Women in Texas

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Women have played an important role in shaping Texas. From Caddo leader Santa Adiva to Spanish rancher Maria Hinojosa de Balli, from Anglo pioneers Jane Long and Mary Austin Holley to suffragists Rebecca Henry Hayes and Annette Finnigan, from civil rights advocates Maria Hernandez and Lulu B. White to Governors Miriam Ferguson and Ann Richards, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, and Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, Dr. Wintz surveys the challenges faced by, and contributions made by, women in Lone Star history.«

A cold wind blew across the narrow bay from onshore signaling the arrival of the season's first winter storm. The north winds would bring with them the opportunity to scavenge for oysters in the low tides. The sky was gray, almost the same steel-gray of the gulf waters. Two women and a young child left a crude half-tent shelter that they had rigged at the abandoned stockade and trudged across the dunes to the narrow beach carrying sacks, which they hoped to fill with crabs or oysters for their evening dinner. The younger woman, a black in her early teens, led the way, looking carefully up and down the beach for any signs of Indians as she hurried toward the shore. The other, a white woman, barely twenty and visibly pregnant, followed, her progress slowed by her young daughter who was almost hidden by the tall grasses that stretched halfway up the dunes. As she approached the beach, her eyes scanned the bleak horizon looking for a sail that might signal the return of her husband, or at least bring news of him.

Jane Long, accompanied by her young daughter Ann and a young slave woman known as Kian, spent the winter of 1820-1821 on Bolivar peninsula, while her husband, Dr. James Long of Louisiana, conducted his ill-fated military mission against Spanish forces in Texas. Jane Long and Kian contended with hunger, cold, isolation, and the threat of attacks by hostile Indians. Kian successfully nursed Long through illness and childbirth in mid-December; at one point the women went three days without food before Kian managed to find an oyster reef in the shallows of Galveston Bay. On another occasion the women dressed in military uniforms, hoisted a red flannel petticoat up the flagpole of the abandoned fort, and fired off the fort's old cannon in order to convince a passing band of Karankawa Indians that the post was still manned by soldiers. The two women and two children survived the harsh winter through a combination of courage, ingenuity, and luck. Their ordeal came to an end when a Mexican rider appeared on the deserted beach with the message that the Spanish had captured and executed Dr. Long. Unwilling to let matters rest, Jane Long and her entourage traveled by horseback, first to San Antonio de Béxar and then to Monterrey, seeking to have her husband's "murderers" brought to justice. Although her determination impressed Mexican officials, she received no satisfaction, only polite expressions of sympathy. Finally Long gave up and returned to her home in Mississippi. A year later, however, she would return to Texas, along with Kian and her two daughters, as one of Stephen F. Austin's original "old three hundred" colonists.

Jane Long's courage and determination, as well as the fact that she was perhaps the first Anglo-American woman to come to Texas—and the first to give birth there—have earned her a place in Texas mythology as the "Mother of Texas." Kian, who shared all of the original adventures, returned to Texas with Long (as her servant and life-long companion), and raised her own family in and around the lower Brazos River town of Richmond, can claim with equal justice the title "Mother of Black Texas." However, women's history in Texas predates Jane Long and Kian. Spanish women, Indian women, and the women ancestors of the American Indians influenced the history and development of the area that we know as Texas long before the arrival of Jane Long and Kian. Indeed, Texas history may be viewed as a series of migrations that brought people into the region. Women, of course, participated in each of these successive waves of immigration and influenced the culture established by each set of newcomers.
While archaeologists continue to search for the clues that will settle the debate over when humans first arrived in North America and subsequently in Texas, there is no debate over the fact that women played a significant role in Texas's earliest cultures. Whether these first inhabitants came 12,000 years ago or 25,000 years ago, the role that women played in early cultures is fairly well known. (Our knowledge of these first inhabitants of Texas comes from the work of archaeologists and anthropologists who have examined the artifacts of early cultures, and from anthropologists who have studied nineteenth- and twentieth-century cultures with economic, social, and technological practices similar to those of earlier cultures.)

Paleo Americans, as the predecessors of the American Indians are generally termed, lived by hunting and gathering. In the more distant past their livelihoods centered around hunting large game, such as the mammoths, mastodons, and prehistoric bison that once were plentiful in North America; around ten thousand years ago, as these ice-age animals became extinct, the peoples' methods of getting food shifted, first to hunting small game and gathering wild plant food, and then, in most areas, to agriculture or a combination of agriculture, hunting, and gathering. Women performed essential tasks in these early cultures. Generally labor was divided along sexual lines. Among the nomadic hunters of large game, women cared for the children, prepared food, processed meat and hides, prepared clothing, sometimes erected shelter, often made tools, and saw to it that all household possessions were properly packed for transport during seasonal migrations. Meanwhile, men primarily were responsible for hunting. As big-game hunting gave way to hunting and gathering, women generally assumed more responsibility for acquiring food—especially the gathering of wild plant food—and processing and storing food. In these early cultures, women played important and occasionally dominant roles in the ceremonial and religious lives of their people. The transition to agriculture tended to make the division of labor along sexual lines more rigid. For those cultures that remained seminomadic, or combined agriculture with a continued reliance on hunting and gathering, women generally added production of the crops to their other labors, while men continued to hunt (and make war). In those societies that settled down in permanent or semipermanent agricultural villages, women acquired additional duties associated with maintaining the home, food preparation, the manufacture of clothing, and caring for the young. They also helped tend the crops, but by this time men began to assume more of the responsibility for farming and home construction.

By the time that Europeans first arrived in the region that became Texas the various Paleo-American cultures had given way to four major Native-American cultures, plus several other minor cultures. The role of women varied considerably from culture to culture. Among the groups that shared the Western Gulf cultures, along the coastal prairies and in the arid lands of South Texas and northern Mexico, there was little division of labor along sexual lines. Life was so harsh and the environment so unproductive for these hunter-gatherers that all members of the community spent virtually all of their time in the search for food. In contrast, among the Lipan Apaches, who occupied the plains of West and Southwest Texas, the roles of men and women were clearly delineated. While men were buffalo hunters and warriors, women cultivated the fields, butchered the buffalo, dressed the buffalo hides and turned them into the leather used to cover tepees and make clothing. Women also built the tepees, made
the clothing, and fashioned tools out of buffalo bone. After the acquisition of horses made
buffalo hunting and warfare rich and rewarding professions, the importance of agriculture,
and consequently the position of women in the Apache economy, declined, and Apache men
frequently made the women abandon their unharvested fields and pack up the village to
follow the buffalo herds, or to engage in military activity.

Among the Caddos of East and Northeast Texas, women attained position and influence
unmatched in early Texas. Two Caddo confederacies existed in Texas in historic times, the
Kadohadacho and Hasinai, as well as related cultures to their south and north. By most standards
the Caddo had developed the most impressive civilization in Texas. They were highly skilled
farmers, lived in permanent agricultural villages, and participated in an extensive trading network
with Indians to the east and west of Texas. The Caddo also maintained a very elaborate political
and social system. In addition, Caddo culture, as well as that of related groups such as the
Wichitas and Tonkawas, was matriarchal. At the beginning of the world, according to Hasinai
mythology, there was one woman, and this woman had two daughters; from these two the human
race descended. In historical times the oldest competent woman, the “mother of the house,” was
the dominant figure in the family; typically the family consisted of a woman, her sisters, her
husband, unmarried children, and married daughters and their families.

