

PEARL

BUCK

& WOMEN



Pearl Buck arrived at the issue of women's rights, not only from her own experiences as a woman in the world at large, but also from her entrenched belief that *all human beings deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.*





She said on multiple occasions that she did not consider herself a feminist; ***she was an outside observer with a unique perspective***, acquired through spending her formative years in a foreign country.

She was outspoken in her support for strong, independent women and her belief that American women experienced a level of privilege that worked to their detriment and to society's.



She illustrated her view of women through the heroines in her fiction and through her speeches, letters, and essays promoting feminist issues of her day.



The fight for women's rights began before the American Civil War. ***All women should have equal rights with men.*** This has taken many forms including the women's suffrage movement, various workplace protections, gaining property rights, the right to vote, reproductive rights, and the rights for equal pay.

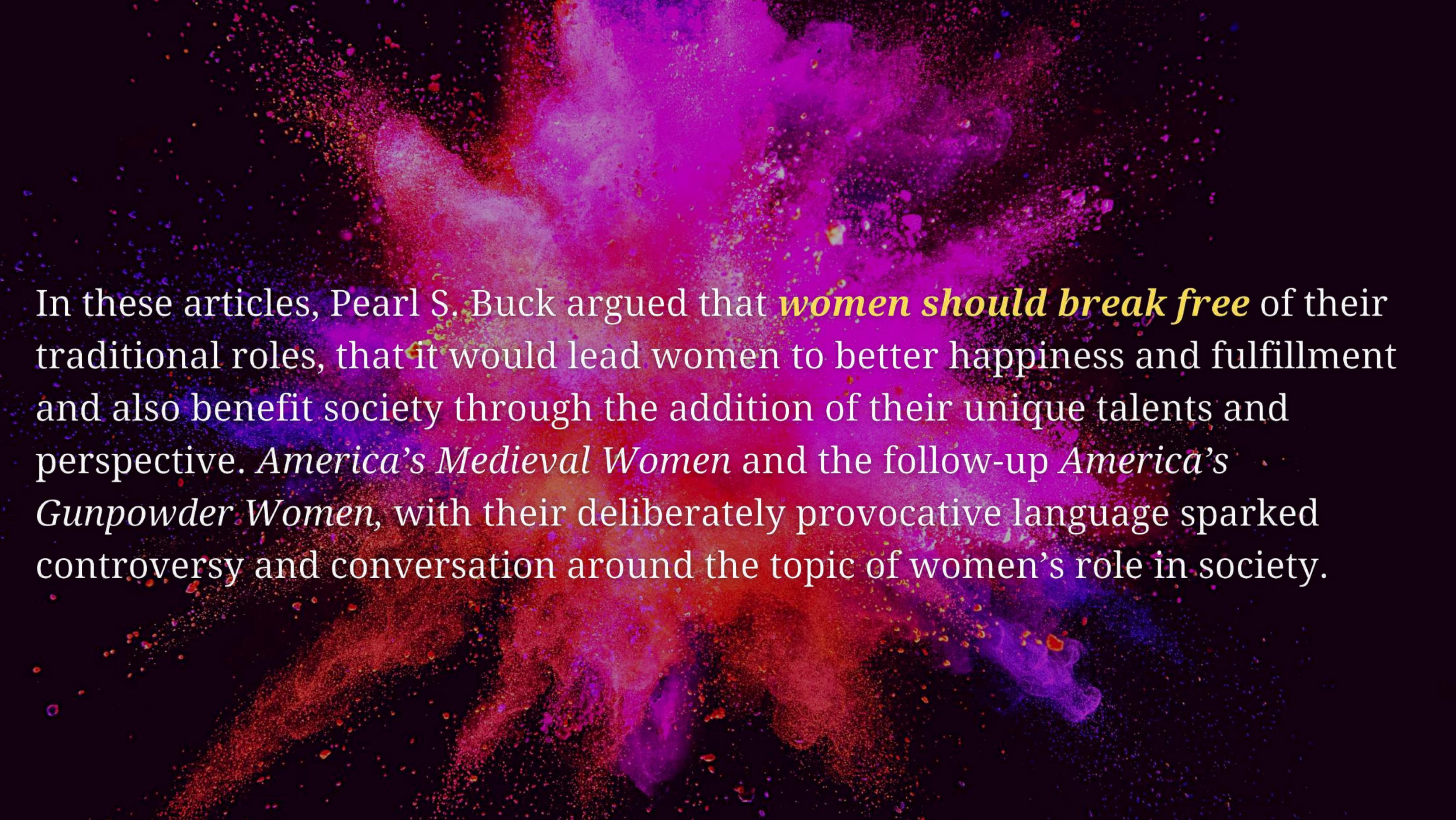


In the 1800's women began to fight for the right to vote. After many years of protest, the 19th Amendment was passed by Congress on June 4, 1919 and ratified on August 18, 1920. Shortly after women gained the right to vote, the Equal Rights Amendment was introduced to Congress. Buck would later become a supporter of this amendment.

