



Honoring Our Founders & Pioneers

At the 2011 National NOW Conference, the organization honored Sonia Pressman Fuentes as one of its founders. Ms. Fuentes has shared with NOW the results of her extensive research to determine exactly who the founders were so that the organization could record this key piece of NOW's origins accurately.

NOW had 49 founders — 28 women who signed on in June 1966 at the Third National Conference of Commissions on the Status of Women, and another 21 women and men who became founders at the October 1966 NOW Organizing Conference (both in Washington, D.C.). NOW also had other strong supporters who did not sign on as founders at NOW's inception for one reason or another. Some, like Catherine East, feared it might jeopardize their government careers. Others joined later, as in the case of Aileen Hernandez, who became one of NOW's first vice presidents upon her resignation from the EEOC and followed Betty Friedan as the organization's second president.

NOW's 49 founders are...

From the June 1966 meeting — 28 women:

Ada Allness, Mary Evelyn Benbow, Gene Boyer, Analoyce Clapp, Kathryn Clarenbach, Catherine Conroy, Caroline Davis, Mary Eastwood, Edith Finlayson, Betty Friedan, Dorothy Haener, Anna Roosevelt Halstead, Lorene Harrington, Mary Lou Hill, Esther Johnson, Nancy Knaak, Min Matheson, Helen Moreland, Dr. Pauli Murray (later Rev.), Ruth Murray, Inka O'Hanrahan, Pauline A. Parish, Eve Purvis, Edna Schwartz, Mary-jane Ryan Snyder, Gretchen Squires, Betty Talkington and Dr. Caroline Ware.

From the October 1966 conference — 21 women and men:

Caruthers Berger, Colleen Boland, Inez Casiano, Carl Degler, Elizabeth Drews, Dr. Mary Esther Gauden (later Jagger), Muriel Fox, Ruth Gober, Richard Graham, Anna Arnold Hedgeman, Lucille Kapplinger (later Hazell), Bessie Margolin, Margorie Palmer, Sonia Pressman (later Fuentes), Sister Mary Joel Read, Amy Robinson, Charlotte Roe, Alice Rossi, Claire R. Salmond, Morag Simchak and Clara Wells.

NOW also wishes to acknowledge the following strong early supporters, some of whom were members of NOW's first national board or chairs of its original task forces: Dr. Shep Aaronson, Dorothy Austin, Sister Austin Doherty, Catherine East, Elizabeth Farians, Betty Furness, Nancy Graham, Representative Martha Griffiths, Jane Hart, Aileen Hernandez, Phineas Indritz, Rev. Dean Lewis, Ollie Butler Moore, Graciela Olivarez, Dr. Patricia Plante, Marguerite Rawalt, Dr. Vera Schletzer, Olla Werner and Herbert Wright.

Below are brief profiles of some of these women and men.

Gene Boyer, 1925-2003

Gene Boyer was one of the 28 women who gathered in Betty Friedan's hotel room on June 28, 1966, and participated in the discussion that inspired NOW. She served as NOW's national treasurer from 1968 to 1974, and was instrumental in forming the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (now Legal Momentum) in 1970, serving on its board and as its president. Boyer was a driving force behind the celebration of International Women's Year, established by an executive order signed by President Gerald Ford in 1975.



Boyer was a lifelong feminist, and her activism spanned working for the Equal Rights Amendment, sexual assault reform, marital property reform, reproductive rights, sex education, and stopping violence against women and girls. Boyer founded the Jewish Women's Coalition in 1995 and, always prescient, established an online listserv and contributed regularly to JWC's email alerts and advisories long before the internet was a primary mode of communication.

Kathryn Clarenbach, 1920-1994

Kathryn Clarenbach was one of the NOW founders who participated in the first meeting in Betty Friedan's hotel room and recruited others to attend. She was on the temporary steering committee that made preparations for NOW's founding conference in October 1966, where she was elected Chair of the Board. A political science professor at the University of Wisconsin, she "forged the link between the emergent women's movement and traditional women's organizations." In 1981, Kay served as president of the NOW Legal Defense & Education Fund (now Legal Momentum). She was a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus and of the Wisconsin Women's Network. She served as executive director of the National Women's Conference in Houston in 1977. She developed continuing education courses for women through the University of Wisconsin Extension until her retirement in 1988. Wisconsin NOW named her Woman of the Year in 1980.