Caddo women also could hold great political and economic power. Fray Gaspar Jose de Solis,
who traveled among the Caddo late in the 1760s, described his encounter with a woman of
great wealth and power known as Santa Adiva. Her house, he wrote, “is very large and has many
rooms. The rest of the Nations bring presents and gifts to her. She has many Indian men and
women in her service called tama comas, and these are like priests and captains among them.
She is married to five Indian men.” Another early European explorer described a “queen”
among the Kadohadacho—a term that probably referred to the mother of the heir apparent, or
the sister of the current ruler, but who was herself a person of great power. In other respects the
role of women in Caddo life reflected the more structured, hierarchal nature of Caddo society.
Labor was divided along sexual lines, with men performing the heavy work of clearing and
plowing the fields, building the houses, and hunting, while women tended the fields and har-
vested the crops, prepared the food, tended house, and gathered wild herbs, fruits, berries, and
nuts. Both men and women held positions in the political and religious hierarchy.

The first Europeans in Texas arrived as part of a series of Spanish expeditions in the sixteenth
century, and a French expedition in the seventeenth century. These were exploratory under-
takings that did not involve European women. However, women were involved in the Spanish
settlement of Texas, which began late in the seventeenth century. While the mission, the prin-
cipal institution for spreading the Spanish Empire north into Texas, was male dominated, the
soldiers who manned the presidios that supported the missions frequently brought their
families with them, so nearly half of the population of the initial civil settlements at San
Antonio and Nacogdoches were women. Even the missions, founded by priests to convert the
Indians and transform them into law-abiding Spanish subjects, actually resembled walled vil-
lages with a population of Indian, Mexican, and Spanish men, women, and children. A census of
the population of the missions in Spanish Texas in 1783 indicated that the population of the
five San Antonio missions consisted of 207 adult men, 149 adult women, 123 male and 75 female children. The population was more balanced in the towns of Spanish Texas; in 1783 San Antonio counted 331 adult men and 311 adult women, while Nacogdoches numbered 129 adult men and 104 adult women.

Women also played an active role in Spanish Texas. Although Spanish custom and law, as well as the rules of the Catholic Church, severely restricted women’s rights, on the fringes of the Spanish empire women were able to assert themselves fully. Whether the opportunity they enjoyed was due to the “democratic” nature of the frontier, the fact that the strength of traditional restrictions against women was diluted by distance and the necessities of frontier life, or the high mortality rate which often forced widows to take over responsibilities generally fulfilled by men, women in Spanish Texas ran businesses and ranches, received land grants, and occasionally even helped lead settlers into Texas, while still performing their traditional duties as wives, mothers, companions, and helpmates. Though women assumed these many roles and tasks, on the official level Spanish Texas remained a male-dominated society, as evidenced by census reports that listed women separately only if they were widows, and, indeed, that treated widowhood as the principal female occupation.

Nonetheless, the degree to which women found room to assert themselves in Spanish Texas is surprising. Fate—often in the form of the death of a spouse—left many women in charge of property and the heads of households, even if adult sons were present. Other women achieved prominence through their economic achievements or their political skills. María Josefa Granados owned the largest general store in San Antonio in the 1780s, while Doña María Hinojosa de Ballí expanded the landholdings that she inherited from her husband until she owned about one-third of the lower Río Grande Valley, including Padre Island, and truly merited the designation as Texas’s first cattle queen. Doña María del Carmen Calvillo not only presided over the ranch that she inherited from her father in 1814, but she expanded its livestock holdings and built a sugar mill, granary, and large irrigation system. María Betancour earned her fame as one of the early pioneers in San Antonio. In 1731, as a twenty-eight-year-old widow and mother of five, she helped lead thirty-one Canary Islanders to San Antonio, became a fixture in the city’s life, and named the main plaza there the Plaza de las Islas in honor of the Islanders’ origins. Early in the nineteenth century María Cassiano, another descendant of María Betancour, was the wife of the Spanish Governor of Texas who assumed the responsibilities of office whenever her husband was absent.

Of course, for most women in Spanish Texas life entailed neither glamour, wealth, nor power; most worked hard as wives and mothers, farmers or ranchers, or seamstresses, cooks, peddlers, or laundresses. Even on the ranches life was spartan—houses were poorly built and usually consisted of only one room—and women worked from dawn to dusk tending the garden, caring for children, cooking, making household necessities such as soap and candles, spinning, weaving, and fashioning clothing and shoes. The women of Spanish Texas were restricted by Spanish law, which prevented them from voting, as well as by religion, both of which bound them to marriage. On the other hand, Spanish law did give women rights in court, allowed them to sue and be sued, and to enter into legally-binding contracts. Spanish
law also protected the property rights of women; it allowed them to maintain property separate from that of their husbands; it protected wives by preventing creditors from seizing their home to satisfy their husband’s debts; and it guaranteed women legal right to half-interest in all profits a married couple earned. These latter two rights would persist after the collapse of Spanish rule and provide the basis for the homestead exemption and community-property rights.

The early nineteenth century brought dramatic changes to Texas. First, in 1821, following a ten-year struggle, Mexico received its independence from Spain. As important as this event was, it was overshadowed by an even more momentous development—the Anglo migration to Texas and the demographic revolution that followed. Mexican independence had little direct impact on women in Texas. The legal rights and restrictions women experienced under Spanish jurisdiction did not change substantially. However, some women who lost their husbands to the long struggle for independence successfully sued the Mexican government for survivor’s benefits. A few used this income, together with the profits they made from shrewd land dealings, to amass substantial wealth. On the other hand, the revolution did not add to women’s political and legal rights or to their social status. The arrival of Anglo-American immigrants, together with African Americans and German immigrants, had a much more profound impact on Texas. By the middle of the 1830s Hispanics were the majority ethnic group only south of the Nueces River and in the Rio Grande Valley, and Hispanic cultural influences, while far from gone, no longer dominated Texas north and east of San Antonio.

Women played a major role in the Anglo migration to Texas. The first Anglo woman known to enter Texas was Jane Long. Almost two years before her adventures on Bolivar Peninsula, she made her first trip to Texas to join her husband, who was attempting to establish a republic for land-hungry Anglos in Spanish Texas. Following the collapse of this expedition and the Bolivar adventure, Jane Long returned to Texas and joined the Austin colony as one of the Old Three Hundred. In 1834 Long and Kian, who would be her lifelong companion, opened an inn at Brazoria; in 1837 they opened another inn, and then a plantation near Richmond. The Long establishments, first in Brazoria, then in Richmond, hosted the most prominent Texans, including Stephen F. Austin and Mirabeau B. Lamar. The latter used the Long inn in Richmond as his campaign headquarters when he ran for president of Texas in 1838. By 1850 Jane Long was one of the sixteen wealthiest people in Texas.

