

Research proposal on the woman's role as wife and mother in the 1870s

[Law](#), [Criminal Justice](#)



Until the mid-1800s in the United States, the woman's role as subservient to the man as wife and mother changed little. As was the case from the earliest history of human civilization, most women typically have enjoyed less social, economic and legal rights than their male counterparts. In fact, women were generally recognized as having the same intellectual abilities, with being a wife and mother as their most significant professions. As in Victorian England, a woman lost her ownership of property upon marriage and if a married woman left her husband, she was economically and socially powerless. Women who did not marry normally became teachers, governesses or domestics, since these were the only positions open to them. Many women became prostitutes, because they could not find any other options (Hymowitz & Weissman, 1978).

In the mid-1800s, equity laws began to slowly change, and the American woman began to gain more legal rights, such as being able to sue her husband. Certain states, such as Mississippi, New York and Massachusetts passed laws that allowed women to retain their property apart from those of their husband after marriage. However, in cases of divorce, the husband usually received legal oversight of the children and property. Even when the 14th Amendment was passed in 1868, all persons had the right to equal protection under the law, but "persons" was defined as "male," not female. In 1870, once again the 15th Amendment said everyone could vote, but only males (Hymowitz & Weissman, 1978).

However, from 1870 on, due in part to the 15th Amendment, there was a greater emphasis on women's rights, with incremental changes made. More

universities allowed women to attend graduate school. In 1878, the Susan B. Anthony Amendment to grant women the vote was first introduced to members of the U. S Congress, and 1887, the U. S. Senate voted on woman's suffrage; the vote lost, and 25 Senators did not even vote (Hymowitz & Weissman, 1978). The legal road to equality was very slow moving. What appeared to move women's equality at greater speed was their growing economic power. Increasing numbers of women were entering the job market, and a growing amount in nontraditional roles in manufacturing.

Thesis Statement: If women did not enter the job market in growing numbers and become more economically independent in the late 1800s and early 1900s, their status as subservient to men would have legally remained the same for a much longer time.

Reference

Hymowitz, C., & Weissman, M. (1978). *History of Women in America*. New York: Bantam.