

***Women in the Workforce after
World War II: Rosie the Riveter
versus G.I. Joe,
1945***

Student Handouts

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Women in the Workforce after World War II: Rosie the Riveter versus G.I. Joe, 1945

Table of Contents for Handouts

1. Objectives
2. Historical Background
3. Women in the Workforce during World War II
4. Women cleaned and maintained railroad cars
5. Women built airplane engines and worked as welders
6. "Rosie the Riveter," *The Saturday Evening Post*, May 29, 1943.
7. Statistics on Women in the Workforce during World War II
8. The issue of Equal Pay
9. Demobilization and reconversion
10. Mock Negotiations, 1945
11. Directions for large group negotiations
12. Directions for small group negotiations or mediation
13. Steps in Negotiations
14. The Roles
15. Steps in Mediation
16. The Mediator: Mary Norton
17. Mary McLeod Bethune
18. Henry Abt, National Association of Manufacturers
19. Eric Johnston, Chamber of Commerce
20. Henry Ford
21. Mildred Jeffrey, Women's Bureau UAW
22. Freida Miller. Women's Bureau U.S. Dept. of Labor
23. Margaret Hickey
24. Elizabeth Christman
25. "Sylvia Woods" –Rosie
26. "Joe Small"—WW II Vet
27. Positions and Interests
28. Debriefing
29. Alternative Mock Congressional Hearing
30. What really happened in 1945?
31. The result
32. Why happened 1945-63?
33. Equal Pay Act of 1963
34. Title VII of Civil Rights Act of 1964
35. Chart of Women's Annual Earnings as % of Men's Annual Earnings
36. Why?
37. Questions for Discussion

Objectives

- ✓ To understand how the need to mobilize for World War II brought women into jobs previously held only by men
- ✓ To analyze the impact of the governmental post-war efforts to avoid unemployment and inflation
- ✓ To compare and contrast the competing positions and interests regarding the Women's Equal Pay Bill of 1945
- ✓ To explain the progress of women, and the impediments, since 1945 in obtaining equal pay for equal work.

Historical Background

- Pre-industrial society: sexual division of labor not rigid
- Industrial society (19th century): The Family Wage: men were the breadwinners and the women's place was the home.
- Women with financial resources to obtain an education could go into teaching, nursing and social work
- Poor, young women worked in fields, factory or as domestics til marriage
- Late 19th century: 1/5 white women and 1/3 black women worked for wages outside home, usually least skilled and lowest paid jobs (majority single and under 25)
- Progressive Era reforms: state enacted protective labor legislation for women and children (maximum hours/minimum wage) also prohibited women from holding a variety of jobs
- Early 20th century—sales and clerical jobs in newly expanding retail stores or business offices (attracted many older and married women)
- Between 1900 and 1940, the percentage of wage earning women over 25 grew from 18 to 31% of the workforce
- More than half were blacks or foreign-born women
- Despite New Deal's minimum wage and maximum hour legislation, women still excluded from more lucrative positions and paid lower wages than men