Other women also achieved prominence in early Texas. Mary Austin Holley, a widow who came to Texas from Connecticut, achieved fame by publishing in 1833 a very popular guide for prospective immigrants to Texas entitled Texas, Observations Historical, Geographical, Descriptive in a Series of Letters, which provided settlers with detailed and practical advice about what household equipment to bring to Texas and what type of life they could expect to have there. Holley, an avid promoter of Texas colonization and a speculator in Texas land, never achieved the economic security (either from her writing or investments) that she suggested awaited all who moved to Texas and returned to Louisiana, where she worked as a governess. Other women were more successful. Many widows received land grants from Austin and other empresarios in their own right; others, whose husbands died in Texas, managed the lands they inherited and added to their estates.
Most women who immigrated to Texas came with husbands and families. Lucky ones like Mary Crownover Rabb, an eighteen-year-old bride from Arkansas who settled near La Grange in 1823 with her husband and a large group of her husband’s relatives, arrived with a ready-made community; other women came only with husband and children; and still others came without husbands, such as Abigail Fokes, a widow with six children who settled on the San Gabriel River in 1835. Stephen F. Austin’s 1830 “Register of Families” listed twenty widows, most with children, in his colony. The experiences of these Anglo women on the Texas frontier differed little from those of the Spanish and Mexican women who preceded them. Their life was difficult and the living conditions were primitive. They worked alongside their husbands and older children, clearing the land and planting crops. Like Hispanic women, Anglos found that the social and legal restrictions that limited the rights of women in the early nineteenth century often weakened as one moved west. In the Anglo colonies men outnumbered women in the early years, sometimes as much as two-to-one—a situation which added to the value and influence of women, but one which also could place them under the social and economic subjugation, albeit the loving subjugation, of a male relative. In addition, the social mores of the early nineteenth century still placed married women in a subservient position and expected them to behave in ways that seem strange today. For example, it was not unusual for women in early nineteenth-century Texas to serve meals to their husbands and then retire to the kitchen to eat separately from them.

In spite of the primitive living conditions and the restrictions forced upon their gender, women contributed significantly to colonial Texas. Some successfully managed land or businesses and achieved economic success; others played important roles as community builders. The establishment of schools and churches in early Texas owed much to the work of women. Mary Rabb, Lydia McHenry, and others were instrumental in bringing the Methodist Church to Texas early in the 1830s, while Mary McKinzie Bell was central in the history of the Presbyterian church in Texas. Mexican women worked to overcome the lack of resources that limited the strength of the Catholic Church in Texas during the early nineteenth century. For example, women in San Antonio and Nacogdoches raised funds to repair church buildings in their communities, while Doña Patricia de la Garza de León provided much of the support for the parish Church at Victoria. Most of the work done by Anglo women to bring protestant churches to Texas was done out of public view, because gender restrictions prevented women from assuming formal positions of leadership. On the other hand, women assumed a highly visible role in the early efforts to establish educational institutions, for teaching was one of the few acceptable occupations for women in colonial Texas. Women not only worked as teachers, but they established or helped to establish schools in Independence, Houston, Matagorda, and Washington County. Most of these institutions were private academies or boarding schools that did not survive more than a year or two; efforts to establish public school systems in Texas did not succeed until after the Civil War.

During the turbulent decade of the Texas Revolution and republic, the position of women in Texas underwent a subtle transformation as Anglo culture supplanted Hispanic culture. These changes affected both Anglo and Hispanic women, as well as the growing population of black women. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, Anglo culture generally placed
greater restrictions on the property rights of women than had Hispanic culture; on the other hand, the initial stirrings of feminism and women’s suffrage would make their way into Texas from north rather than from south of the Rio Grande.

The mythology of the Texas Revolution, which produced larger-than-life male heroes and tales of heroic encounters between Texans and Mexicans, also encompassed women—most notably Emily Morgan, who reportedly joined Santa Anna’s entourage as his army pursued Texas refugees during the Runaway Scrape, sent word to Sam Houston about Santa Anna’s position, and then kept the Mexican general “occupied” as the Texans launched their attack at San Jacinto. Morgan, a mulatto and most likely a slave who was rewarded with freedom for her heroism, was immortalized in the song *The Yellow Rose of Texas*. Less well known are the activities of those women left at home while their husbands fought the Mexicans at the Alamo, Goliad, and San Jacinto. They ran the farms and plantations in their husband’s absence and organized the evacuation of their families as Mexican armies approached. Others were more directly involved in the war, including several who survived the siege of the Alamo. One of these, Suzanna Dickinson went to the Alamo with her husband and served as a cook and nurse throughout the battle; another, Andrea Candelaria, served as a nurse for James Bowie during the siege (and was one of the few Tejano women at the Alamo).

In spite of the fact that a number of Tejano men and women supported the Texas struggle against Santa Anna, Texas independence generally had a negative impact on them. Many Anglos were bitter over the atrocities committed at Goliad and the Alamo, some were reluctant to accept Tejanos as equals, and others were determined to eliminate the Mexican influence, if not their very presence, in South Texas. The Anglos’ attitudes generated racial conflict that resulted in prejudice against Mexicans in Texas that occasionally erupted in violent acts. Mexican women found themselves victims of both gender and racial prejudice. For example, Doña Patricia de León, who had helped build the Catholic church in Victoria and who had supported the Texas Revolution, was forced to leave Texas and lost control over the extensive property that she had inherited from her husband, empresario Martin de León.

The role of Hispanics in Texas was further diminished by the demographic changes that followed the Texian victory at San Jacinto. Texas independence and then statehood triggered a massive immigration to Texas, the population of which soared: from approximately 50,000 in 1836 to 212,592 in 1850 and to 604,215 by 1860. While a sizeable portion of these immigrants came from Germany, the vast majority came from the United States, especially the southern states, and they helped bind Texas to the United States in general and to the South in particular. The sexual imbalance continued, especially on the frontier, but not to the degree that it had among Anglos in colonial Texas. In 1860 men outnumbered women in Texas by approximately 36,000.

Women’s rights during this period included those based on American (and English) law as well as those derived from Hispanic practices. More dramatic, however, were the restrictions Texas society now placed on women’s rights. Women could not vote or hold public office, sue or testify in court, or gain entry into most professions; married women did not
have full control over their earnings or full guardianship of their children. Women were not permitted to present public lectures or sermons and were shackled by a double standard in morality. The mid-nineteenth century also witnessed the emergence of the "cult of true womanhood," which honored women as the guardians of home and hearth, entrusted them with nurturing the children and with safeguarding the moral values of the community; at the same time it did not view them as mental or physical equals of men. The first half of the nineteenth century, then, confronted American (and Texas) women with severe social, political, and economic restrictions; however, this same period also witnessed the emergence of the first organized women's rights movement. Women, especially in the northern and northwestern states, defied restrictions on public political expression by becoming actively involved in and even spokespersons for a number of social reform programs. Furthermore, at this time women began to gain entry into a number of professions, achieved greater economic rights and greater control over property, and launched their struggle for suffrage. These reforms, however, made few inroads into Texas in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The influx of Anglo women was not the only demographic change Texas experienced early in the nineteenth century—many migrants from the United States brought their slaves with them. While the Spanish were the first to bring African slaves into Texas, blacks did not comprise a major element in the population until the 1820s, when Anglos began importing slaves as labor for the production of cotton and later sugar cane in the fertile river bottoms of the state. As a result, the black population soared from approximately 450 late in the eighteenth century to about 5,000 in 1836 and to over 182,000 in 1860.

