Abbott, Grace (1878-1939)

One of the many social reformers influenced by Chicago’s Hull House and its founder Jane Addams, Grace Abbott worked to improve the lives of immigrants and children, using her skills as a researcher to investigate and report the conditions in which they lived and worked. Born in Grand Island, Nebraska, Grace Abbott earned her bachelor’s degree from Grand Island College in 1898, studied at the University of Nebraska, and earned her master’s degree in political science from the University of Chicago in 1907.

She began her career as the first director of the Immigrants’ Protective League, conducting research on immigrants’ lives and writing a series of articles published as “The Immigrant and the Community” (1917). Based on her research, Abbott concluded that immigrants needed protection from aggressive employment agencies, and she proceeded to successfully lobby the Illinois legislature for a measure to regulate said agencies. In 1913, she directed an investigation into the exploitation of immigrants in Massachusetts and again recommended proposals for the legislature’s consideration.

In 1917, Julia Lathrop, who was director of the Children’s Bureau in the U.S. Department of Labor, invited Abbott to join her staff and direct the implementation of the Keating-Owen Child Labor Reform Act. The next year, however, the U.S. Supreme Court found the law unconstitutional. Abbott, who had observed abuses of child labor, became a dedicated advocate for a child labor amendment, which was passed by Congress in 1923 but was not ratified by the states.

Abbott succeeded Lathrop as head of the Children’s Bureau in 1921 and had as her first mission the implementation of the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921, which provided federal grants-in-aid to states for maternal and infant health programs. Under
Abbott’s leadership, approximately 3,000 child health and prenatal health clinics opened across the country. Despite the program’s demonstrated success and the protests of Abbott and other social reformers, Congress ended it in 1929. During the 1930s, Abbott directed several studies on the Depression’s impact on children, describing the nutritional deficiencies, educational losses, and health hazards that threatened children’s well-being. Neither the research findings nor Abbott’s pleas convinced President Herbert Hoover that children were suffering. After Franklin Roosevelt’s election to the presidency, Abbott’s proposals for a mother’s pension and emergency food and medical care for the neediest children gained acceptance.

Abbott resigned from the Children’s Bureau in 1934 to recover from tuberculosis, but she remained involved in the agency as an adviser, helping develop sections of the Social Security Act of 1935 that related to maternal and child health, aid to dependent children, children with special needs, and crippled children. From 1934 until her death, Abbott was professor of public welfare administration at the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration.

See also: Addams, Jane; Child Labor Amendment; Children’s Bureau; Lathrop, Julia; Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921


Abel, Hazel Pearl Hempel (1888-1966)

Republican Hazel Abel of Nebraska served in the U.S. Senate from November 8, 1954 to December 31, 1954. She had run for the office for a very specific reason: “To me it was more than a short term in the Senate. I wanted Nebraska voters to express their approval of a woman in government. I was a sort of guinea pig.”

Born in Plattsmouth, Nebraska, Abel graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1908. A high school mathematics teacher and a high school principal from 1908 to 1916, she left teaching to marry George Abel and moved to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1916. She joined his construction company, and following his death in 1936, she became company president. She was also a Girl Scout leader, treasurer of the Nebraska League of Women Voters, and active in the Nebraska Republican Party, serving as vice chairwoman in 1954. Her many activities in Lincoln earned her the nickname “Hurricane Hazel.”

In the summer of 1954, Abel became a candidate for the U.S. Senate to complete an unexpired term that would have only two months left at the time of the election. A technicality in Nebraska law prevented candidates from running for both the unexpired term and the full six-year term that would be filled in the election. During her short time in office, Abel held the distinction of being the only
senator to listen to all of the debate to censure Senator Joseph McCarthy. She voted with the majority to censure him.

Abel was a delegate to the White House Conference on Education in 1955 and a member of the Theodore Roosevelt Centennial Commission from 1955 to 1959. In 1960, she unsuccessfully ran in the Republican primary for governor.

See also: Bowring, Eva Kelly; Congress, Women in


**Abolitionist Movement, Women in the**

In the 1830s, both African American and white women from the North and the South entered the men’s political world to crusade against slavery. Outraged by slavery’s inhumanity, they founded anti-slavery societies, broke social taboos by making public speeches before audiences of both women and men, and petitioned Congress. The honor of their cause did not protect them from public acrimony and derision or from threats of violence, and in the process they carved new public spaces for themselves and laid the groundwork for a women’s rights movement.

Women encountered their first significant obstacle to participating in the abolitionist movement in 1833 at the founding meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in Philadelphia. The meeting organizers permitted women to attend the meeting but refused to let them speak from the floor or join the society. After the meeting, a group of black and white women organized the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. In 1832, a group of African American women had already moved on to the public stage when they formed the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, Massachusetts, one of the first abolitionist groups. Groups formed in Boston, New York, and other communities, particularly in New England. When the National Female Anti-Slavery Society convened in New York in 1837, delegates from 12 states attended.

Participating in the abolitionist movement required courage as well as commitment. Some courageous women, Harriet Tubman being a notable example, served the abolitionist movement as conductors on the Underground Railroad, and others housed and fed fugitive slaves as they made their way North. Even attending abolitionist meetings could be dangerous. For example, when William Lloyd Garrison was scheduled to speak at an 1835 meeting of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society meeting, an angry mob gathered and the mayor ordered the women in the convention hall to leave. In order to provide some level of safety to the African American women in the audience, each white woman accompanied a black woman out of the building. Garrison did not escape, and was dragged through the streets on a rope. At the second Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, held in Philadelphia in 1838, a mob gathered outside the convention and later burned the meeting hall.

Without voting rights, women were limited in the ways that they could influence political decisions, but they conducted petition drives and gathered thousands of signatures. In 1836, after abolitionist women had flooded Congress with petitions to end slavery, Congress responded to their pleas by passing a gag rule prohibiting the petitions from being read or considered.

The commitment to ending slavery compelled some women to break the social prohibition against women speaking in public. Frances Wright, Maria Stewart, and Angelina and Sarah Grimké all drew criticism from the public, the press, and the pulpit for publicly addressing mixed audiences of women and men in the late
1820s and 1830s. In the next decade, however, it became more common for women, including Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, and Sojourner Truth, to use their oratorical skills on behalf of the abolition movement.

Women writers used their pens to expose the wretchedness of slaves’ lives and to decry the injustice of slavery. For example, in 1833 Lydia Maria Child wrote the first anti-slavery book by a northern abolitionist calling for the immediate emancipation of the nation’s two million slaves. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* humanized slavery for thousands of readers, solidifying their antipathy to slavery. As women continued to seek the end of slavery, they became increasingly frustrated by the limits placed on their effectiveness as abolitionists and their rights as citizens. One of the most historically significant examples of these limits occurred at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London. Despite objections and a heated debate, the convention ruled that only male delegates could be seated. Among the women relegated to the convention hall galleries were U.S. delegates Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Excluded from direct participation, the two women spent hours discussing women’s status and the need for change. Eight years later, in 1848, they organized the first U.S. women’s rights convention and launched the nineteenth-century women’s rights movement.

Women remained active in the abolitionist movement, turning their attention to supporting the Union army during the Civil War. After the war ended, philosophical conflicts broke out between those whose first priority was protecting the newly freed slaves and those who preferred to focus on fostering women’s rights.

