

# Women in Sports

Late 1800s-1970s



# Notable Female Athletes



Gertrude Ederle, first woman to swim across the English Channel, 1926



Wilma Rudolph, first American woman to win three gold medals in the track and field competition, 1960.



Kathrine Switzer, first woman to run the Boston Marathon, 1967



Althea Gibson, tennis player and pro golfer, first African American to win a Grand Slam title, 1956



Alice Coachman, set a world record of 5'6 & 1/8" in the high jump finals at London Olympics, first black woman to win an Olympic gold medal, 1948.



Babe Didrikson Zaharias, who excelled in golf, basketball, baseball and track and field. She won two gold medals in track and field at the 1932 Summer Olympics, before turning to professional golf and winning 10 LPGA major championships.





Women's opportunities in sports have in many ways been a reflection of & response to opportunities in society.

# Women's Sports in the 19th Century



- Before to the 1870s, activities for women were recreational, non-competitive, & informal (emphasized physical activity not competition.)
  - Belief in the 1800s was that *each human had a fixed amount of energy. If this energy was used for physical & intellectual tasks at the same time, it could be hazardous.*
  - Physical activity for a woman was thought to be especially hazardous because during menstruation she was “periodically weakened.”
- In the 19th century, women’s modesty was valued over physicality.
  - Elite women did not exert themselves.

Why might people say bicycles were dangerous for women?



Students, write your response!



## Bicycles: An Instrument of Feminism or Terror?

- Biking was adopted by many middle & upper class men and women in the 1890s. But it was controversial for women.
  - For men, it was a novelty and a cheap, fast form of transportation.
  - For women, it meant greater mobility, a way to escape the home and experience the city on their own terms.
    - As context, for many women, it was the first time in their lives that they were able to control their own vehicle & travel without the supervision of a male driver or chaperone!

# Opposition to the Bicycle

**Anti-bicycle movement:** Many (male) doctors gave all sorts of reasons to convince women not to ride bikes. They argued that:

- Biking was excessively taxing & unsuitable for women.
- Any kind of exertion had the potential to damage a woman's future ability to bear children.
  - One pamphlet at the time declared that *"women are, as a rule, physically smaller & weaker than men; their brain is much lighter; and they are in every way unfitted for the same amount of bodily or mental labour that men are able to undertake."*
- Biking would make women sexually aggressive & adventurous.



## THE BICYCLE FACE.

Bicycles are responsible for many things in our social life. The bicycle feet and the bicycle hands are already enregistered in medical annals. Now, says the *Daily Telegraph*, a doctor has discovered the bicycle face. Why do men, and women too, acquire such 'anxious, weary, worn, haggard looks, compared with the time when they used to indulge in croquet, boating, or lawn tennis? The first answer will probably be that they come from too late hours, or the worry of business, or are the effects of the ball-room. Mistake. These looks are due to the bicycle. So much anxiety is developed in learning to ride the popular vehicle, and, when that science has been acquired, in avoiding the accidents of various kinds which it invites, that it insensibly affects the muscles of the face, and gives even the openest and blindest physiognomy an eager, careworn expression, which is retained during the other hours of life. At least, the doctor—an M.D. of London—says so, and he ought to know.

# Opposition to the Bicycle (cont.)

## Another “medical” concern:

- It would lead to “bicycle face,” exhaustion, insomnia, heart palpitations, headaches, & depression.

