

HAPPY HOT SUMMER BROTHERS AND SISTERS. LABOR DAY IS HERE!!

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Labor Day is supposed to be a celebration of all who work for a living and a reminder of the hard-won workplace rights that we hold. We must consider how we got this last summer holiday. There were contributions from many of our Brothers and Sisters in the labor movement.

The First Labor holiday was celebrated in New York City on September 5, 1882. It was organized by the Central Labor Union and nearly 10,000 workers participated in the march. This was repeated for several years to encourage labor organizations around the country to celebrate the “workingmen’s holiday.” In February 1887, Oregon became the first state to officially recognize workers with a Labor Day.

This holiday is a reminder of women’s labor and employment rights. It’s a time to consider the inclusion of women in the workplace; recognition of the discrimination against women on the basis of sex and the understanding that the fight for women’s equality is not just a women’s issue. Women are truly seeing how the changes in the laws and rules are having a direct impact on our future. It’s important that we remain vigilant and alert and engaged in the impending decisions relating to us.

Women are involved in all parts of society, but some matters affect and touch women more than others. The “glass ceiling” is a popular phrase that women have been striving to break through for decades. It refers to gender equality, primarily in the workforce, and great progress has been made over the years. It is no longer uncommon for women to run businesses, even the biggest corporations, or hold job titles in the upper ranks of management. Many women also do jobs that are traditionally male-dominated. Yet, for all the progress that has been made, sexism can still be found. It may be more subtle than it once was, but it makes an appearance in all parts of society, from education and the workforce to the media and politics.

Here are a few examples of the notable contributions made on by our Sisters.

In Massachusetts in 1843, nearly 50 years before Labor Day became a federal holiday, Sarah Bagley of the Female Labor Reform Association organized textile workers to appear before state lawmakers. The women offered testimony about workplace health and safety risks, and petitioned for a 10-hour workday.

Freed black women who worked as laundresses in Mississippi formed a union in 1866. They subsequently went on strike to demand higher wages. And, in 1869, women shoe stitchers from six states formed the first national women’s labor organization, the Daughters of St. Crispin.

In 1881, the Knights of Labor became the first large-scale national labor federation to admit women. The first female chapter, the United Garment Workers of America, was organized by a woman named Lenora O’Reilly. She was influential during the “Uprising of the 20,000,” which followed the dismissal of female seamstresses in garment factories for union organizing. Unfortunately, this did not signal broad acceptance of women in labor organizations. When the American Federation of Labor was founded in 1886, its first president, Samuel Gompers, denied women membership.

Although Albert Parsons is credited with founding the International Working People’s Association in 1883, he did so with a key partner: his wife Lucy Parsons. She would later help found the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, which was a coalition of seven smaller organizations, and the Industrial Workers of the World. She also was instrumental in linking the plight of workers to larger issues of poverty through her 1915 Chicago Hunger Demonstrations. Just before the turn of the century, Josephine Lowell and Jane Addams launched the National Consumers’ League to improve working conditions for women.

As of 2016, women make up 47% of the labor force and are the sole or primary breadwinners for 40% of families with children, according to the Shriver Center. Almost every occupation has a wage gap which affects women, and women of color the most. According to National Women’s Law Center, two-thirds of low wage workers are women, and nearly half of low wage workers are women of color.

In industries where women have become well integrated, they still remain at the bottom of the pay scale. And as we have seen with the #MeToo movement, women are at risk of facing discrimination and harassment at work, which leads to further mental and physical harm. So go have a fun day at the beach—but don’t forget all of the men and women, past and present, who dedicated their lives to a better life for all of us. Take some time on Labor Day to consider how far women have come, and how there still I more work to do!