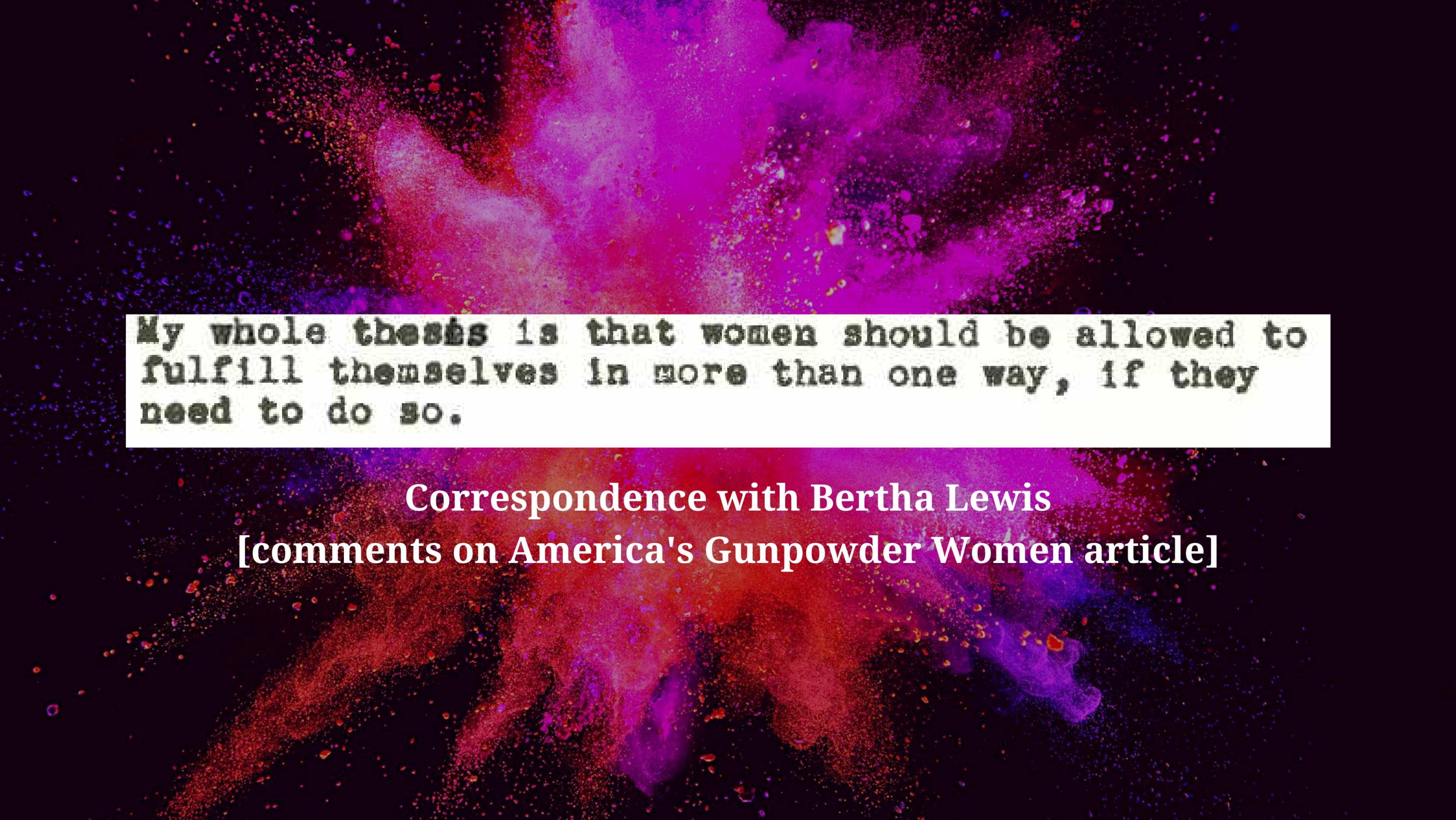


Two of Pearl Buck's essays, published in 1938 and 1939 in popular magazines of the day, received wide spread attention and prompted Ms. Buck's involvement with the women's rights movement. In these articles, *America's Medieval Women* and the follow-up *America's Gunpowder Women*, she describes the position of privilege most women experience in their homes and the burdens this creates on them and their families. She found that women have full access to education, and many are well-educated, but then prevented from using it.

“That means that millions of women have been made ready for work they either had no chance to do or never wanted to do”



In these articles, Pearl S. Buck argued that **women should break free** of their traditional roles, that it would lead women to better happiness and fulfillment and also benefit society through the addition of their unique talents and perspective. *America's Medieval Women* and the follow-up *America's Gunpowder Women*, with their deliberately provocative language sparked controversy and conversation around the topic of women's role in society.



My whole thesis is that women should be allowed to
fulfill themselves in more than one way, if they
need to do so.

Correspondence with Bertha Lewis
[comments on America's Gunpowder Women article]



In *Women: A Minority Group*, published in Opportunity Magazine in June of 1940, Pearl Buck describes women as *“the largest minority group, in numbers as well as in the massed inequality and prejudices under which they must pass their lives.”* They struggle “against wages lower than men’s for the same work, against a fresh tide of undiminished prejudice against married women workers, against prejudice toward women in the professions, in business, in government and to some extent in the arts.” She believed that women, struggling as a minority for equality, have gone about it the correct way, without violence and resentment, but by continuing in their work while steadily pressing for their rights.