The vast majority of black women in early-nineteenth-century Texas were slaves. While sharing some experiences with Anglo and Hispanic women (such as harsh working conditions and primitive living conditions), black women had their rights restricted far more by slavery than by gender discrimination. Slave codes restricted the legal rights of all blacks, and the lack of legally recognized marriage contracts left slave women with even less legal and social protection than their nonslave counterparts. Slave women, of course, had virtually no voice in the decision to migrate to Texas. While the trip to Texas could be arduous for Anglo women, and while many came to Texas as the result of decisions made by their husbands, fathers, or other male relatives, their immigration could not compare with that of Silvia King, who reported that she was marched in chains from the slave market in New Orleans to a plantation near LaGrange: "it was a horrible time because we were all chained up . . . when one got tired or sick, the rest had to drag and carry him." Once in Texas slave women experienced an equality of sorts in the cotton fields. They did the same work as men, usually six days a week from sunrise to sundown, or, as some put it, from "can see to can't see." Sarah Ashley recalled, "I used to have to pick cotton and sometimes I picked 300 pounds and toted it a mile to the cotton house . . . I never got whipped because I always got my 300 pounds." On some plantations women with young children received less demanding work assignments. In any event, not all black women submitted to slavery without resistance. A number ran away, protesting the violence of the system or the destruction of slave families; some committed acts of violence against their masters or overseers.
In spite of the difficulties that enslaved black women faced and the severe restrictions placed on free blacks in antebellum Texas, some black women achieved a measure of success. A slave woman named Minerva often served as overseer on a Brazoria plantation in the slaveowner's absence. Fanny McFarland, a free black woman, lived in Houston for years, even though she had no legal right to reside in Texas; she worked as a laundress and engaged with some success in real estate speculation. Harriett Reynolds owned and operated a fairly successful ranch in Jackson County.

The Civil War influenced dramatically the lives of all women in Texas, but most especially those of black and Anglo women. Wars consume men, and in the process thrust new responsibilities onto women. The Civil War, by precipitating the abolition of slavery, also bestowed freedom on black women.

As the conflicts over the expansion of slavery, abolitionism, and sectionalism deepened in the 1850s, Texas women were drawn into the political arena. Just as abolitionism drew women into political activity in the North, women's participation in the debates of the day in Texas, first over slavery, then over secession, eroded traditional restrictions on women's involvement in public issues. While most women in the Lone Star State supported slavery, states' rights, and later the Confederacy, some were outspoken unionists, a few were even abolitionists. Melinda Rankin, a Presbyterian missionary who came to Texas in the 1850s, lost her job because of her advocacy of abolitionism and her outspoken unionism. Elise Waerenskjold, an immigrant who settled in North Texas late in the 1840s and became a leader in the Norwegian community, advocated women's rights, education, and abolitionism. Her critique of slavery centered on her conviction that all humans were equal and that slavery was "contrary to the will of God."

Once the war began, Texas women generally supported the conflict in the same manner as did others in the South and those in the North—by filling jobs that men vacated when they marched off to battle. In Texas, women ran the farms, plantations, and businesses. They also wove cloth for uniforms, made bandages, ran hospitals, and attempted to bolster morale among the civilian population and, through their letters, the men on the front lines. In Austin the Ladies Needle Battalion sewed uniforms for soldiers, while in East Texas Harriet Perry reported that the women and the slaves kept busy by making cloth for the army "up to 90 yards of cloth a week" in some households. Some Texas women played an even more active role. Sally Scull ran the Union blockade by shipping cotton overland to Mexico and exchanging it for munitions for the Confederate military. Sophia Porter, the "Texas Paul Revere," rode her mule across the icy Red River to notify Confederate forces of the location of Union soldiers who had quartered at her trading post. Chipita Rodriguez, who ran an inn in San Patricio was as spy for the Union; she was hanged in 1863 after being framed for murder.

While isolation from the major theaters of war spared Texas much of the devastation experienced by other Confederate states, Texans did face hardship. Over 100,000 Texans fought in the Civil War. Women separated from their husbands or widowed by the war not only experienced loneliness but were forced to assume many of the roles that men traditionally served. In addition, although escaping the more direct ravages of battle, they endured shortages that were sometimes extreme. Paper, medicine, and some foodstuffs were in
short supply, as was salt, which was essential to food preservation in the prerefrigeration era. In Galveston, when a group of women organized a protest against shortages and the high price of basic commodities, Confederate military leaders arrested them and removed them from the island.

Black women also shared in the hardships of war. Not only did they spin thread to make cloth for Confederate uniforms, but, like Anglo women, many had to endure the absence of their loved ones: some black men were forced to attend their masters on the battlefield, others had run away to join the Union forces. After the slaves were emancipated, black women assumed an even more active role in Texas society. Like Anglo pioneer women, they participated in organizing their communities and played a major role in establishing schools and churches. They also moved quickly into the workforce. Some labored alongside their husbands; single women, including widows, became working single head of households. Black women toiled as agricultural workers, sharecroppers, farmers, laundresses, and domestics. They adjusted quickly to the wage-labor market. Some negotiated their own sharecropping contracts, while others became active in the state’s fledgling labor movement. In 1877, under the slogan “we will starve no longer,” black laundresses in Galveston organized a strike for higher wage. This labor strike was the first by the women of Texas, and it reflected the growing involvement of women in social and political reform movements in decade following the Civil War.

In these years, Texas again experienced a large influx of settlers. The expansion of agriculture, the spread of the open-range cattle industry, the construction of railroads, and the first stirrings of industrial development attracted hundreds of thousands of new residents to Texas and transformed the state demographically, economically, and politically. The population of Texas increased from about 600,000 in 1860 to over 3,000,000 in 1900, with most of the new residents settling on farms as the Texas frontier moved west. The population of Texas also remained predominantly male (about 110 men for every 100 women) through the end of the century.

Women participated in all aspects of the post–Civil War expansion of Texas. During the heyday of the Texas cattle industry, a number of women, following in the footsteps of successful Hispanic women of the colonial period, achieved success as cattle ranchers. Lizzie Johnson made a fortune by investing in cattle in the 1870s; she was also one of the first women to participate in a cattle drive along the Chisholm Trail. Following the death of her husband, Captain Richard King, Henrietta King ran the famed King Ranch for forty years, from 1885 to 1925. With the help of her son-in-law, she eliminated the ranch’s debt and doubled its land holdings to over 1 million acres. She also promoted the development of South Texas by donating land for Kingsville and other townsites and by contributing funds to aid the development of the First Presbyterian Church of Kingsville, Texas A&I University, and other community institutions. Some Mexican women remained active in the ranching industry in the late nineteenth century. Margarita Villareal and several others operated ranches in far South Texas after the Civil War.

