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ABSTRACT

The economic evolution of American women from the colonial era to 1984 is examined. The labor-scarce environment of the colonial era gave women access to any occupation they wished, e.g., field work, household manufacturing. With the Industrial Revolution, 1820-1865, the role of women changed. Industrialists hired women because they would work for low wages. Late in this period the "cult of true womanhood," i.e., women belong in the home raising children, appeared. In the period from 1865 to 1920 work opportunities for women changed and widened. Women entered the professions of nursing and teaching. The proportion of women employed increased from 14.7 to 24.9 percent; a women's union movement was founded. In 1920 women won the right to vote. From 1920 to 1984 more women entered the work force but at a slower rate. Although women had access to skilled, higher-paying industrial jobs, they were discriminated against. The women's liberation movement of the 1960's demanded employment equalities as a condition for equality of the sexes. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was approved by Congress, but was not ratified by the required 38 states. ERA supporters, however, have not conceded defeat. (RM)

AMERICAN WOMEN:

DIMENSIONS IN ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

by

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for
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"Work defines who we are."[2]. The labor of women is as essential in the economic survival and advancement of our nation as any other labor. The purpose of this paper is to examine the way the American system has operated to structure the economic life of its women and to examine future directions. Women's work is complex and consists of several separate parts . . . market labor, volunteer community service, child bearing and rearing, and housework.[3] Each is essential to our economy.

Market labor force participation by females has changed throughout our history. As of June 1980, it was 51.4 per cent and women constituted 40 per cent of the civilian labor force. However, women's earnings overall are only 59 per cent of men's labor force earnings and two out of every three persons living below the poverty level in the United States today is a woman.[4]

Housework is necessary for the day to day operations of the economy. Table I summarizes a recent study. Note that women outside the market labor force spend 8 hours per/day on household work, employed women spend 5.3 hours per/day on household chores whereas men spend 1.6 hours per/day on duties around the house.

* *

TABLE I

Daily Hours Spent on Household Work

		Women	
	Men	Employed	Not Employed
All food activities	.2	1.6	2.3
Care of the house	.6	1.2	1.6
Care of clothing	---[a]	.9	1.3
Care of family members	.4	.8	1.8
Marketing and record keeping	.4	.8	1.0
Total	1.6	5.3	8.0

[a]Less than .05 hours/day

Source: K. Walker and M. Woods, Time Use: A Measure of Household Production of Family Goods and Services, 1976, Washington, D.C.: American Home Economics Association (p. 50-51, 62) survey data, c. 1968.

* *

Bearing and rearing children likewise is productive work. Our children are the labor force of the future.

In addition, the creation and/or operation of community institutions is productive work. The sense of community is as vital to the health of a society as an awareness of self, a sense of family and economic well-being. Women perform much volunteer community service in religious, educational and civic organizations. Thus, like many other productive endeavors, women's work generates externalities which are difficult for the market to capture. We will now examine the economic evolution of American women.

THE COLONIAL ERA TO 1820

Labor of all kinds was one of the most scarce resources in the New World and very few of the early settlers were female. The settlers and the trading companies made concentrated efforts to import women. Their success enabled the colonies to prosper.

Women's child bearing work was actively encouraged. As Bettina Berch says in The Endless Day:

> . . . There are several ways labor-scarce societies can encourage the necessary population increase. They can promote earlier marriages, more births per marriage, easy divorces with quick remarriages, and short mourning periods with quick remarriages. . . . Given the range of customs in the different colonies, evidence can be found for all of these policies.[5]

As Calhoun reports:

> They marry generally very young, some at thirteen or fourteen, and she that continues unmarried until twenty is reckoned a stale maid . . .[6]

Women produced large families average 7 or 8 surviving children per family. Remarriages were also socially desirable. Calhoun says that:

> . . . Contrary to our images of Puritan family life, divorces, for example, were relatively easy to obtain. Grounds for divorce in the American colonies included more than the standard adultery or desertion claims, the courts lending a sympathetic ear to charges of mental or physical abuse, other forms of cruelty, or stinginess. Liberalized divorce, in the context of a social compulsion to remarry, can result in higher proportions of happy marriages with greater numbers of children. Toward this end, the remarriage of spouses after death or divorce was an established custom in the colonies. Widowers remarried so swiftly that it was not considered tasteless to serve the leftovers from the funeral wake at the wedding feast![7]

