

**“WHAT ROLE DID WOMEN PLAY IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT HISTORY, AND
WHAT ROLE DO YOU SEE WOMEN IN THE FUTURE OF LABOR?”**

Susan B. Anthony once said “It is we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people, who formed the Union.” Women have participated in labor organizations since the 1800’s in United States history and they will continue being a powerful influence in the future. My name is Georgia Kendall and my step dad has worked in a union for all the 16 years that I have known him. I have grown up with a deep understanding about unions and what it is meant to be a part of one and I know what it has done for me and my family and I will continue to support them in the future.

The labor movement in the US grew out of the need to protect the common interest of workers. For those in the working in industrial type jobs, organized labor unions fought for better wages, reasonable hours and safer working conditions. The labor movement led efforts to stop child labor, give health benefits and provide aid to workers who were injured or retired.

Women’s participation in unions dates back to the 1800’s. Wikipedia states, in 1843 female textile workers in Lowell Massachusetts formed the Lowell Female Reform Association (LFLRA). They were able to petition legislature for a 10-hour work day, among other things.

There are many movements from women in the 1800’s for better working conditions and higher wages. According to Wikipedia, The Collar Laundry Union formed in 1864 in New York and it was the first entirely female labor union in the United States.

In the 1900’s the International Ladies Garment Workers Union is formed. Lucy Parsons is a key organizer of this new union. Lucy Parsons plays a very important role in the American labor

movement for women. According to Wikipedia, Parsons is described by the Chicago Police Department as “more dangerous than a thousand rioters” in 1920. Lucy Parsons fought for the rights of the poor and disenfranchised in the oppressive industrial economic system.

In 1920 the U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau is founded. According to the web site the law gave the Bureau the duty to “formulate standards and policies which shall promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment.”

During World War II, millions of women join the industrial work force and became “Rosie the Riveters”. This is when we see a jump in women participation in the unions. In 1964 with the passage of the Civil Rights Act we get the creation of the Equal Employment opportunity Commission. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission opens up new fields of employment to women. In 1993 The Family and Medical Leave Act is signed by President Clinton to provide job protected leave to employees to take care of themselves and families.

The beginning of the 21st century has seen more change with women in unions, more opportunities and more women in leadership roles. Mary Kay Henry, an American labor union activity and International President of the 2 million member Service Employees International Union (SEIU) is the first woman to lead the union. She has helped pioneers SEIU’s card check agreement, non-traditional collective bargaining agreements, and a system wide health care strategy. Mary Kay Henry recently tweeted, “Our unions work best when every person has a voice.”

Women’s participation in unions is beneficial for several reasons. Unionized women have greater earnings. According to the web site Status of Women Data, \$212, or 30.9 percent more

week. Health insurance coverage is higher than non-unionized women. Women's leadership is also critical to promoting issues of importance to women and families, like paycheck fairness, access to affordable child care, raising minimum wage, and access to paid sick days. Women are working toward better representation with union leadership, for example, there are 10 out of 55 female Executive Council members of the AFL-CIO.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, in May 2019, the unemployment rate for adult women remained at historic lows – 3.2 %. Today, women make up nearly half of our workforce, and many women are the primary breadwinners for their families. In fact, more than 75 percent of single mothers are the sole provider for their family.

Even though women still face challenges and obstacles we have and will continue to make progress. I believe women will reduce barriers that prevent access to better jobs and ensure women's fair treatment in the workplace. We need to continue to improve workplace practices and support, promote fair compensation and equal pay, help women prepare for better jobs. Increase educational opportunities and gain a larger presence in leadership positions. Unions need to highlight the importance of women's contributions in the union. We need to support women in leadership positions, create mentoring programs, address women's priorities and provide flexible options for involvement.

Bruce Springsteen is quoted to say, "Unions have been the only powerful and effective voice working people have ever had in the history of this country." Unions, when strong, will help empower women. We are all human and should be treated equally and we should not be treated differently based on gender, anything that is available to one person should be available to everyone.