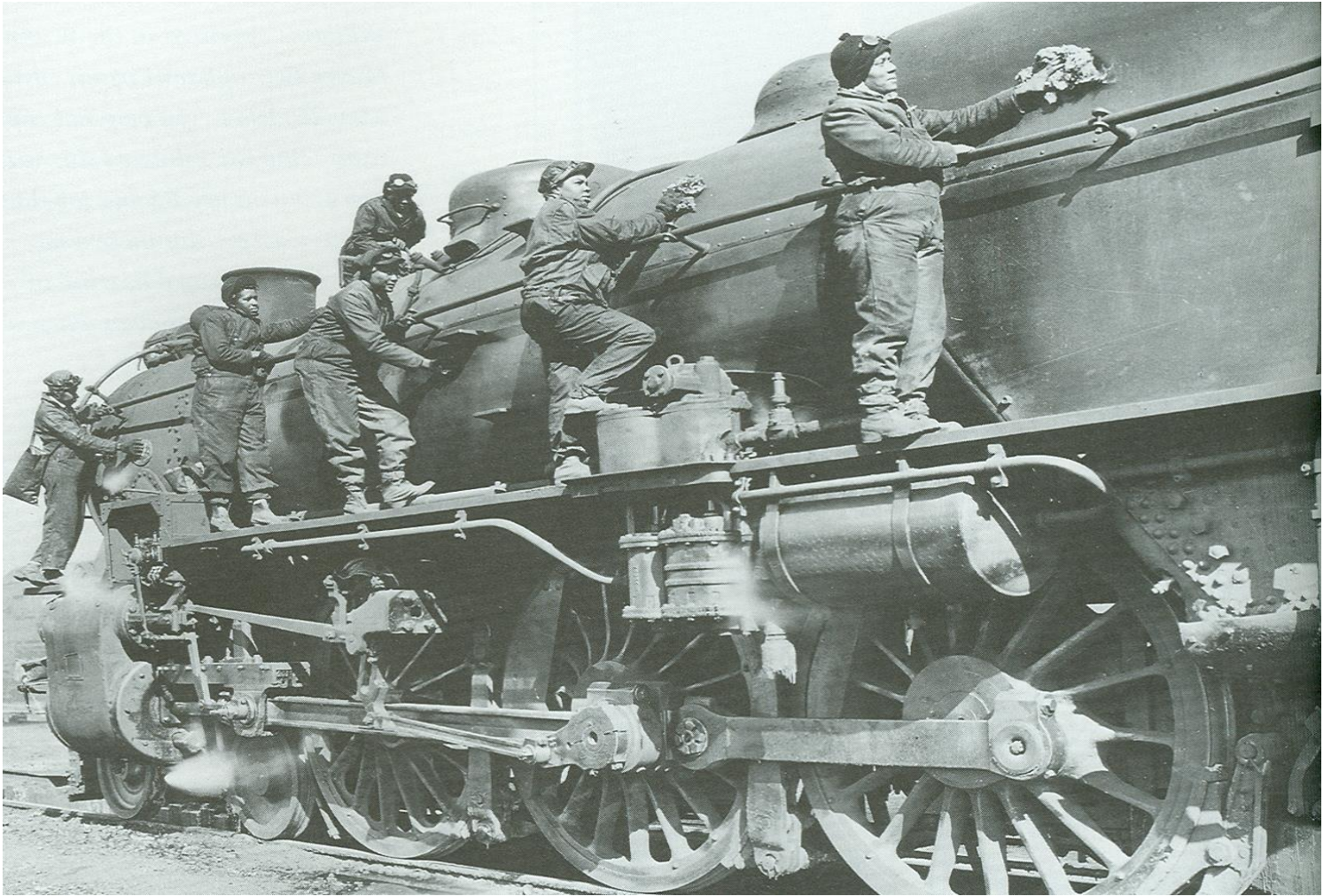
Women in the Workforce during World War II

- At end of 1930s, 25% of American were unemployed
- After Pearl Harbor (Dec. 1941), 16 million men and 300,000 women entered armed forces (1/6th of male population)
- By 1942, employers sought women for non-traditional jobs to meet the industrial demand



- A massive propaganda campaign was undertaken in 1943 by the War Production Coordinating Committee to attract women to work.
- Social pressures for women to stay at home were lifted.

***During World War II,
Women cleaned and maintained railroad cars***



Built airplane engines



Worked as welders



Rosie the Riveter

“Rosie the Riveter” rests her feet on Hitler’s Mein Kampf. From Norman Rockwell’s iconic image for the cover of the Saturday Evening Post, May 29, 1943.



Women in the workforce during World War II

- Female portion of labor force grew from 11 to 23 percent
- Between 1941 and 1945, 6.5 million women took paying jobs.
- In 1940, 25% of adult women were in the paid workforce, by 1944 that percentage had risen to 36%.
- By 1944, there were more women employed in factories than in the entire labor force in 1940.
- More than 19.5 million women were participating in the paid workforce in 1945.
- The largest number of new female workers were married (75%) and middle-aged

The Issue of Equal Pay

- The policy of equal pay for equal work was endorsed by federal wartime agencies in 1942 (NWLB Order #16), but the policy was never effectively implemented: government agencies allowed employees to use loopholes, such as reclassifying work as “light” rather than “heavy” to discriminate against women.
- Unions and men supported the concept because they feared losing their jobs to lower paid women after the war.
- Traditionally men were paid according to the value of what they produced and in comparison to other men; women were paid according to their needs (which were assumed to be low because a husband or father was supporting them).
- Influx of women into workforce during World War II led to increased support for “equal pay for equal work”
- Half a dozen states with ¼ of the nation’s female wage earners enacted their own equal pay laws: Michigan and Montana (1919), Washington and Illinois (1943), New York (1944) and Massachusetts (1845)
- Some companies (especially with cost-plus war contracts) agreed to equal pay adjustments during the war.
- In 1945, women only earning 55% of what their male coworkers earned.