PEARL BUCK CALLS FOR FULL EQUALITY

Women Must Share Responsibility With Men to Save Democracy, She Asserts

CITES CONDITIONS ABROAD

Dictatorships Develop Most Where Women Are Least Free, She Tells Convention

On December 7, 1940, Pearl Buck addressed the Biennial Convention of the National Women's Party in Washington D.C. This impactful speech was reported on the following day in The New York Times and later recorded into the U.S.

Congressional Record. In it she supports the Equal Rights Amendment *“because in any democratic country the constitution ought, as a matter of course to apply to everyone in it, regardless of sex, in the exact same way.”*

Pearl S. Buck pointedly aligns racial discrimination with prejudice against women. In her arguments about women, she reiterates the theme of privilege and asserts “women are bound by a traditionalism they themselves maintain.”

Pearl Buck Favors A Constitutional Guarantee Now

By PEARL S. BUCK
Nobel Prize Novelist



'EQUAL RIGHTS' BY AMENDMENT?

The nation must recognize the value of women not as dear and weaker possessions but as hu-

man creatures in their own right and with a function to perform in all parts of our national life. To announce this recognition the Equal Rights Amendment is necessary.

Pearl Buck, distinguished writer and Nobel Prize winner:

JANUARY 19-OCTOBER 13, 1962

I have been thinking a good deal about the Lucretia Mott amendment (the proposed equal rights for women amendment), and the more I think about it the more confirmed I am in my conviction that it is only when a nation's people are governed by laws made for its citizens and not for male and female that men and women can live in mutual happiness with each other and with justice toward each other.