Colonial women also devoted their time to household chores, household manufacturing and field work. The nuclear family was the typical family group, and it functioned as an economic unit. The primary goal was survival, i.e., the manufacture of food and clothing. With women working alongside men, their work was visible and highly valued. This

labor scarce environment in a less developed country gave colonial women access to any occupation they wished. Neither economic nor social factors prevented them from working outside the home. Even the religious climate, i.e., the Protestant ethic, esteemed hard work and condemned idleness. A few southern women were exceptions since wealthy white southern women lived differently. However, black slaves participated in all facets of productive work and their owners reaped the benefits therefrom.

Towards the end of the colonial period and the ensuing industrialization, the role of women changed somewhat. While some political leaders were encouraging the development of industrial manufacturing, men hesitated to join the wage labor force. Free land and independence produced opportunity costs higher than they were willing to pay. Women, as a result, were solicited into industry. Industrialists were anxious to hire them because, even then, women usually received lower wages than men.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION, 1820-1865

As the country continued to grow, debates developed between agarian and industrial interests. Jefferson and his supporters opposed industrialization arguing that workers would leave the land for the city. Hamilton and his supporters argued for industrialization, protective tariffs, women workers and lower wages therefor. It was argued that:

> It has been alleged that wages were too high in America to admit of our entering into competition in manufactures with the older countries of Europe, particularly Britain. We believe the opinion is not well founded . . . women and children who perform a great part of the work can be hired nearly as low here as in England.[8]

The wage labor system continued to grow through the first half of

the nineteenth century and women entered in large numbers. Many worked in factories producing goods that had traditionally been produced by women in the home, such as in textiles. However, factory conditions deteriorated. Massive immigration increased the supply of labor and precipitated the further degeneration of factory work. The collective resistance of women to the degrading working conditions began in the 1820's. From 1824 to 1837, women were leaders in twelve or more strikes that took place in textile factories.

Factory conditions further declined and many women left the textile industry. Some joined the western movement. They went west to accompany their husbands, to make money, to improve their health, etc. The westward trip was hazardous and many pioneer women performed not only the traditional women's jobs . . . child bearing and rearing, housework and market work such as taking in boarders, selling eggs, or teaching school, but many traditionally male jobs such as hunting, housebuilding, etc.

It was later in this period that a new and different female American ideology appeared. It was the first appearance of the "cult of true womanhood" - the ideology that women belong demurely and submissively in the home and that their primary function is the moral guardians of society through their maternal and wifely roles. Women's idleness became a new status symbol. This is the exact opposite of the Puritan belief that idle hands are the devil's workshop.

Mrs. Stanford wrote in 1842:

> A really sensible woman feels her dependence. She does what she can, but she is conscious of inferiority, and therefore grateful for support.[9]

It was also during this period that there developed tensions between women of different classes. As Bettina Berch says:

> . . . Most likely, women recently "released" from the necessity to work, or women in professions trying to justify their existence in the labor force as genteel, socially acceptable types, felt somewhat threatened by working class women: these women were doing "men's" work and generally spoiling the image of delicate womanhood.[10]

THE DRIVE TO MATURITY, 1865-1920

The period of the Civil War and the closing decades of the nineteenth century saw the market work opportunities for women changing and widening. The reduction in the labor force caused by the war drew women into two higher-status occupations--nursing and teaching. In fact,

> . . . the wartime experience permanently changed the conventional view of nursing as improper for women to the view that it was a profession not only allowable for women, but one for which they were uniquely suited. This rapid change in ideology, . . . reveals how practical, really are the ideologies about what women are suited for. Wherever women are needed economically it is quickly decided that they are biologically or even spiritually destined.[11]

After the Civil War industrial revolution accelerated. A union victory strengthened the foundation for a powerful industrial economy. There was also a marked increase in the rate at which women entered the work force. Between 1880 and 1910, the proportion of women who were employed in the market increased from 14.7 to 24.9 per cent. Nevertheless, the new American ideology of American womanhood re-emerged in the American Labor movement.

