

The approaches that feminists use to pursue equality are as dynamic as they are diverse. The *NCJW Journal* approached seven activists — each known for utilizing a different vehicle for social change — and asked them to discuss their priorities for women today.

As a feminist and parent of two middle-school daughters, my priorities for social change include a future in which every girl will grow up in charge of her body, her life, and her destiny. A future in which every girl can grow up with clean air and clean water, nutritious food, a good education, equal opportunities, full health care, freedom from misogyny, bigotry, racism, hatred, and violence, and with equal access to the bounty of this country — without taking it from the pockets of our neighbors here and around the world. And all this in a world at peace.

As a feminist leader, I know that we will not achieve equality until women take our rightful place in the leadership of this country, from the smallest town council and Chamber of Commerce to the statehouse to the White House.

Ask a woman to run.

—Kim A. Gandy, *president of the National Organization for Women (NOW)*

I read dozens of stories by and about Jewish women every week, and the diversity of their journeys toward Jewish and female identities is striking: a Latin American Jewish woman coming of age in the US, a Hasidic girl in Brooklyn, a Persian Jew in LA.

Our respect for anecdote — for the power of personal narrative to spur change — is crucial. Hear the story of one teen terrified because she can't find a doctor to perform an abortion (and this in 2006!) or of one person transformed after reading how an Orthodox lesbian came out to her family, and you see the power of the personal to change how people think.

In my vision of the future, I nominate listening to how diverse women are living out the most crucial feminist issues: ensuring reproductive rights, creating healthy relationships, validating women's prayer, and nurturing a new generation of women philanthropists and scholars.

—Susan Weidman Schneider, *founding mother and editor-in-chief of Lilith Magazine (www.lilith.org), author of Jewish and Female*



A democracy cannot survive without the active, informed, knowledgeable participation of all of its citizens. Women — through their voices, intelligence, intuition, and experience — are key to creating governance for the public good. To fully participate in that governance, women need to have the freedom to decide on the size of their families. This is a civic, private, and constitutional right. Those who deprive women of this right are keeping society in the dark ages. Benito Juárez, the first indigenous president of Mexico, said, “Respecting other people’s rights is peace.” As a Catholic mother of 11 children, I support this statement. A woman’s choice affects only her and her family, not anyone else. A woman’s right to have a safe medical procedure to end an unwanted pregnancy needs to be protected.

— Dolores Huerta, *president of the Dolores Huerta Foundation and co-founder of the United Farm Workers of America*

My priorities are to build on the progress achieved for women in those areas where problems remain — providing access to health care and insurance; eliminating violence against women and human trafficking; providing affordable, quality child care; addressing problems of women prisoners; providing paid family leave and flexible work options; increasing the minimum wage; encouraging women’s political participation; ending sex discrimination; and supporting equal rights for women throughout the world.

To achieve these goals, we need to revitalize commissions for the status of women, secure ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, encourage the US to sign the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, pass needed legislation, involve youth, elect political candidates who are committed to women, and form and join organizations devoted to these priorities.

— Sonia Pressman Fuentes, *first female attorney in the Office of the General Counsel of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, co-founder of NOW*

A few years ago, I began interviewing people about their abortions and learned that the most “pro-life” women had had abortions and that some of the most consciousness-raised, hard-core feminists had deep ambivalence about theirs. To me, the abortion issue is a lens through which I can understand class issues (who has access to abortion, the hoops poor women jump through), racial injustice (how hard it is to place black and brown babies in adoptive homes), and generational differences. These untold or suppressed stories are the key to building a movement that truly supports women’s freedom and autonomy. And pop culture and political discussions are powerful conduits for doing so. Telling the truth about our lives is critical to cracking open this divisive issue.

— Jennifer Baumgardner, *co-author of Manifesta and Grassroots, producer of Speak Out: I Had an Abortion*

For the past decade, my priorities for Orthodoxy have been to secure the ordination of women, eliminate all abuse of agunot (women chained to dead marriages), and implement a gender-sensitive approach to teaching sacred texts. These changes would be transformative to Jewish society without trampling community sensibilities or disconnecting from our treasured past.

Indeed, we are on our way: The Orthodox community enjoys the new religious leadership of women as halachic advisers, teachers of Talmud, congregational leaders, full participants in partnership minyanim, and more. Global solutions for agunot are increasingly discussed. And in Orthodox day schools, a new gender curriculum developed by the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance has been introduced.

But beyond this, my concern is for Israel’s vulnerability. Each of us, as Jewish women, must devote time to this issue. We can plead Israel’s case in the courts of world opinion and correct distortions and lies. The power of women united is vast and effective. We must use this power now for the Jewish state.

— Blu Greenberg, *co-founder and first president of the Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance, author of On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*

In these difficult days, I am grateful for the heritage left by Jewish women of the past. Bella Abzug showed that you could “knock the crap out of the political power structure” and fight effectively for gender equality, the environment, and peace. Emma Goldman’s fighting spirit still resonates in the imperative to resist today’s assaults on civil rights and liberties and to insist that American realities reflect American ideals. Indeed, our embattled planet seems to call out for Abzug’s combativeness and Goldman’s radicalism.

Yet meaningful impact doesn’t always require a big hat or an anarchist’s bullhorn. Sometimes, I feel that the most critical moment in American Jewish women’s history may be the founding of NCJW by Hannah G. Solomon and her colleagues in 1893. Way before modern feminism, they realized that the way to be heard and to make a difference was to work together. May we never forget that lesson. ☞

— Karla Goldman, *historian in residence at the Jewish Women’s Archive (www.jwa.org), author of Beyond the Synagogue Gallery*

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