Demobilization and Reconversion, 1944-45

- How can the U.S. reconvert industry from military to domestic production quickly and smoothly enough to avoid massive unemployment and inflation? 28 million men and women employed in war industries and another 11 million in armed services soon to be discharged
- War Manpower Commission simply lifted all controls regarding the workforce
- The only preparation was the June 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act (known as the "G.I. Bill"): provided medical care, unemployment compensation, government guaranteed mortgage funds, job counseling and placement and educational and vocational training for World War II veterans (women veterans largely ineligible)
- Truman's Sept. 1945 recommendations for postwar recovery included legislation to encourage full employment, increase the minimum wage, built more than 1 million homes annually and comprehensive medical insurance. However, proposals were blocked by coalition of Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans.
- The first month after Japanese surrender (Sept. 1945), 2.5 million American workers were laid off or fired, disproportionately women (1/4 of women employed in factories three months earlier lost jobs).
- Reports from industry indicated that women workers during the war had been capable and efficient.
- Surveys indicated that at least 75% of women wanted to continue to work.
- Women's Bureau at the Dept. of Labor urged an "Equal Pay" bill

Mock Negotiations: The Women's Equal Pay Bill of 1945

- In January 1945, Mary T. Norton, a Democratic member of Congress from Jersey City, and chair of the House Labor Committee, introduced a bill requiring that women be given “equal pay for equal work”.
- In June 1945, Senators Claude Pepper (Democrat from Florida) and Wayne Morse (Republican from Oregon) introduced the same legislation, S. 1178, “The Women’s Equal Pay Act.”
- Hearings before the Senate Education and Labor Subcommittee are slated to start on October 29, 1945.
- Concerned about getting sufficient support behind her bill, Representative Norton has asked representatives from business, labor, women’s organizations, female workers and veterans to meet with her in early October 1945 prior to the hearings to address their concerns and to develop a piece of legislation that might be acceptable to all of these groups.

Directions for the Large Group Negotiations

Form groups of 11 and assign the following roles:

1. U.S. Congresswoman Mary Norton, the facilitator
2. Henry Edward Abt, National Association of Manufacturers
3. Eric Johnston, US Chamber of Commerce
4. Henry Ford II
5. Mildred Jeffrey, Women's Bureau, UAW
6. Frieda Miller, Women's Bureau, US Dept. of Labor
7. Margaret Hickey, National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Associations
8. Elisabeth Christman, Women's Trade Union League
9. Sylvia Woods, a "Rosie the Riveter"
10. Joe Smith, a G.I. Joe
11. Mary McLeod Bethune, the observer/recorder/reporter

Directions for Small Group Negotiations or Mediation

Form groups of three and assign the following roles:

1. Sylvia Woods, a “Rosie the Riveter”
2. Joe Smith, a G.I. Joe
3. Mary McLeod Bethune, the observer/recorder/reporter

For mediation, form groups of four and add:

4. A mediator

Steps in Mediation

1. Mediator introduces self and the disputants and sets the ground rules—no triggers, no interruptions, respect each other, and agree to work together on resolving the issue.
2. Each side tells story
3. Mediator helps disputants identify facts and issues through questions, paraphrasing and reframing
4. Mediator summarizes; disputants agree on issues and interests
5. Mediator helps disputants brainstorm alternative solutions
6. Mediator helps disputants to evaluate solutions
7. Caucus: mediator may speak separately with each of the disputants
8. Mediator helps disputants agree on a solution
9. Mediator memorializes the agreement

The Roles

- The **FACILITATOR or MEDIATOR** should move the discussion along and try to uncover any concerns with the Women's Equal Pay Bill. When appropriate, he or she should interject the political realities of the time. The mediator's goal is to develop a bill which is acceptable to all parties.
- The **PARTICIPANTS** should actively listen to each other and within the context of their roles try to find a bill which is acceptable to all parties.
- The **OBSERVER/REPORTER/RECORDER** does not take part in the caucus. The role is to objectively observe and record the process and the results using an evaluation form, and then to report to the class what transpired.