When one sex is given discrimination, either favorable or unfavorable, the effect works ill for everyone. If women do not have as a matter of course an unequivocally equal place with men before the law, men suffer with them. A mother cannot train her son in the vigor of free thought and action when she herself does not share completely in that freedom. Something of her sense of inferiority shadows him to weaken him in his own moral fiber or to make him feel falsely superior on that utterly untenable ground for superiority, mere sex.

When woman does not share in the life of the nation equally with man, with a mental atmosphere as clear as his, and the right to action no more hampered than man's by discriminatory laws and social attitudes, it means that half the nation and the half which has as its peculiarly important work the bearing of children and their early education, is a depressed group and as such affects the whole.

It is as a mother even more than as a professional worker that I say that I believe the Lucretia Mott amendment is the only self-respecting basis for citizenship in a true democracy.

"His fear is further proved by his continuing rejection even of the primary concept of human equality expressed in equal rights amendment [now passed] which year after year is denied approval by congress, although surely there was never a more simple declaration that citizens should not be denied their human rights merely because they are women. True, there are also women who are opposed to the Amendment. Some women have the habit of inequality. They have no opinions of their own and, slave like, merely echo the words of the men they know. Other women profit by special protective laws, not knowing that all persons, men and women, have the right to protective laws. Still others actually do profit by the segregation of women, even as some Negroes profit from racial segregation. In our interesting and complex national life certain persons benefit from inequalities and the limited competition that results from inequality anywhere."

-Pearl S. Buck

"Thoughts of a Woman at Christmas"

PEARL S. BUCK

Of MEN

and

WOMEN

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
1941

A collection of nine essays, published in 1941, offers a look at the relations between men and women. *Of Men and Women's* thesis is that democracy depends on the equality and freedom of women. Pearl S. Buck believed that both men and women share responsibility for the subordination of one to the other.

Pearl S. Buck says things like: "For the real female quality is something tough and strong and resistant. Women are not weak, except when they are uncertain of themselves. Once they are certain, they are whirlwinds of power and wells of strength."

PEARL BUCK TELLS OF HER PSEUDONYM

The Long Love, The Townsman, Voices in the House, The Bright Procession, and The Angry Wife, were all written by Pearl S. Buck under the pseudonym John Sedges, beginning in 1945 until 1949.

This gave her an opportunity to break from the assumptions about her only being able to write about Asia.

In the Sedges novels she wrote about American life, including racial prejudice, and she wanted them to be "accepted on their [own] merits."

THE LONG LOVE

PEARL BUCK TELLS OF HER PSEUDONYM

"To provide freedom for this American me," she said, "pseudonymity was the answer. The writer must have a new name. I chose the name of John Sedges, a simple one, and masculine because men have fewer handicaps in our society than women have in writing as well as in other professions."

