

- Committee on Foreign Affairs

¹⁴⁶ General information from: Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Ileana Ros-Lehtinen," House of Representatives, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=R000435> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Summary

Ros-Lehtinen was “born in Havana, Cuba.”¹⁴⁷ Elected in 1988, she would be the first woman from Cuba elected to the House of Representatives. Ros-Lehtinen, through her long history of legislative work, has taken a stance as a proponent of higher education, even implementing a “pre-paid” system in her home state of Florida.

While her focus is on education, she also stays tied to equality for women, sponsoring the “Violence Against Women Act, which imposes stricter penalties on individuals who are convicted of domestic violence.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 1990-1999

During the 1990s, the number of non-incumbent women elected to the United States House of Representatives doubled. The 90s were a decade during which the fact that women were equal was taken for granted. Of course, the military skirmishes with the Middle East involved both men and women. This is really one of the first times the military allow women to join and fight (legally beside their husbands). This may be more symbolic than anything else. At the beginning of this discussion, women were not aloud to serve in the military, but at this point, they may serve in the military, and often do.

New Women Elected/Appointed 1990-1999

1990-1999	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	1990	4		4
	1991	1		1
	1992	22	3	19
	1993			
	1994	11	7	4
	1995	2	1	1
	1996	9	2	7
	1997	2	1	1
	1998	6	1	5
	1999			
	Total	57	15	42

Nydia Velazquez¹⁴⁹

State: New York

Political Party: Democrat

¹⁴⁹ General information from: Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Nydia Velazquez," House of Representatives, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=V000081> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Year Elected: 1992

Committee Assignments:

- Small Business
- Financial Services

Summary

Velazquez was the first Puerto Rican woman to serve in the United States House of Representatives.¹⁵⁰ She focuses mainly on the economy, housing, and small business.

Ellen O’Kane Tauscher¹⁵¹

State: California

Political Party: Democrat

Year Elected: 1996

Committee Assignments:

- Armed Services

Summary

Tauscher was a businessperson turned politician.¹⁵² Through her experience at the New York Stock Exchange, she had gained the skills necessary for success in a House made up of

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ General information from: Women in Congress: Member Profiles, “Ellen O’Kane Tauscher,” House of Representatives, <http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=243> (accessed April 1, 2011).

almost all men. Tauscher's politics were more "middle of the road" than anything, blending a "demand for tax cuts"¹⁵³ with an increase in Middle Eastern military presence.

Although Tauscher was a Democrat, she concurred with the idea to send more troops to Iraq in the early 2000s. Tauscher would move up to the Presidential Cabinet in 2009 after being "appointed by Hillary Clinton to serve as a liaison for Arms Control and International Security."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

Women in Congress, 2000-2010

At the beginning of the new millennium, women had gained a great deal of representation in the United States House of Representatives. However, the question is whether the temporary disappearance of inequality will prevent an issue in the future of politics.

New Women Elected/Appointed 2000-2010

2000-2010	Year	# of Women Newly Elected/Appointed to House	Republicans	Democrats
	2000	7	3	4
	2001			
	2002	9	6	3
	2003	1		1
	2004	9	4	5
	2005	1	1	
	2006	9	1	8
	2007	3		3
	2008	12	2	10
	2009			
	2010	14	10	4
	Total	65	27	38

Cathy McMorris Rodgers¹⁵⁵

State: Washington

Political Party: Republican

Year Elected: 2004

Committee Assignments:

- Energy and Commerce

¹⁵⁵ General information from: Biographical Directory of the United States Congress, "Cathy McMorris Rodgers," House of Representatives, <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M001159> (accessed April 1, 2011).

Summary

Rodgers is a moderate conservative who serves as a member of the Republican leadership team and has served as “Co-chair of the bipartisan Congressional Women’s Caucus.”¹⁵⁶ Rodgers highlights the opportunity women are granted to think outside the proverbial box in Congress. Rodgers was born to farmers, and does her best to send funds back to her district in Washington. This highlights that women have more control over where congressional funds are used.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES AND CONCLUSION

Although the case studies presented in Chapter Three seem disjointed, they are presented to point out the way women have developed stronger positions in the United States House of Representatives throughout the almost ninety-four years they have served in it. Although the American public knows women hold a place in Congress, this place is often believed to be much more than it is in reality. Today, women hold about 17 percent of the 435 seats in the United States House of Representatives. It is obvious that the percentage of women in Congress and the percentage of the American population composed of women are not reflective of one another. There are multiple reasons for this, ranging from religion to women's lack of political rights to the fact that fewer women than men run for office.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, many women questioned the importance of suffrage, and the rights that would be acquired with it. However, questions about the possibilities that came with suffrage dissipated after Jeannette Rankin was elected to the House of Representatives only three years after her home state of Montana granted women the right to vote.

