Women in Revolt: The Enduring Legacy of The *Newsweek* Lawsuit

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Individual Documentary

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While most of my past National History Day projects have focused on women’s issues, I have never examined the Second-wave Feminism movement of the 1960s-1980s before. Upon further research, I discovered that Second-wave Feminism coincided with several other movements such as the Anti-War and Black Power Movements. I recognized that this was an extremely unique and progressive time in America’s history and decided that I wanted to focus on an aspect of Second-wave Feminism. I specifically chose the topic of the Newsweek Lawsuit of 1970 because of its historical anomaly. Women hired to work at Newsweek magazine were barred from writing positions and confined to the job of “researcher,” which involved fact checking the male writer’s articles. However, the women banded together in solidarity to launch the first class action lawsuit by women in the news media in order to protest these discriminatory practices.

My research started off with examining several primary and secondary sources regarding the social and political climate of the 1960s-1980s in relation to the Newsweek lawsuit. However, the most valuable resources in creating my project were the interviews I conducted with Lynn Povich, former Newsweek researcher and one of the leaders of the lawsuit, Susan Brownmiller, former Newsweek researcher, and Jesse Ellison, former Newsweek employee of the early 2000s. These interviews helped me tremendously because there are not a whole lot of primary sources online specifically about the lawsuit, so speaking to these women really helped me gain a deep, holistic, and multifaceted understanding of the story. Additionally, Lynn Povich also provided me with scans of legal documents, letters, photographs, and newspapers from her private collection that are not available online or in archival sources.
I decided on the documentary category because I wanted to place the lawsuit in the context of a wide range of photographs and videos from the Second-wave Feminism movement in order to examine how the lawsuit impacted not only the women within *Newsweek*, but the Women’s Movement as a whole. I created my project by combining audiovisual components using iMovie.

On March 16th, 1970, forty-six *Newsweek* women announced their lawsuit. While this lawsuit resulted in a triumph with the bosses signing an agreement to stop discriminatory hiring and promotional practices, it was short lived. Two years later, conditions had remained virtually unchanged. The women sued again, this time with a specific list of demands. This second lawsuit resulted in lasting change, but not just for the women of *Newsweek* because women at *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, and the *New York Times* all launched subsequent lawsuits against their employers. Furthermore, the *Newsweek* lawsuit demonstrated that no matter what laws, bills, or memorandums are signed into effect, if people do not keep pressing issues an important part of social dialogue, then tragedies can still occur. Initially, the women of *Newsweek* triumphed on paper, yet they still faced the tragedies of sexism in their workplace, but it was because they never ceased to continue the discussion that would lead to their lasting legacy of triumph.
Annotated Bibliography

Primary Sources

Personal Interviews


Jesse Ellison was a former *Newsweek* contributor during the 2000s. She grew up an era of “girl power” and faced close to no sexual discrimination during her upbringing and was able to accomplish many of her goals, including attending the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. However, once she started working at *Newsweek*, she realized that her sex was indeed a factor that dictated what she was able to accomplish. After some extensive research, she discovered that there was a lawsuit on sexual discrimination within *Newsweek* decades ago. She wrote an article in 2009 about the issues she faced working at *Newsweek* and drew a parallel to the lawsuit in the 1970. The interview with Ellison helped me really understand what exactly she and the rest of the women at *Newsweek* were facing in the modern day. Speaking to her really aided in my project because I was able to hear about how these issues supposedly resolved decades ago are still relevant in the 21st century.


Lynn Povich was one of the main leaders of the lawsuits in the 1970s, and she wrote a book detailing the whole story. It was an honor to speak to her because her actions directly resulted in lasting change not only within the field of journalism, but many aspects of society. She provided me with her personal story as well as the issues other women of *Newsweek* were facing at the time. The interview was instrumental in the creation of my project because it gave me extensive detail as to what exactly occurred and how she personally felt about it. Using her perspective, I was able to create a more holistic and multifaceted project that accounted for multiple sides of the story.
“Interview with Susan Brownmiller.” Personal Interview. 2 June 2018.