Steps in Negotiations

1. Discuss the rules—no triggers, no interruptions, respect each other, and agree to work together on resolving the issue.
2. Each party presents facts, feelings and issues from his or her perspective
3. Actively listen—indicate that you heard and understood
4. Brainstorm possible solutions
5. Evaluate alternatives
6. Agree on a solution
7. Agree what to do if conflict recurs
8. Write down the agreement
9. Preserve the relationship

Rep. Mary Norton (D-NJ)

Facilitator



Born in Jersey City in 1875, to staunch Roman Catholic Irish parents, Norton attended business college and worked as a secretary. She married Robert Francis Norton in 1909. Their only son died. She met Jersey City Mayor Frank Hague, who wanted her help in encouraging the newly enfranchised women to vote as Democrats. Norton became a county freeholder in 1923, and then ran for congress. In 1937, Norton became the senior Democrat on the House Labor Committee, a position which enabled her to shape the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which set a floor for wages and a ceiling for hours. In 1944-45, she introduced the “Women’s Equal Pay Bill” and the “Fair Employment Practices Bill.” After the defeat of these bills, she resigned from the Labor Committee in 1946. Norton refused to support the Equal Rights Amendment, as did the majority of women in the 1930s and 40s who favored protective legislation. Norton died in 1959.

Mary McLeod Bethune, observer/recorder/ reporter



Born on a farm in South Carolina in 1876, Mary McLeod was the first African American to attend Moody Bible College in Chicago. She taught in Georgia, where she met and married Albertus Bethune. They had a son and moved to Florida where Bethune established a School for Negro Girls, which later merged with Cookman Institute and McLeod Hospital for African Americans. A close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, Bethune was appointed by President Roosevelt as director of the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration. In 1940, Bethune joined forces with A. Philip Randolph to plan the March on Washington, a demonstration in support of equal job opportunities. President Roosevelt responded with Executive Order 8802, abolishing discrimination based on race, creed, color or national origin. Bethune was president of the National Association of Colored Women and founded the National Council of Negro Women and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. She died in 1955.

Henry Edward Abt, National Association of Manufacturers

Henry Edward Abt was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1902. His father was a merchant and manufacturer. He graduated from Cornell University in 1925 and pursued graduate studies while working as an advertising manager in Ithaca, New York. He moved to New York City in 1927 and worked for several advertising agencies until organizing his own company in 1931. He went to Washington, D.C. as economic adviser to the National Recovery Administration in 1934. In 1939, he became director of group relations at the National Association of Manufacturers until 1945, when he was named managing director of Brand Names Research Foundation and in 1947 he was elected president. Abt continued with its successor, Brand Names Foundation, Inc., as membership organization composed of manufacturers, advertising agencies and consulting retailers until the close of his life.

Eric A. Johnston, president of U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Eric A. Johnston was born in Washington, D.C. in 1896, the son of a local chemist. He started to work young and continued working through high school and college. He graduated from the University of Washington with a law degree in 1917, and joined the United States Marine Corps., serving until 1922. He settled in Spokane, Washington and married. Johnson started several vacuum cleaner businesses, which he built into a large concern. He became president of the Spokane chamber of commerce and entered the national field, becoming the youngest president of the United States Chamber of Commerce in 1942, a position he held for four years. Johnson was a handsome, youthful man, who was a born salesman. In 1945, he was chosen as president of the Motion Picture Association of America and helped organize a self-censorship system for the industry. In 1963, he became a special representative of the President with the rank of Ambassador of the Middle East, and valiantly tried to deal with the Palestinian refugee problem.

Henry Ford II, president of Ford Motor Company

Henry Ford, II was born in 1917 in Dearborn, Michigan, the eldest grandson of Henry Ford, founder of the Ford Motor Company, which pioneered assembly-line produced, single model automobiles with interchangeable parts at prices within the reach of many. A champion of the “Open Shop,” willing to use strong-arm methods to block unions, Ford had a poor record of labor-management relations throughout the 1920s and 30s. After 1937, Ford was the only holdout to the UAW, causing much labor violence at Ford plants, until the UAW was accepted in World War II. Henry Ford II was educated at Hotchkiss and Yale and served in the Navy during World War II. He joined the company in 1943, became vice-president in 1944 and replaced his grandfather as president in 1945, remaining in this position until 1960, when he became chairman and chief executive officer, a post he held until 1980. In 1945, he began a massive recovery of the firm, which had been losing almost \$10 million a month. He brought in highly competent new managers. Henry Ford II was as autocratic and difficult as his grandfather.