Once women were granted suffrage by the 19th Amendment, they began an ascent in representation. At first, however, there was a common theme of women succeeding their husbands in the House of Representatives and only subsequently being elected to the House. Succession may seem negligible in women's march toward a more equal representation, but it symbolized the idea women were unable to serve in government without an acquisition of their husbands' political savvy. Of course, this eventually faded, and the election of women to the House of Representatives became commonplace in America. After the election of women to the

House of Representatives became common, women were forced to decide what position they needed to take in order to gain further equality in the House of Representatives.

The women who have served in Congress have established a spectrum for the advocating the rights of women. The 1920s and subsequently 1970s saw an introduction and reintroduction of the Equal Rights Amendment to enforce gender equality. Although this would seem to be an amendment easily adopted by women it was not, and for good reason. Some women like Mary Robertson believed that equality had to be earned, and that it could only be earned through cooperation. Others, however, like Alice Paul pressed for the implementation of legislation for change. While Paul's approach would serve as a catalyst for women's suffrage, it would be unsuccessful in implementing an Equal Rights Amendment. Instead, a majority of women elected to Congress took Robertson's stance, trying to let their actions outweigh their words. In this way, women became an accepted and necessary part of Congress's infrastructure.

After carving out their place in the House of Representatives, they started to find their own respective niches. For instance, a common theme for women was to take up a position relative to their careers or constituencies. Women championed endless subjects ranging from Native American Affairs to student loans. In fact, women representatives served as the foundation for the system of student loans utilized today.

Although American women have moved closer to equality in comparison to where they stood in 1776, it would be a fallacy to call their political and social positions in today's society equal to those of men. In many instances, however, this is exactly what Americans accept as true. Even with its dynamic transformations throughout American history, *equal*, could never define women's position in the United States House of Representatives. Of course, one must question

whether gender polarization in the United States House of Representatives signals inequality. The answer to this could go either way. If it *does* mean inequality, it is not itself inequality, but stems from other practices that have stressed inequality. Although this is confusing, it basically means that women's position in the House is not the foundation of inequality. Instead, other practices like religion, tradition, and public opinion have set up women's inequality in the House of Representatives. On the other hand, one could note that this is not inequality. The House of Representatives is the house in Congress that is the most closely associated with the people. People, including women, have the right to choose their representatives, and whether they are men or women. Therefore, if women's lack of service in the House of Representatives signifies inequality, it is partially implemented by women. It is also notable that fewer women than men run for the House of Representatives. But the question posed by this thesis is whether this is women's choice or something that has been engrained as the idea that politics is a sphere that belongs to men.

The case studies presented in the preceding Chapter, however, show there is no single cookie-cutter type of woman who has served in Congress. They vary in age, race, and political stance. There is no political party that favors women more than the other, embodied by the almost equally distributed Republicans and Democrats. They also rose to power in many different ways. Some took over for their husbands, others were elected, and some were appointed. What the case studies also show is that, typically, social change comes with policy change. For instance, after the passage of the 19th Amendment, more women began being elected to Congress. Also, after the implementation of the Civil Rights Act, the first African American

woman was elected to the House of Representatives. Whether this is causal or coincidence is arguable, but both interpretations are possible.

Why are the causes of gender polarization in the United States House of Representatives?

First, it is important to note that fewer women than men run for government positions. In fact, “50% less women than men consider running for office. Of those, 30% actually run.”¹⁵⁷ This figure leads one to question the reasons women choose not to run for office. Although the lack of women running for office has been caused by a number of different things, those that seem to have remained a factor, even in the 21st Century, are:

1. Religion
2. Domesticity
3. Classically Conditioned Tradition

Although each of these factors played a role in the creation of gender polarization in the United States House of Representatives, it is important to remember that there is no particular system to calculate the exact weight of each of them on the final product of this polarization. However, they are all interconnected in the way they repressed the number of women running for Congress.

Although religion does not directly, explicitly forbid women from serving as more than a domestic servant, marriage does. Marriage has changed throughout America’s existence, but this change has been incremental. In the 18th and 19th centuries, and even into the first few decades of

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer Lawless and Richard L. Fox, *It Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office* (New York: Cambridge University, 2005).

the 20th century, women symbolized a man and a woman becoming a single entity, and most importantly, a single political being. If marriage did, in fact, join a couple together as one political being, the man was both the decision maker and spokesperson for the couple. Marriage led to women developing a sort of complex or aversion to leaving the domestic sphere, and especially participating in public service. This aversion would eventually be dubbed the “Cult of Domesticity.”

Domesticity, even though it has changed throughout the years of America’s existence, is still very much alive in the societal foundations of the United States. This ideology frames women as those who should serve as domestic managers. Domestic manager was a sweeping term that annotated a sweeping number of responsibilities including: taking care of the home, cooking, raising children, and taking care of a husband. Domesticity was not posed as something repressive of women, but as something that would help women thrive, reach their “full potential,” and eventually transform them into “ladies.” As noted above, domesticity does not exist in the same propensity it did even fifty years ago, but left behind tradition, which has become conditioned into the minds of Americans by past generations.

