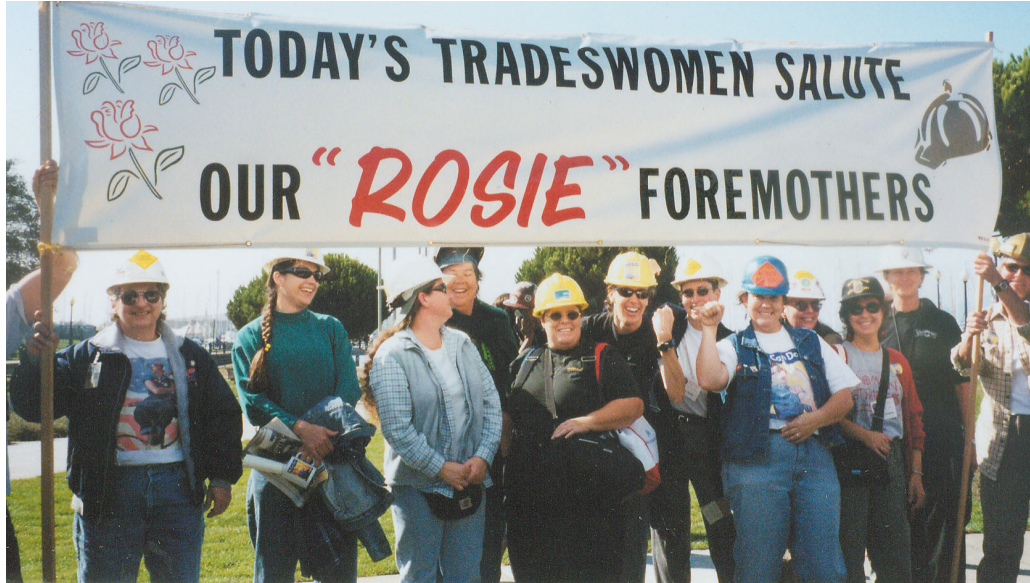




Tradeswomen History Media Guide

Learning from the past to CHANGE the future

"If you don't know where you come from, you don't know where you're going."

Sister Addie Wyatt, CLUW Co-Founder

Vice President, Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union

Media Guide

By: Brigid O'Farrell and Molly Martin*

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Media Presentation

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Available at: [Media Presentation](#) or (<http://vimeo.com/247078061>)

Introduction

This Media Guide accompanies the short [Media Presentation](#) designed to open a Tradeswomen History Workshop, *Learning from the Past to Change the Future* (vimeo.com/247078061). In five minutes photographs, images, words, and music are used to present the history of women in skilled trades including the legal framework opening these jobs to women, the strategies tradeswomen have used to achieve change—legal, program, and organizing—the barriers that remain, and new approaches now being developed. This brief overview guide (pages 1-12) and the image credits referenced (pages 13-20) enable you to use the video to develop a history talk and/or workshop that meets the needs of your tradeswomen organization, classroom, union hall, or community meeting.

Tradeswomen have been at the forefront of the struggle for job equality and an end to sex discrimination and sexual harassment for decades, yet their voices have not been heard. Skilled union construction work offers women and men an opportunity to learn while they earn through apprenticeship programs, secure decent wages and benefits to support themselves and their families, and retire with dignity and security. The work can be rewarding, as well as challenging and dangerous. Women have proven their ability to do skilled physical labor, but barriers remain and progress is slow. There is much to learn from the past as we plan for a future that now includes the #MeToo movement.

Part I. Around the World and Over Time

Women have always done hard, physical labor. While their numbers have been small, women have been found doing construction work from Africa to Wales, from ancient times through the World Wars, and up to the present. For example Shelley E. Roff explores women's participation on construction sites in Medieval Europe. Lan Dehua describes the hardships faced by the largely unskilled women construction workers in China today.¹

Part 2. The Legal Framework for Workers

Union women and men have fought to establish a legal framework to protect worker rights in the United States. For the first time, during the New Deal in 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) guaranteed workers the right to join a union. The National Labor Relations Board was established to oversee elections and resolve disputes. The Fair Labor Standards Act followed in 1937 establishing the minimum wage, limiting overtime, and ending child labor, but the laws did not apply to all workers. Other laws such as those protecting health and safety followed.²

The legal arena, however, is also a constant struggle with laws being passed to weaken worker protections and make it harder to belong to unions. By amending the NLRA, the

