About Women's Studies Archive: Women’s Issues and Identities

Much of history is one-sided, mainly focused on the male perspective; women's voices are not often heard. *Women's Issues and Identities* provides the opportunity to witness history from the female perspective. Offering coverage of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, *Women's Issues and Identities* allows for the serendipitous discovery of commonalities among a variety of archival collections.

Global in scope, the archive presents materials covering the social, political, and professional aspects of women’s lives and offers a look at the roles, experiences, and achievements of women in society. A wide range of primary sources provide a close look at some of the pioneers of women's history, a deep dive into the issues that have affected women, and the many contributions they have made to society.

*Women's Issues and Identities* spans multiple geographic regions, providing a variety of perspectives on women's experiences and cultural impact. Within the archive can be found fascinating historical records from Europe, North and South America, Africa, India, East Asia, and the Pacific Rim with content in English, French, German, and Dutch.

Following are some highlights from the archive:

Founded in 1877, the **Malthusian League** was one of the first organizations in the world to advocate voluntary family limitation as the solution to the problems of overpopulation and poverty. The activities of the league are documented in their journal *The Malthusian*, which includes a wealth of letters and articles on poverty, over-population, demographic principles, legislation, race, family size, birth control, and statistical comparisons with other European nations and major powers. Also included is *The Eugenics Review*, featuring articles, discussion, and reviews on a wide range of topics such as abortion, alcoholism, birth control, child welfare, crime, divorce, ethics, religion, legislative processes, fertility, maternity, poverty, peace and war.

The records of the **Planned Parenthood Federation of America** document its struggles to provide services including birth control, men's sexual health, relationship counseling, sex education, treatment for sexually transmitted disease and international family planning. The collection is exceptionally strong in its coverage of the legal challenges supported by PPFA and its predecessor organizations, as well as in documenting the relations between PPFA and major stake-holding groups like physicians, social workers, nurses and public health staff. The relationship between local affiliates and the national organization is illuminated both in the collection’s coverage of annual meetings and its affiliate files.

Highlights of the PPFA records include:

- the evolution of the PPFA starting with the American Birth Control League and the Birth Control Clinical Research Bureau
• how the organizations faced the challenging economic uncertainties of the American Great Depression in the 1930s
• the emergence of PPFA during World War II and its family planning work both during and after the war
• how Margaret Sanger and British family planning activists created the International Planned Parenthood Foundation in 1952
• references to the 1965 U.S. Supreme Court ruling Griswold v. Connecticut, in which the last bastion of the 1873 Comstock Act, Connecticut’s draconian law forbidding the practice of contraception even among married couples, was struck down

Women and Health/Mental Health offers articles, research papers, theses, speeches, leaflets, poetry, and graphics created by women and addresses a variety of significant issues in women’s lives. Covering topics such as sterilization, alcoholism, birth control, marriage, lesbianism, motherhood, prostitution, suicide, violence, and many others, this collection offers multiple views and points of view on issues important to women’s health.

Grassroots Feminist Organizations covers aspects of the women’s liberation movement. Highlights of the collection include records of the Women’s School, where women could acquire new skills, including ones generally deemed inappropriate for girls such as auto-mechanics and self-defense. The Women’s Educational Center records are also provided, where among many other important occurrences, activists founded the Rape Crisis Center, created the Houseworker’s Handbook, established the Elizabeth Stone House for disturbed women, and built Transition House as a haven for battered women and their children.

Within Herstory can be found journals, newspapers, and newsletters of women’s liberation and women’s civic, religious, professional, and peace organizations from all over the world. The collection offers multiple perspectives on the empowerment of women in the twentieth century.

Covering the period from the 1880s to the 1950s, The Women Missionaries Collection, part of the Women’s Lives collection, provides a rich history of both American woman missionaries and the peoples with whom they resided abroad. A highly literate group, women missionaries wrote long letters home and kept journals of their observations of local peoples and customs. Papers from East Asia, the Pacific Rim, South Asia, Africa, South America, and the United States are all represented in this collection.

Also found within the Women’s Lives collection, The Women Pioneers Collection contains a number of significant materials relating to women’s history and history of the Pacific Northwest in the United States. The majority of files in this collection are diaries and reminiscences describing overland journeys along the Oregon Trail undertaken by pioneer families. Additional journals and diaries describe the daily concerns of women living in towns and on farms and ranches in Oregon.

Women and Law offers materials in a variety of categories. Within the collection can be found information on the changing roles and social conditions of women throughout the world; how men have related and reacted to women and women’s movements; non-women’s liberation groups; materials on women in classical, traditional roles, vocations, and stereotypes; articles and research describing the nature of women’s oppression by institutions and laws; materials about women’s liberation groups and movements. This is by no means a comprehensive list of the contents, but rather
offers a flavor for what one can find in the collection.

The records of the Committee of Fifteen offer a snapshot of the history of prostitution in New York City as well as a view into immigration history. The Committee of Fifteen was actually the first of New York City's two antivice committees of the early twentieth century (the Committee of Fourteen continued many of the investigations begun by the Committee of Fifteen). Although only active for a year, the reports, notebooks, letters, and scrapbooks of the committee members and investigators provide a rich social and urban history and an interesting perspective on women's history.

The records of the Women's Labour League, a broadly based feminist pressure group founded in London, England, document the organization's efforts to promote the political representation of women in parliament and local bodies. Materials include periodicals, pamphlets and annual reports from its beginnings in 1906 through to 1977. Reflecting more than 70 years of sustained campaigning, this collection offers the opportunity to examine the substance and causes of political change over an extended period of time.

Women's history and labor history are presented within the Women's Trade Union League collection. The League sought to counter the exploitation of working women through organization of women's trade unions and securing the passage of protective legislation regulating hours and working conditions and setting minimum wage standards. The WTUL records also portray the history of the American immigrant experience; as families from all over the world moved to America seeking opportunities, many of them ended up living on the edge of subsistence, forcing children into the work force at the age of 12 or 13 to work in crowded, unsanitary factories with long working hours and seasonal layoffs.

The WTUL supported the suffrage movement by bringing women into the movement and winning the support of male unionists. The records also bear witness to the WTUL's influence on the role of women in government agencies during World War I; the founding and work of the federal Women's Bureau; and the split within the women's movement over the Equal Rights Amendment, which the WTUL and other women's groups actually opposed as a threat to protective legislation.

Covering the period from 1840 to 1940, the European Women's Periodicals collection offers periodicals from Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and German language issues from Paris and Prague, the Netherlands, Dutch Indonesia, Switzerland. Within this collection can be found periodicals from women's groups against German National Socialism, from continental European suffragists, from birth-control propagandists, from housewives' associations, and from educational reformers. Among numerous interesting subjects, researchers can discover:

- how the First World War transformed women's opportunities
- information about second wave feminists (women's liberation) as they attempted to change the things about society that kept women subordinate such as low pay, discrimination in hiring, or lack of control over their own reproductive lives
- how women's liberation activists organized against the portrayal of women as sex objects, against racism and homophobia, and in opposition to the many kinds of violence that kept women in their place

For scholars and amateur researchers alike, a rich history of women's experiences in the nineteenth
and twentieth centuries awaits within *Women’s Issues and Identities.*