

**FEMINISM, WOMEN'S MOVEMENT, AND
WOMEN'S HISTORY—SOME IMPLICATIONS
OF THE DEBATE ON EEOC v. SEARS,
ROEBUCK AND COMPANY**

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the relationship and conflict among American feminism, women's movement, and women's history. The debate provoked by EEOC v. Sears, Roebuck and Company, from 1979 and 1986, was well-known, especially in the academic community. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission accused the Sears, Roebuck and Company of sex discrimination in hiring workers. Two feminist historians, Rosalind Rosenberg and Alice Kessler-Harris, were invited to testify in the court. After analyzing the testimony of these two witnesses and the discussion of other scholars, the author proceeds to show that there is a paradoxical relationship among feminism, women's movement and women's history: they "nurture" each other on the other hand, but they also have opposite philosophies, missions, and strategies on the other.

Rosalind Rosenberg, pro Sears, testified that it was not the hiring policy of Sears but rather women's free choice at the traditional ideology of women's social role that gave rise to the fact that the overwhelming majority of male workers were better paid than their female counterparts. On the contrary, Alice Kessler-Harris, pro EEOC, took the same fact as a strong evidence to prove that Sears did have discrimination in hiring workers. Both Rosenberg and Kessler-Harris are feminists and historians. They used the same material only to reach opposite conclusions. This confrontation and apparent contradiction leads the author to study the implications of the Sears case. The author argues that Gerder Lerner's interrelatedness approach to women's history might give a good framework toward resolving the dilemma posted here.