Far more women were involved in farming than in ranching. As late as 1940 half of the women (and men) in Texas worked at farming—either on family farms or as tenant farmers or sharecroppers. On the frontier farm there was little differentiation in the work regimen of men and women. Women, in addition to their duties as wives and mothers, participated in planting and
harvesting crops, caring for livestock, and even clearing land. On more prosperous farms in settled areas, women's work usually was confined to "household duties," which included planting, tending, and harvesting gardens, canning and preserving foods, assisting in the slaughter of livestock, salting or smoking fresh meat, spinning thread and weaving cloth, making clothes, washing clothes, cleaning house, and raising children. For these post–Civil War pioneers, life on the frontier could be as primitive as it had been for their predecessors fifty or even one hundred years earlier. Generally, new arrivals on the Texas High Plains set up housekeeping in a tent or covered wagon before moving into a frame house of one or two rooms; some spent an extended period of time in dugouts or in sod houses.

Women also continued to be involved in organizing and working with the basic community institutions—home, school, and church. Some, such as Margaret Adams McCollum Moor, became active in women's clubs. Moor, determined to inform the women of West Texas about the national issues that affected their lives, helped found the "Up-to-Date History Club" in Colorado City in 1892. For the most part, though, women on the frontier concentrated on recreating whatever life and culture they had left behind. For some this meant organizing schools and churches, working as school teachers or music teachers, and bringing "culture" to the West; others, perhaps those with less formal educations, focused on transplanting their eastern cultural values and basic domestic skills.

The most notable change in the role of women in late-nineteenth-century Texas was that increasingly it expanded to include involvement in political and social reform. As Texas women became more politically active, a second theme would emerge in the history of Texas women—their struggle for equal rights. Women were active in the various organizations that made up the agrarian movement, they played a major role in the prohibition movement, and they voiced concern about other social and political issues. While Texas was not a center of feminism in the late nineteenth century, Texas women increasingly interpreted their responsibilities as the guardians of the home and public virtue under the "cult of true womanhood" as necessitating their active involvement in politics and in social reform organizations.

Since the majority of women lived on farms or in farming communities, it is not surprising that they became involved in agrarian protest movements. Texas farmers did not fare well in the thirty years that followed the Civil War. Continually declining agricultural prices and deflation were especially debilitating to the debt-ridden agrarian class. The shift from subsistence to commercial agriculture left farmers at the mercy of transportation systems, banking institutions, and marketing processes with which they had little experience or understanding, and over which they had virtually no control. And as government fell increasingly under the control of business and industrial interests, farmers became frustrated over their lack of political influence. They responded to the crisis with the formation of the Grange and Greenback parties in the 1870s, the Farmer's Alliance in the 1880s, and the People's party in the 1890s. Texas women participated in several phases of this agrarian protest.

In 1873, when the Grange first appeared in Dallas, it was the first farmer's organization in which women were engaged to any significant degree. The Grange accepted women as members but it generally restricted them to involvement in women's auxiliaries or Grange
youth groups. Nevertheless, for the first time Texas women participated openly and in large numbers in a political organization, and although their role was limited they acquired a political consciousness and leadership skills that would be valuable to them in future political efforts. The experience that women gained in the Grange enabled them to assume a far more active role in the Farmer's Alliance. The Alliance, which had been founded in Lampasas in 1875, did not become a significant instrument of agrarian protest until the mid-1880s. More than any other political organization in nineteenth-century Texas, the Farmer's Alliance accepted (indeed, it actively sought) the involvement of women on an equal footing with men. As a result of the opportunity afforded to them, women such as Fannie Moss, Dr. Helen Lawson Dabbs, and Bettie Gay played active roles by writing numerous articles and essays about the Alliance (and about the rights of women) and serving as delegates to Alliance conventions. Fannie Moss served as secretary-treasurer of the Texas Farmer's Alliance from 1892 to 1894; her successor in this position was Dr. Francis Elizabeth Daniel Leak. Bettie Gay, who wrote extensively on the relationship between women and the Alliance, argued that the Alliance would redeem women from the unnatural position of inferiority in which society had placed them and restore them to their proper sphere of equality; she insisted that women could be active in the politics of the Alliance without neglecting their responsibilities in the "home sphere."

The Texas women who were active in the Farmer's Alliance also tended to be active in other reform organizations. A number participated in the St. Louis convention that resulted in the founding of the People's party in 1892, although many Texas women had their enthusiasm for the new party dampened by its failure to endorse women's suffrage. The most popular reform movement among Texas women of the period was prohibition. Many Texans (and Americans) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries believed that alcohol abuse was linked to an array of social and moral problems from crime to poverty, to prostitution, divorce, and delinquency. Furthermore, most advocates of prohibition approached the issue as a moral crusade; they refused to consider compromise, and they branded their opponents as sinners. The debate in Texas over this issue generated excited and heated political conflict, which in the words of former governor Oran M. Roberts "stirred up society to its very foundations with a greater manifestation of universal feeling and interest than had ever occurred before in Texas."

Women emerged as an active force in the debate over prohibition with the establishment of Texas's first chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in Paris in 1882, following a speech there by Frances Willard, president of the national body. The WCTU recruited the wives of a number of prominent Texas political leaders, including Matilda Cassa Denton Maxey, wife of Senator Samuel Bell Maxey. However, its most important Texas recruit was Helen Stoddard, a Fort Worth mathematics professor who joined the organization in 1887. Stoddard served first as the legislative chair of the Texas WCTU, during which time she successfully lobbied for the passage of a series of reform laws, including an act that mandated the inclusion of curriculum material on alcohol and drug abuse in the state's public schools. Beginning in 1891, Stoddard served sixteen years as president of the WCTU.
Women were attracted to the WCTU and the prohibition issue for a variety of reasons. The definition of the campaign against alcohol as a moral struggle fit well with the popular image of the role of women as defenders of the home and of community morality. Also, many women believed that the misuse of alcohol induced men to wife battering and child abuse—issues of great concern to women. Finally, the WCTU was the first organized political association of Texas women; consequently it provided the first political forum for women’s issues, including ones that ranged far beyond the scope of prohibition. It was, for example, the first organization in the state to endorse women’s suffrage, and its legislative program included the enactment of anti-tobacco legislation as well as a state child-labor and pure-food-and-drug act; the WCTU also championed the creation of a state college for women. In 1903, after a ten-year political struggle, the WCTU saw the establishment of the Texas Industrial Institute for the Education of the White Girls of the State of Texas in Arts and Sciences (now Texas Woman’s University); Stoddard, who had directed the campaign for the college, was one of three women named to the institution’s first board of regents—the first women to hold such a position in the state.

