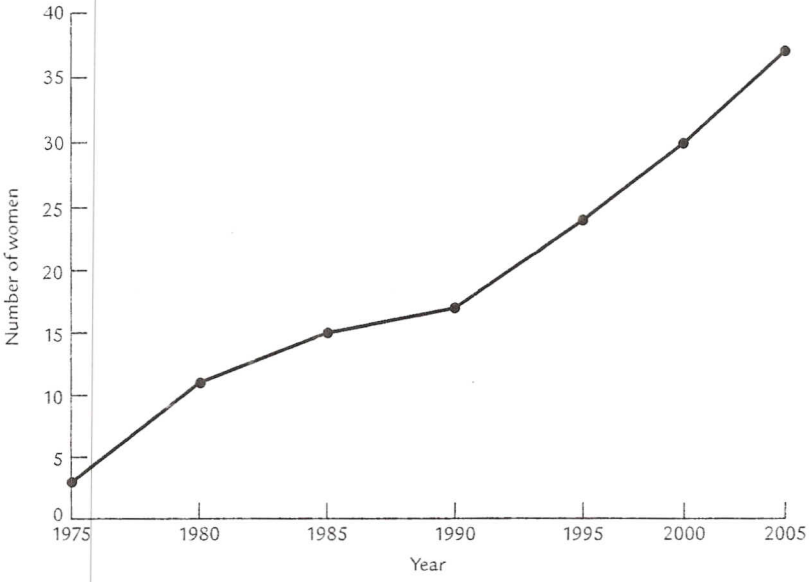

Women in the California legislature, 1975-2005. (*Based on data in the* California Journal.)

office. It was only in the administration of Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr., that women for the first time moved into top positions of power throughout state government. In his two terms in office, Brown appointed more than 1600 women to various boards and commissions and named women as directors of the departments of agriculture, finance, transportation, veterans affairs, motor vehicles, conservation, and corrections. In February 1977, Rose Elizabeth Bird became the first woman ever appointed to the California Supreme Court—and Governor Brown made her not merely a justice but the chief justice. The following year Bird won confirmation at the polls by an extremely close margin.

Employment opportunities for women gradually expanded in the twentieth century, and an increasing proportion of women sought employment outside the home. World War II was a catalyst for change in the status of California women, just as it was for the state's racial minorities. Government and military officials and leaders of industry exhorted women to take jobs in factories and offices. Rosie the Riveter was the epitome of a woman doing her patriotic duty. About half the women who went to work in the wartime shipyards and aircraft plants had already been in the labor force, usually at lower-skilled and lower-paying jobs. At war's end most of the women workers wanted to continue in the work they were doing, but as male workers returned from the armed forces and as wartime industries cut back production, many women were displaced from their jobs. Nevertheless, the number of women in the workforce continued to increase. In 1950, 30 percent of all California women were working outside the home; by 1977 a majority of California women were in the labor force. Overwhelmingly, women sought employment for economic reasons. Working was a necessity for the many widowed, divorced, and

separated women who composed a major part of the female labor force. For other women, work was necessary to support their families or to provide better education or health care for their children. In the years following the war, relatively few California women sought employment merely for personal fulfillment.

In the early 1970s, the National Organization for Women and other women's rights groups conducted a strong campaign for the equal rights amendment (ERA): "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Congress approved the ERA by overwhelming votes in both houses in 1972 and set a 7-year deadline for ratification of the amendment by three-fourths of the nation's state legislatures. The California legislature promptly approved the ERA; but in the states as a whole, strong opposition developed and stalled the process for several years. After a vigorous campaign by the amendment's supporters, Congress extended the deadline to 1982, but even with this extension the ERA failed to win the needed ratifications.

The issue that came to dominate the feminist movement in the 1980s was *comparable worth.* Although women were making inroads into a few occupations with high status and high earnings, the majority of women continued to be employed as clerks and service workers. As more women moved into the labor force, the discrepancy between their wages and those of men actually increased in some fields. Most women in the workforce remained concentrated at the lower end of the pay scale, earning considerably less money than their male coworkers. Citing these economic inequities, feminists argued that women workers should receive equal pay for doing comparable, but not identical, work to that of men.

The California legislature in 1981 declared that comparable worth should be considered when setting salaries for state employees in female-dominated jobs. Over the next 3 years, several additional comparable-worth bills were passed by the legislature but were vetoed by a Republican governor. The California Comparable Worth Task Force reported in 1985 that the state's labor force remained highly segregated by sex. It also found that for every $1 earned by a male worker in California, a female worker earned only 60 cents. The task force recommended that businesses in the state be required to close the gap by upgrading the pay scale for their women workers and by integrating them into traditionally male-dominated positions. The gap steadily narrowed over the next two decades; by the early 2000s women in California were earning nearly 80 cents per dollar earned by men. Clear progress had been made but the movement for full equality continued.

Selected Bibliography

Several articles in Robert F. Heizer (ed.), *California* (1978), provide information on California Indians in the twentieth century. See also Adam Fortunate Eagle, *Heart of the Rock: The Indian Invasion of Alcatraz* (2003); Troy R. Johnson, *The Occupation of Alcatraz Island* (1996); Joan Weibel-Orlando, *Indian Country, L.A.* (1993); and George H. Phillips, *The Enduring Struggle* (1981). The larger context is provided in James J. Rawls, *Chief Red Fox Is Dead: A History of Native Americans since 1945* (1996).