New York Times April 17, 1958

THE LONG LOVE

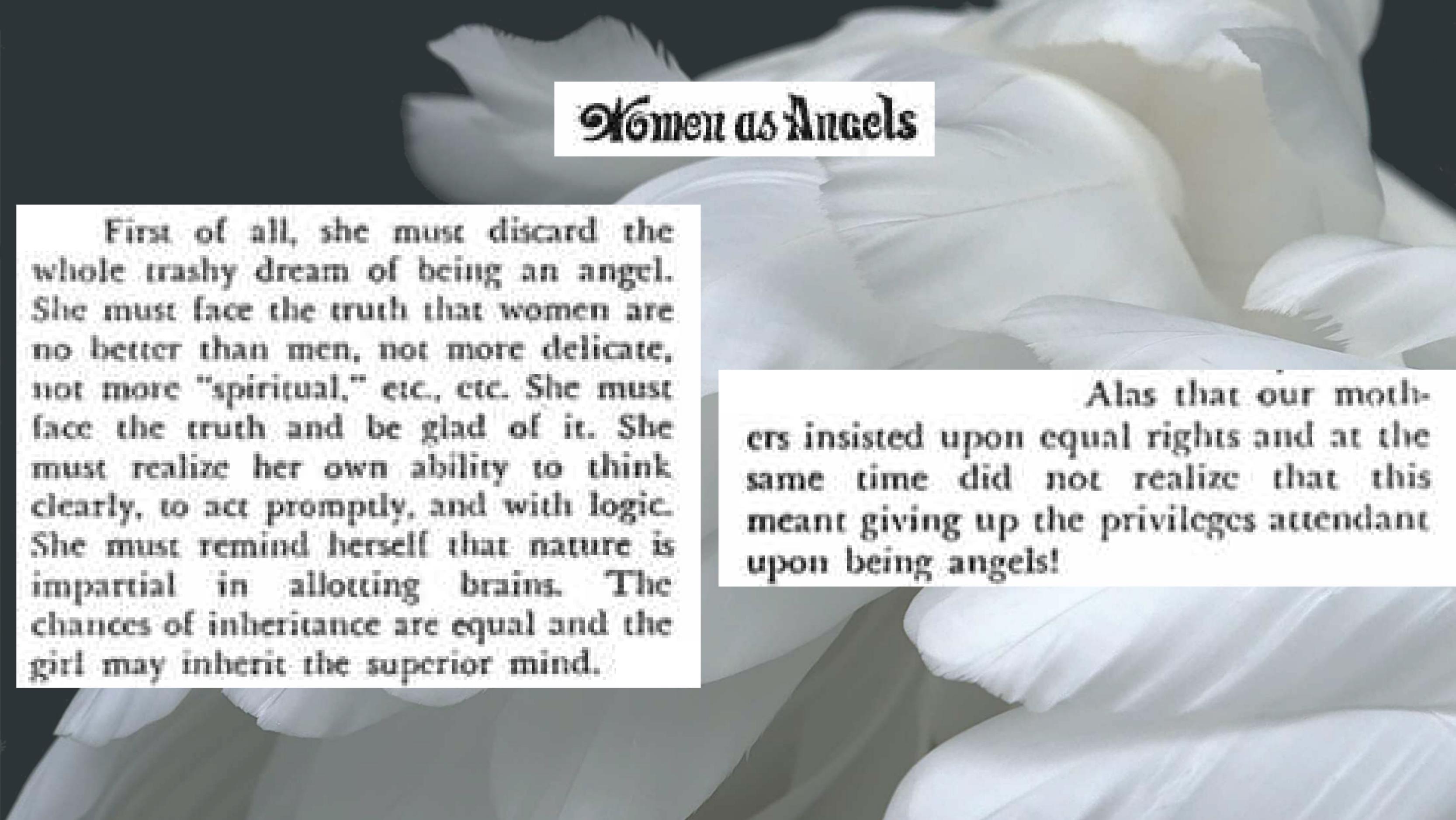


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PLAYBOY

Women as Angels

In 1966 Pearl S. Buck wrote *Women as Angels*, for Playboy Magazine. "Women as angels" was used previously as a metaphor in writing by authors such as William Thackeray (1811-1863) and Virginia Woolf (1882-1941), for female purity and wholesomeness. *It's use indicated that women were expected to be modest, innocent, pure, and angelic.*

GALA CHRISTMAS ISSUE! BEGINNING A NEW 'SPY NOVEL' BY LEN "IPRESS FILE" DEIGHTON
FACT AND FICTION BY JAMES BALDWIN, BUDD SCHULBERG, KINGSLEY AMIS, MACKINLAY
KANTOR, HARRY GOLDEN, ARTHUR C. CLARKE, SAMMY DAVIS JR., PEARL BUCK, KENNETH
TYNAN, JOHN GUNTHER, BROOKS ATKINSON, ROBERT RUARK, MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE • PLUS
"THE GIRLS OF TAHITI" • "PLAYBOY ON THE TOWN IN LONDON" AND THE CELEBRITY-
STUDED, SWITCHED-ON SCENE AT THE LONDON PLAYBOY CLUB • OUR BIGGEST ISSUE YET!



