

Women in american history essay examples

[Countries](#), [United States](#)



Question 1

Benjamin Wadsworth in his treatise, *A Well Ordered Family*, describes what the Puritan society deems to be the most ideal composition of the family. He begins by explaining the need for unity between a husband and his wife, which must be founded on love for one another. Up to this point, he captures the very essence of all types of families throughout history, whereby both men and women endeavored to be each other's companions and, by extension, helpers. One of the most luminous figures of American history that epitomizes this concept is Eleanor Roosevelt. She was the wife of the 32nd President of the United States, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. In her capacity as the American First Lady, she stood beside her husband whenever he had to make seemingly impossible decisions. In line with Wadsworth's conceptions about the ideal union between a husband and wife, Eleanor Roosevelt was fully devoted to her husband and she is noted as one of the most fervent supporters of the long-enduring policies of the American government at the time.

Foremost, she was behind the President in his novel approach to the Great Depression that hit the United States in the 1930s and devastated the economy. The President's first pragmatic approach to the economic disaster was the highly-acclaimed series of economic policies collectively known as the New Deal. In this proposed New Deal, the government set out to provide relief for the economically challenged and the unemployed through a set of relief programs. It is this central aspect of the New Deal solution that Eleanor Roosevelt ardently supported. She became the de facto female face of the program by championing its full implementation to reflect the vast majority

of the women population. In this regard, she could see that most women in the country easily fell into either the poor or unemployed category.

Wadsworth goes on to suggest that the role of men and women in the family should take a slightly different turn. He arbitrarily assigns men the duty of being kind and loving to their wives while admonishing the women to be kind and obedient. It is this second idea that stirs up some trouble. In such a definition, women are relegated to subservience while the men are made the dominant ones in the relationship. Obedience essentially requires that the obeying party submit to the will of the person issuing the commands. The case of Eleanor Roosevelt paints a slightly different picture of her approach. She appears to support her husband, the President. As noted earlier, she supported his New Deal proposal and the coalition that was formed from thereafter. It might appear as though she was submitting to the will of her husband, but a closer look at the situation shows that she kept her own counsel.

First, her husband did not specify that women were to be given any preferential treatment in the proposed economic plan. She, however, made her case to the effect that women were at a slightly greater disadvantage than men, which must be reflected in the implementation of the New Deal. In this regard, she set out to work with like-minded individuals and women rights institutions to ensure that the women were not short-changed. This essentially catapulted her to the status of a national civil rights activist, with more focus being on her efforts to bolster women's rights.

Question 2

The place of women in American history is sometimes shrouded in controversy as the sheer extent of misogyny within the society of the time becomes apparent. Even before these women were allowed to vote, they still managed to influence their societies in other subtler ways, some of which might have escaped the annals of history. In the 17th century, for instance, there are various documented cases of brave women who stood up for what they believed in against strong currents of oppression from the adversely patriarchal social systems of the time. One such woman was Anne Hutchinson. She is touted as one of the most defining female figures of the America of the 17th century. She stood up against what the Puritan system of the time considered acceptable and orthodox.

In the middle of the century, Hutchinson began to voice her discontent openly towards the theological doctrines of the then Puritan orthodoxy. She made it clear to everyone that she did not favor the popularly held belief that sanctification of the unholy by the ordained powers of the church trounced God's infinite grace. This was in line with the Reformation efforts that were prevalent at the time as a means of dissenting against the orthodox teachings of the Catholic Church. Hutchinson felt that free grace was more important as a Puritan doctrine and that it was intrinsically inclusive of a vast majority of people. For instance, people needed to believe that God was with them as individuals and that He did not require the confines of a church to help His creation. This was an uplifting message to the disenfranchised masses who heard it.

Other heroines of American history that existed before the reality of suffrage

dawned on the American women include Mother Anne Lee. Anne Lee was renowned as a religious leader at a time when few women were allowed to do so. She began her religious ministry towards the end of the 18th century dubbed the Shaking Quakers, or simply the Shakers. This move, though entirely religious, is seen as a step forward towards the realization of women's rights as appertains to their leadership abilities. Having secured a place within the Christian establishment as a public preacher and church minister, she effectively opened the way for other women to exercise the same skills. The Christian Orthodoxy of the time forbade women from the engaging in events such as preaching in public since those activities were arguably not sanctioned by the early church leaders and founding fathers. At the turn of the 19th century, there was a similar religious revolution among women taking shape in America. The Christian Church was engaged in missionary activities aimed at spreading the religion throughout the world. Women were seldom considered for roles such as those of missionaries since the Christian orthodoxy did not sanction it. Nevertheless, one woman stood out from the rest by the name of Ann Hasseltine Judson. She was one of the first American women to be selected by the Church as a missionary of the faith throughout Europe and Asia. Her most notable work in that capacity was when she served as a missionary in Burma. During that time, she undertook to translate some core biblical texts to Burmese for the convenience of her Burmese hosts. She translated the books of Daniel and Jonah into Burmese, as well as developing a Christian catechism in the same language.

The 20th century saw a similar wake of women-led revolutions against the

rigid and stifling social systems of the time. One notable example was Alice Freeman Palmer. She rose to become the first woman leader of a nationally acclaimed institution of higher learning against a backlash of discontent among a section of society that did not even favor the education of women. Her role as the President of Wellesley College gave credence to the notion that women are equally capable of leadership just like their male counterparts.

Question 3

Judging by the myriad examples of success stories involving women in American history, there are several key lessons to be learnt by both genders. The first lesson I consider to be the most vital is that of education. In essence, women in American history have been associated with subservience in a male-dominated world. This notion was however challenged on several occasions by women who believed in their own power to learn. One key example of this drastic shift in the social psyche is Alice Freeman. She began her journey towards self realization at a tender age when she is said to have taught herself at school. She later rose to become the head of Wellesley College, which effectively made her the first woman to lead a mainstream institution of higher learning.

Similarly, women leaders have revolutionized the primitive ideals that women are only as good as the men in their lives determine. This meant that women could only serve as the submissive subordinates of the men, since they were not thought to be able to lead. This approach to leadership further highlights a deep sense of denigration towards women as the inferior gender. Several prominent women leaders in American history such as

Eleanor Roosevelt have served to shift this skewed mental attitude towards a more inclusive social paradigm that recognizes the capacity of women to lead. She served as part of the New Deal coalition in America at a time when the country was facing an economic calamity. Her astute leadership during the period earned her a permanent position in American history as one of the leaders of a social revolution that led to the enfranchisement of women. Other women leaders were essentially instrumental in changing the orthodox view that only men had the right and authority to preside over religious events. This effectively meant that women were not allowed to preach and present sermons to the public, thereby leaving their spiritual wellbeing at the hands of the men. Even when a woman would disagree with an aspect of the doctrines fronted by the Christian orthodoxy, she was required to keep those opinions to herself. As such, women voices were muffled by the views and decisions of the gravely patriarchal religious establishments. One example of a woman who changed this ideology is Anne Hutchinson. She became one of the few women to openly dissent against the ideologies of the male-dominated church of the time. She challenged the focus of the church on such matters as “ justification by sanctification” over what later became known as “ free grace.” Her open dissent gave impetus to the fight for women to be recognized as equal members of the church.