In spite of their increased activity in politics and social reform, Texas women did not see their overall status change significantly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Women remained politically disfranchised; they could not serve as lawyers, sit on juries, or hold elected public office, and, except for on the farm and in the home, their presence in the workplace still was rare. The census of 1870 listed only 5 percent of women over the age of ten as employed; by 1900 this figure had risen only to 13 percent. Of those who did work outside of the home (aside from agricultural labor), most found employment as domestics. Other women worked as seamstresses, laundresses, hotel employees, milliners, tailors, and laborers. Only a handful of women managed to gain entry to the professions at this time; the 1880 census listed a few women bankers, lawyers, doctors, and ministers. Even the traditional women’s professions, nursing and teaching, still were dominated by males as late as 1880.

The political experience gained by Texas women through their involvement in the Grange, the Farmer’s Alliance, and the prohibition movement provided the foundation for their increased political activity and for their greater political success in the progressive movement of the twentieth century. Additionally, Texas women entered the progressive movement through their involvement in women’s clubs, which increasingly became centers of social reform, and the women’s suffrage movement. Each of these approaches had its roots in the nineteenth century but achieved real success during the Progressive era. The prohibition movement, especially the WCTU, continued to build on the base it had laid in the late nineteenth century. After failing to win referendums on prohibition in 1887 and 1911, the movement successfully lobbied for statewide prohibition and the approval of the national prohibition amendment in 1918. Women’s clubs, often dismissed merely as social organizations, in reality became the principle vehicle for the political activism of Texas women. Indeed, women’s clubs and prohibition groups were fundamental components of the alliance that comprised Texas progressivism. The clubs channeled women’s political energies into community development activities, which left their mark on Texas, and committed themselves to a broad agenda of social reform. For example, following the passage of a resolution supporting public libraries at the first statewide meeting of
the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, in Tyler in 1898, Texas women’s clubs began an active campaign to establish public libraries across the state. Over 85 percent of the public libraries in Texas trace their origins to this movement. Prison reform was another issue that women’s clubs championed. Many Texas women believed that through their influence the state’s prisons could accomplish what they had failed to achieve under male leadership—the social rehabilitation of inmates. As early as 1906 the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs endorsed prison reform, but they did not focus their energies on this issue until after 1918. In that year an investigation of prisons prompted the Women’s Clubs to put forth their plan for reform, which included placing a woman on the three-person Texas Prison Board, placing women on the staff of all prisons, and placing the women’s prison under the full control of women. Women would not have as much luck with prisons as they did with libraries. They enjoyed limited but short-lived success in prison reform in the 1920s during the administration of Governor Dan Moody (1927–1931), but most of their gains were reversed by his successor, Ross Sterling.

Women’s clubs in Texas pursued a broad-based agenda that encompassed self-improvement, community action, social reform, and political reform. The program of the Current Topics Club of El Paso, which included a study of Ibsen’s plays and Roman history as well as an examination of the issues of household economy, cooperative living, and the rehabilitation of convicts, illustrates well this scope of interests. The Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, organized in 1897 as the Texas Federation of Women’s Literary Clubs, dropped the “literary” from its name in 1899 as it broadened its agenda to include such things as compulsory school attendance, pure food and drugs, and issues protecting children and women. By 1907 they could claim credit for state laws that established a juvenile court system, regulated adoption, and provided for compulsory blood tests for marriage licenses. In 1908 the Dallas Clubwoman published a list of the projects that should attract the energies of Texas women. The list included: the improvement of parks, public health, and sanitation; pure-food legislation; civil service reform; laws controlling child labor and improving the status of women workers; and expansion of libraries and public education. These issues were not only important to women’s clubs; they also represented the basic elements of the progressive agenda. In no sense were the interests of Texas club women confined to local issues. Under the leadership of Anna Pennybacker, who served as president of the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs from 1901 to 1903 before assuming the leadership of the national body (General Federation of Women’s Clubs) from 1912 to 1916, the Texas organization endorsed world peace and U.S. participation in the League of Nations.

In addition to the Texas Federation of Women’s Clubs, other women’s organizations with more specific interests helped promote social and political reform. Ella Caruthers Porter helped establish the Texas Congress of Mothers (which later became the Parent-Teacher Association—or PTA) in 1909. Local mother’s clubs, which first appeared in Texas in the mid-1890s, worked primarily to improve schools and the services they provided. Porter, who had first become interested in issues affecting women and children through her work in the WCTU, used the state organization to lobby for a number of social reforms, including a state child-welfare commission, which was established in 1918 under the direction of Ms. Claude De Van Watts. Black women also established a number of women’s clubs during the first quarter of the century that were committed to self-improvement and community service.
Since the Texas Association of Women’s Clubs was segregated, in 1905 Ms. M.E.Y. Moore founded the Texas Association of Colored Women, and in 1911 Jovita Idar established The League of Mexican Women (La Liga Femenil Mexicanista), which advocated education for women and opposed racial discrimination.

In spite of the broad range of concerns of the various women’s clubs, the major political goal of Texas women during the progressive movement was women’s suffrage. The roots of the Texas suffrage movement reach back to the immediate post–Civil War years when women petitioned unsuccessfully to get women’s suffrage included in the Constitution of 1869 and then in the Constitution of 1875. In 1887, following their defeat in the state prohibition referendum, the WCTU endorsed women’s suffrage. The first organizations in Texas created specifically to promote women’s suffrage appeared in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1893, Rebecca Henry Hayes of Galveston, an associate of Susan B. Anthony and vice-president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, organized the Texas Equal Rights Association to promote the “industrial, educational, and legal rights of women and to secure suffrage to them;” ten years later Annette Finnigan of Houston, an associate of Carrie Chapman Catt, founded the Texas Woman Suffrage Association. Neither of these organizations survived long. However, a third organization, the Texas Equal Suffrage Association, founded in 1915 under the leadership of Minnie Fisher Cunningham, spearheaded the successful drive for women’s suffrage. With effective grass-roots organization, skillful lobbying efforts, and the ability to take advantage of the patriotism generated by World War I and the support of both President Woodrow Wilson and Governor William P. Hobby, suffragettes achieved victory in their long struggle for the vote. Black women, such as Christia Adair, joined in the campaign for women’s suffrage, even though the Texas Equal Suffrage Association was segregated and most black men in Texas had been effectively disfranchised by 1915. In 1917 the Texas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs endorsed suffrage, and in 1918 Ms. E. P. Simpson of El Paso unsuccessfully attempted to affiliate the El Paso colored Women’s Club with the National American Women’s Suffrage Association. In a special session in 1918 the legislature granted women the right to vote in primary elections; at the request of Governor Hobby in 1919, the legislature submitted a state constitutional amendment enfranchising women—an amendment that the voters rejected. Finally, in that same year, the Texas legislature’s favorable vote made Texas the ninth state and the first southern state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. One year later, with ratification by the necessary three-fourths of the states, white women had gained the right to vote in Texas and throughout the United States.