Taft Hartley Act, 1947, placed constraints on unions as did the Landrum Griffin Act, 1959. Efforts to positively reform the labor laws for the 21st century have failed over the last several decades, while efforts to weak them have grown stronger. The strongest threats today are state so called “right-to-work” laws, which make it legal for workers to benefit from union contracts, but do not require workers to make any contribution to the union.³

For Tradeswomen

Women workers adopted the legal strategy for protection at work including passage and implementation of legislation and executive orders. In the early part of the 20th century women fought for protective laws at the state level, to limit such things as the hours they could work and the weights they could lift. A law guaranteeing “equal pay for equal work” became a rallying cry first at the state level and then in 1963 when the federal Equal Pay Act was passed, making it illegal to pay women less than men who are doing the same work. The federal law is now enforced by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

For the first time Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act declared that it was illegal to discriminate in employment (e.g. recruitment, hiring, promotion, firing) based on race, color, religion, national origin and sex. While sex discrimination was not originally intended to be in the bill, it established the primary legal framework to end sex discrimination in employment. The law established the EEOC and is enforced through commission administrative actions, as well as private lawsuits. It wasn’t until 1968, however, that sex discrimination in employment by companies with federal contracts was prohibited under Executive Order 11246. Its regulations are now enforced by the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs in the U.S. Department of Labor (OFCCP).⁴

Both Title VII and Executive Order 11246 began to define discrimination in employment based on sex and to establish a process for reviewing employer and union policies and practices. They created a system for women wanting to join the construction industry to file complaints and lawsuits against discriminatory recruitment, hiring, and retention policies by contractors and unions. The EO 11246 enabled the OFCCP to initiate compliance reviews of contractors with government contracts over a certain size.⁵ Many states and cities also established civil rights laws that cover employment discrimination.

Part 3. Tradeswomen Strategies for Change

The legal framework was just the beginning. Laws are only as effective as they are rigorously enforced. Women immediately went to work pushing the government to enforce Title VII. Large legal settlements were made in industries such as airline, telephone, and steel to end sex discrimination and establish affirmative action plans to increase the

number of women working in jobs from entry level to top management. Little progress was made for tradeswomen in construction, however.

It wasn't until the 1970s that tradeswomen joined with allies in newly-formed women's legal organizations to force the government to extend affirmative action concepts to integrating construction companies and unions doing business with the federal government. Lawsuits were initiated on both the east and west coasts, suing the U.S. Department of Labor for not implementing Executive Order 11246. Within the framework of the larger women's movement, tradeswomen fought for their own legal framework and then for strategies to use that framework: legal, program, and organizing.⁶

Legal Strategies

The results of the lawsuits against the Department of Labor established the guidelines for recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting women in the construction trades. The regulations applicable to federal construction sites have not been updated. The 1978 goals include:

- For Women
 - 6.9 % of Hours Worked on Federal Projects
 - 23 % of New Apprentices
- In the Work Environment
 - Free of harassment, intimidation, coercion
 - Assign 2 or more women to each project
 - Ensure supervisors carry out obligations

Other cases of critical importance to tradeswomen include the *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* decision where the Supreme Court distinguished between and prohibited two kinds of sexual harassment. Quid pro quo harassment occurred when women were made offers such as a promotion in exchange for a sexual favor. Equally important, however, was the hostile environment harassment where men could make the everyday workplace into a hostile place by threats, offensive images, abusive language, and physical violence.⁷

In *Jenson v. Eveleth Taconite Co*, in 1998 the courts established the use of "class action" for sexual harassment, meaning that many women were covered in the lawsuit against the mining company and each woman didn't have to file individually. This case was documented in the book *Class Action* and the award winning movie *North Country*. Lois Jenson was the miner who first brought the suit.⁸

It was not long, however, until new laws were used against tradeswomen. Ward Connerly began his anti-affirmative action efforts at the state level.⁹ California's Proposition 209, for example, was passed in 1996 and critically weakened state level affirmative action efforts

to recruit women for the trades. In 2011, the Supreme Court weakened the use of class action suits when it ruled in favor of Wal-Mart in *Dukes v. Wal-Mart Stores, Inc.* The Court did not rule on the substance of the case, but ruled that the class was simply too large for the plaintiffs to be similar enough to be a class. Weakening class actions was a major setback for all working women.¹⁰

There are established frameworks for filing complaints starting with the employer, the union, and the federal, state or local agency being used. If a complaint leads to a lawsuit the process can take many years and be extremely difficult for the individuals involved who are often the targets of attacks at their work and in their personal lives. Women who file complaints and lawsuits may accumulate significant legal fees and lose in the end for many different reasons. The laws are critical, but the process should be approached with caution.