During the industrialization of the United States, workers worked long hours, earned low pay and their working conditions were very poor. As a result of the institutional structure and power of the large corporations, workers began to band together and form unions in an effort to regain some control over their working lives. Two successful unions

of this period were the Knights of Labor and the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Females were generally excluded from membership. However, by 1880, it was the policy, if not the practice, of the Knights of Labor to accept female members. In 1882, the AFL allowed representation of women's labor organizations. In 1883, it approved of equal pay and in 1885, it urged the organization of working women. Then a change occurred. In 1892 and 1894, it urged special legislation for women and in 1898 the AFL introduced a resolution at their national convention to ask the U.S. Congress:

> . . . to remove all women from government employment, and thereby to encourage their removal from the "everyday walks of life and relegate them to the home."[12]

Samuel Gompers, the President of the AFL from its inception until his death in 1924, was a leader of the anti-women worker campaign of the AFL. Table II shows the participation of women in various industrial sectors for selected years. Male workers in these sectors were more threatened by women than men in industries with few female workers.

* *

TABLE II

Women's Labor Force Participation in Various Industrial Sectors

Sector	1860	1890
Textiles	53.4%	40.6%
Clothing	45.0%	55.9%
Tobacco and cigars	13.9%	37.5%
Paper and printing	27.3%	24.8%

Note: Percentages given represent the proportion of women to all workers in each sector.

Source: Kuczynski (p. 76) from Senate Hearings, 1910.

* *

Since female workers were excluded from unions, they could be used to break strikes, would work for lower wages, etc. Thus, women were not completely excluded from the job market. Then, unions decided to push for "protective legislation" for females and, thereby limit their participation in the wage labor market. As the cigarmakers said:

> We cannot drive the females out of the trades but we can restrict this daily quota of labor through factory laws. No girl under eighteen should be employed more than eight hours per day; all overwork should be prohibited; white married women should be kept out of the factories at least six weeks before and six weeks after confinement.[13]

Women workers eventually realized that the male dominated unions were not interested in their problems and they tried a different approach. They formed a women's union movement, the National Women's Trade Union League (NWTUL) in 1903. The NWTUL endorsed equal pay for equal work, organization of all workers into unions, the eight-hour workday, minimum wage scales, and full citizenship rights for women. The NWTUL membership consisted of female workers and women who were "ally" members . . . those middle and upper class women who sympathized with unions and who had more leisure time than women in any previous generation. Thus, the NWTUL was composed of women from different classes and its theory was that "sisterhood is powerful". Many of these ally members were concerned primarily with citizenship activities.

Women won the right to vote in 1920. Thereafter, middle class and working class women lacked a common goal. Middle class women were not very active, sensitive, or supportive in joining women workers in their struggles for better working conditions. Differences in dress, manners, speech, and consumption patterns became more apparent . . . a product of the interaction of industrialization and the now ever present "true wo-

manhood" ideology. As a consequence, a cross-class feminist solidarity has not been firmly established since 1920.

THE MODERN ERA, 1920-1984

The decades of the 1920's and 1930's saw more women enter the work force, but the rate at which they entered slowed down drastically--the proportion of women over fourteen holding jobs increased by only one per cent, compared to the very rapid increase in preceding decades.[14] Two forces were responsible. First, with the end of World War I, the United States was faced with an adequate supply of labor and an increase in productivity. This meant that fewer jobs were available. Women workers were especially hard hit since they were generally the lowest paid as well as the first to be fired or laid off and the last to be hired. In addition, the feeling that working women took jobs away from men surfaced and intensified.

Second, the stock market crash of 1929 and ensuing economic depression of the 1930's left many workers jobless, homeless, and starving. The overall unemployment rate soared and the male-dominated unions again fought for legislation to exclude women from jobs. Overall, union membership declined in the 1920's and 1930's reaching a low of 11.5 per cent of the nonagriculatural work force in 1933.[15] There was no distinct women's labor movement in the 1930's.