**See also:** Child, Lydia Maria Francis; Grimké, Angelina Emily and Sarah Moore; Mott, Lucretia Coffin; Stanton, Elizabeth Cady; Stowe, Harriet Elizabeth Beecher; Suffrage; Truth, Sojourner; Tubman, Harriet

**References:** Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America.*

## Abortion

The issue of a woman’s right to decide whether to continue a pregnancy or to terminate it became one of the United States’ most challenging political questions in the last three decades of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century, with no signs of opponents finding a resolution between adamant anti-abortion stalwarts and equally strong pro-choice advocates. Debates on abortion have taken place in front of abortion clinics, in state legislatures, on the floors of the U.S. House and Senate, and in the U.S. Supreme Court, but the nation has not found a common ground on which to rest the range of issues related to abortion. It has prompted men and women to organize, run for political office, and perform acts of civil disobedience. Violence, including murder, has been committed in the name of protecting fetuses.

In 2019, state legislatures took action to limit abortion rights with an uncommon vigor. The table below summarizes the states that passed restrictive legislation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>State</strong></th>
<th><strong>Law</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>The nation’s most restrictive abortion ban with no exceptions for rape or incest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>An abortion ban after 18 weeks into pregnancy with no exceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>The state passed a fetal heartbeat ban.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Abortion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>State</strong></th>
<th><strong>Law</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>The state has passed two laws this year, with the first banning dilation and evacuation in some cases and the second allowing medical professionals to choose not to perform abortions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>The legislature passed and the governor signed a measure banning abortions after a fetal heartbeat is detected. The American Civil Liberties Union challenged the law and a federal judge stopped it from going into effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>Blocked by a federal judge, the law would ban abortions once a fetal heartbeat could be detected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>The state has banned abortions at eight weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>New York stands in contrast to other states in that its new abortion law protects access to abortion, even if <em>Roe v. Wade</em> is overturned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>The abortion method commonly used in the second trimester is banned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Abortion is banned once a fetal heartbeat is detected.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>If <em>Roe v. Wade</em> is altered or overturned, this law would make abortion illegal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>A federal judge has blocked a law banning abortions after 18 weeks while it is being challenged by Planned Parenthood and the American Civil Liberties Union.</td>
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</tbody>
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Those who support reproductive rights insist that women must have the right to control their own bodies and that the state has no role in the decision regarding whether a woman continues a pregnancy. Calling themselves pro-choice, they argue that no one favors abortion, but that circumstances, including a woman’s health, the fetus’s health, the pregnant woman’s ability to care for a child, and other factors such as rape or incest make the decision so intimate that only the pregnant woman can make it. Those who oppose abortion call it infanticide and insist that abortion is murder. Identifying themselves as pro-life, they argue that life begins at conception, that all life must be protected, and that abortions must stop.

In 2002, about 1.29 million abortions were performed in the United States, down from about 1.36 million in 1996. In 2014, the number of abortions was down to about 926,200. More than half of the women obtaining abortions were in their 20s in 2014. The same year, 46 percent of all abortions were among women who have never married.

In 1821, Connecticut became the first state to enact abortion legislation, making it illegal after quickening (first recognizable movement of the fetus). In 1860, Connecticut made all abortions illegal, a policy followed by every state by the end of the nineteenth century. By 1930, an estimated 800,000 illegal abortions were performed annually, and between 8,000 and 17,000 women died every year from them.
In addition to prohibitions against abortion, access to birth control information and devices was also limited in some states and illegal in others. The first step in the legalization of abortion occurred in 1965, when the U.S. Supreme Court decided *Griswold v. Connecticut*. The case centered on a Connecticut law that made it illegal for anyone, including married couples, to obtain birth control drugs and devices. The Court found that the ban on contraception violated the constitutional right to marital privacy. In 1972, the Court extended the right to use contraceptives to all people, regardless of their marital status.

As the second wave of the feminist movement developed increasing visibility in the 1960s, reproductive rights, including the right to abortion, became one of the demands. Feminists initiated a wide range of projects to make abortions available, from teaching women how to self-abort to establishing referral services to presumably safe practitioners. In some communities, physicians and Protestant ministers established abortion referral services or worked together to provide abortions by disguising the procedure in their records and reports. Between 1967 and 1971, 17 states decriminalized abortion, reflecting a change in public opinion: 15 percent of Americans favored legal abortions in 1968, and by 1972, 64 percent did.

In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court made its landmark decision in *Roe v. Wade*, invalidating restrictive abortion laws across the country and making abortion legal. The Court found that the right to privacy “is broad enough to encompass a woman’s decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” The Court also recognized two compelling state interests that would justify restricting a woman’s right to choose. During the second trimester (four to six months) of a pregnancy, the abortion procedure could be regulated to protect a woman’s health. After fetal viability (approximately the 24th to 28th weeks), a state could pass legislation prohibiting abortions to protect the life of the fetus. The Court also stated that abortions could be performed at any time during the pregnancy to save the life of the mother.

To some, the decision meant that women would no longer need to seek illegal abortions and that women’s lives would be saved. To others, the decision meant that more pregnancies would be terminated. A Roman Catholic bishop called the decision “an unspeakable tragedy.” Those opposed to the decision organized to seek ways to make abortion illegal again. On both sides, existing organizations began defining their stands, and new organizations were formed to preserve *Roe v. Wade* or to reverse it. More than two dozen resolutions to overturn the decision by constitutional amendment were introduced in Congress following the announcement of the Court’s decision in 1973. Several pro-life groups supported, and members of Congress introduced, the Human Life Amendment that stated that life begins at conception and that ending it was murder.

One of the early questions that arose centered on the issue of whether tax dollars could be used to pay for poor women’s abortions. In 1974, Medicaid programs in 43 states and the District of Columbia paid for first-trimester abortions without restrictions for women who were covered by the program. In addition, Medicaid programs in 39 states and the District of Columbia paid for all legal abortions. In 1976, Republican Congressman Henry Hyde of Illinois passed a measure prohibiting the use of federal funds for abortions. Known as the Hyde Amendment, the measure excluded coverage for abortions under Medicaid except to save the life of the mother. In subsequent years, Congress permitted the use of Medicaid funds for abortions for pregnancies resulting from rape or incest and pregnancies that two doctors agreed would cause the mother to suffer “severe and long-lasting physical health damage.” Pro-choice advocates promptly began looking for test cases with which to challenge the policy. In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Harris v. McRae* that the Hyde Amendment was constitutional. Justice Stewart Potter wrote: “...The Congress has neither invaded a substantive constitutional right or freedom, nor enacted legislation that purposefully operates to a detriment of a suspect class, the only requirement of equal protection is that congressional action be
rationally related to a legitimate governmental interest.” In 2003, 17 states used public funds to pay for abortions for some poor women, usually under conditions requiring a court order to obtain the funding.