Program Strategies

Program strategies overlapped with the legal cases. Even with a positive court ruling it was necessary to develop remedies for how to correct the problems. Consent decrees often involved setting goals and timetables for recruiting and hiring women, establishing pre-apprenticeship training programs, providing training on sexual harassment, and working with local tradeswomen organizations to meet their requirements. The Century Freeway was one such project in Los Angeles that lasted from 1974 to 1993, documented by electrician and professor Vivian Price in the film *Hammering It Out*.¹¹ Two other programs that tradeswomen have fought for are WANTO and PLAs.

WANTO: Outreach and training programs for women and people of color, especially related to apprenticeship, were created in the 1970s as part of the federal government employment and training programs. Women in Apprenticeship and Nontraditional Occupations (WANTO) was a program established through federal legislation in 1993. WANTO created a grant program to assist women in the trades with an average of \$1 million a year divided between 4 and 6 organization recipients. Tradeswomen organizations worked with community groups and developed technical assistance programs to help employers and unions create outreach, recruitment, and training programs to increase the number of women, including women of color, in nontraditional occupations. Many, although not all of the programs, focused on skilled trades in the construction industry. While under assault in the federal budget most years, WANTO continues to be administered by the U.S. Department of Labor through the Women's Bureau and Office of Apprenticeship.¹²

PLAs: Project Labor Agreements have also been used to successfully increase the number of women in the trades. A PLA is an agreement between a contractor and the building trades council that basically requires that the contractor hire workers through the

union halls, with prevailing wages and benefits. In return unions agree not to strike or have other work stoppages. The goal is to have quality projects completed on time, within budget, by skilled workers in a safe environment. PLAs have been used since the 1930s and the Grand Coulee Dam was the first such public project completed in 1939.¹³

By working with community groups PLAs can also guarantee that local workers will be hired and can target hiring women and people of color from the community. A recent example is the Viking Stadium in Minnesota completed in 2016, where the contractors exceeded their goals for women and minorities and developed a compliance model to recruit, train, and retain a diverse workforce. Project labor agreements are often done with city and county governments, like the Boston Big Dig, but can also be negotiated with private sector contractors and projects.¹⁴

Organizing Strategies

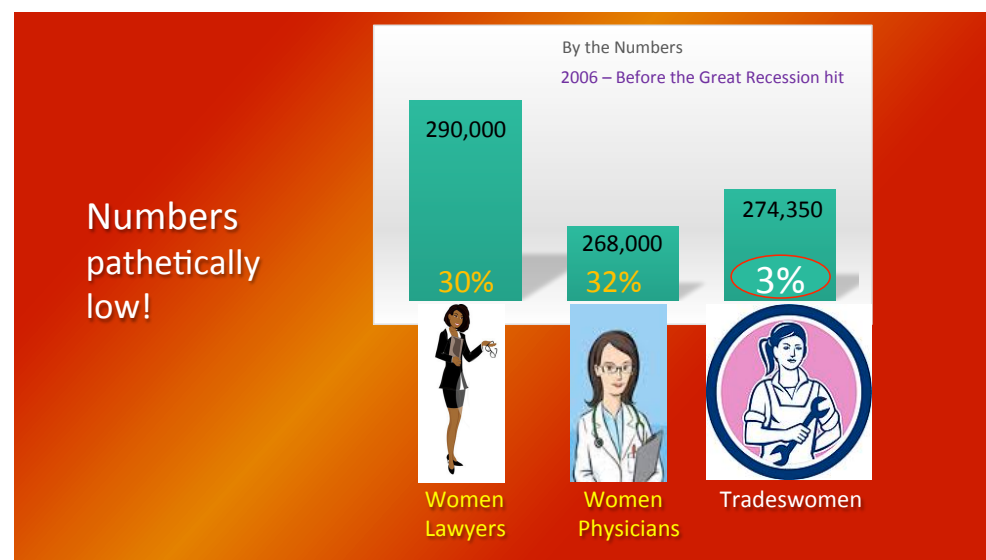
None of these lawsuits, consent decrees, technical assistance projects, or project labor agreements would have happened without tradeswomen organizing. Since the 1970s they have been organizing to pressure unions, contractors, and governments to open the doors to women. They have formed tradeswomen organizations across the country. These organizations provide pre-apprenticeship and outreach programs for recruiting and training women and for providing support for women, which is extremely important in helping retain and promote women in the trades. These tradeswomen groups have been effective at building coalitions with civil rights groups, other women's programs, community colleges, and unions to work on issues to support tradeswomen. Communicating and coming together in conferences have been critical organizing and support tools. (See *Tradeswomen Resources* for more details and links.)