However, there were rapid changes in the economic status of women in the 1940's. In addition to pulling the United States out of a depression, World War II gave women access to skilled, higher-paying industrial jobs for the first time. Women entered the work force in great num-

bers once again, and the proportion of women working increased from 25 to 36 per cent - a rise greater than that of the preceding four decades.[16] Union membership rose to almost 36 per cent of the nonagriculatural work force in 1945.[17] A notable change also occurred in the composition of the female work force: for the first time, black women found jobs in manufacturing; married women composed the majority of women workers; and the average age of employed women increased.

Despite these changes, the public attitude toward working women did not change. Women continued to be paid less than men; they were denied opportunities for training and advancement; and they still worked in separate job categories. Following World War II, the economy could not provide full employment. Once again, many groups tried to convince women that their place was in the home, and "homemaking" was encouraged.

These social pressures were not enough, however. Inflation created an economic pinch. Instead of keeping pace with economic growth, households found themselves struggling to make ends meet. Women who were able to find openings in "traditional" women's jobs continued to work out of economic necessity.

It was at this time that a new wave of consciousness began to spread across the nation. There was a trend in which many exploited peoples and oppressed minorities rose up in revolt, and they began to organize in the 1960's. The civil rights movement was one of the first radical social movements, and it sparked a proliferation of others. Among them was the women's liberation movement.

As in the nineteenth century feminist movement, educated women became the activists. However, the perspective of the movement was differ-

ent this time. The earlier feminist demands sought to attain equality through the guarantees of civil liberties i.e., the women's suffrage movement, rather than through the acquisition of employment. This new women's movement demanded employment equality as a condition for equality of the sexes. Sex discrimination in employment became the concern of the movement.[18] Many working women who were dissatisfied with the low social and economic status of their jobs found common ground with the movement on several points: equal pay, equal job opportunities, and equal legal rights.

By 1964, the central issue in the American economy was job rights. Until Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, occupational segregation was difficult for women to break. The insertion of the word "sex" to the list "race, color, religion and national origin," opened the way for persons exercising equal skill, effort and responsibility to get equal treatment and compensation. The Equal Pay Act of 1963, broadened in 1972, reflects the institutional changes that are taking place in the American labor market. Women once again seek equal recognition.[19] Nevertheless, in 1983, women's market wages were 59 per cent of men's market wages. In addition, child bearing and rearing, and other nonmarket household and volunteer community work remain largely outside the economic sector in the United States.

Equal legal rights for women also still face many legal and social obstacles. For example, "'Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on the account of . . .' Complete the phrase with race or colour and the Constitution already guarantees it; write in sex and the country isn't ready for it.[20]

The original proposed Equal Rights Amendment introduced in 1923 read: "Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction." This occurred three years after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment whereby women achieved the right to vote. It took forty-nine years of similar or identical wording before being approved by Congress on March 22, 1972.[21]

During this time activity before Congress varied. The Senate held several hearings and they were always approved. The House was considerably less active. The House Judiciary Committee held one hearing in 1948, but there were none again until 1971, because Chairman, Representative Emanual E. Cellar (D. - N.Y.) refused to schedule them.[22]

After years of relatively little activity, Congressional support for the ERA increased dramatically. It was said that: "The feeling in the Congress was widespread that, after almost fifty years of intermittent debate and long periods of neglect, the ERA embodied an important and timely principle."[23] It easily passed through both houses and was approved by Congress in 1972. With the ERA receiving such overwhelming support at this time by both major political parties, six previous Presidents, a lengthy and impressive list of national associations and interest groups "political observers expected that it would be ratified by the required thirty-eight states long before the deadline of March 22, 1979."[24] Twenty-two states approved the amendment in the first year. But then strong opposition surfaced. By November 1978, only thirteen more states had ratified and four states voted to rescind their approval. A "straightforward commitment to fairness began to be regarded as a threat to the American way of life."[25] Opposition mobilized in defense of motherhood and apple pie. With only 35 state ' ratification and the

deadline drawing near, supporters of the ERA rallied and bought time with an extension of thirty-nine months to June 30, 1982. Even with only three states being needed, not one state ratified after the extension.

