

Women's Bureau in 1920). After the war women lost their jobs and higher pay to the returning men.

After Pearl Harbor the government urged industry to tap into "woman power" for the intense labor effort necessary to win World War 2. The defense industry alone hired two million women during the war. They built airplanes and ships, assembled machine guns, operated railroads and wired electrical equipment. Altogether six million new women entered the labor force, including large numbers of married and non-white women (although 50,000 Japanese-American women were interned in detention camps). Congress passed the 1942 Lapham Act, which established public nurseries for the children of working women, but only until the end of the war.

At the end of World War 2 in 1945, many women lost their jobs, especially in heavy industry, replaced as they were following World War 1 by returning males. In the Detroit auto industry, for example, women employees dropped from 25% to 7.5% of the workforce despite protests from UAW women leaders, who by 1944 had their own division in the union. Before women were forced back into domesticity at war's end they had a total national union membership of three million, increased from about 800,00 in 1940.

Yet by 1950 almost 30% of all American women worked and represented about one-fourth of the total workforce. More than half of single women had jobs and nearly a quarter of married women, a big increase from 1940.

In 1960 about 35% of American women worked, including more than 30% of married women. Rate of pay dropped, however, averaging 60 cents for every \$1 men earned, down from 1955's 63 cents for every male \$1. (Women of color averaged 42 cents.) About 30% worked in clerical jobs; black women about 11%.

In 1970 close to 44% of women worked, including about 41% of married women. Women moved to skilled trades as carpenters, electricians, plumbers and machinists. However most women were still concentrated in poorly paid jobs. Average women's wages dropped to about 59 cents for every male \$1, even less for women of color, although the gap between white and non-white women narrowed.

In 1980 more than half of women were in the workforce, including just over 50% of married women. They continued to earn an average of 59 cents to every male \$1. At the top level, 427 of the top 1300 American corporations had at least one woman on the board of directors, almost double the number of four years earlier. Also the number of women-owned businesses increased 56% in the previous decade, five times the rate of men.

In 1985 the number of women in management positions had doubled since 1965, from 14% to 33%. Yet one-third of women were still in low-paying clerical jobs. Even in new fields women were over-represented at the bottom and under-repre-



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sented at the top, a condition that continues to exist in 2004. (For example, in 1985 only one-third of computer programmers were women compared to two-thirds of word processor and computer operators, which has not significantly changed two decades later.)

About three-fourths of women ages 25 to 54 were wage earners in 1990. About 24% of lawyers were women, compared with only 3% two decades earlier. Almost half of all accountants were women, double the number of two decades before. Similar gains were made in other professions: by 1987 there were close to 300 women on the boards of major U.S. companies, almost

double the number of four years earlier. By 2000 women owned more than one fourth of American businesses, three times as many as in 1980. Men still held 95% of top management jobs in the biggest corporations, however, and though the gap between men's and women's average earnings has narrowed, women still make on average about 70 cents for every \$1 men make.

"All issues are women's issues," Geraldine Ferraro said the year she campaigned as Vice President. Which is exactly the point of this chronology, only a partial account of women's role in the structure of American history but an example of the depth and complexity of that participation. Debbie Twombly, a founding member of the North Coast Women's History Project, wrote in this newspaper (March 1989):

"During recent years women have reached into the past to gain a hold on our roots. The results have been an affirmation of our worth, and finally a documentation of the contributions of our foremothers. History lessons have basically taught children that women have been invisible in the development of our country; but gradually, women are being written back into history."

"As we learn more, surely a positive reaction will be the gradual awareness that women have always been a part of our past and girls will begin to feel worthy of a place in history. Optimally, we will come to realize that women can reach the historical heights that men have kept for themselves."

The quality of seekers of the Presidency have seldom been high and as the power of the Presidency increases the quality has proportionately declined. The voters are always offered two (Christian) white men in a polyglot nation in which women are the majority and the great variety of races outnumber Caucasians.

There are many reasons a woman ought to be elected the American President in the year 2004. Chances are very good that she will probably be a much better leader than a masculine counterpart because male culture demands women possess and demonstrate superior skills simply to compete with the reigning supremacy of the killer gender.

An excellent reason a woman should be President is that women generally represent the most generous and humane prospects of humanity. Women are literally pregnant with our future and provide the true compassion and Gaia wisdom of our species.

A common question asked by dubious men (and some women: Phyllis Schafley comes to mind) is "Do you think a woman can do better than a man?" The response is that she certainly couldn't do worse.

But of course that is a piggyback negative. A woman ought to be President at the start of Western culture's 3rd Millennium simply because after all this time a woman deserves to be.

(Indispensable to this article has been *Timelines of American Women's History* by Sue Heinemann. Thanks also to Gerda Lerner for her 1971 book, *The Woman in American History*. And many others for which there is no room to list as a bibliography. 'Ms. Smith Goes to Washington' originally appeared in the Summer 1997 issue of the *North Coast Times Eagle*, and has been slightly revised and updated for 2004.)

THE RIGHT TO KNOW WHO YOU ARE

In late July 2000, Helen Hill spoke to the North Coast Women's Political Caucus in Astoria about the rigors and hardships she encountered to sponsor an initiative petition the state's governments and newsmedia were dead against — the "Oregon Open Adoption Rights Bill" that was challenged for a year in the courts immediately after it qualified for the 1998 ballot with 100,000 signatures and was elected into law by a significant majority of Oregon voters.