Pro-life groups also sought ways to limit access to abortion by establishing a variety of conditions and restrictions before the procedure could be performed. Several states passed legislation requiring minors seeking abortions to notify one or both parents or to obtain a judicial waiver. Beginning in 1976, the U.S. Supreme Court considered a variety of different approaches. The Court rejected requirements that both parents be notified, but permitted the minor woman to obtain an abortion with the notification of one parent. In addition, the Court insisted that minor women must have an option beyond telling a parent and approved a system that allowed a minor woman to bypass her parent(s) and obtain permission from a judge to obtain an abortion. In 2019, 37 states required parental consent or notification for minors seeking an abortion.

Another approach to limiting access to abortion developed in 1988, when President Ronald Reagan’s administration issued new regulations for federally supported family planning programs. Under what became known as the “gag rule,” 4,000 federally funded health clinic medical personnel were prohibited from discussing abortion with their clients. The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the regulations in *Rust v. Sullivan* (1991), but in 1993 President Bill Clinton eliminated them.

The availability of physicians trained and willing to perform abortions also became an obstacle to women seeking abortions. By 2000, 87 percent of counties in the United States had no trained, qualified doctors willing to perform abortions, requiring some women seeking abortions to travel great distances. Thirty-four percent of all women aged 15 to 44 lived in counties without abortion providers. In South Dakota and North Dakota, for example, only one physician in each state performed abortions. Some physicians stopped performing abortions because they did not want to be harassed by pro-life demonstrators or because they feared for their safety. In addition, 45 states allow health care providers to refuse to participate in the procedure.

Violence at abortion clinics first appeared in the 1970s, when groups including Operation Rescue physically blocked clinic entrances and destroyed clinic property and equipment. Between 1977 and April 1993, there were 36 bombings, 81 arsons, 84 assaults, and two kidnappings at abortion clinics or involving abortion providers. In 1993 and 1994, abortion opponents killed two doctors, two clinic workers, and one volunteer escort. The National Organization for Women (NOW) initiated a lawsuit contending that the violence was part of a nationwide conspiracy that used violence to attain its goal of closing abortion clinics. NOW argued that trespassing, arson, the theft of fetuses, physical attacks, and threats against abortion clinics and abortion providers constituted extortion and came under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) statute. In *NOW v. Scheidler* (1994), the U.S. Supreme Court agreed and held that RICO could apply to anti-abortion protesters. The U.S. Supreme Court revisited *NOW v. Scheidler* two more times, in 2003 and in 2006, ultimately concluding that RICO could not be used to sue anti-abortion organizations because economic extortion was not involved.

Congress, however, passed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act of 1994 to help protect women seeking abortions and the facilities and professionals providing the service. The law prohibits the use of force, threats of force, physical obstruction, and property damage intended to interfere with people seeking or providing reproductive health services.

In the mid-1990s abortion opponents focused on making a specific abortion procedure illegal, one they named “partial birth abortion,” which is not a medical term. Several states passed measures prohibiting partial birth abortions and Congress twice passed bills prohibiting partial birth abortions, but President Bill Clinton vetoed both bills. Congress again passed a ban on the procedure in 2003, which President George W.
Bush signed. The first federal law restricting abortion practice, it was immediately challenged in three federal courts on the basis that it endangers the lives of women.

Congress passed, and President George W. Bush signed, “conscience clause” legislation in 2004. It was an expansion of earlier conscience clause policies that protected health care providers who refused to perform abortions based upon their personal opposition to the procedure. The measure, passed in 2004, denies federal aid to states and localities that require health care providers, hospitals and other facilities, or health insurance companies to fund, provide, or refer abortion services.

By the 1980s, abortion had become a delineating issue between the Republican Party, with its adamant insistence on opposing abortion, and the Democratic Party, with its strong support for abortion rights. The issue may have determined the 1992 presidential election between pro-life Republican incumbent President George H.W. Bush and pro-choice Democratic challenger Bill Clinton and the 1996 race between pro-life Republican Robert Dole and incumbent Clinton. Polls suggest that abortion played a key role in both years and that women who support abortion rights may have provided the winning margins for Clinton, who promised to support those rights. Clinton kept his pledges to pro-choice supporters. He overturned the gag rule that prohibited abortion counseling in federally funded family planning clinics, lifted the ban on fetal tissue research, and ended a ban on abortions at overseas military medical facilities. In addition, Clinton ended the Mexico City Policy, which denied United States aid to international family planning organizations that provided abortion services. Republican President George W. Bush reinstated the policy immediately after taking office in 2001. Democratic President Barack Obama rescinded it in 2009. Republican President Donald Trump reinstated it in 2017.

Preventing unwanted pregnancies has been a goal of both reproductive rights supporters and opponents. In 1970 Congress created the family planning program, offering birth control information, devices, and prescriptions through hospitals, health departments, Planned Parenthood affiliates, and other agencies. Then in 1981, Congress passed the Adolescent Family Life Program (AFLP) designed to discourage teenagers from being sexually active and to encourage pregnant teens to carry their pregnancies to term and put their babies up for adoption. The AFLP sponsors demonstration projects designed to encourage abstinence and to provide health, education, and social services to pregnant adolescents, adolescent parents, and their infants, male partners, and families. The AFLP also supports research on adolescent sexuality, pregnancy, and parenting.

Groups that support abortion rights include the American Association of University Women, American Civil Liberties Union, NARAL Pro-Choice America, National Council of Jewish Women, National Organization for Women, National Women’s Political Caucus, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and Religious Coalition for Reproductive Rights.

Groups that oppose abortion rights include the American Life League, Concerned Women for America, Eagle Forum, Feminists for Life of America, National Right to Life Committee, Operation Rescue, and Pro-Life Action League.

See also: Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health; American Association of University Women; American Civil Liberties Union; American Life League, Inc.; Bellotti v. Baird; Bray v. Alexandria Clinic; Colautti v. Franklin; Concerned Women for America; Doe v. Bolton; Eagle Forum; Feminists for Life of America; Griswold v. Connecticut; Harris v. McRae; Hodgson v. Minnesota; Hyde, Henry John; National Council of Jewish Women; National Organization for Women; National Right to Life Committee; National Women’s Political Caucus; NOW v. Scheidler; Operation Rescue; Planned Parenthood Association of Kansas City, Mo. v. Ashcroft; Planned Parenthood of Central Missouri v. Danforth; Poelker v. Doe; Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice; Roe v. Wade
Democrat Bella Abzug of New York served in the U.S. House of Representatives from January 3, 1971 to January 3, 1977. The first Jewish woman to serve in Congress, she was an outspoken, flamboyant feminist who once said: “We don’t so much want to see a female Einstein become an assistant professor. We want a woman schlemiel to get promoted as quickly as a male schlemiel.”

Born in New York City, Bella Abzug earned her BA from Hunter College in 1942 and entered Columbia University School of Law, but left to work in a shipbuilding factory to aid the war effort. She resumed her legal studies at the end of World War II and received her law degree in 1947 from Columbia University. She also did graduate work at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America.

In her legal practice, Abzug specialized in labor and civil rights cases, representing fur workers, restaurant workers, longshoremen, and civil rights workers. She defended people accused of subversive activities by Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s and was a lawyer for the Civil Rights Congress and the American Civil Liberties Union. From 1961 to 1970, she was national legislative director for Women Strike for Peace, an organization she helped found.