Inez Casiano, 1926-2011

Inez Casiano Inez Casiano was a member of the first National Board of NOW, elected in October 1966. Casiano had been a director of a direct market research company in Venezuela. Moved by her passion for human rights, Casiano left her career in market research to dedicate herself to the empowerment of marginalized communities in the U.S. In the year of NOW's founding, she was at once engaged in feminist organizing and involved in the planning of the White House Conference on Children and Youth. Casiano had to resign from the board when she joined the EEOC staff, where she wrote a program for unions for Hispanic Americans. She later worked for the Department of Labor, ultimately becoming a division chief in the Job Corps. In the 1970s, she co-founded the National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, now the National Puerto Rican



Coalition. Casiano lives in Arizona and has been a lifelong advocate for youth, a champion of social and economic justice, and “equal parts feminist and civil rights activist.”

Mary Eastwood, 1930-

In the 1960s, Mary Eastwood worked at the Office of Legal Counsel in the Department of Justice. With Dr. Pauli Murray, she co-authored the article, “Jane Crow and the Law: Sex Discrimination and Title VII,” which reviewed the legal discriminations against women and declared that more women are feeling the effects of sex discrimination in the 1960s than in previous years. Eastwood was among the group in Friedan’s hotel room the night of June 28, 1966, when a discussion of feminist action led to the founding of NOW. She was a key early organizer of the organization’s work, and with East, Indritz and Caruthers Berger made up NOW’s first Legal Committee, the first to sue on behalf of airline flight attendants claiming sex discrimination. NOW’s picket of the EEOC, protesting their sex-segregated Help Wanted ads, was organized at Eastwood’s apartment, and her photo was in the Washington Post the next day (above). Eastwood is retired and living in Wisconsin.



Catherine East, 1916-1996

Betty Friedan described Catherine East as “the midwife to the contemporary women’s movement,” and East worked closely with Friedan in NOW’s early days. As staff to the JFK-created Commission on the Status of Women, East encouraged the creation of state-level commissions on women in order to generate local activism. She held senior staff positions with every presidential advisory commission on the status of women from 1962 to 1977, and from these positions, East was the women’s rights movement’s most important source of information on the nationwide status of women. After her retirement in the late 1970s, East remained an active feminist, serving as the women’s issues coordinator for John Anderson’s presidential campaign, and vice-chair of the Virginia Women’s Political Caucus. She was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 1994.



Elizabeth Farians, 1923-

For the past forty years, Elizabeth Farians has been engaged in a tireless fight against discrimination in religion. Farians attended the first graduate program in theology for women at Saint Mary’s College-Notre Dame and with her doctorate was destined to be a pioneer woman theologian. In 1966, she integrated the then all-male Catholic Theological Society, but they threatened to have her arrested if she tried to attend the annual meeting. Farians began writing and speaking out against misogyny and discrimination in the religious arena, and as a NOW founder she chaired the first NOW Task Force on Women and Religion. Farians rallied hard (and with considerable success) to get religious groups to support the Equal Rights Amendment. She testified in both the House and Senate that the ERA was compatible with religion. She is a co-founder of “Catholics for the ERA” and “Catholics for Choice.” Farians lives in Ohio and is also an advocate for animal rights.



Muriel Fox, 1928-

While Muriel Fox was heading American Women in Radio and Television, she met Betty Friedan. Fox wrote a note to Friedan, telling her, “If you ever start an NAACP for women, count me in.” Friedan remembered this and included Fox as one of NOW’s founders. The night after NOW adopted its Statement of Purpose, Fox and a small group stayed up until the wee hours printing NOW’s first press release, and then hand-delivered the press releases to newspaper offices. A prominent public relations executive, in 1967 Fox became chair of NOW’s first Public Relations Task Force. She served on the NOW Board for ten years, and was elected Chair of the Board in 1971. Fox was also founder of the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund (now Legal Momentum), serving as President and as Board Chair for 13 years. She now serves as Chair of the Veteran Feminists of America board. Fox, retired, continues to write from her home in New York.