Communicating: Tradeswomen have always found ways to tell their stories. Several tradeswomen have written books about their experiences such as Kate Braid's *Journeywoman, Swinging a Hammer in a Man's World*, while others have collected and analyzed the stories of many tradeswomen, such as Molly Martin's *Hard Hatted Women* and Susan Eisenberg's *We'll Call You if We Need You*.¹⁵ Tradeswomen also communicate through magazines like "Tradeswomen, Magazine," edited and published by volunteer tradeswomen from 1981-1999. Just about every program has a newsletter and they're online, including the e-magazine "Pride and a Paycheck." These groups also produce calendars, art work, and research, the latter often in collaboration with other women's advocacy groups. Today, information and support are also provided through social media—twitter, blogs, web and facebook pages. The Tradeswomen Archives offers a place for tradeswomen to retire their papers and do research on tradeswomen issues. Much of the information is available on-line.

Coming Together: Other major activities tradeswomen have undertaken are organizing and attending local and national tradeswomen conferences. Women come together across trades to learn new skills and to support each other. National conferences started in 1983 with the first national conference in Oakland. In 1989 the second national conference was held in Chicago. Addie Wyatt, one of the co-founders of the Coalition of Labor Union Women and Vice President of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters Union, was a keynote speaker signifying the importance of tradeswomen working with other union women and women's organizations. In 1997 the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) was the first international building trades union to sponsor a women's conference. In 2002 the State Building & Construction Trades Council of California was the first state organization to sponsor a tradeswomen conference and in 2010 the national building trades became co-sponsors. In 2016 the National Women Build Nations Conference moved from California to Chicago and in 2017 nearly 1,700 tradeswomen attended the conference co-sponsored by North America's Building Trades Unions (NABTU) and Chicago Women in Trades (CWIT).

Part 4. Progress, Barriers, And Still We Persist

Despite 40 years of activism in the legal, program, and organizing areas, women remain a pathetically low 3 percent of the trades and we don't know how many of those women are apprentices or journey workers. While the actual number of women in trades the government counts has steadily increased (and is now back to growing since the 2008 recession), women have made far more progress in other occupations. Lawyers and doctors were 3 percent women in the 1960s. Women are now over 30 percent of these occupations and almost 50 percent in law and medical schools.



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007¹⁶

Individual stories and research studies show that barriers remain. The laws have not been adequately enforced, women are discriminated against in hiring and promotion, women still face isolation, harassment, and physical violence on the job, and male hostility can be seen at many levels.¹⁷ Tradeswomen are part of the #MeToo movement.

“Yet still, we persist” captures the spirit of the tradeswomen. Some women are retiring after successful careers, and others have stepped up into leadership positions as joint apprenticeship program directors, business agents, heads of state building trades councils, and elected public officials. For example, Gina Walsh is a Missouri State Senator, president of the Missouri State Building and Construction Trades Council, and member of the International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers, with over 35 years in the trade. Tradeswomen have taken their message to Washington, DC. They continue to work in coalition with legal, civil rights, and research groups to push for legislative changes and stave off efforts to defund and weaken programs through organizations like the [National Task Force on Tradeswomen’s Issues](#). The newest job training and technical assistance effort is the [National Center for Women’s Equity in Apprenticeship and Employment](#), coordinated by Chicago Women in Trades.

There are new initiatives within unions working with NABTU’s Tradeswomen Committee. In a break though effort in 2017, the Iron Workers Union negotiated a paid maternity leave provision in their contract with the Ironworker Management Progressive Action Trust. They have started a “Be that One Guy” campaign to reinforce support from male co-workers. In 2014 the California State Building and Construction Trades Council distributed a flyer notifying all locals that men and women in construction are eligible for the state paid family leave program. Tradeswomen have also joined their unions in the fights to preserve prevailing wage, to stop right-to-work legislation, and they are part of the all-important get-out-the-vote efforts.

In Summary

This historical review suggests the following conclusions for discussion:

- Women are successfully working in the construction trades.
- For change to happen the legal framework is important, but it is not sufficient.
- As federal laws weaken, then state and local initiatives become more important.
- Project Labor Agreements offer an opportunity for making change.
- There are new openings to work with union brothers and bargain collectively.
- Coalitions with other organizations are central.
- There are more sisters now in leadership positions who can be part of the process.
- Tradeswomen organizing on their own behalf remains critical.