Early in her legal career, Abzug began wearing her trademark hats. She explained: “When I was a young lawyer, I would go to people’s offices and they would always say, ‘Sit here. We’ll wait for the lawyer.’ Working women wore hats. It was the only way they would take you seriously.” She added: “When I got to Congress, they made a big deal of it. So I was watching, did they want me to wear it or not? They didn’t want me to wear it, so I did.”

Abzug challenged the incumbent Democratic Congressman from her district in the 1970 primary, running as an anti-Vietnam War candidate. With the campaign slogan, “This woman belongs in the House: the House of Representatives,” she promised to work for better housing, a reduced defense budget, equal rights for women, and an end to the war in Vietnam.

A leading opponent of the war, she introduced a measure on her first day in office to withdraw troops
from Vietnam by July 4, 1971. It failed, as did her other attempts to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam. She supported the Equal Rights Amendment, childcare, women’s credit rights, pay equity for women, and welfare reform. She introduced the measure that created Women’s Equality Day in 1973, which celebrated the 53rd anniversary of woman’s suffrage. She helped organize the Congresswomen’s Caucus, but in part because some did not want to be identified with Abzug’s outspoken feminism, it did not formally organize until she left Congress. She wrote the bill that created the National Women’s Conference, which was held in 1977 and which she chaired. Following the conference, President Jimmy Carter appointed Abzug co-chair with Carmen Delgado Votaw of the National Advisory Committee for Women. Six months later, Abzug criticized the president’s economic policies, charging that they adversely affected women, and Carter dismissed her. Abzug ran unsuccessfully in the Democratic primary for United States senator in 1976, for mayor of New York in 1977, and for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1978 and 1986.

A founding member of the National Women’s Political Caucus, she also founded the Women U.S.A. Fund in 1980. With an initial agenda of increasing women’s involvement in politics through voter education and registration programs, the Women U.S.A. Fund worked to involve more women in foreign and environmental policymaking.

Abzug presided at the World Women’s Congress for a Healthy Planet in 1991 and was a member of the 1992 International Facilitating Committee of Nongovernmental Organizations and Independent Sectors for the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. She also founded the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), which served as one of the main coordinators of the nongovernmental forum held in coordination with the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China.

She wrote Bella! Ms. Abzug Goes to Washington (1972), and co-authored Gender Gap: Bella Abzug’s Guide to Political Power for American Women (1984), as well as other works relating to women and politics. She died on March 31, 1998 of complications following open heart surgery.

**See also:** Congress, Women in; Congressional Caucus for Women’s Issues; Equal Rights Amendment; National Women’s Conference; National Women’s Political Caucus; Pay Equity; Women Strike for Peace


**Achtenberg, Roberta (b. 1950)**

When President Bill Clinton nominated Roberta Achtenberg for the position of assistant secretary for Housing and Urban Development in 1993, she became the first acknowledged lesbian considered for a cabinet level post. Republican Senator Jesse Helms (Republican, North Carolina) labeled her a “damn lesbian.” He said that he would not vote for her because she was a “militant, activist, mean lesbian,” none of which reflected her abilities to perform on the job. After nine and a half hours of filibuster in the Senate, the body confirmed her. She also served as senior adviser to the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. President Barack Obama later appointed Achtenberg to the United States Commission on Civil Rights in 2011.
Achtenberg served on the Board of Supervisors for the City and County of San Francisco from 1990 to 1993. Achtenberg has also served as a teaching fellow at the Stanford Law School, Dean of New College of California School of Law, Staff Attorney of the Lesbian Rights Project of Equal Rights Advocates, Inc., and founded the National Center for Lesbian Rights. In addition, Achtenberg serves on the California State University Board of Trustees.

Achtenberg earned her JD degree at the University of Utah.

See also: Democratic Party, Women in the; Lesbian Rights; National Center for Lesbian Rights


Adams, Abigail Smith (1744-1818)

Abigail Adams established herself as an early advocate for women’s rights with a letter she wrote to her husband John in 1776, asking him to “remember the ladies” as he helped construct a new nation. A dedicated correspondent with her husband and other revolutionary leaders and thinkers, she shared her husband’s commitment to American independence.

When John Adams became president of the United States in 1797, Abigail Adams became First Lady. Born in Massachusetts, Abigail Adams was largely self-educated, primarily because schools for women in colonial America were nonexistent. The lack of educational opportunities for women was a continuing disappointment to her and one that she saw as an unnecessary limitation on her sex, an early indicator of her awareness of women’s status. In 1764, she married John Adams, who deeply influenced the depth of her patriotism and her commitment to separation from England. When John Adams was elected to serve in the First Continental Congress in 1774, the couple began decades of extended separations as he accepted a variety of assignments at home and abroad. Abigail Adams remained at home with their growing family, managing their farm and educating their children. Her business acumen may have saved the family from the financial ruin that many other patriots experienced.

In addition, she provided John Adams with reports on local political developments through their extensive correspondence. In her letters she expressed her concerns about proposals for taxation and trade policies as well as her opposition to slavery. Of her many letters, the one dated March 31, 1776 has received the greatest attention. In it, Abigail Adams wrote to John Adams:
I long to hear that 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 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 particular care and attention is not paid to the Ladies we are determined to foment a Rebellion 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 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 Supreme Being make use of that power only for our happiness.

In this historic letter, Abigail Adams’s request is modest. She does not ask for political rights such as suffrage rights or political equality; she only sought legal protection for women. Under English common law, married women had no legal existence and were thus vulnerable to abuse by their husbands.

When John Adams replied on April 14, 1776, he compared women to other dependent groups:

As to your extraordinary Code of Laws, I cannot but laugh. We have been told that our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government everywhere. That Children and Apprentices were disobedient, that schools and Colleges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their Masters. But your Letter was the first Intimation that another Tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented.

Abigail Adams repeated her pleas for women in later letters, including one in which she described to John Adams the frustrations of women patriots, who could not vote, serve in the government, own property, or have a voice in legislation. As she explained, women patriots had also made significant sacrifices in the quest for independence, but they were limited in the ways that they could contribute to their country or could benefit from its potential. In a letter to another woman, Abigail Adams contemplated sending a petition to Congress calling for women’s independence. In other letters, Abigail Adams expressed her concern about the inequality of educational opportunities among children and married women’s lack of rights.

In the context of the American and French Revolutions in which the ideals of freedom, liberty, and equality were being sought in new ways, Abigail Adams’s plea for women’s rights could be viewed as a reasonable extension of the philosophies supported by her husband and other American patriots. Abigail Adams’s letters testify to one woman’s interest in women’s status, but she did not begin a woman’s movement or provide the basis for later women’s rights efforts.

See also: Coverture; Suffrage

Adams, Alma (b. 1946)

An artist and college art educator for forty years (1972-2012), Democrat Alma Adams of North Carolina was first elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in a special election in 2014. As a congresswoman, her priorities include increasing the minimum wage, protecting Social Security, and advocating for strong education policies, along with the arts and culture.

Adams began her political career when she ran for and won a seat on the Greensboro, North Carolina school board in 1984, serving until 1986. She then served on the Greensboro city council from 1987 to 1994 and the North Carolina House of Representatives from 1994 to 2014. In 2014, Mel Watt, the Congressman representing her district resigned, and the seat became vacant. Adams ran simultaneously for the 113th and 114th Congresses. In the 114th Congress, she served as Assistant Whip for the Democratic Caucus. She also founded the Historically Black College and University Caucus.