The Gallup Public Opinion Poll of 1981 reported the following:

> Although there is majority support for the ERA in all major population groups, somewhat greater opposition is found among Republicans, persons living in the Midwest and South, and older Americans. Conversely, greater backing for the amendment is expressed by nonwhites, Democrats and independents, and persons living in the eastern and western regions of the country. . . The greatest increases in support for the ERA since 1980 are found among women, persons with grade school education, Republicans (However, the Reagan Administration does not support the amendment) and independents, and persons under thirty years of age, those with annual family incomes of less than $15,000, and residents of the East and West. . . Opposition to the ERA centers around the belief that ratification would mean increased competition between men and women for jobs and that de facto equality between the sexes already exists."[26]

The Equal Rights Amendment did not meet the extension deadline of June 30, 1982. It was still three states short. Even before the final day, an identical constitutional amendment was introduced in the House. The new proposed amendment is the same as the one previously rejected: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by any state on the account of sex."

Prospects for passage soon are dim. However, supporters have not conceded defeat. The National Organization for Women (NOW) will concentrate on defeating conservatives in Congress and in state legislatures.[27] They will attempt to elect more women in the political structure. Conversely, prominent opponent Phyllis Schlafly, plans to continue to fight for the concept of the family, striving for the re-election of those who voted against the ERA. Schlafly says "her group will focus on 'protecting the rights of the housewife' in such areas as Social Security benefits and on raising the amount that nonworking spouses can contribute to

individual retirement accounts.[28]

However, women's suffrage was a 78-year battle and by that measure this battle is still young.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study of women's activities throughout our history in the realm of the economic environment is, as any economic topic, very complex. The multitude of relationships that must be analyzed often causes us to overlook the most fundamental considerations. In the case of women's rights, we must ultimately be concerned with a search to satisfy the basic human needs of dignity, respect, a sense of self-worth and accomplishment. In my opinion, the next step is the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, i.e., "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by any state on the account of sex."

FOOTNOTES

[1]Dr. Casperson is Professor of Economics at Louisiana State University - Shreveport.

[2]Rosalyn Baxandall, Linda Gordon, and Susan Reverby, America's Working Women (New York: Random House, 1976), xiii.

[3]Bettina Berch, The Endless Day (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1982), p. 4.

[4]D. Pearce, "Women, Work and Welfare: The Feminization of Poverty," in K. Feinstein, ed. Working Women and Families, p. 103.

[5]Berch, p. 27.

[6]A. Calhoun, Social History of the American Family, Vol. 1, p. 245.

[7]Ibid., p. 248.

[8]From the 1817 "Memorial on Manufactures from Citizens of Baltimore" quoted in Abbot, p. 498n.

[9]Berch, p. 34.

[10]Ibid., p. 35.

[11]Baxandall, Gordon, and Reverby, p. 75.

[12]G. Boone, The WTUL in Great Britain and the United States, p. 54.

[13]Berch, p. 43.

[14]Baxandall, Gordon, and Reverby, p. 220.

[15]Jim E. Reese and Gilbert C. Fite, An Economic History of the United States, (New York: Houghton Miflin, 1973), p. 475.

[16]Janice Fanning Madden, The Economics of Sex Discrimination, (Lexington Books, 1973), p. 26.

[17]Reese and Fite, p. 475.

[18]Vatter, Barbara A., "The Law and Women's Economic Position: An Economic Historical Developmental Perspective." An Unpublished working paper.

[19]"24 Words That Won't Shake the World," The Economist, 26 June 1982, p. 22.

[20]Janet K. Boles, The Politics of the Equal Rights Amendment, (New York: Longman, Inc., 1979), p. 37.

[21]Boles, p. 38.

[22]Boles, p. 40.

[23]Boles, p. 3.

[24]"24 Words That Won't Shake the World," p. 22.

[25]George H. Gallup, The Gallup Public Opinion Poll 1981, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1982), p. 175.

[26]Congressional Quarterly, 3 July 1982, p. 1741.

[27]Avery, p. 55.

[28]Patricia A. Avery, "With ERA Dying, What's Ahead for Women's Groups", U.S. News and World Report, 28 June 1982, p. 55.