The enfranchisement of Texas women removed the final legal barrier to their participation in all aspects of the political process. A few women had held public office prior to 1918, usually on local school boards or in appointed positions, and for several decades they had worked diligently in reform movements and in lobbying efforts. But the acquisition of the right to vote in primary elections in 1918 and in all elections in 1920 allowed women to take an even more active role in state politics. After gaining the right to vote in primaries in 1918, over 385,000 women registered to vote and then immediately elected the first woman to statewide office in Texas when they selected Dr. Annie Webb Blanton as the state superintendent of public instruction.
During the decade following suffrage, hundreds of Texas women followed Blanton's example and ran for local or state office. Many were successful. By the end of the 1920s, 109 of the state's 254 counties had women treasurers; two women, Edith Wilmans (in 1922) and Helen Moore (in 1928), won election to the Texas House of Representatives, and in 1926 Margie Neal was elected to the Texas Senate and became the first woman to serve on the Texas State Democratic Executive Committee. In 1928 Minnie Fisher Cunningham became the first woman in the country to run for a seat in the U.S. Senate; and, in 1924, Texas elected a woman as governor.

In addition to their success at the polls, Texas women also utilized the political skills they had gained through their experiences in reform movements and the suffrage campaign to structure a sophisticated political machine in the early 1920s. Soon after the enactment of the Nineteenth Amendment, the Texas Equal Suffrage Association was reorganized as the Texas League of Women Voters under the leadership of Jessie Daniel Ames. By 1922 the League had allied with the Texas Federation of Women's Clubs, the Congress of Mothers, the PTA, the WCTU, the Texas Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and the Texas Graduate Nurses Association to form the Joint Legislative Council. This "petticoat lobby," as its detractors labeled it, proved to be an effective force in the legislature in the early 1920s. During the four years of its existence, it saw its entire legislative package enacted into law, including improved funding for public education, public health programs, and new labor laws; it also advocated prison reform and stricter enforcement of prohibition laws.

The most dramatic evidence of the new role of women in Texas politics was the election of Miriam A. Ferguson as governor of Texas in 1924 and again in 1932. "Ma" Ferguson was a controversial political figure. Many Texas women opposed her candidacy on the grounds that she was only a stand-in for her husband, James "Pa" Ferguson, who was ineligible to run for governor following his impeachment in 1917, and because James had been one of the state's most adamant opponents of women's suffrage. On the other hand, Jessie Daniel Ames, former suffragist and first president of the Texas League of Women Voters, campaigned for Miriam Ferguson because of her anti—Ku Klux Klan stance. As Governor, Miriam Ferguson clearly allowed her husband to influence her administration. On the other hand, she supported aid to education and prison reform, issues that the petticoat lobby had endorsed, and she appointed Emma Maharg as Texas's first woman secretary of state.

Whether Miriam Ferguson truly was governor or just a figurehead, her campaign and presence in the governor's mansion reflected the changes that women's suffrage had brought to Texas politics. Recognizing the new power women exercised at the polls, some campaign literature early in the 1920s began to focus its appeal directly to women voters. Women's groups opposed Tom Connally's bid for a Senate seat in 1922, castigating him for opposing the Federated Women's Clubs' legislative agenda in Congress and for failing to support the woman's suffrage amendment. Furthermore, Miriam Ferguson's campaign directly confronted the issue of a woman campaigning for office, as well as her principal opponent's link to the Klan. In a Spanish-language appeal to the Hispanic voter she assured her supporters that "Yo sere el Gobernador y no Jim" (I will be the governor and not Jim); another broadside read, "We will vote for a woman with a bonnet and a dress before we will vote for a man with a pillow case and sheet on."

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Women continued to be active in Texas politics in the 1930s and 1940s. The victory in the suffrage campaign and occasional victories at the polls did not end the quest for equal rights, for women continued to face discrimination in many areas. Texas women did not gain the right to serve on juries until the 1950s, and they did not gain complete equality in property and contract rights until the 1970s. Efforts to secure the passage of an equal rights amendment in the 1920s were unsuccessful. Although only about one-third of the women had entered the workforce (including a growing number of married women by 1930) and women had found increased employment opportunity as clerical workers and in retail sales, women professionals continued to be confined primarily to occupations that had become stereotyped as “women’s work.” In 1930 women comprised over 80 percent of the teachers and 90 percent of the nurses and librarians, but less than 2 percent of the lawyers and doctors. During the Great Depression, Texas women experienced discrimination in employment and in New Deal agencies. New Deal agencies that found work or provided job training for the unemployed generally restricted women to “traditional” jobs (sewing, food processing, health care, and domestic service), and some officials did not approve of jobs for married women. In San Antonio, New Deal officials channeled most black women into training programs for domestic service, or into segregated programs. World War II, like other major wars, brought more women into the workforce, and into jobs traditionally held by men.

One political gain that Texas women made in the mid-twentieth century was the increasingly prominent role that they played in national affairs. No Texas woman was more visible during this period than Oveta Culp Hobby. Her career in politics began in 1926 when, at the age of twenty-one, she served as parliamentarian to the Texas House of Representatives. In the 1930s she worked for the Texas State Banking Commission and married former governor William P. Hobby. During World War II she became the first commander of the newly organized Women’s Army Corps; then, during the Eisenhower administration, she headed the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, becoming the second woman ever to serve in the cabinet. Following her retirement from politics, she became the publisher of the Houston Post.

The political agenda of Texas women had changed somewhat by the middle of the twentieth century from the strong commitment to social reform that had typified their activities in the first quarter of the century. Organizations such as the League of Women Voters focused more on international issues, voter registration and education, and expanding the political rights of women by abolishing the poll tax and overturning the laws that prevented women from serving on juries. The political activities of women became more diversified in the postwar period. Women served as volunteers and held leadership positions in both the Democratic and Republican parties and were especially instrumental in establishing the latter as a viable political force in the state. They also were active in some of the political fringe groups that were common in the state and the nation during the era of political excess that grew out of McCarthyism. In Houston, the Minute Women became a powerful force in local politics, especially school-board politics, as they campaigned to “save” Texas from communism in the early 1950s. In the late 1950s professional atheist Madalyn Murray O’Hair made Austin
the home of her campaign to take prayer out of the public schools and to purge religion and religious symbols from all government activities.

But even as Texas approached the mid-twentieth century, African American and Hispanic women were still struggling for their basic political and civil rights. This struggle was initiated largely by women in the second quarter of the century. Black women played a central role in the founding of chapters of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in Houston in 1912 and in Dallas in 1918. Lulu B. White, a school teacher born in Elmo, Texas, in 1898, became active in the Houston branch of the NAACP in the mid-1920s. In 1939 she became president of the Houston branch, and in 1943 she became its executive secretary. An uncompromising foe of segregation, she led the challenge for the integration of The University of Texas that resulted in the landmark Supreme Court decision, *Sweatt v. Painter*. Christia Adair, the former black suffragette, also became active in civil rights and in the Houston chapter of the NAACP, campaigning to end restrictions on black suffrage, integrate public facilities, and end racially motivated violence. Juanita Craft did similar work in Dallas; as an NAACP organizer she was credited with establishing 182 chapters of the organization in Texas. In addition she spearheaded voter registration drives, fought discrimination, and organized youth clubs. Following the *Smith v. Allwright* decision by the Supreme Court in 1944, which made possible black participation in Texas politics in significant numbers for the first time since the 1890s, voter registration drives and get-out-the-vote campaigns became the focus of the political activity of black women. Hattie Mae White was the first to benefit from these developments. In 1958 she became the first black elected to political office in Texas since the early twentieth century when she won a seat on the Houston school board. A few years later Juanita Craft became the first black woman elected to the Dallas city council.