Adams earned a B.S. degree from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in 1968 and a M.S from the same university in 1972. She earned a Ph.D from Ohio State University in 1981.

See also: Congress, Women in


Adams, Annette Abbott (1877-1956)

In 1914, Annette Adams became U.S. attorney for the northern district of California, which, at that time, was the highest judicial position any woman in the world had ever held. In 1920, she became the first female U.S. assistant attorney general.

Born in Prattville, California, Annette Adams graduated from the State Normal School in Chico, California, in 1897 and taught school for five years. She returned to college and earned her bachelor of law degree in 1904 and her JD in 1912, both from Boalt Hall.

In 1912, Democratic Congressman John Raker recruited Adams to join presidential candidate
Woodrow Wilson’s campaign. After Wilson won the election, Raker believed that Adams deserved a reward for her labors and began to work for her appointment as an assistant U.S. attorney, the kind of post that generally went to young men with political potential. Raker brought her to the attention of President Wilson, the U.S. attorney general, and other decision makers, developing strategies to make the novel choice of a woman an acceptable one. Raker worked for more than a year and finally won Adams’s appointment in 1914. Adams became the first female federal prosecutor when she was appointed assistant U.S. attorney for the northern district of California. Her first cases involved U.S. neutrality laws in the early days of World War I, a group of cases that other prosecutors had not successfully pursued. However, Adams developed a strategy for prosecuting the cases that succeeded where others had failed. President Wilson appointed her special U.S. attorney in San Francisco in 1918.

In 1920, she became the first woman to hold the position of assistant attorney general. Assigned to enforce the Volstead Act, her first case required defending the constitutionality of the Eighteenth Amendment, which she successfully did before the U.S. Supreme Court. After Democrats lost the presidency in the 1920 elections, Adams stayed with the Justice Department until the summer of 1921, when she was replaced by Mabel Walker Willebrandt.

Adams unsuccessfully ran for a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1923 but remained active in the Democratic Party. She persuaded the California Democratic Party that 50 percent of its delegates to the party’s 1924 national convention should be women. She also worked for Franklin D. Roosevelt’s 1932 presidential campaign. She was appointed presiding justice of California’s intermediate appellate court in 1942, the year she was elected to a full 12-year term. She retired in 1950, four years before her term expired.

See also: Democratic Party, Women in the; Willebrandt, Mabel Walker


Adams, Sandra (Sandy) (b. 1956)

Republican Sandra Adams of Florida served in the U.S. House of Representatives from January 3, 2011, to January 3, 2013. Supported by the Tea Party, she was elected in 2010 when Republicans became the majority party in the U.S. House of Representatives. Adams was given two key committee assignments: Judiciary and Science, Space, and Technology. On the Judiciary Committee, Adams focused on illegal immigration. On the Science, Space, and Technology Committee, she argued for renewing manned space flights, important to many of the voters in her district, who had previously worked in the field.

Adams introduced a bill reauthorizing the Violence against Women Act, which the House approved, but the Senate did not approve until the next session of Congress.
Adams ran for a second term in 2012, but redistricting following the 2010 census had placed her in the same district as a long-time Republican incumbent. She lost her re-election attempt in the primary.

Adams had an uncommon background for a member of Congress. The daughter of a military family, Adams continued the tradition by leaving high school at the age of 17, before graduating, and joining the U.S. Air Force. After marrying, she left the military and had a daughter. After enduring her husband’s abuse, Adams left the marriage and, as a single mother, raised her daughter. She completed her GED, attended a police academy, and began a career as a deputy sheriff in Orange County, Florida.

Adams served in the Florida state house of representatives from 2002 to 2010. She earned her BA at Columbia College in 2000.

See also: Tea Party


Addams, Jane (1860-1935)

A leader in the settlement house movement, Jane Addams founded Hull House in Chicago in 1889, perhaps the best known of the settlement houses in the United States. Addams created an environment at Hull House that nurtured the development and activities of immigrants, political activists, artists, union organizers, children, and young adults. A social reformer, Addams supported education and labor reform, women’s suffrage, improvements in municipal government, and other aspects of the progressive social agenda.

Born in Cedarville, Illinois, Jane Addams graduated from Rockford Seminary in 1881. She enrolled in the Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1881, but poor health and the realization that she was not suited to be a doctor contributed to her decision to leave the college. Addams went to Europe in 1883, where exposure to London’s slums and the wretched living conditions of poor introduced her to the type of environment in which she would eventually live and work. She began to consider living in a poor neighborhood with other like-minded women and through it test the concepts she had learned at school. A visit to London’s Toynbee Hall gave her a model for the institution she wanted to establish.

With her friend Ellen Gates Starr, Addams came across the abandoned Hull mansion in a Chicago neighborhood that was home to 5,000 Greek, Italian, Russian, German, and other immigrants. Addams and Starr moved into it in 1889, invited the neighbors to visit them, and began the traditions of Hull House. Over the decades, the list of programs grew to include childcare, children’s activities, youth activities, social events for women and men, English-language classes, cultural activities, health care, and dozens of others. The continued
success of Hull House depended on Addams’s ability to attract talented and dedicated residents, her skill at raising money from wealthy Chicago women, and the program innovations that sustained interest in the settlement and helped it grow. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of the neighborhood and thereby address its fundamental problems, the settlement residents embarked on a study of it. The Hull House Maps and Papers, published in 1895, provided a survey of the housing, sweatshops, and child labor in Chicago’s 19th Ward. Pressure from Addams and other Hull House residents helped pass Illinois’s first factory inspection law and contributed to the establishment of the nation’s first juvenile court. Addams and other Hull House activists led crusades for trash removal, recognition of labor unions, protective legislation for immigrants, and many other reforms.

Beginning in 1907, Addams took an active part in the Chicago woman’s suffrage effort and was an officer of the National American Woman Suffrage Association from 1911 to 1914. In 1912, she seconded Theodore Roosevelt’s nomination at the Progressive Party convention and campaigned for him. Also active in the peace movement, she headed the Woman’s Peace Party in 1915 and served as the first president of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom from 1919 to 1928. In 1931, she shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Nicholas Murray Butler.

Addams wrote The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets (1909), Twenty Years at Hull House (1910), A New Conscience and an Ancient Evil (1912), and The Second Twenty Years at Hull-House (1930), among other works.

In the mid-1960s, most of the Hull House buildings were torn down for the construction of the University of Illinois-Chicago, but the Hull House Association continued to provide services to the neighborhood until 2012.

**See also:** Abbott, Grace; Balch, Emily Greene; Lathrop, Julia; National American Woman Suffrage Association; Progressive Party, Women in the; Suffrage; Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom

**References:** Addams, Twenty Years at Hull-House (1911); Lasch, ed., The Social Thought of Jane Addams (1965); Chicago Tribune, January 25, 2012.

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**Addington, Julia C. (1829-1875)**

Julia C. Addington was first appointed Mitchell County, Iowa, superintendent of schools in 1869 to complete the unfinished term of a male superintendent. Later that year she was elected to the position for a full two-year term, likely making her the first woman elected to a public office in the United States.