Sometimes it is difficult to let go of things with which we have been conditioned. Tradition plays a large part in who we are, and has served the same way in the development of the United States. Even today, in many cases, women are expected to care of children and the domestic sphere. These expectations, of course, come with the fact that most women also work a job outside of the domestic sphere. According to *The Sense of a Woman: Gender, Ambition, and the Decision to Run for Congress*, “women in state legislatures have less ambition to run for

Congress than their male counterparts, but are equally likely to do so.”¹⁵⁸ Of course, ambition is a subjective term, but in this case, it means that women felt more restraint than men with regard to caring for their children. This restraint stems from the idea of domesticity, which leaves women with the responsibility of caring for children. Of course, the article above also notes that, even if women are less ambitious in seeking office, “they are equally likely to do so.”¹⁵⁹ So, if women *are* equally likely to run and *actually* running, why aren’t they winning?

In the United States, candidates are faced with a two party system and election by majority. Typically, if a candidate is not endorsed by one of the major parties, they have little to no chance of being elected. In 2010, 262 women ran for the United States House of Representatives. Of these, 138 won their primary.¹⁶⁰ This may seem like a significant amount, but there were 2,300 people chose to run for Congress in 2010 (although this number includes those who sought seats in the House and Senate).¹⁶¹ Of course, the candidates who ran for the House of Representatives were seeking one of the 134 seats up for grabs. With the two party system, this number is narrowed down, typically giving two candidates from each district a (legitimate) chance of winning. Of course, one of these candidates actually wins. The above facts lead one to wonder whether a proportional electoral system would be more effective in electing women to the United States House of Representatives. In a proportional system, majority does

¹⁵⁸ Sarah A. Fulton et al., “The Sense of a Woman: Gender, Ambition, and the Decision to Run for Congress,” *Political Research Quarterly* 59.2 (June 2006): 235, accessed April 4, 2011, doi:10.1177/106591290605900206.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ “Year of the Republican Woman? Yes and No: Women Candidates in the 2010 General Elections,” *Center for American Women and Politics*, http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/press_room/news/documents/PressRelease_09-20-10-postprimary.pdf (accessed April 15, 2011).

¹⁶¹ “About 2,300 Running for Congress, Most in Decades,” *US News*, June 2, 2010, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2010/06/02/about-2300-running-for-congress-most-in-decades> (accessed April 15, 2010).

not dictate a winner. Instead, a representative gains as much power as the amount of vote they win. This would break America out of the two party system, expanding the candidate base outside the narrow two-party platform. Although the ratio of women to men signals that it is unlikely that women would be elected more, they would at least have more of a chance. Of course, a woman's appearance, stance on issues, and attitude also determine whether they will win election. Debra L. Dodson notes that women are, with the new women's issues being presented, able to actually, "run as women."¹⁶² However, Libby Copeland in her article, "The Rules for Female Candidates," notes: "women need to reinforce the image of themselves as competent and professional," while, "guys often roll up their sleeves and appear in work shirts."¹⁶³ Although this seems to be an insignificant characteristic, in recent times, voters have voted not just for appearance and issues, but also relate-ability.

Why is gender polarization a problem that needs a solution?

Many of the issues that have become the pivot points of political party platforms in the last few years have dealt with women's rights. "Gender discrimination, women's health, and issues involving the balance between family and workplace have begun to be seriously addressed."¹⁶⁴ This leads many to note the irony in the idea that only 17 percent of the House of Representatives that is making, sometimes pivotal, decisions about women, are women. This

¹⁶² Debra L. Dodson, "Representing Women's Interests in the U.S. House of Representatives," in *Diversity In Contemporary American Politics and Government*, ed. David A. Dulio, Erin E. O'Brien, and John S. Klemanski (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 257.

¹⁶³ Libby Copeland, "The Rules for Female Candidates," in *Diversity In Contemporary American Politics and Government*, ed. David A. Dulio, Erin E. O'Brien, and John S. Klemanski (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 235.

¹⁶⁴ Roger H. Davidson, Walter J. Oleszek, and Frances E. Lee, *Congress and Its Members*, 12th Ed. (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2010), 129-30.

lends credence to the idea that domesticity and male polarized representation are still very much alive in today's society. Like the original institution of marriage, but on a national level, American women are to trust a Legislature, 83 percent of which is composed of men, to protect and advance their rights.

What might help mitigate this problem?

The answer to the above question can be found in two words: education and understanding. Earlier in the text, it was noted that many Americans believe American society to be equal. As established through this text, this assumption is a fallacy, and a detrimental one at that. If women do not understand the great gender polarization in the House of Representatives, and the significance of that gender polarization, there are few pressed to fight against that polarization.

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