The most significant change that Mexican-American women confronted in the twentieth century was the migration of hundreds of thousands of persons from Mexico to Texas. By 1988, Hispanics were the largest minority in the state, numbering almost 4 million and comprising 23 percent of the population. During the first half of the century, reform efforts in the Mexican-American community were centered in labor organizations. Mexican-American women played a major role in these activities. For example, in 1938 the twenty-year-old Emma Tenayuca organized a strike of 10,000 largely Mexican-American pecan shellers; this was the largest labor action Texas had seen to that time. As the strike dragged on, and as the strikers endured abuse and violence, the action was transformed into a broad-based struggle for jobs, equal rights, and protection against deportation. Tenayuca became a local folk heroine for her fiery leadership and courage. Other Mexican-American women were instrumental in improving the working conditions and wages of garment workers in Dallas and San Antonio.

Women also played a major role in the political organization of the Mexican-American community. In 1929 Maria Hernandez helped found one of the first organizations in the state dedicated to protecting the civil rights of Mexican Americans. After World War II, political energies in the Mexican-American community shifted from labor struggles to
civil rights. Women became involved in LULAC and the GI Forum, where they worked to end discrimination and gain equal rights. Mexican-American women frequently faced the same kind of prejudice from men within their community as Anglo women had faced when they had first become politically active in the mid-nineteenth century. Frequently Mexican-American women were forced to limit their political involvement to women's auxiliaries of LULAC and other organizations. Nevertheless, Mexican-American women made political gains. In 1974 Irma Rangel became the first Mexican-American woman elected to the Texas legislature.

The person who symbolized the success of minority women in Texas politics in the second half of the twentieth century was Barbara Jordan. Like Oveta Culp Hobby, Jordan's first political success came in the state legislature in Austin, before she moved on to Washington and the national spotlight. Jordan grew up in Houston's Fifth Ward and attended Texas Southern University prior to earning a law degree at Howard. In 1966 she became the first black elected to the Texas Senate in the twentieth century; six years later she became the first woman from Texas elected to Congress. During the televised Watergate impeachment hearings, Jordan entered the national spotlight as perhaps the most articulate, certainly the most compelling, orator on the House Judiciary Committee. Before ill health forced her to retire from Congress in 1979, some political observers suggested that she had the potential to become the first black and the first woman president.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, inspired by the civil rights movement and the antiwar movement, feminism enjoyed a resurgence in Texas. The new feminist agenda centered on: ending job discrimination for women; eliminating sexism in the media and in education; increasing the number of women in elected political positions; assuring equal status for women under the law; addressing social problems confronting women such as wife battering, rape, and child abuse; and guaranteeing women access to legal abortion. The issue that became the focus of the women's movement in the 1970s was the effort to secure ratification of the equal rights amendment to the U.S. Constitution; in the 1980s the abortion issue dominated the women's movement. Both of these issues (but especially the abortion issue) divided women as had no others. Although the Texas legislature approved ratification of the equal rights amendment, the measure failed to gain the approval of the necessary three-fourths of the states and was not ratified. As of 1997 the right of women to legal abortion had not been restricted in Texas.

Women succeeded in attaining many of their political objectives in Texas. Women's groups set up shelters for battered women and rape crisis centers in most of the state's major communities. In 1972, by an overwhelming majority, Texas voters added an equal rights amendment to the state constitution that eliminated virtually all of the legal discrimination against women. In 1973, a Texas attorney, Sarah Weddington, successfully argued the case for legalized abortion before the Supreme Court. Even though job discrimination did not vanish in Texas, by the 1990s women had gained access to management positions and entry into the professions in unprecedented numbers.
Women’s success in politics also was impressive. On the local level, women became a major political force. Beginning with the election of Carole Keeton Rylander as mayor of Austin in 1977, and the election of Kathy Whitmire as mayor of Houston in 1981, women mayoral candidates have had remarkable success in Texas’s major cities; in the late 1970s and 1980s Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin, El Paso, Galveston, and Nacogdoches have all had women mayors, and Whitmire of Houston had held the post longer than any other person in the city’s history. Indeed, in 1990 the state’s largest city had a woman mayor, a woman school superintendent, a woman police chief, an African-American woman as president of its largest university, and a woman as president of its chamber of commerce. Minority women have shared in this political success. In Houston, for example, the mid-1990s saw African-American, Mexican-American, and Asian-American women serving on the city council, and Sheila Jackson Lee, an African-American woman, representing the city in the U.S. Congress.

Women’s influence in state politics also increased. Between 1922 and 1985, forty-six women served in the state legislature; in 1985, nineteen women (seventeen in the House, two in the Senate) served there. However, even though women have comprised the majority of the state’s population ever since 1960, they still make up less that 14 percent of the legislature. Furthermore, since Miriam Ferguson was elected for her second term as governor in 1932, no woman won election to statewide office for fifty years. In 1972 Frances Farenthold, a two-term veteran of the Texas House of Representatives, made a credible run for the governor’s office. She finished second in a field of seven in the Democratic primary before losing to Dolph Briscoe in the runoff. Ten years later Ann Richards became only the third woman to win a statewide race when she was elected state treasurer. However, 1990 was the banner year for women politicians in Texas. That fall 21 women were elected to the legislature (as late as 1970 there were only two, Farenthold and Jordan). Kay Bailey Hutchison, a Republican, defeated another woman, Nikki Van Hightower, for state treasurer. And Ann Richards was elected Governor of Texas, the second woman to hold that office and the first to be elected in her own right. Two years later Kay Bailey Hutchison became the first woman from Texas elected to the U.S. Senate.

As Texas approaches the twenty-first century, no one can seriously question the fact that women play a major role in the state. The 1990s not only have witnessed a woman in the governor’s mansion and a woman representing Texas in the U.S. Senate, but women administering the government of several of the state’s major cities, holding positions of responsibility in corporations, medical institutions, colleges and universities, and the media. Texas women work as physicians, attorneys, accountants, and engineers, as well as in the “traditional” professions of nurse and teacher. As they have done since they first arrived in Texas, women continue to contribute to the task of creating the community in which they live, organizing its principal institutions, and working to ameliorate the social problems that exist there. As new waves of migration bring new groups of residents into Texas, women will continue to participate in the building of new communities. And Texas women will continue to assert their right to an equal partnership in the state that they have helped to build.