After her election, Addington wrote to the state superintendent of schools: “Having been elected to the office of county superintendent of common schools, Mitchell County, I am desirous of obtaining your opinion in regard to certain questions connected with the office before I shall assume its responsibilities, or attempt to perform its duties.” She asked if she had the legal right to hold the office and get paid for it, if her opinions were valid, should...
someone challenge them, and if “there would necessarily be any occasion for trouble to arise to the annoy-
ance of myself, or the county?”

The state superintendent of schools consulted with the state attorney general, who could not find any pro-
hibition against women serving as county superintendent of schools, being paid, or having the full authority
of the office.

Ill health prevented Addington from seeking a second term and she died at home on September 21, 1875.


**Adkins v. Children’s Hospital (1923)**

In *Adkins v. Children’s Hospital*, decided in 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court found unconstitutional a 1918
law providing a minimum wage for women workers in the District of Columbia. Similar to laws passed in
several states to protect women workers, the District of Columbia law created a three-member board charged
with determining the wages for women and minors, depending upon the occupation and upon the board’s
determination of the amount necessary to maintain workers’ good health and to protect their morals.

The Court acknowledged that several states had enacted comparable laws and that women’s wages were
higher with the policies, but questioned whether minimum wage laws were the reason for the improvements.
In finding the law unconstitutional, the Court explained that if the legislation were legally justified, “the field
for the operation of the police power will have been widened to a great and dangerous degree.” Because the
law considered only the needs of the employee and not those of the employer, the Court expressed concern
that some employers’ “bargaining power may be as weak as that of the employee” and that the employer
could be left “without adequate means of livelihood.” The Court concluded that the minimum wage unduly
restricted the freedom to contract and that no reasonable relationship existed between pay and health and
morals. Social reformers characterized the decision as guaranteeing women’s constitutional right to starve.

See also: Employment Discrimination; *Muller v. Oregon*; Protective Legislation

References: *Adkins v. Children’s Hospital*, 261 U.S. 525 (1923); Baer, *The Chains of Protection: The Judicial Response to Women’s

**Adkins, Bertha Sheppard (1906-1983)**

Under Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare from 1958 to 1960, Bertha Adkins was the first woman
to hold the position of undersecretary in any department of the federal government. Adkins began her po-
itical career as representative to the Republican National Committee for Maryland in 1948 and served as
director of the Republican Party’s Women’s Division from 1950 to 1953, when the division closed. Adkins
then became assistant to the chair of the Republican National Committee, serving until 1960.

One of presidential candidate Dwight Eisenhower’s earliest supporters, Adkins played a central role in
organizing women to support him in 1952. The effectiveness of her efforts appears in the significant amount
of support he received from women: Eisenhower won with one of the earliest identified gender gaps, about
6 percent. To maintain women’s support for President Eisenhower, Adkins established a series of “for ladies
only” breakfasts to provide women with access to him and to introduce him to potential presidential appoin-
tees. She relentlessly presented the president and members of his administration with women candidates for
federal appointments.
She also organized annual conferences for Republican women, attracting between 1,500 and 1,800
women to hear Cabinet members, Vice President Richard Nixon, and Eisenhower speak; to attend classes on
political organization; and to share information on political strategies.

Born in Salisbury, Maryland, Adkins earned her BA at Wellesley College in 1928 and her MA from Co-
lumbia University. Adkins taught at a private school from 1928 to 1932, after which she became a secretary.
She served as dean of women at Western Maryland College from 1934 to 1942 and dean of residence at
Bradford Junior College from 1942 to 1946.

She was headmistress of the Foxcroft School in Middleburg, Virginia, from 1961 until her retirement in
1967. In 1970, she served as special assistant on President Nixon’s Advisory Committee on Social Security
and, in 1972, was executive vice chair of the Older Americans Advisory Committee. She chaired the Na-

See also: Gender Gap; Republican Party, Women in the

References: H.W. Wilson, Current Biography Yearbook 1953 (1953); Helmes, Orchids in the Icebox: The Story of Bertha Adkins and
Other Influential Women in the Eisenhower Administration (Chapel Hill: Chapel Hill Press, 2002); The New York Times, August 14,

Affirmative Action

Affirmative action seeks to remedy past discrimination against women and minorities through education,
employment, and contractual policies. The primary strategies used in affirmative action employment pro-
grams are increased recruitment, promotion, retention, and on-the-job training opportunities. Affirmative
action in education includes removing admissions barriers to educational institutions and providing grants
and graduate fellowships in nontraditional careers—for example, in engineering, math, and the physical sci-
ences. Women’s rights and civil rights groups have supported affirmative action plans and programs as
demonstrations of the United States’ commitment to equal opportunity. Conservative groups have opposed
affirmative action, arguing that it leads to reverse discrimination.

Within the civil rights context, affirmative action had its earliest roots in presidential orders, beginning
with President John F. Kennedy’s 1961 Executive Order 10925, which referred to efforts to end racial dis-
crimination. In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson’s Executive Order 11246 required federal contractors to
take affirmative action to ensure equality in employment as it related to race, religion, and national origin.
Explaining his concept of affirmative action to Howard University’s 1965 graduating class, President
Johnson said: “You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring
him up to the starting line of a race and then say, ‘You are free to compete with all the others,’ and still justly
believe that you have been completely fair.” President Johnson expanded the scope of his 1965 executive
order to include women in his 1967 Executive Order 11375. The order covered employment, upgrades, de-
motions, transfers, employee recruitment and advertising for employees, pay rates, layoffs and termination,
and training opportunities. President Richard Nixon significantly expanded federal involvement in affirmati-
ve action in 1969 when he announced the Philadelphia Order, which instructed federal construction con-
tractors to establish goals and timetables for affirmative action. In 1970, he included non-construction fed-
eral contractors in the policy.

In addition to presidential actions, Congress contributed to the concept of equal opportunity by passing
the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which included prohibitions against employment discrimination and created
the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Title VII. The EEOC was given enforcement
Affirmative Action

By 1968, the government had developed goals and timetables for affirmative action programs and recognized that discrimination could be systemic and unintentional. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972 expanded coverage of the 1964 act and increased the EEOC’s enforcement powers. In addition, one of the more persistent advocates of affirmative action, Congresswoman Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, passed a measure that required that contracts for the construction of the Alaskan pipeline be awarded on an affirmative action basis, and she placed amendments that required any project receiving federal funding to implement an affirmative action plan. Eventually, the measures became known as the Burke Amendment.

Although the U.S. Supreme Court has never defined affirmative action as a legal term, it has decided several cases related to it. The Court has decided that affirmative action programs are permissible when there is evidence of continuing discrimination. The plans must not use quotas, must be flexible, cannot require the selection of unqualified candidates, must not last longer than necessary to remedy the discrimination, and must not replace incumbent white male employees or businesses.

The most widely publicized affirmative action case was probably Bakke v. Regents of the University of California (1978). Bakke was a white man who applied to the University of California Medical School but was denied admission, even though minority students with lower scores were admitted. The U.S. Supreme Court decided that race could be a factor in admissions policies, that universities could design affirmative action programs to increase the enrollments of minority students, and that those policies must be the least intrusive available. The Court decided that the University of California did not meet the criteria, and Bakke won his case, but the Court also concluded that affirmative action programs are constitutional. In Gratz v. Bollinger (2003), the U.S. Supreme Court concluded that affirmative action strategies for college admissions that treated race as a determining factor were unconstitutional. In a related case, however, Grutter v. Bollinger (2003), the U.S. Supreme Court decided that college admissions policies that treated race as one consideration among many considerations were constitutional.

