

AMERICAN WOMEN IN LEGAL EDUCATION: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

With less than 5 percent of the world's population, the United States has about one-half of the world's lawyers. American legal services have turned into a major national industry. This paper addresses the question of to what extent, under the traditional masculine consciousness of the legal profession, women could historically participate in this prestigious profession. It explores the development of the American legal profession and the reasons why women lawyers were totally absent in the first century of American history. It traces the efforts of early American women to enter this profession by obtaining a legal education, their struggles against sex-based discrimination and exclusion in the 19th century, the transformation of legal education and the legal profession in the 20th century, and the unprecedented expansion of women law students after the 1970's. This paper also assesses the significance of the recent increase in women's attendance in law school and in practice, and offers a proposal as to how law schools and the society might respond to these changes.

Key Words: legal education, legal profession, first American woman law students, first American woman lawyer, gender bias in the law school curriculum