Women as Angels

First of all, she must discard the whole trashy dream of being an angel. She must face the truth that women are no better than men, not more delicate, not more "spiritual," etc., etc. She must face the truth and be glad of it. She must realize her own ability to think clearly, to act promptly, and with logic. She must remind herself that nature is impartial in allotting brains. The chances of inheritance are equal and the girl may inherit the superior mind.

Alas that our mothers insisted upon equal rights and at the same time did not realize that this meant giving up the privileges attendant upon being angels!

At the height of her career, Pearl S. Buck was often writing about the lives of women in the United States, although she always used her knowledge and experience of China's society as a jumping off point to discuss controversial topics such as the role of women.

She compared the social challenges faced by Chinese women, *including female infanticide, arranged marriages, marriage at an early age, subservience to the male, isolation to the home, and the custom of foot-binding* to the various challenges faced by American women existing within a differing societal structure.

Pearl Buck also tackled many of these difficult topics in her novels. She used her female characters to illustrate the various hardships faced and their effects on the lives of the women whose stories she told.



O-lan

The Pulitzer and Nobel prize-winning book, *The Good Earth*, partly focuses on the story of the ultimate “earth mother”, O-lan, a slave who is purchased by a man to become his first wife. She accepts her life of servitude and sacrifice as she works for her family’s survival. She deals with the terrible conditions leading to infanticide, with foot-binding, and with concubines and polygamy while she is never fully appreciated as the wise center of her family.

A stylized illustration of a woman in profile, facing right. She has dark hair pulled back and is wearing a red high-collared garment under a greyish-blue outer layer. She is carrying a large, woven basket on her back. The background is a soft, hazy landscape with mountains.