Strategies used by affirmative action opponents have included ballot initiatives. Voters passed measures in California in 1996 and Washington in 1998 that ended affirmative action programs and policies in those states. In 2006, Michigan voters decided the fate of a similar measure.

Although women are the largest group of Americans to benefit from affirmative action, the only affirmative action case to reach the Supreme Court that dealt specifically with women was Johnson v. Transportation Agency of Santa Clara County, decided in 1987. The Court approved the county’s affirmative action program, which set goals that would have a workforce of women, minorities, and people with disabilities in proportion to their population in the county.

See also: Bachur v. Democratic National Committee; Burke, Perle Yvonne Watson Brathwaite; Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VII; Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; Johnson v. Transportation Agency of Santa Clara County

Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health (1983)

In *Akron v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health*, the U.S. Supreme Court considered five aspects of an Akron, Ohio ordinance relating to abortion and found all of them unconstitutional. The Court rejected the requirement that after the first trimester of pregnancy, all abortions had to be performed in a hospital, saying that it “unreasonably infringes upon a woman’s constitutional right to obtain an abortion.” It turned down the requirement that before performing an abortion on an unmarried minor under the age of 15, a physician had to obtain either the consent of one of her parents or the minor had to obtain a court order. The Court disagreed with the stipulation that the attending physician had to inform the woman about the status of her pregnancy, the development of the fetus, the likely date of viability, the physical and emotional complications that could result from an abortion, sources of assistance for pregnant women, and information about childbirth and adoption. The Court also disallowed the mandatory 24-hour waiting period after a woman had signed the informed consent form, saying that no legitimate state interest had been demonstrated in defense of it. The last section considered by the Court required physicians performing abortions to ensure the humane and sanitary disposal of fetal remains or risk punishment for a misdemeanor. The Court decided that the provision violated the due process clause because it failed to give a physician fair notice that he or she could be breaking the law. The Court considered several of these issues in earlier and subsequent cases.

**See also:** Abortion; *Bellotti v. Baird*; *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*


Albright, Madeleine Jana Korbel (b. 1937)

The first woman U.S. secretary of state, Madeleine Albright served from 1997 until 2001. Upon taking the post, Albright became the highest-ranking woman in the U.S. government in the nation’s history.

After she left office, she explained that as a woman, the personal relationships she had established had “mattered in terms of what I was able to get done. And I did bring women’s issues to the center of our foreign policy.” During the first Clinton administration, she was the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations and a member of the National Security Council.

Born in Prague, Czechoslovakia, Albright was the daughter of a member of the Czechoslovak diplomatic service. Her father’s career played a significant role in Albright’s life, beginning in 1938 when her family had to flee their home to escape the Nazis. When Communists took over the Czech government in 1948, Albright, her siblings, and her parents became refugees and were granted political asylum in the United States. These experiences greatly influenced Albright’s views on the United States’ responsibilities toward refugees and on its relationships with totalitarian governments.

A naturalized U.S. citizen, Albright graduated from Wellesley College in 1959 and then earned her MA and PhD from Columbia University. Albright began her career as a professor and researcher, developing and implementing programs designed to enhance women’s professional opportunities in international affairs. She entered politics by working for Senator Edmund Muskie’s 1972 presidential campaign and later became his chief legislative assistant. In 1974, she became congressional liaison for national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, one of her former professors. A foreign policy adviser to Democratic vice presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, Albright held the same position in presidential candidate Michael
Dukakis’s campaign in 1988. She then taught international relations at Georgetown University in the School of Foreign Service until 1992.

President Bill Clinton appointed Albright the U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations in 1993. After her appointment, she explained her perspective on the United States’ role in international affairs: “For me, America is really, truly the indispensable nation. I’ve never seen America as an imperialist or colonialist or meddling country.” Her belief in the central role the United States plays in international affairs includes the use of military power, a belief that was exemplified by her active efforts in two areas. She worked for United Nations authorization to use military force in Haiti in 1994, which led to the legally elected president of that nation being restored to power. In addition, she worked with several nations in developing the UN plan to use force to quell the war in Bosnia in 1995 and was a leading voice in the creation of a war crimes tribunal in that country. During her tenure as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, Albright inspected peacekeeping operations and United Nations initiatives in 24 countries.

When Clinton began his second term in 1997, he appointed Albright secretary of state. On her first day as secretary, Albright learned that her ancestry was Jewish and that three of her grandparents had died at the hands of the Nazis. News stories abounded, some of them openly skeptical that she could have been ignorant of her ancestry. Albright, however, steadfastly maintained that she had not known and that she was proud of her parents for making the decisions they had to protect their children. She also expressed pride in her heritage.

As secretary of state, Albright worked to convince the American public that the country’s foreign policy should be important to them, even in the post-Cold War era. Albright worked to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), obtained Senate approval of the International Chemical Weapons Treaty, and gained congressional approval of the State Department reorganization plan.

Albright published her memoir, Madame Secretary, in 2003 and Fascism: A Warning in 2018.

See also: Cabinets, Women in Presidential; Ferraro, Geraldine Anne


Alexander, Sadie Tanner Mosell (1898-1989)

Lawyer and civil rights advocate Sadie Alexander led desegregation efforts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the 1930s by helping draft Pennsylvania’s public accommodation law prohibiting discrimination in hotels, restaurants, and theaters. She and her husband Raymond Alexander, also a lawyer, tested the law by attempting to enter a theater. When the manager refused to admit them, he was arrested for violating the law, and the Alexanders won their point. They continued their crusade at hotels and restaurants.

Born in Philadelphia, Sadie Alexander received her bachelor’s degree in education in 1918, her master’s degree in economics in 1919, and her doctorate in economics in 1921. She was the first African American woman in the United States to earn a doctorate. Unable to find work as an economist, other than a stint as an actuary, Alexander entered law school in 1924. She completed her law degree in 1927, receiving all of her degrees from the University of Pennsylvania. Alexander entered private law practice and served as Philadelphia assistant city solicitor from 1927 to 1931 and from 1936 to 1940.

In the late 1940s, Sadie Alexander was named “Woman of the Year” in the comic book Negro Heroes. She served on the President’s Committee on Civil Rights, which reported in 1948 that the United States had a

Alexander was the first national president of Delta Sigma Theta, a black woman’s sorority. She was also active in the American Civil Liberties Union, Americans for Democratic Action, and the National Urban League’s national board.

See also: American Civil Liberties Union; Civil Rights Movement, Women in the; Delta Sigma Theta Sorority


**Allen, Maryon Pittman (1925-2018)**

Democrat Maryon Allen of Alabama served in the U.S. Senate from June 8, 1978 to November 7, 1978. While working as women’s editor for *The Birmingham News*, she interviewed Alabama lieutenant governor James B. Allen in the spring of 1964 and married him that summer. Following James Allen’s death while serving in the U.S. Senate, Governor George Wallace appointed Maryon Allen to fill the vacancy, with the understanding that hers would be an interim appointment, ending when another person was elected in the fall. Instead, she announced her candidacy to complete the unexpired term. When a newspaper article quoted Maryon Allen criticizing Governor Wallace and his wife, her support dwindled, despite her contention that her comments had been distorted. Allen won more votes than any of the other primary candidates, but not a large enough percentage of votes cast to win the primary. She lost in the runoff election.

