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A Report in Depth

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First Edition

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The American Woman 1987–88: A Report in Depth is the first edition of what is planned to be an annual report on the status of women in this country. It is designed to keep readers abreast of changes in the roles of American women and their families, and to analyze the social, political, and economic consequences of those changes. "What has happened to the traditional family?" "How many women are working for pay and what are they doing?" "Who's watching the children?" "What is the status of the gender gap? . . . the pay gap? . . . the parental leave bill?" "How much progress are women making in politics? . . . in business? . . . in the military?"

These queries are typical of those that are asked of the Women's Research and Education Institute (WREI), the non-partisan research arm of the bipartisan Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues. WREI's special mandate is to channel sound, scholarly research on women into the national policy-making process, but we have also found ourselves serving as a clearinghouse for a growing number of journalists, women's advocates, government workers, union employees, aides to state and local officials, writers, and students who turn to us for information on women's issues.

Many call us needing an answer in a hurry: a reporter has a deadline to meet; a state official is giving a speech that evening; a student has a paper due the next morning. All that they need is a quick number or two. But others who contact us are attempting to marshal facts, evaluations, and expert opinion on a variety of subjects for a variety of reasons, whether it be to help them make a case for legislation, or for changing a company's leave policy, or for the establishment of a new social program. They usually not only want to know "what," but "how," and "why": How are families coping with the changes in women's roles? How has the labor force accommodated the influx of working women? Why hasn't the wage gap narrowed more over time? The answers require evaluations as well as unadorned statistics.

The inquiries WREI receives reflect a growing interest in women's issues throughout American society. More and more politicians at every level of government are seeking the "women's perspective" on the prevailing issues of the day. Employers are increasingly interested in how they can best respond to the unique needs of women workers with family responsibilities. Educators are concerned with how best to encourage more women to enter and remain in such fields as science and engineering. While we at WREI by no means labor under the illusion that we do or could handle all of the public's information needs regarding women, we do compile a great deal of useful information that we feel should be made accessible to a wider audience. To achieve this aim, we decided to publish an annual volume, pulling together the latest data and thinking on a range of subjects of concern to women.

When we brought this idea to colleagues whose judgment we trust and who themselves might refer to a resource of this kind, their reaction was enthusiastic: a comprehensive report on women and the changes in women's lives would be a very useful resource indeed, especially if it were updated regularly. As one whom we consulted put it, the report is "one of those

ideas that is so instantly understood that it immediately makes you wonder why someone hasn't already done it." We then submitted a proposal to the Ford Foundation and were rewarded with a grant that put us to work.

We thought long and hard about what an annual report on the status of women should contain. Just as those who call or write to WREI for information have various needs, so, too, would the readers of our book. From the start, our goal has been to appeal to as many types of users as possible by presenting information in several formats and on those subjects that, in our experience, are of particular interest to the public.

We thought it important for the first edition to provide a broad overview of how the lives of women have changed during the course of the twentieth century, with special emphasis on their roles in the family and in the economy. Thus, this volume examines the evolution of women as mothers, wives, workers, and political activists to bring the reader up to date and set the stage for editions to come. The authors of the book's four main chapters discuss in considerable detail the causes and consequences of some of the predominant historical and contemporary trends that have shaped and are shaping the way women conduct their lives today. For the reader who is interested in understanding how and why the status of women has changed, these chapters provide not only a wealth of information but food for thought. Although not all readers will necessarily agree with the perspectives or emphases of the authors, few are likely to disagree on one point that emerges from this book: its title is in a sense misleading, for there is no "typical" American woman!

To assist readers who want information in a hurry, we have provided highlights that summarize the key points

in the chapters, "Women in Twentieth Century America," "Women and the Family," "Women and the Economy," and "The Women's Movement in Recent American Politics." And to complement and augment the broad sweep of the long chapters, we have included 14 short chapters, each of which evaluates, close-up, so to speak, the status of women in specific fields or situations, such as the military, business, the theatre, or science.

The section "1986 in Review" lists major legislative, judicial, social, and economic events pertaining to women that occurred during that year. And the statistical appendix, using the most up-to-date data available, paints a picture of women today in charts, tables, and graphs. Readers who prefer not to deal with the detailed numbers in the appendix may find the highlights to the appendix especially helpful.

Our guiding principle for this first edition has always been to serve many purposes for our readers. For those who already know-or think they know-the story of women in America and want the exact numbers to confirm (or, perhaps, refute) their knowledge, we have provided facts and figures. including trend data. For other readers, we have sought to offer the story itself, told by informed observers bringing their personal perspectives and expertise to bear on the shifting landscape of women's lives. We have tried to be comprehensive, but, of course, no single reference volume could answer every question that the serious, or even the casual, reader might ask. Topics in The American Woman 1987-88 reflect our best judgment as to what might be most useful to the most people. Nevertheless, despite the scope of this volume, we have not been able to address a number of important issues. such as women and health, women and aging, or women and religion. Many of our readers may feel that some of the sub-

jects we have covered—for example, women in broadcasting, or Latina women—deserve more than just a few pages. We agree, and in future editions we intend to expand on many themes treated only briefly here, in addition to generating new material.

Gaps notwithstanding, we are pleased with the wealth of information that we have been able to assemble in this report. We hope that readers will be too.

In the acknowledgments that follow, WREI's Executive Director, Betty Parsons Dooley, makes clear the extent to which so many people contributed so willingly to this book. I wish to add my particular thanks to Anne Stone of WREI, whose exceptional writing ability is reflected on virtually every page. Editing this volume has been a challenge, but has been a far more agreeable one than it would have been without her most willing assistance.

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