Susan Brownmiller is an author and journalist who frequently writes about women’s issues. She was also a former researcher/fact checker at Newsweek. Speaking to her was really helpful in creating my project because was able to tell me some of the struggles she faced within the doors of Newsweek. She told me how the people in charge prohibited her from ever writing for the magazine and her feelings of anger from these remarks, which in turn, pushed her to work even harder and succeed.

Letters


The women of Newsweek who were involved in the class action lawsuit filed their complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in the form of a letter. The purpose of this letter was to make the federal agency aware of the issues that are happening so that they can help to address it. The women detailed some of the issues they were facing and the reason for making the complaint and for suing. A scan of this letter was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.

Legal Documents


This was the second complaint filed by the women of Newsweek to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. It was useful to my research because it showed that even with the first memorandum, conditions at Newsweek had not changed. It allowed me to see the frustration and issues the women continued to face. A scan of this complaint was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.

This was filed by Montagno on behalf of fifty other women working at *Newsweek* who still faced discrimination working there, even after the first lawsuit where the bosses promised to stop the sexist practices. It was useful to me in my research because it described how the women felt about the practices at *Newsweek*. A scan of this complaint was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.

**Newspaper Articles**


This article by Thomas Corpora of the *Associated Press* was useful to me in my research because it allowed me to see what the information given to the public was, seeing as though the *Associated Press* was a very large source of news for Americans. It also provided an overview of the press release and contains quotations from some of the women at the press release. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.


This article was published in an Italian newspaper two days after the *Newsweek* lawsuit was announced. It demonstrated to me that this story was gaining traction not only in the community of journalists and the country of America, but also internationally. The title translates to "Discrimination, The *Newsweek* Editors." A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.


This article was published in the *New York Times* many months after the initial lawsuit was announced. It was useful to my research because it showed that it took a while for the people in charge at *Newsweek* to come around to the idea of hiring women for positions other than researcher/fact checker. It also showed that there was a continual discussion of the issue which ultimately led to lasting change. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.

This article was published in the New York Times two years after the initial lawsuit, and directly after the second lawsuit was announced. It demonstrated that these issues were still present in Newsweek despite a promise for change by the bosses. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.


This article was published shortly after the women of Newsweek announced their lawsuit and demonstrated how quickly the conversation around it started in the country. The article was helpful in my research because it contained a quotation from Eleanor Holmes Norton, the attorney of the women, as well as detailed a protest against the treatment of female journalist employees that happened the week before. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.


This article was really insightful to my research because it highlighted an irony in the situation. Newsweek had found Second-wave Feminism as a compelling enough story to be the cover of their publication, yet it still practiced discriminatory hiring and promotion policies. This article was responsible for generating the conversation that allowed both the people within Newsweek and the public to see this discrepancy and work to address it. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.


This article came from the perspective of Diane Shah, one of four female writers for The National Observer at the time. It was really interesting to be able to read it from this unique perspective because it was written by someone who likely dealt with similar issues as the Newsweek women did. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.


This article was published in the Daily Express, which is a publication from London. It once again demonstrated that this story was quickly making its way around the world in
order to generate conversation and change. Overall, it reflects bad on *Newsweek*, a magazine of the liberal perspective, to have these kinds of issues within their own doors. A scan of this article was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her personal collection.

**Magazine Articles**


This article was the cover story of the *Newsweek* March, 1970 issue titled “Women in Revolt.” I was able to read this article with the help of Sally Edelstein, a author and a vintage memorabilia collector who wrote an article about Second-wave Feminism. She provided me with scans of the magazine in her collection. This article was really insightful because it directly came from *Newsweek* and was able to shed perspective on what *Newsweek* considered worthy of a cover story, despite still having discriminatory practices within its own doors.


This article written by Otto Friedrich, a *Time* editor, criticized the fact checkers and researchers at publications such as *Newsweek*, calling them “unqualified for anything.” This article allowed me to learn more about a different perspective, one that demeaned the women who worked at *Newsweek*. This article was later responded to by Fay Willey, a researcher at *Newsweek*. Her letter was published in the next issue of *Harper's*.