Mildred Jeffrey, Women's Bureau of the United Auto Workers

Mildred Jeffrey graduated from Bryn Mawr and worked as an organizer for the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the CIO's Textile Workers Organizing Committee in the 1930s. In the 1940s, she and her husband, who also was active in the labor movement, took jobs in the Roosevelt administration. Jeffrey was employed by the War Production Board. On the recommendation of Roy Reuther, Jeffrey was offered the position as the first director of the Women's Bureau at the United Auto Workers (UAW). During the spring of 1944, the Women's Bureau focused its attention on projects designed to increase women's participation in union affairs. The union's Research Department indicated that women were being laid off in disproportionately higher numbers than men. The bureau began to receive many reports from women that they were being laid off without regard to their seniority. To the surprise of many men, 85.5 percent of female UAW members surveyed by the Research Department in the summer of 1944 stated that they wanted to keep their jobs after the war. This included 100 percent of those who were widows, 98.5 percent of single women and 68.7 percent of those who were married. The bureau refocused its attention on protecting women's rights to postwar employment in the auto industry.

Frieda Miller, Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor

Frieda Miller was born in Wisconsin in 1889. Her interest in labor began at her grandfather's factory where loyal skilled artisans worked. Miller studied labor economics and political science at the University of Chicago. In 1916, she became a research assistant at Bryn Mawr College, and in 1920, executive secretary of the Philadelphia Trade Union League. Miller moved to New York City in 1924 where she worked as a factory inspector for the Joint Board of Sanitary Control. In 1929, Miller was appointed head of the state labor department's Division of Women in Industry. When New York passed a minimum wage law in 1933, Miller directed studies to determine fair wages for women in industries and set up boards to secure the compliance of employers. In 1944, Miller was appointed director of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor. Her major focus was the problems of postwar reemployment of women. She emphasized equal pay and equal access to jobs for women, and testified in favor of the Equal Pay Act of 1945. Although she opposed the Equal Rights Amendment as a threat to laws protecting women in industry, Miller shifted the emphasis of the Bureau away from protective legislation toward issues of equality in the workplace.

Margaret A. Hickey, president of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs

Margaret Hickey was born in 1902 in Kansas City, Missouri. She earned a law degree and became owner and operator of a business school. During World War II, she was the chairwoman of the Women's Advisory Committee of the National War Manpower Commission from 1942-45. After the war, Hickey served on a variety of high-level panels concerned with women's rights, including president of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, an organization which represented 91,000 members in 17,000 communities throughout the country. Beginning in 1946, she was also public affairs editor of the *Ladies Home Journal*. In January 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson appointed Hickey chairwoman of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which had been established by President Kennedy.

Elisabeth Christman, Women's Trade Union League

Elisabeth Christman was born in Germany in 1881. Her family immigrated to the United States when she was young and settled in Chicago. Christman began work in a Chicago glove factory at age thirteen. In 1902, she formed the Operators Local 1 of the International Glove Workers Union (IGWU). She served as local shop steward and treasurer from 1905 to 1911 and president from 1912 to 1917. She was an officer of the IGWUA from 1916 to 1937. From 1910 to 1929 Christman served on the national executive board of the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL), which was established in 1903 by a coalition of women workers and middle and upper-class women reformers to organize working women and educate the public about labor conditions. During World War I, Christman was chief of the women field representatives under the National War Labor Board. After the war, she was selected as WTUL secretary-treasurer, a full-time position she held until 1950. During World War II, Christman headed the efforts of the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor to secure trade union support for equal pay for women workers in war-related industries. She made significant gains for women workers in many plants throughout the country.

Sylvia Woods, a representative "Rosie the Riveter"

Sylvia Woods was born in 1909 in New Orleans, one of three children of a union roofer and a domestic worker. At age sixteen, Woods married and moved to Chicago. While working in a succession of laundries, she agitated for equal pay and promotion for black employees. She was employed by Bendix Aviation during World War II, where she worked on an assembly line. At Bendix, she joined the United Auto Workers and was elected first shop steward, then shop committeewoman and financial secretary. When Bendix Aviation closed after the war, Woods continued her union activities. In the 1960s, she was active in the campaign to free Black Panther Angela Davis.