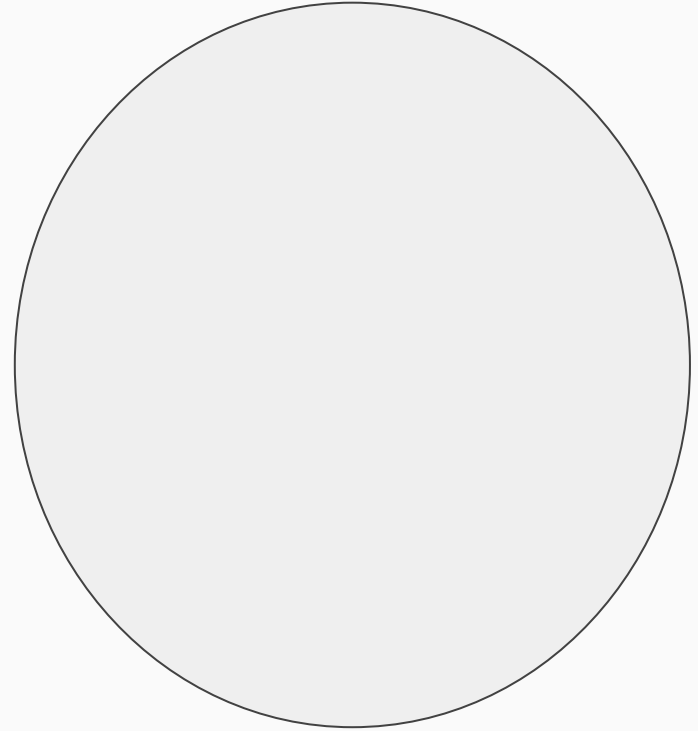


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Draw a picture of what you imagine "bicycle face" to look like:



Students, draw anywhere on this slide!



THE AWFUL EFFECTS OF VELOCIPEDING

Biking

What is this cartoon saying are the “awful effects” of cycling for women cyclists?

Students, write your response!

# Why the resistance?

In part, men feared losing control & seeing the traditional norms/roles turned upside-down.

Consider this late 19th century poem:

*Mother's out upon her bike, enjoying of the fun,*

*Sister and her beau have gone to take a little run.*

*The housemaid & the cook are both a-riding on their wheels;*

*And Daddy's in the kitchen a-cooking of the meals.*



# Bicycles: An Instrument of Feminism?

*fem · i · ni · sm*

(n.) /ˈfemɪnɪzəm/

Origin: late 19th century, from French (féminisme).

The advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality.



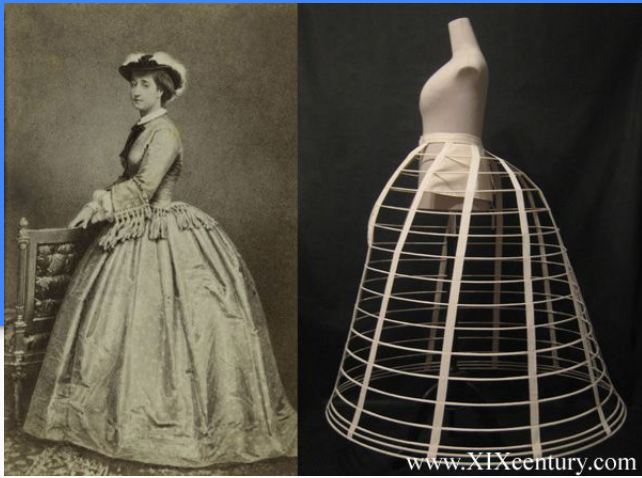
**How could you make the case that bicycles helped to advance women's rights?**

*"Let me tell you what I think of bicycling," said Susan B. Anthony in 1896. "I think it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world. I stand and rejoice every time I see a woman ride by on a wheel."*



Students, write your response!

# Bloomers vs Hooped Dresses



**What impact do you think that changes in women's clothing in the late 19th century may have had on women's level and type of activity?**



Students, write your response!



# Women's Sports During World War II (1940s)

- During WWII, millions of American men enlisted in the military. Many women left their positions as homemakers to join the military or fill the void left in the workforce.
- The war years helped build women's self-esteem & self-confidence, which in turn helped to fuel the movement for women's equal rights.
- Many women believed that if they could compete successfully in the workforce that they could also compete in sports.



The  
All-American  
Girls'  
Professional  
Baseball  
League



- By 1942 many minor league teams had disbanded as men went overseas to fight. Many Major League Baseball parks had nobody left to play.

- Philip K. Wrigley, who had inherited the Chicago Cubs franchise from his father, came up with a solution - a women's softball league.

- The league was started in the spring of 1943 and was the first professional women's sports league.





Rosie the Riveter promoted the image of a strong & feminine woman.



Look at the All-Star team above - how is the league also promoting a similar image?



Students, write your response!