Born in Meridian, Mississippi, Allen attended the University of Alabama from 1944 to 1947 and the International Institute of Interior Design in 1970. After serving in Congress, Allen wrote a column for *The Washington Post* from 1978 to 1981. She returned to Birmingham in 1993 and opened Cliff House, a clothing restoration and design company.

See also: Congress, Women in


**Allred, Gloria Rachel Bloom (b. 1941)**

Feminist lawyer Gloria Allred’s decades of advocacy for women continued into the 2010s, when she represented several of the women who accused comedian Bill Cosby of drugging and sexually assaulting them. After Cosby’s sentencing in 2018, Allred told a reporter that the best thing about her work is “their courage and their spirit. To watch them evolve from being victims, to survivors [then] to fighters of change. I like to
help women become empowered human beings who are then role models in their own families, in their workplaces and in their communities.”

Allred has argued family law, sexual harassment, employment discrimination, and sex discrimination cases. Some of her cases have been considered trivial. For example, one challenged the higher rates that dry cleaners charged for laundering women’s shirts than for men’s. But she notes that she has never had a case dismissed for being frivolous or without merit.

Founder and president of the Women’s Equal Rights Legal Defense and Education Fund, Allred became an activist lawyer as a result of personal experience. She explained that it developed from “being married as a teenager, giving birth to a child, getting divorced, not receiving child support, basically having to raise a child by myself, getting paid less than a man in my first job for what I consider to be equal work and equal experience, having been raped, having to have an abortion when abortion was illegal and unsafe, almost dying from it.”

Although Allred has generally used litigation as the method for seeking justice, she has also used other techniques. She once gave a chastity belt to a California state senator who supported a constitutional amendment to outlaw abortions, and she led a group of women who hung diapers in a governor’s office to impress upon him the importance of a bill to allow payroll deductions to enforce child support. On another occasion, she organized a picket outside a courthouse after a judge made a sexist comment during a rape trial.

Allred has hosted a daily radio talk show in Los Angeles and provided commentary on television news programs. “Seeing Allred,” a documentary about Allred’s life and work, was released in 2018.

Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Allred received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1963, her master’s degree from New York University in 1966, and her law degree from Loyola University in 1974.

See also: Lesbian Rights


Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®

Founded at Howard University in 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®(AKA) was the first African American women’s Greek letter society. Begun by nine women, it grew into an organization of almost 300,000 members in 1,000 chapters in the United States, West Africa, the Bahamas, Germany, Korea, Japan, and the Caribbean. The 2018-2022 international program theme is “Exemplifying Excellence through Sustainable Service.”

During the Depression of the 1930s, AKA entered into an era of social action, developing plans for teacher education, lobbying to end lynching, and working with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). It also established a program to address health problems on the Mississippi Delta, where people suffered from malnutrition, diphtheria, smallpox, and syphilis and other venereal diseases. Beginning in 1935 and continuing for eight years, AKA sponsored mobile health units staffed by doctors and nurses that traveled throughout Holmes County, Mississippi, providing medical services. Known as the Mississippi Health Project, it received national attention for its contributions to public health.
Working with other groups in the 1940s, AKA's political agenda included the elimination of discrimination, ending disenfranchisement, supporting anti-lynching legislation, establishing a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, and ending racial inequities in federal programs. During World War II, the sorority also worked with the National Council of Negro Women to convince the U.S. Navy to admit African American women into the newly formed Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES) and to end discrimination and segregation in the Women's Army Corps (WAC).

AKA established “ON TRACK,” an acronym for organizing, nurturing, team building, achieving, character building, and knowledge, targeting at-risk elementary school students to help them prepare for middle school. It has worked with the U.S. Department of Health to promote women’s health, and with the U.S. Department of Transportation to increase seat belt use among minority populations. In 2000, it established a school in South Africa.

Providing educational and employment opportunities, making grants for medical research and education, honoring black families, and supporting black businesses are among the many areas in which AKA has provided leadership in the United States. On the international level, it has helped improve life in several African nations by providing training, improved water supplies, assistance to refugee children, and relief.

The sorority established the Educational Advancement Foundation in 1980. By 2010, the foundation had helped more than 1,400 students and had more than 50,000 members.

In the twenty-first century, the sorority had several programs covering a wide range of topics, including leadership for girls, asthma prevention and management, environmental stewardship and sustainability, global poverty, and economic security, as well as helping students apply for college entrance.

See also: Anti-lynching Movement; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Women in the; National Council of Negro Women


Alpha Suffrage Club

Organized in 1913 by writer and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the Alpha Suffrage Club of Chicago was the first and arguably one of the most important suffrage clubs in the city. In the year of the club’s founding, the Illinois General Assembly passed the Illinois Suffrage Act, opening the voting booth to women. Wells-Barnett sought to show the black women of Chicago the importance of the ballot box and help them learn how to vote.

Wells-Barnett organized women to canvass black neighborhoods, registering African Americans to vote in the 1914 alderman elections, despite being jeered at by men who said she should be home taking care of babies. When women questioned the appropriateness of their work, Wells-Barnett assured that them that their work was important. The club’s dedication paid off in 1914 when Oscar DePriest was voted the first black alderman in Chicago.

Wells-Barnett formed the club out of her commitment to woman’s suffrage and because the dominant woman’s suffrage organization, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, held racist views and excluded African American women. Members of the Alpha Suffrage Club registered and organized voters and offered political education programs. The club even held a meeting at Bridewell Penitentiary; one of its goals was to convince women incarcerated there to “deport themselves that they might be proven worthy” of suffrage.
Alvarez, Aida (b. 1949)

A member of President Bill Clinton’s cabinet, Aida Alvarez was administrator of the Small Business Administration (SBA) from 1997 to 2001. She was the first Hispanic woman and the first person of Puerto Rican heritage to hold a position in a president’s cabinet. As head of the SBA, Alvarez shaped the policies governing federal programs that provide financial and business development assistance to entrepreneurs. Alvarez’s priorities included improving access to capital and credit for a diverse population. She said: “Small business is the heart and soul of the American economy. It has always been, and it will always be.”

Reflecting on her tenure as administrator, she believed that she had “captured an opportunity because we really zeroed in on the fact that women and minorities were starting up businesses at a faster pace than the general population. And we worked with our lenders and with our district offices to set goals to create more lending activity. We’ve seen a tripling in the number of SBA loans for women, and a near tripling of the loans for minority-owned businesses.”

Born in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, Alvarez earned her bachelor’s degree from Harvard University in 1971. A television and print journalist from 1973 to 1984, she worked for the New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation from 1984 to 1985 and was an investment banker in San Francisco and New York from 1986 to 1993. Appointed the first director of the Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight in 1993, she established regulatory oversight of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the nation’s two largest housing finance corporations.

See also: Cabinets, Women in Presidential