



# **NOW ORIGINS**

**A summary  
description  
of how  
28 women  
changed  
the world  
by reviving  
a revolution  
everyone  
thought  
was dead!**

The National Organization for Women (NOW) was born June 30, 1966 out of the fury and frustration of 28 women attending the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women in Washington, D.C.

Their fury was understandable. The Commission had been set up by President John F. Kennedy in 1961 under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt and three full years had passed since it had first reported (in *American Women, The Report of the President's Commission on the Status of Women*, in 1963) that, despite having won the right to vote, women were discriminated against in virtually every aspect of life. These findings had been reinforced by the reports of the state commissions that had also come into being in the intervening years.

Nevertheless, the 1966 Conference delegates were prohibited by the Administration's rules for the conference from even passing resolutions recommending that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforce its legal mandate to end sex discrimination.

Betty Friedan, a Conference guest and author of *The Feminine Mystique*, invited a group of women to her hotel room one night to discuss alternative strategies. It was decided that the only solution was to form a separate civil rights organization dedicated to achieving full equality for women. It was Friedan who christened it NOW.

Kathryn Clarenbach, head of the Wisconsin Commission on the Status of Women, was named temporary coordinator and the women drafted a statement of purpose.

"To take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, assuming all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in fully equal partnership with men."

Thus was born the new feminist movement—and not unlike the way that the original suffragists were inspired to launch their revolution after being frustrated in attempts to take their rightful places as delegates to the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London.

In addition to Clarenbach and Friedan, NOW's 28 founding mothers were: Ade Allness, Mary Benbow, Gene Boyer, Analoyce Clapp, Catherine Conroy, Caroline Davis, Mary Eastwood, Edith Finlayson, Dorothy Haener, Anna Roosevelt Halstead, Lorene Harrington, Mary Lou Hill, Esther Johnson, Nancy Knaak, Min L. Matheson, Helen Moreland, Pauli Murray, Ruth Murray, Inka O'Hanrahan, Pauline Parish, Eve P. Purvis, Edna Schwartz, Gretchen Squires, Mary Jane Snyder, Betty Talkington, and Caroline Ware.

NOW's first organizing conference was held October 29-30, 1966 in Washington, D.C. More than 300 women and men from all parts of the country assembled in the John Phillip Sousa Community Room of the Washington Post Building to formulate an organizational structure and philosophy for the united front of the new feminist movement, or as Friedan termed it, "the unfinished revolution."

Kathryn Clarenbach was elected NOW's first chairone of the Board and Betty Friedan, NOW's first president. Richard Graham, former EEOC Commissioner, was elected vice president, and Caroline Davis, of the United Auto Workers, secretary-treasurer.

Other members of NOW's first National Board were: Colleen Boland, Catherine Conroy, Carl Degler, Sister Mary Austin Doherty, Elizabeth Drews, Muriel Fox, Betty Furness, Dorothy Haener, Jane Hart, Anna Hedgeman, Phineas Indritz, Dean Lewis, Inka O'Hanrahan, Patricia Plante, Sister Mary Joel Read, Charlotte Roe, Alice Rossi, Vera Schletzer, Edna Schwartz, and Herbert White.

NOW was incorporated officially in Washington, D.C. on February 10, 1967, after finalization of its National Constitution and By-Laws by an appointed committee.

The watch word was "action" as NOW waged war on all aspects of sex discrimination. Task forces were set up to deal with the problems of women in employment, education, religion, poverty, law, politics and their image in the media. Committees were also organized to handle finance, membership, public relations, legislation and legal activities.

Somehow, without one paid staff member and no budget, NOW started raising the consciousness of the nation. Closet feminists began to expound their beliefs in public and NOW chapters were formed all over the country.

By the time NOW held its second National Conference in Washington, D.C., November, 1967, membership had risen to 1200. That was the year NOW startled the media and lost some members by declaring its support for repeal of all abortion laws and passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Today, of course, the Equal Rights Amendment is supported by such old-line organizations as the League of Women Voters, the Girl Scouts and the Y.W.C.A. Even more significantly, Congressman Emanuel Cellers, arch foe of the ERA for the past 50 years, was defeated for office in 1972 by a woman.



He partially blamed—or credited—the women's movement for his defeat.

Betty Friedan continued as president through the Third National NOW Conference in Atlanta, Georgia (December, 1968) and until March, 1970, when Aileen Hernandez, former EEOC Commissioner, was elected to that office at the Fourth National Conference in Des Plaines, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. Wilma Scott Heide became chairone of the Board. Also at that time a Legal Defense and Education Fund was finally incorporated.

On August 26, 1970, 10,000 women and men staged a spectacular march down New York City's Fifth Avenue, as part of NOW's nationwide celebration of the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage—still another example of NOW's successful adoption of tactics used by the early feminists.

Membership had mushroomed to 15,000 by September, 1971 when NOW chapters from Maine to Hawaii attended the Fifth Annual Conference in Los Angeles on Labor Day weekend. Wilma Scott Heide became NOW's third national president and Muriel Fox became chairone of the Board. The "shocker" resolution of this convention was that NOW acknowledged the "oppression of lesbians as a legitimate concern of feminism."

In 1971, NOW members came together with other feminist organizations and formed the National Women's Political Caucus, a non-partisan coalition of women in politics, which provided a forceful demonstration of woman power in politics during the 1972 election campaigns.

Yes, an old revolution caught fire again in 1966 and NOW will continue to fan the flames until women finally achieve the long-sought goal of the first wave of feminists—full equality!



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