## Expectations of the players:

The women were expected to be highly skilled players AND meet high moral standards & rules of conduct.

- Uniforms: one-piece short-skirt flared dress (designed after figure skating costumes), satin tights, knee-high baseball socks, and baseball hat.
- Women were required to attend night classes after practice where they were taught proper etiquette for all situations, personal hygiene, manners/social skills, dress code, and how to select clothes, sit, walk, speak, apply makeup.



# Expectations of the players

- High priority was placed on maintaining femininity
- Wrigley hired Helena Rubenstein's Beauty Salon to meet with players at spring training



# Rules of Conduct - a few examples...

- ALWAYS appear in feminine attire when not actively engaged in practice or playing ball. This regulation continues through the playoffs for all, even though your team is not participating. AT NO TIME MAY A PLAYER APPEAR IN THE STANDS IN HER UNIFORM, OR WEAR SLACKS OR SHORTS IN PUBLIC.
- Boyish bobs are not permissible and in general your hair should be well groomed at all times with longer hair preferable to short haircuts. Lipstick should always be on.
- All social engagements, eating quarters, and living spaces must be approved by chaperone. Legitimate requests for dates can be allowed by chaperones.
- Players will not be allowed to drive their cars past their city's limits without the special permission of their manager. Each team will travel as a unit via method of travel provided for the league.
- FINES OF \$5 FOR FIRST OFFENSE, \$10 FOR SECOND, AND SUSPENSION FOR THIRD, WILL AUTOMATICALLY BE IMPOSED FOR BREAKING ANY OF THE ABOVE RULES

# Expectations of the players

- The league promoted the idea of the wholesome "All American Girl" (the symbolic girl next door in spikes)
  - Formed a V for victory before each game down baselines as the "Star Spangled Banner" played.
  - Visited wounded veterans in Army Hospitals.
  - Played exhibition games to support the Red Cross & armed forces.
- Message of patriotism & service helped to normalize the addition of women to the workforce.



How could you make the case that the league was BOTH a step forward for women in sports AND a sign that not much had changed for women in terms of how society thought of them?

Step forward for women	Limited signs of progress for women



Students, draw anywhere on this slide!

# Legacy of the League



- Teams were popular during the war and post-war era. The league operated until 1954.
  - Rationing of gas during the war forced people to stay close to home – women's baseball became a popular form of entertainment.
  - The AAGPBL host cities started Junior Leagues for young girls 14 years and up.
  - An estimated 3,000 people attended each women's baseball game.
  - The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League gave more than 600 female athletes the opportunity to play at the professional level.
- When WWII ended, organizations for women in sport began to increase.

# What impact did working during the war have on women?

In the words of Helen St. Aubin, a member of the AAGPBL: *“this experience allowed me to be independent, to have my own money and make my own decisions at a time when few women did that, let alone girls. Women were supposed to be in the kitchen, taking care of kids. They weren’t supposed to be considered independent people. That’s what was so great about it. We got to make choices.”*



Inez Sauer, a Boeing tool clerk said: *“My mother warned me when I took the job that I would never be the same. She said, ‘You will never want to go back to being a housewife.’ At that time I didn’t think it would change a thing. But she was right, it definitely did... I found a freedom and an independence that I had never known. After the war I could never go back to playing bridge again, being a club woman...when I knew there were things you could use your mind for. The war changed my life completely.”*



Students, write your response!



Post-war: Back to the kitchen & the myth of the "Happy Housewife"



# The Happy Housewife...





How do you think many of those women who worked in factories and played baseball during the war felt with their new jobs as wives and mothers?



Students, write your response!

# Betty Friedan calls into question the happy housewife narrative (The Feminine Mystique, 1963)

“The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered in the middle of the twentieth century in the United States. Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night – she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question – ‘Is this all?’”