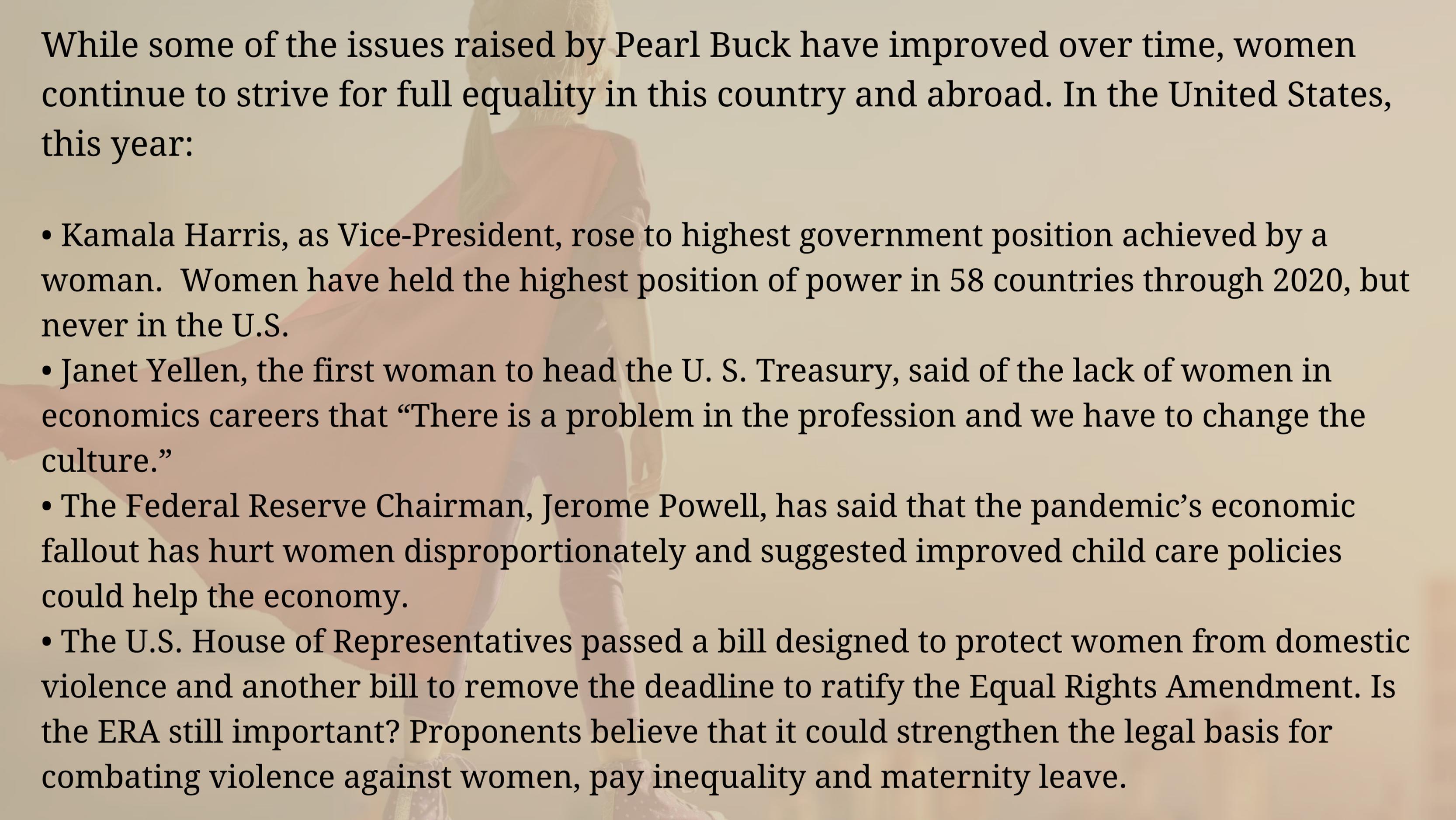
Jade

Dragon Seed is a fictional novel about the Japanese attack on Nanjing in the late 1930's and the humiliating and brutal treatment of the Chinese by the invaders. Jade is a young wife, happy in her traditional role, who takes heroic actions against the Japanese occupying her country. She and her sister-in-law, Mayli, are portrayed as modern, free-thinking Chinese women who are also forward-thinking in the way Pearl Buck is advocating for women in America.



Suzanne

In *This Proud Heart*, set completely in the United States, main character Susan Gaylord is an especially brilliant woman, struggling between her traditional role of wife and mother and her career as a sculptor, as she navigates through two unhappy marriages and care of her children. Pearl Buck examines the limits faced by women in America and concludes the novel with Susan's realization that she can't have both a traditional marriage and a career in America of the late 1930's.



While some of the issues raised by Pearl Buck have improved over time, women continue to strive for full equality in this country and abroad. In the United States, this year:

- Kamala Harris, as Vice-President, rose to highest government position achieved by a woman. Women have held the highest position of power in 58 countries through 2020, but never in the U.S.
- Janet Yellen, the first woman to head the U. S. Treasury, said of the lack of women in economics careers that “There is a problem in the profession and we have to change the culture.”
- The Federal Reserve Chairman, Jerome Powell, has said that the pandemic’s economic fallout has hurt women disproportionately and suggested improved child care policies could help the economy.
- The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill designed to protect women from domestic violence and another bill to remove the deadline to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment. Is the ERA still important? Proponents believe that it could strengthen the legal basis for combating violence against women, pay inequality and maternity leave.