Joe Smith, a representative "G.I. Joe"

Joe Smith is a composite World War II veteran who returned from the service in 1945 at age 25. He was born in Indiana in 1920 and moved with his family to the Detroit Area so his father could work in a Ford Motor plant which offered better pay in the 1930s. After graduating high school in 1938, Smith worked for Ford Motor Company for four years, working his way up to assembly-line inspector. He enlisted in the U.S. Army in late 1942 at age 21. He served as a combat infantryman in the European theater of operations, including the Battles for Sicily, France and Germany. He was mustered out of the army in August 1945 with an honorable discharge and several commendations for bravery. He recently married his high school sweetheart and has saved all of his army pay as a deposit on a house. He does not want his wife to work. He is concerned about getting a better job so that he and his new wife can start a family and live comfortably. He believes that he should have seniority at Ford for the two and a half years that he was in the army serving his country, in addition to the four years of employment with Ford.

Positions and Interests: Business and Industry

Positions

- Support equal pay for equal performance in principle.
- But there are other, hidden costs involved in hiring women which must be considered, such as:
 - Women have a higher level of absenteeism and higher turnover.
 - Women have less skill and require more training.
 - Women more susceptible to fatigue and need more rest periods.
 - Women are not as strong.
 - Men don't like to work under female supervisors.
 - State mandated amenities and protections, such as rest rooms, lunchrooms, hours, rest periods, add hidden costs to hiring women.
- Women's home roles should take precedence over women's work lives.

Interests

- Women should be paid less because it would provide cheaper labor for business. Some evidence that men being rehired back at women's rates.
- "Men should be the bread winners."
- Women's higher turnover rates make them useful as temporary employees.
- Keynesians believe that bringing women into the workforce would increase productivity and consumption which would, in turn, boost the economy (not necessarily at equal pay).
- Fear that equal pay for women would reduce male solidarity and undermine unions

Positions and Interests: Labor Unions

Positions

- Equal pay is fair and just.
- It is necessary to protect the wage standards of men and women—without equal pay the wages of men might be driven down by the lower wages of women.
- Equal pay underlines the full employment campaign.

Interests

- Labor unions were divided but many of the unions continued to see men and women as having separate types as jobs, with the women's jobs paying less. They did not anticipate that women would take men's jobs.
- Most unions were male dominated and had a stake in occupational segregation to preserve male
- Equal pay will force unions to pay more attention to female members.
- Equal pay is the only fair way to treat women in the workforce.

Positions and Interests: Veterans

Positions

- Veterans risked their lives for their country and should be able to get good jobs.
- It's only fair that veterans should get their jobs back.
- Veterans should get their jobs back with the seniority they had.
- Veterans should be given extra seniority for time spent in the service in addition to existing seniority they had in their jobs beforehand (opposed by women's' groups and labor unions).

Interests

- Get jobs back—spring 1945 study of veterans showed that they were worried about the kind of work they would do after the war.
- Maintain level of income as family providers.
- Keep wages from being depressed—the 1945 study indicated that 56% of veterans surveyed anticipated a depression.

Positions and Interests: National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs

Positions

- "...Inequality in wage structure promotes price cutting, depresses the labor market, and thereby unbalances the whole economic system." (Hickey)
- Equal pay on the basis of merit without discrimination because of sex will give all workers greater job security.
- "Lower wages for women for the same work done are detrimental to standards of living of women workers who constitute one-third of our total labor force." (Hickey)
- Since there are no differential prices on consumer goods, when women are paid less there is an increasing economic burden.
- Technology has eliminated the need for physical strength for tasks that were assigned only to men in the past.
- Wartime experiences have shown that women have been able to successfully assume many of the skilled and unskilled jobs that had in the past been assigned solely to men.
- Some individualistic feminists reject protective legislation for women and urge instead the "Equal Rights" Amendment and equal pay in order to end job segregation by sex.

Interests

- Professional women want equal opportunity for professional male jobs.
- Increasing numbers of women are working for wages—fear that women will be pushed out of higher paying jobs.
- Support that principle that woman have an equal right to jobs and to equal pay.

Positions and Interests: Women's Trade Union League (WTUL)

Positions

- Equal pay is fair and just.
- Need a federal law because majority of women are not in unions and even for those who are in unions, the union agreements are not self enforcing even when they have an equal pay clause in the contract.
- Working class women support protective legislation for women.
- Women's groups argue that women will need to support disabled veteran husbands or as single heads of family—try to minimize threat to men and emphasize the family.

