

Research Question: *How did women influence the foreign policy of the United States of America during the twentieth century?*

HPHI5018

Independent Project Plan

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## **Project Overview**

The topic of my project will be the impact and influence of women on the foreign policy of the United States of America in the twentieth century. This topic is theoretical in focus, as it will look at historical analysis of the impact of these women and does not involve hands-on application of the research to come. This topic falls into many historical disciplines, including women's history, gender history, American history, political history, and international history. Moreover, this topic has multidisciplinary relevance, intersecting with studies relating to political science.

Overall, the project will take on a historical tone. While I will lean on studies from different disciplines within the humanities, I will write about them from the perspective of a historian. I will examine prominent women who directly and indirectly influenced U.S. foreign policy, as well as some collective efforts made by female groups and movements who exercised their agency in response to foreign policy decisions made by the U.S. government throughout the twentieth century.

The thesis for my project will be centred on the argument that women were not silent victims but active participants in shaping U.S. foreign policy between the administrations of Theodore Roosevelt (1901) and Bill Clinton (2001). This long time period will be necessary to effectively show the transformation of U.S. foreign policy throughout the twentieth century and the role that women had in these changes.

## **Topic Interest and Significance**

This topic interests me for a variety of reasons. The first reason is that this is a study on women, and I have a particular passion for women's history, as I am a woman myself. The

second reason is my interest in American history. I took an interest in American history after taking an American history class at my home university during my second year. I found the U.S. in the twentieth century fascinating. I wrote a paper on the impact of American society on American women's fashion between 1920 and 1960, which is still my favourite paper that I have done to this day.

This topic is significant due to the current global landscape. Since I left home in January, the United States' diplomatic position has undergone drastic changes. The Trump administration has placed a number of tariffs on my home country, Canada, as well as made a few unsavoury comments concerning our sovereignty, which has strained our long-standing diplomatic relationship. This pattern has been mirrored with much of the rest of the world, including Europe, and it has caused an undeniable shift in the dynamics of international diplomacy. While I will look at U.S. foreign policy from a historical perspective, I firmly believe in the concept of the past informing the present and future, making historical analysis on this topic relevant.

### **Aims and Objectives**

This independent research aims to prove my thesis that women played a role in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century. I would like to look into different aspects of female influence on foreign policy, including direct and indirect contributions. By looking at different paths taken by women to have their voices heard, I will display how women exerted agency on political matters of international scope.

### **Methods and Tools**

This project will use a biographical and social-gender historiographical approach, challenging common state-centred, male-dominated historical narratives to argue that women played a pivotal role in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century. I will write the paper in an organisational format that focuses on events, movements, groups, and individuals chronologically, which will be effective in displaying how elements of U.S. foreign policy developed, changed, and progressed throughout the century.

In order to prove my thesis, I will draw from a variety of secondary and primary sources. Based on initial research, a variety of secondary sources are available through both the UWTSD library and MacEwan's library. I have also purchased relevant books, including Sylvia Bashevkin's *Women as Foreign Policy Leaders: National Security and Gender Politics in Superpower America*, which looks at women in foreign policy positions from the 1980s to the 2010s. This source is valuable in examining the last quarter of the twentieth century. I will also draw on the work of political scientists like Sara Angevine, who has written extensively on women and U.S. foreign policy.

I have determined that I will not have to travel to acquire primary source documents. Websites such as the *National Archives*<sup>1</sup> and the *Library of Congress*<sup>2</sup> will be invaluable in locating relevant primary sources that are free to view by the public.

This project will not come without its challenges. I expect to find an increasing amount of information on female influence as I look later into the twentieth century due to the nature of American society throughout the century. I acknowledge that it may be difficult to find obvious female influence in the earlier part of the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> National Archives. "National Archives," <https://www.archives.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> The Library of Congress. "Home | Library of Congress," <https://www.loc.gov/>.

Additionally, I expect to find more indirect forms of influence in the earlier decades of the twentieth century and more direct forms in the later decades. For example, American women acquired the right to vote in 1920,<sup>3</sup> so it is reasonable to assume that prior to this date, women would have had much more of an indirect influence on foreign policy matters. On top of this, Jeane Jordan Kirkpatrick was the first woman to hold a seat regarding foreign policy in U.S. history, joining the Reagan administration as an ambassador to the United Nations, but this did not happen until 1981.<sup>4</sup>

In order to overcome these challenges, I plan on dedicating more research time to the earlier decades in order to weed out less obvious, indirect influences. While I will still have enough time allotted to the later half of the twentieth century, I am anticipating having more difficulty with the earlier half. It is my hope that being aware of these difficulties will aid in having a more balanced final project.

### **Assessable Outcome**

I will produce a final essay of approximately 4000 words, in which I will effectively demonstrate that women played a significant role in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the twentieth century. This will be achieved by looking at different forms of influence and agency exerted by American women during the period, drawn from a variety of relevant primary and secondary sources.

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<sup>3</sup> “19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Women’s Right to Vote (1920),” National Archives, February 8, 2022, <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/19th-amendment>.

<sup>4</sup> Sylvia Bashevkin, *Women as Foreign Policy Leaders: National Security and Gender Politics in Superpower America* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2020), 58.

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Other Sources Pending Further Examination

Angevine, Sara. “Aborting Global Women’s Rights: The Boundaries of Women’s Representation in American Foreign Policy.” *Politics & Gender* 17, no. 4 (2021): 799–826.

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