A "creepy" lawyer Helen fought against in court represented six unnamed birth mothers who wanted to rescind the vote to protect their identities and save them from 'shame'. That was the reason for the campaign, she said, to eradicate the shame that hangs over mothers who give up their children for adoption and those like her who are adopted. She said the system's bitter attempt to destroy the bill, Ballot Measure 58, was a last-defense strike for preserving patriarchal control.

Helen told how she got involved as sponsor and chief petitioner of an initiative petition. She said that anyone who thinks to become involved must ask fundamental questions of themselves about dedication and endurance. She recounted a skeletal frame of how she indeed dedicated enough to endure — the endless filings of paper with interminable bureaucracies, mobilizing petition signature gatherers (she had to resort to paid petitioners), enduring the bad press simultaneously with gaining no recognition (not even by KMUN, which never put her on the air) — yet she said she just tapped into something whose "time had come." She credited Internet services of adoption finders, in particular 'Bastard Nation' for its early original work setting up systems and interconnecting support groups.

It was as a delegate to a Bastard Nations convention that she was inspired to write the Open Adoption Records bill. A political activist noted she was from Oregon, its only delegate, and urged her to utilize the existing initiative process, which few states have. The rest is history: by persevering over official disapproval, and especially the nasty political and personal attacks on her by the corrupt adoption cartel that seals records of adopted children to conceal diseases or infirmities for cash sales to beguiled adopting parents. There was a large market for white babies in the 1950s when she was born and adopted, she said. Yet, despite news blackouts and media attacks (an editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* suggested she should have been aborted as a fetus — a coarse allusion to adoption as her life saver), Helen was supported by passionate allies, particularly adoptees who, as she said, "deserved the right of every other citizen to know who they are."

She stressed the shame that was prevalent among adoptees and birth mothers who let them go, and said her major reason for her campaign for opening birth records of adoptees was to end the shame she believes was especially inculcated in women to protect the identities of anonymous fathers as well as for the substantial profits trafficking in the "bastard baby" trade.

She told about the hate mail she received, writers who reviled her as "evil." One letter she received, typically anonymous, started out calling her evil but then continued on for several pages with the story of the writer's struggles as an adoptee. Helen took out an ad in a newspaper and wished the woman who wrote the letter a happier life.

Helen's intent and the reason she was invited to speak to the Women's Political Caucus was to describe the process of political activism. She sketched background, purpose and her personal experience with power, press and public. A labyrinth of moves and countermoves; the near fanatic attention to detail necessary to follow a political act to fruition. And always the dedication, fervor and furious endurance that is indispensable to nurturing and parenting a political idea into mature reality.

The personal reward, she said, is in the doing of something she deeply believed must be done and in knowing she was right in what she was doing. She said the best and worst acts by humans are when they act forcibly upon their beliefs — that the "noblest deeds in history" are performed by the believers, and also the vilest. Yet it is that belief which creates and sustains the extreme difficulties believing inspires in its struggle to be made real.

Helen emphasized that the Open Adoption Law does not force reunions of adoptees and birth parents. Identity and medical records are all that are required be revealed. Reunions occur; some turn out bad, others like Helen's own are welcomed and life altering. Many adoptees are not interested in discovering their real identity, assumedly content as they are, or afraid of who they might turn out to be. The personal stories of adoptees and birth parents are as varied as each experience.

The real point behind the Oregon Open Adoption Law is that the freedom and opportunity for adoptees to discover their true identity is open and available for those who choose to use it. It removes an unjust and shameful cloak that disguised wholesale trafficking in babies for the profit of the adoption industry by concealing the identities from all concerned, and most especially from the children themselves.

Yet this concealment intensified individual probes into personal identity, which (as Helen compared) like the abortion rights movement grouped together adoptees in formidable opposition to an unjust status quo. This is the point at which, Helen had said, the right to identity had reached its moment of acceptance and reality: "It's time had come."

She spoke of a man who described voting as a spiritual process, which defined for her the necessity of keeping Oregon's initiative process open and untampered with. Its excesses will shake out and it will reform itself, she said. It is direct democracy, which is another issue whose time has arrived.

Helen described the intense media attention she received after Measure 58 passed but was locked up in a local court. The 'Today' show television takeover of her Manzanita neighborhood before dawn one morning she depicted as "outer space" with satellite dishes set up to beam and bounce an interview with her directly to Rockefeller Center in NYC. She said she began to understand the Native American belief that cameras steal people's souls. She began to feel she was losing her sense of purpose as well as perspective; she began craving media attention and being jealous when not getting it. She was severely critical of TV news, which she dismissed as artificial and superficial as well as deliberately deceitful, but praised print journalists whom she said worked hard to get their stories although they were often incorrect — but the diligence was there, and the attempt to take her vision seriously.

In the end the U.S. Supreme Court deferred to a lower court decision that upheld Measure 58 as Oregon law, and it went into effect May 31, 2000. The fight was over. It was an important victory, which will eventually germinate all over the country.

The mother of three, Helen said during the campaign, "As we grow older, we have vital questions to ask about our parentage because we have children who need to know about future health problems we and they might have inherited."

Helen lives in Manzanita, in a house rebuilt from an overnight fire; she remembers repeatedly counting her children that night to be sure they were safe. Writer, artist, dollmaker and art teacher, she is owner/manager of the Bay City Arts Center and the founder, producer and director of *Kloochy Theater*.

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