

## PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

General Editor: William Leuchtenberg, Duke University



Eleanor Roosevelt, left, and Esther Peterson

**The President's Commission on the Status of Women examined discrimination against women and recommended ways to eliminate it. Chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt, the commission studied legislation and services that would help women to fulfill their roles, whether as housewives or as workers, and prompted legislative and executive actions.**

The records of UPA's *President's Commission on the Status of Women* span the life of the commission, December 1961 to October 1963. Here on approximately 11,000 pages are the correspondence, minutes of meetings, reports, and transcripts of the general commission and of each of its seven technical committees: Education, Federal Employment Policies and Practices, Home and Community, Political and Civil Rights, Private Employment, Protective Labor Legislation, and Social Insurance and Taxes. Within the individual series, materials are arranged alphabetically by type of document.

### **Commission Established by Executive Order 10980**

Esther Peterson, assistant secretary of labor for women's affairs, first suggested this commission at a 1961 meeting of trade union women. She developed the idea further and made a formal recommendation to President Kennedy in June 1961. The President established the commission on December 14, 1961, by Executive Order 10980.

A bipartisan organization comprised of twenty-six members, the commission was chaired by Eleanor Roosevelt. Members included educators, writers, leaders of women's organizations, union leaders, five Cabinet members, and members of both houses of Congress. President Kennedy directed several federal departments and agencies to work closely with the commission and to provide the information it needed.

### **Furthers Women's Economic Rights**

The commission's work prompted legislative and executive actions. It spurred an executive order requiring equal employment opportunities for women under federal contracts. In 1963, President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act, which had been endorsed by the commission. The commission also advocated changes in state laws that excluded women from jury duty, from owning property or a business, or from legal control of their earnings. Within a few years every state had established its own commission on the status of women. The national commission also made recommendations to the private sector on issues such as day care, access to education, and wages.

### **Reports on the Status of American Women**

The commission was officially dissolved after transmitting a final report, *American Women*, to President Kennedy on October 11, 1963. To further its objectives, however, the president signed an executive order creating both the Citizen's Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the Interdepartmental Committee on the Status of Women. The Interdepartmental Committee included many people who had worked closely with the original commission and published a second volume on the status of women entitled *American Women, 1963-1968*.

**Source note:** The collection described above was filmed from the Federal Records Collection, John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

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