Interests

- Fear that wage differential will undermine whole wage structure
- Equal pay helps to open up more job opportunities for women.
- Equal pay will allay male fears to restrict women from coming into the workforce.
- Support job preferences for returning veterans but protest against a preference for young, non-veteran men who are entering the workforce for the first time.

Debriefing

The Process:

- To what extent did the parties use active listening skills?
- To what extent did the parties brainstorm and evaluate possible alternatives
- To what extent were the parties able to articulate their real interests?
- To what extent did rhetoric get in the way of pursuing the parties real interests?
- To what extent were the roles played with historical accuracy?

The Results:

- Were the parties able to reach mutually acceptable solutions? Why or why not?
- What were some possible options?
- How did the results of the mock negotiations differ from what really happened and why?

Alternative Activity: Mock Congressional Hearing and Debate

1. Select a balanced representation of members of the Senate Committee on Education and Labor from the 79th Congress sitting in the fall of 1945, e.g.:

- Senator Claude Pepper (Florida—cosponsor)
- Senator Allen Ellender (Louisiana)
- Senator James Tunnell (Delaware)
- Senator Joseph Guffey (Pennsylvania)
- J.W. Fulbright (Arkansas)
- Senator M. La Follette, Jr. (Wisconsin)
- Senator Robert Taft (Ohio)
- Senator Joseph Ball (Minnesota)
- Wayne Morse (Oregon—cosponsor)

2. Participants provide testimony about S 1178 as witnesses before the Senate committee

3. Senate Committee members debate and vote on whether to report the bill out of committee

What Really Happened in 1945?

- The Equal Pay Bill of 1945 (S 1178) failed to get out of Committee.
- Some women protested but there was no mass feminist movement in 1945.
- There was little change in attitudes about women's role or the equality of the sexes: less than 22% of men and 29% of women thought that women "should have an equal chance with men" for any job in 1946.
- Veterans had priority over wartime workers for their old jobs.

The result?

- Women were laid off at a rate 75% higher than men
- Many rejoined the workforce but in traditional women's jobs: clerical work, waitressing and retail sales
- Just as companies had reclassified jobs to bring in more women when they needed them during the war, now companies reclassified jobs as "heavy" or requiring skills for which women had not be trained in order to exclude women
- Many companies refused to hire black women, relegating them to domestic service, cooks, cafeteria workers and unskilled, low-paid jobs in industry.

What Happened between 1945 and 1963?

- The wartime experience had breached traditional barriers to occupational segregation: if women could do the same jobs as men, why should they be paid less?
- The WTCL and Women's Bureau at the Dept. of Labor waged aggressive, continuous campaigns for Equal Rights Bills.
- By the end of 1955, 16 states had equal pay laws
- Pres. Eisenhower supported it in his State of the Union address in 1956
- Keynesian principles of economic growth required women to be both workers and consumers—higher standards of living could be achieved through enhanced productivity and consumption
- Continuing production demands for consumer goods and defense pulled more women into the workforce (need)
- The family wage came to include men as well as women
- Social fairness and economic self-interest both supported the idea of equal pay for equal work

The Equal Pay Act of 1963



UAW Members Lobbying for the Equal Pay Act

- Requires equal wages for equal work in industries engaged in commerce or producing goods for commerce
- However, it did not require that all jobs be available for women at the same pay as for men
- The provisions of the act were strengthened by court cases:
 - ✓ *Schultz v. Wheaton Glass Co.* (1970)(Jobs can be “substantially equal”)
 - ✓ *Corning Glass Works v. Brennan* (1974)(wage differential because men will not work for rates paid women not acceptable reason)