Ways to

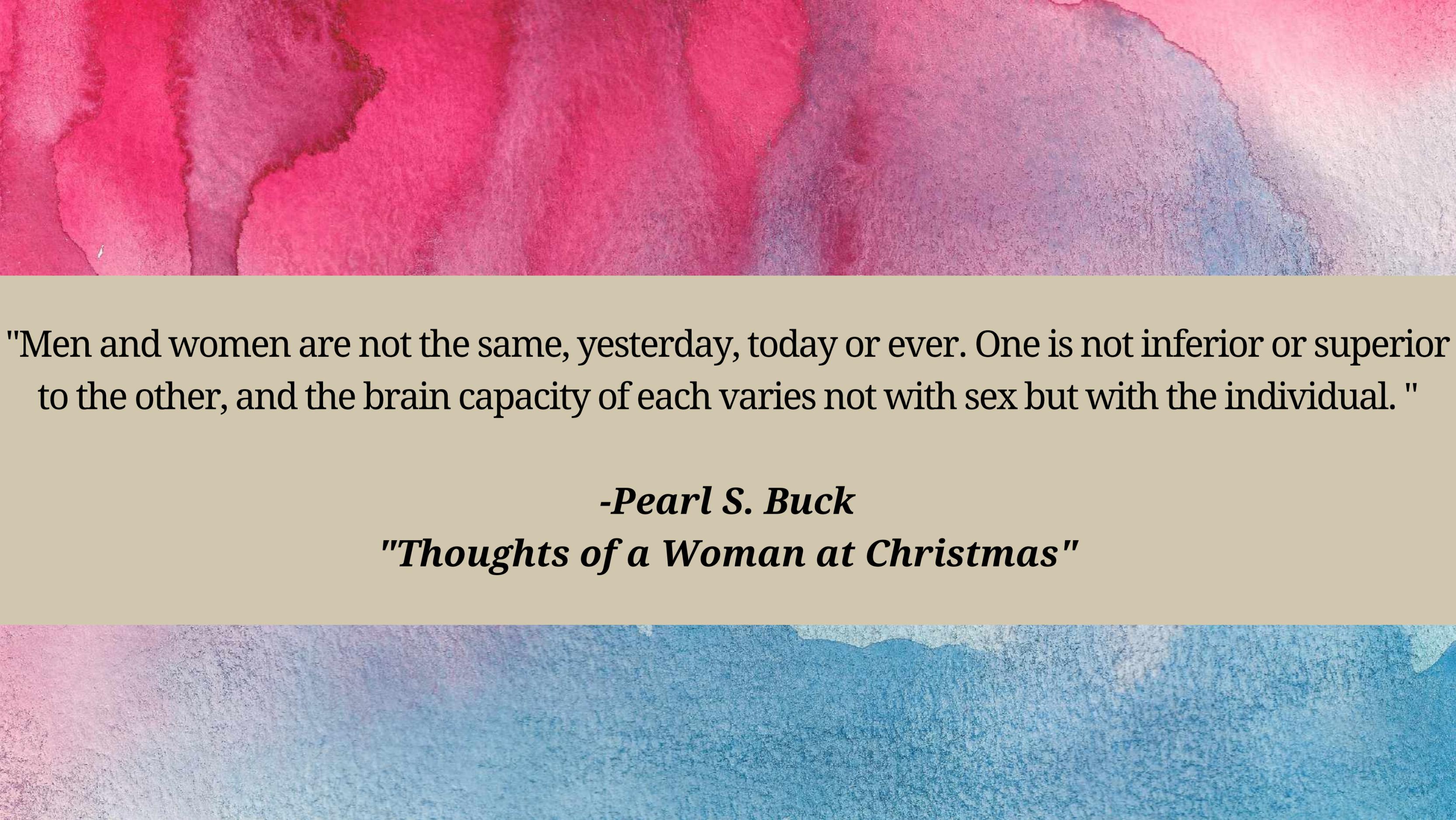
Take Action

Learn more about women's rights <https://www.archives.gov/women>

Become involved <https://www.unwomen.org/en/get-involved> in women's rights

Read *Amazons, Abolitionists, and Activists: A Graphic History of Women's Fight for Their Rights*

Empower young women by volunteering for Girls For A Change



"Men and women are not the same, yesterday, today or ever. One is not inferior or superior to the other, and the brain capacity of each varies not with sex but with the individual. "

-Pearl S. Buck

"Thoughts of a Woman at Christmas"