This article in the *New Yorker* allowed me to gain more knowledge on how journalists and the general public views the protests of the 1960s and 1970s. The article demonstrated to me that this era was filled with social discourse and articles such as this one contributed to the social dialogue about the injustices present.


Willey Fay responded to Friedrich’s article. She states that the women have attended prestigious universities and are qualified and intelligent. The discourse between Fay and Friedrich helped me understand the varying perspectives surrounding the *Newsweek* lawsuit.
Press Releases

“Newsweek Lawsuit.” American Civil Liberties Union, 1970.

The press release allowed me to be placed in the moment when the women announced their lawsuit because there are no known audio or video resources from that day. It allowed me to see what exactly was said and how the information was presented to the public in order to generate social dialogue. A scan of the press release was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her private collection.

Speeches


The speech/address Eleanor Holmes Norton gave during the press conference outlined the reasons for the lawsuit as well as her and the women’s concerns. This was really useful in my research because it allowed me to be placed in the moment of the press conference because no known video or audio exists of it, so having the words said at the press conference helped me overcome this particular set back. A scan of the speech was provided to me by Lynn Povich from her private collection.

Books


Susan Brownmiller is a journalist and writer who often wrote about the issues women faced in society. This particular book was helpful in my research because there was a section where Brownmiller discussed her experiences working at Newsweek. It allowed me to create a more multifaceted depiction in my documentary because I was able to learn about the individual stories of many women who worked at Newsweek during this time, like Brownmiller.


This memoir by Elliot was helpful in my research because it allowed me to hear another perspective of the story. It helped me better understand why the conditions at Newsweek
were present due to the decades of tradition that had created the environment of *Newsweek*. Additionally, this memoir also taught me more about the world of journalism during this era of progress and protest.


This landmark book written by Betty Friedan is one of most widely discussed pieces of feminist literature. It was extremely helpful and insightful during my research because it provided necessary context for the events that unfolded at *Newsweek*. It allowed me to learn more about the status of women during this time period, and how that led to many protest movements and women banding together in solidarity to create change.


This book by Povich was where I initially started my research because it detailed the entire story of the women who took a stand against their employers, from how they met an planned a course of action to their subsequent success once allowed to hold writing positions. It was extremely helpful because it allowed me to get a holistic understanding of the story before delving deeper into specific areas of the case.


This book was extremely useful in my research because it demonstrated the issues the women at *Newsweek* faced were not unique to only *Newsweek* because women across many publications found themselves discriminated against. Many of these publications featured stories centered around the progressive political climate, yet they still practiced discriminatory procedures within their own doors. This book, written by Robertson who experienced the story herself, allowed me to learn more about this topic.

Photographs


This photograph helped me see the conditions of a segregated classroom in America.

This photograph helped me see the immense amount of opposition the Little Rock Nine faced and the fact that the US Government supported the integration by introducing the National Guard.


This collection has a total of four images that were taken on the day of the press conference. It depicted what the room of the American Civil Liberties Union office looked like as well as the reporters who showed up to capture the story. I was able to use these images in my documentary when describing various aspects of the lawsuit and press conference. Additionally, the photographs captured the emotions of the women which ranged from excitement to anxiousness.

Collapse of efforts to keep Little Rock public schools segregated is the most significant gain in the integration fight. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/00649676/.

This photograph gave me a greater insight into the crowds that the Little Rock Nine faced as they integrated Little Rock Central High School.


This photograph allowed me to see Baisy Dates, a key component in the success of the Little Rock Nine’s integration.

Mrs. Nettie Hunt, sitting on steps of Supreme Court, holding newspaper, explaining to her daughter Nikie the meaning of the Supreme Court’s decision banning school segregation. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/00652489/.

This photograph allowed me to see the sense of triumph that Brown v. Board brought.