Now, what are the plans to move forward in your local?

Attachments: Resources By and About Tradeswomen Handout
Media Image Credits and References

* Brigid O'Farrell, National Writers Union, UAW Local 1981, is a researcher whose latest report, with Ariane Hegewisch, is "Women in the Construction Trades, Findings from the IWPR Tradeswomen Survey." Her latest book is *She Was one of Us: Eleanor Roosevelt and the American Worker*, Cornell University Press: mbridgofarrell@gmail.com.

Molly Martin is an electrician, retired IBEW Local 6, co-founder of Tradeswomen Inc., in Oakland, and author of *Hard-Hatted Women: Life on the Job*, Seal Press. She led a group of volunteer tradeswomen to edit and publish *Tradeswomen Magazine* from 1981-1999. Photo Courtesy of Molly Martin and Tradeswomen, Inc.: tradeswomn@gmail.com.

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³ For a labor perspective on right-to-work state laws see: <https://aflcio.org/issues/right-work>. To learn if your state is right-to-work go to NW Labor Press: <https://nwlaborpress.org/2017/02/another-state-goes-right-to-work-missouri/>.

⁴ More about the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is found at: <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/index.cfm>. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance, U.S. Department of Labor is found at: <https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/>.

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⁶ A summary of the legal action for tradeswomen is presented in Carrie N. Baker, *The Women's Movement Against Sexual Harassment*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008, Chapter 4.

⁷ The Meritor case is discussed in Carrie N. Baker, *The Women's Movement Against Sexual Harassment*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2008.

⁸ Clara Bingham and Laura Leedy Gansler, *Class Action, The Story of Lois Jenson and the Landmark Case That Changed Sexual Harassment Law*, Doubleday, New York, 2002.

⁹ Ward Connerly, *Creating Equal, My Fight Against Race Preferences*, Encounter Books, San Francisco, 2000.

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¹¹ Vivian Price materials at the Tradeswomen Archives, California State University, Dominguez Hills, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt838nf3rf/>.

¹² The Women's Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor continues to provide resources for tradeswomen: <https://www.dol.gov/wb/>. For a review of training programs and the effectiveness of WANTO see: Sharon H. Mastracci, *Breaking Out of the Pink-Collar Ghetto: Policy Solutions for Non-College Women*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 2004

¹³ "Getting to the Table, A Project Labor Agreement Primer," Liam Garland and Susie Suafai, National Economic Development and Law Center, Oakland, CA, Spring 2002.

¹⁴ To learn more about the Viking Stadium project see Erin Johansson and Benjamin Woods, "Building Career Opportunities for Women and People of Color: Breakthroughs In Construction," Jobs With Justice Education Fund and North America's Building Trades Union Tradeswomen Committee, November 2016: <http://www.jwj.org/building-career-opportunities-for-women-and-people-of-color-breakthroughs-in-construction>.

¹⁵ See Kate Braid, *Journeywoman, Swinging a Hammer in a Man's World*, Caitlin Press, Halfmoonbay, BC 2012; Molly Martin, Ed., *Hard-Hatted Women: Life on the Job*, Seal Press, Seattle, WA, 1988, 1997; Susan Eisenberg, *We'll Call You If We Need You*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 1998, With a new preface, May, 2018.

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TRADESWOMEN HISTORY MEDIA GUIDE ATTACHMENTS

RESOURCES BY AND ABOUT TRADESWOMEN, November 2017

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Journeywoman, Swinging a Hammer in a Man's World

Kate Braid, Caitlin Press, 2012

<http://caitlin-press.com/our-books/journeywoman/>

Dirt Work, An Education in the Woods

Christine Byle, Beacon Press, Boston, 2012

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Live Wire, Women and Brotherhood in the Electrical Industry

Francine Moccio, Temple University Press, 2009

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Sisters in the Brotherhoods

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Kris Paap, ILR Press/Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, 2006

<http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100310210>

Breaking Out of the Pink-Collar Ghetto: Policy Solutions for Non-College Women

Sharon H. Mastracci, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 2004

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We'll Call You If We Need You: Experiences of Women Working Construction

Susan Eisenberg, ILR Press/Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY, (1998).

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Alone in a Crowd: Women in the Trades Tell Their Stories

Jean Reith Schroedel, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1985

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Mary Lindenstone Walshok, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New, 1981

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Welder Certificate, Courtesy of L.B. Mitchell.

Rosies' Corner, New York, Courtesy of Molly Martin.

Tradeswomen Salute Rosie Foremothers, Courtesy Tradeswomen, Inc.

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