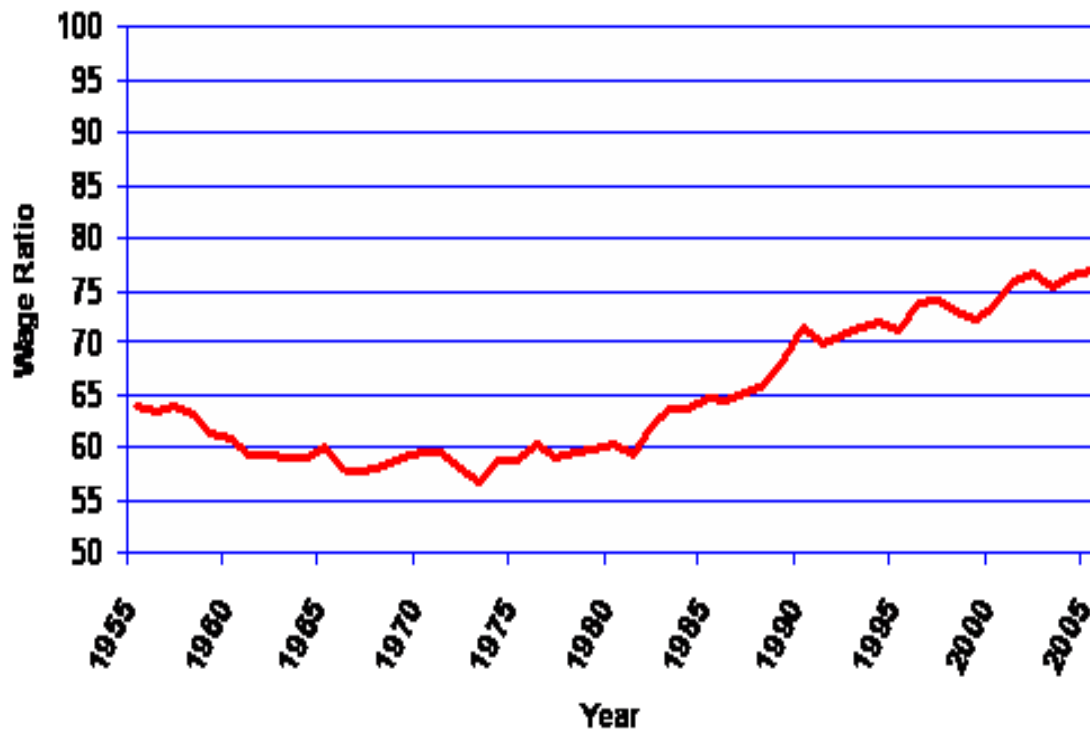
Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

- Prohibited discrimination in employment
- During the first year, about a third of the claims under this legislation were against sexual rather than racial discrimination
- EEOC rules in 1968 that sex-segregated help-wanted ads in newspapers were illegal

Attitudes Changed

- *The Feminine Mystique* gave voice to dissatisfied white, middle class housewives
- Women's liberation movement in the 1970s sought an end to occupational segregation by sex

Women's Annual Earnings as a Percent of Men's 1955-2005



Sources: Institute for Women's Policy Research, *Fact Sheet* #C350 (2005); U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Blau & Ferber, *The Economics of Women, Men and Work*, 2nd ed. (1992).

The Persistent Wage Gap

- At the start of 20th century women were 18.4% of workforce
- At the start of the 21st century women are 46.4% of workforce
- Women earned less than 60% of what men earned through the 1960s and 70s
- Today they earn 77% of what men earn
- The wage gap exists across a spectrum of occupations

Why?

The following reasons have been suggested:

- Women had less education, skills and experience—no longer true
- Women only work in predominantly lower-paid female occupations—no longer true
- Women have different values—value family life more
- Women are still primary caregivers
- Subsidized child care in US is minimal
- Where subsidized child care and flexible parental leave exist, women are larger part of workforce
- When domestic and caretaking (“women’s work”) are valued more, the gender gap may close

Questions for Discussion

1. What were the prevailing attitudes regarding a woman's role at the start of the 20th century? What are the prevailing attitudes regarding a woman's role at the start of the 21st century? How do they differ?
2. Since employers praised the work of women in the paid workforce during World War II, why was this experience not able to change the attitudes about women's place in the paid workforce?
3. How could the direct conflict between the interests of veterans returning from World War II and women who wanted to continue to work at well-paid "men's" jobs have been reframed to find a solution that might have satisfied both women and men returning from war? What could the government have done to expand the economy that had contracted with the end of World War II? What ultimately solved this economic problem?
4. An equal pay bill was introduced in every session of Congress from 1945 to 1963. Why do you think that equal pay for equal work legislation was not passed by Congress until 1963?
5. Why was such legislation not one of the main goals of labor and women's organizations? Do you think that there might have been earlier legislative action if equal pay had been a primary goal of labor and women's organizations?
6. Compare the influence of the media in the post World War II period and today in defining and reinforcing societal expectations regarding the role of women.
7. Has anything changed since the start of the 21st century?
8. Why do you think that a wage differential between men and women persists?
9. What changes would you propose?