# Women's Fight for Equality

(Birth of the modern Feminist Movement, late 1960s)

- In the mid to late 1960s, women began forming groups dedicated to increasing awareness of women's situation in society: **National Organization for Women** (NOW), led by Betty Friedan, which advocated for issues like fair pay, equal job opportunities, a more realistic portrayal of women in the media, etc...
- In 1968 feminists staged a highly publicized protest at the Ms. America pageant in Atlantic City. As part of their protest, women ditched what they deemed to be physical manifestations of women's oppression (bras, girdles, curlers, false eyelashes, women's magazines, etc.) in the "freedom trash can," refused press interviews with male reporters and boycotted pageant sponsors for helping to perpetuate a sexist image of womanhood.



# Women's Fight for Equality (The modern Feminist Movement, 1970s)



In 1970, the Women's Strike for Equality took place in more than 90 cities across the U.S.

In 1972, Congress approved passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). The law promised equal treatment for men and women in all spheres, not just employment. (Although the ERA was at first highly supported, it failed to gain ratification by the necessary number of states and was not added to the Constitution.)

Ms. magazine, first published in 1972 by Gloria Steinem, became enormously popular. Ms. was a publication edited by women that spoke to women's issues.

In 1973, Roe v. Wade struck down anti-abortion bans in 30 states.

# Title IX



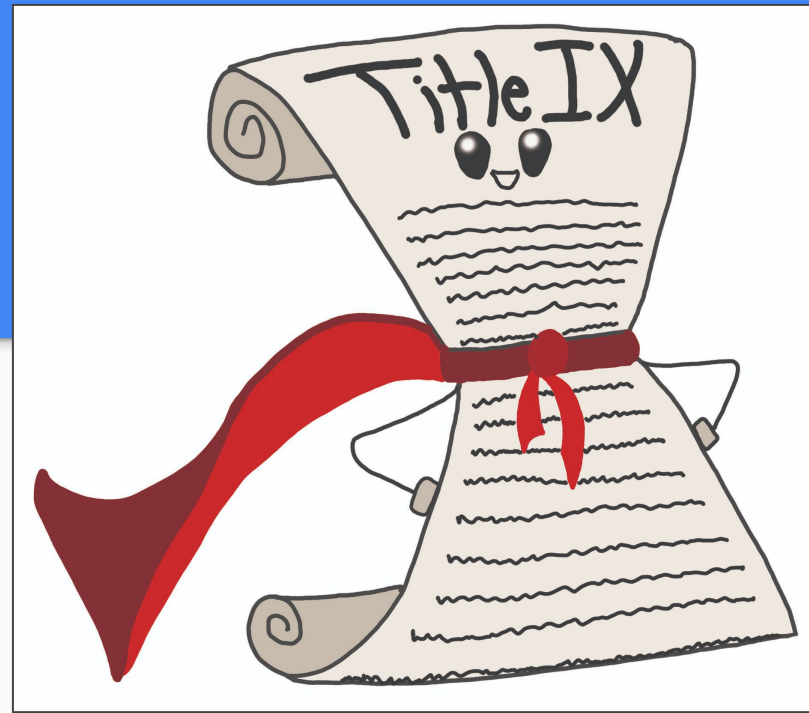
## WHAT IS TITLE IX?

**Title IX is a federal law**, enacted in 1972, stating that no person on the basis of sex shall be “excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.”

# Title IX

Title IX forced all federally funded institutions (high schools, universities, etc.) to have equal funding spent on males and females in the classroom & on the playing field.

Title IX was designed to end sex discrimination in educational/sports programming & increase the amount of opportunities & participation for females in athletics.



In 1971-72, 294,015 girls participated in high school sports nation-wide, just 7% of the total. (In 2018, a record high of 3,415,306 girls participated in high school sports, making up a roughly 43% of the total number of high school athletes.)



# Case Study: Billie Jean King & the "Battle of the Sexes" (professional sports)



I have often been asked whether I am a woman or an athlete. The question is absurd. Men are not asked that. I am an athlete. I am a woman.

— Billie Jean King —

AZ QUOTES

## THIS DAY IN HISTORY

Sept. 20, 1973

**Billie Jean King** beats Bobby Riggs in the tennis "Battle of the Sexes." More than 30,000 people filled the Houston Astrodome, and 50 million watched on TV. The victory challenged skeptics who believed a woman could not beat a man in a sports competition, and King paved the way for a generation of female athletes.