This illustration was from the Newsweek issue “Women In Revolt,” which depicts the various thoughts and goals of Second-wave feminists. It was useful to my research because it demonstrated the key target areas the women focused on during this time period.


I used this photograph to understand the conditions and the immense hate that the Little Rock Nine faced as they integrated Little Rock Central High School.


The bulk of the images I used in my documentary and to better understand my topic were provided by Lynn Povich, a former Newsweek researcher/fact checker and one of the leaders of the lawsuits. She sent me scans of the photos, and they were extremely helpful to me because they depicted a variety of different occurrences from what happened within the doors of Newsweek to her own personal successes after the lawsuit.

Political Cartoons

“With All Deliberate Speed.” The Baltimore. 2 July 1955.

This political cartoon helped me understand the message that the Supreme Court sent to the country that called for an end to segregation; however, this message was not acted upon until activists rose up and challenged the ideologies and belief systems of society.

Videos


This film clip allowed to see what the Second-wave Feminism protests were like and the tactics the organizers used to emphasize their message. Additionally, it showed the power of solidarity amidst tumultuous times. I used this clip in my documentary as well to illustrate the protests of the time period.
“Carrie Chapman Catt and Dr. Anna Howard Shaw. Suffragettes March.” 1905. Film Archives.

This clip helped me better understand what the protests of First-wave Feminism were like and the tactics they used. There were many similarities between the first and second wave, most notably the women banding together in solidarity.


This documentary helped me learn more about the Women’s Movement from the very beginnings all the way to present day. It helped me draw connections over various time periods which was helpful in formulating and supporting my thesis statement.


I was able to use this film clip in my documentary to demonstrate what exactly the protests were like during the Second-wave Feminism movement. Additionally, this video clip featured a wide range of protests signs, so I could easily see the messages the women wanted the public to know.


This clip was really helpful to me because it took place in New York City, where the Newsweek office was located. It helped me understand the environment in which the women of Newsweek were in, which helped to explain some of their actions of taking their own stands against discrimination.


By examining this film clip, it allowed me to see how people during the protests felt about the present conditions in society because the clip included interviews from protesters. Additionally, there was a clip of Betty Friedan speaking to the women that was really helpful because it showed the kind of leader she was and how she impact the movement.

“Women's Movement USA, 1950s-60s.” People’s Century. PBS.

This documentary was really helpful in my research because it provided an extensive overview of the Women’s Movement during the 1950s and 1960s and how these events would result in cases such as Newsweek.
Secondary Sources

Books


This book helped me understand the role of the media in the Second-wave Feminism movement. This was especially important to my research because my topic is placed directly within the scope of journalism, which often times reported on the progressive news of the era.


This book gave me an extensive overview of the progress women have made since the 1960s to the present day. It allowed me to learn more about the effects of Second-wave Feminism on the actions that would later be a reaction to prior movements. This book helped me place the *Newsweek* lawsuit in a greater historical context.


This book gave me insight into some of the issues women are facing in modern day American society. The book argues that decades of tradition still affect women today, and it helped me draw parallels between the *Newsweek* lawsuit and what is going on in the world today.


This book applied the events of the Second-wave Feminism movement to a greater historical impact. This book was really helpful in my research because it outlined the process by which women gradually gained more power in society and that subsequent power’s impact on the rest of America. It allowed me to see what exactly individual events, such as the *Newsweek* lawsuit, could do if put together to generate conversation.

This book detailed the life of Eleanor Holmes Norton, the attorney who represented the women of *Newsweek* in the initial lawsuit. It gave me context as to why Norton chose to pursue a career in law and her passions in life, which ultimately drove her to be a champion against racism and sexism.

**Scholarly Articles**


This article examined the grassroots leadership of the Second-wave Feminism movement and how the women were able to work together to create lasting change. There were many parallels between the “Women’s Clubs” this article discussed and the community of *Newsweek* women who organized in secret before finally announcing their lawsuit.


