

Debating New Roles for Women

Primary Sources

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In-Depth Resources: Unit 7

Name _____

Date _____

The debate over woman suffrage was part of a larger debate on the roles of women and men in society. Should women work outside the home? Should women go to college? Should women and men share housekeeping chores? Women disagreed over these questions. In the first excerpt, Rena Rietveld Verdun, a farmwoman in Illinois, argues that women should enter higher education. She herself, though, went to school only through the fifth grade. In the second excerpt, Mrs. Gilbert E. Jones argues against woman suffrage. To support her argument, she looks at the impact of women's votes in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho—the first states to grant suffrage to women.

Rena Rietveld Verdun

Why, men seem to think that the women have no

business on the face of the earth except to work and slave for them. . . . Women are treated something like

this: after a woman is married, that good master of

hers takes her, builds four walls around her and tells

her, "Now little woman you just mind your business

in here, and see to it that everything is kept in good

order and that the meals are prepared just as I want

them, and that nothing is prepared that I don't like.

And if you need any money, come to your Master for

it. And never you mind what's going on outside of

those walls; that's none of your business. We can do

very well without you." And he expects the woman to

bow her poor head and say amen to all this. . . .

Girls, get an education and escape slavery.

from Gerda Lerner, ed., *The Female Experience* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1977), 250.

Mrs. Gilbert E. Jones

Have the saloons been abolished in any of the suf-

frage states? No.

Do men still drink and gamble? Yes, without a

doubt.

Have the slums been done away with? Indeed no.

Are the streets better cleaned in the states where

women vote? No, they are quite as bad as in New

York City and elsewhere. . . .

Have women purified politics? No, not in the least.

Have women voted voluntarily? Some do; but

thousands are carried to the polls in autos and

carriages; otherwise they would not vote.

Critical Thinking

1. According to Verdun, how do men view the role of women?
2. Which four states had granted women full suffrage by the time Jones wrote her speech?
3. **Making Generalizations** According to Verdun, how will education affect the relationship between women and men?
4. **Making Generalizations** According to Jones, how significant has granting woman suffrage been in changing public policies?

Main Ideas

1. Has pure food and pure milk been established by the woman's vote? Not at all.
2. Have women's wages been increased because women vote? No, indeed.
3. Have women equal pay for equal work? Not any more than in New York City.
4. Are there laws on the statute books that would give women equal pay for equal work? No, and never will be.
5. Are women treated with more respect in the four suffrage states than elsewhere? Not at all.

from Mrs. Gilbert E. Jones, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Supplement XXXV (May, 1910), 6–9. Reprinted in Thomas A. Bailey, ed., *The American Spirit*, Vol. 2 (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1963), 651–653.