This article placed Second-wave Feminism in relation to some of the other protests and movements of the era. It demonstrated how the 1960s and 1970s were a time of political and social strife, but ultimately would result in lasting change as a result of conflict and social dialogue.


This article helped me in my research because it allowed to learn about feminism from the perspective of several races. This could explain how during the *Newsweek* lawsuit, black women were hesitant in participating because their interests were more closely aligned with the Civil Rights Movement.

This article helped me learn more about the Black Power Movement which coincided with the Second-wave Feminism movement. It was helpful to my research because it allowed me to see the other events that were happening at the same time of the *Newsweek* lawsuit so that I could place it in greater historical context.


This article helped me learn more about how the Second-wave Feminism movement resulted in the rise of the Third Wave. It provided me with an overview of the successes and failures of the Second-wave and its subsequent impact on the Third-wave. It allowed me to place the *Newsweek* lawsuit in greater historical context.


This article helped me learn more about Third-wave Feminism, which was a direct response to and result of the Second-wave movement. It helped me see which issues were still not resolved after the Second-wave and as a result, had to be carried over to the next wave.


This article helped me understand the responses to feminism in modern day America, as well as Canada. It was useful to my research because it demonstrated how certain issues in regard to women’s rights are still relevant even today.
This article helped me understand why the 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of so many social movements in relation to the “Flower Power” slogan. It helped me understand the environment in which the Newsweek women lived and worked in and often times reporting about these events.

**News, Magazine, and Online Articles**


This article provided me with an overview of Jessica Bennett’s experience working at Newsweek in the 2000s. It discussed similar issues to those of the women of the 1960s and 1970s. It helped me delve deeper into the occurrence that conditions still remained similar to an extent to pre-lawsuit times.


This article gave me some insight into the sexual harassment that occured at Newsweek. It was compared to the Amazon online series adaptation of the Newsweek story, which featured some parts of sexual harassment. This was yet another issue the women at Newsweek had to face during their time working there.


This article provided me with information about the landmark Supreme Court case of Brown v. Board of Education, which I use saw as a historical parallel when researching. It showed that no matter what laws, bills, or paper documents are agreed on, if the public
does not make an active effort to create social dialogue around the issue, change will
could take much long to arrive.

Donaldson James, Susan. “Newsweek Still Wages Gender War, 40 Years Later.” ABC News, 23
Mar. 2010,
17100.

This article provided me with an overview of the Newsweek lawsuit forty years after from
a perspective of reflection. The article discussed some of the issues the women at
Newsweek were facing in the 21st century and related it back to the issues of the 1960s
and 1970s. It was helpful to my research because it allowed me to see that these topics
are still continually discussed, which helped me formulate my thesis statement.

“Four Waves of Feminism.” Pacific University, 28 Nov. 2018,
www.pacificu.edu/about/media/four-waves-feminism.

This article helped me learn more about each of the waves of feminism, ranging from the
first wave which accomplished the 19th Amendment, all the way to present day. It
provided necessary context for my project because it showed what exactly resulted in the
second wave and how the second wave influenced subsequent movements.

Ziv, Stav. “‘Good Girls Revolt’: The Feminist Legacy of a Newsweek Lawsuit.” Newsweek, 10
Nov. 2016,

This article specifically focused on the legacy of the Newsweek lawsuit decades later. It
was useful to my research because it allowed me to see the impacts the lawsuit had on
society and how it is still relevant today.

Videos

Good Girls Revolt. Created by Dana Calvo, season 1, episodes 1-10, Amazon Studios, 28 Oct.
2016.

After discovering Lynn Povich’s book, The Good Girls Revolt: How the Women of
Newsweek Sued their Bosses and Changed the Workplace, was adapted into a web
television series, I quickly watched the series after reading the book to see how a modern
perspective would adapt the story. It was useful to my research because it demonstrated a clear narrative that the staff of the show wanted to portray, so it was intended to keep these issues relevant in modern society.

**Websites**


This website gave me an overview of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the practices it made illegal in America.


This website allowed me to learn more about the Little Rock Nine, which I used as a historical parallel in my documentary.