Betty Friedan, 1921-2006

In June, 1966, Betty Friedan and others attending a national conference of the Commissions on the Status of Women met in her hotel room—the first of three meetings the weekend of NOW’s birth. They were concerned about the EEOC’s failure to enforce Title VII. Friedan wrote that prior to the weekend she had “learned how seriously handicapped [EEOC commissioners Hernandez and Graham] were by the absence of support or pressure from organizations who would speak out on behalf of equality for women as the Civil Rights Movement had done.” At the first conference in October 1966, Friedan was elected NOW’s first president, and her fame as the author of the bestselling book *The Feminine Mystique* helped attract thousands of women to the new organization. Friedan drafted NOW’s original Statement of Purpose, which began, “The purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.” (See also NOW Presidents, Betty Friedan)



Sonia Pressman Fuentes, 1928-

As the first woman attorney in the EEOC’s General Counsel’s Office, Sonia Pressman Fuentes drafted many of the EEOC’s landmark decisions. It was a frustrated Fuentes who confided to Betty Friedan that the EEOC was not enforcing the law against sex discrimination and that someone outside of the bureaucracy needed to start a national organization to fight for women, like the NAACP fought for blacks. Fuentes went on to become a part of NOW’s first organizing conference in October 1966. She was a key player in NOW’s prolonged campaign to pressure the EEOC to implement the law prohibiting sex discrimination in employment during the early years of the agency. In addition to her founding role at NOW, Fuentes was a founder of the Women’s Equity Action League and Federally Employed Women. A feminist activist, lawyer, and writer, Fuentes has traveled around the world to speak on women’s rights for the then-U.S. Information Agency. Fuentes, who now resides in Sarasota, Fla., serves on the advisory committee of the Veteran Feminists of America.



Until 2006, she also served on the Board of Trustees of the National Woman's Party, where she was one of the organization's longest serving members.

Richard Graham, 1920-2007

When Detroit Congresswoman Martha Griffiths wrote to the EEOC protesting the commission's guidelines with regard to sex-segregated employment ads, Dick Graham, then an EEOC Commissioner, agreed. One of the first commissioners appointed after passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, along with Aileen Hernandez, Graham fought for enforcement of Title VII, the provision prohibiting sex discrimination, from the start. His dedication to feminism led to his election as NOW Vice-President in October of 1966 during NOW's first organizing conference. He went on to found the District of Columbia Commission on the Status of Women, and to serve as the Executive Director of the Center for Moral Development at Harvard. In 1975, Graham was named President of Goddard College, where he helped found the Goddard-Cambridge Center for Social Change, one of the earliest centers for women's studies.



Anna Arnold Hedgeman, 1899-1990

Dr. Anna Arnold Hedgeman was the first black woman to graduate from Hamline University (MN) in 1922, the first black woman to serve on a mayoral cabinet in New York City from 1954 to 1958, and the first African-American to hold a position in the Federal Security Agency. In 1963, she was only woman on the Executive Committee that organized the now-famous March on Washington. In October 1966, Hedgeman, one of the founding members of NOW, served as temporary Executive Vice President of NOW until March 1967. Hedgeman was a member of our first National Board, and was Chair of the first Women in Poverty Task Force.



Aileen Hernandez, 1926-

In 1964, after passage of the Civil Rights Act, Aileen Hernandez was the only woman appointed by President Lyndon Johnson to the new five-member Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charged with enforcing the act. She and fellow commissioner Richard Graham pressed hard for that body to take action against sex discrimination in employment, which had been made unlawful by the Civil Rights Act, but they were outnumbered. Hernandez was a speaker at the Commissions on the Status of Women conference where NOW was conceived, and shortly thereafter she resigned as an EEOC commissioner because of the agency's unwillingness to enforce the law against sex discrimination. She was nominated in absentia as Executive Vice President of NOW at the first organizing conference, and accepted the position in March, 1967. (See also NOW Presidents, Aileen Hernandez).



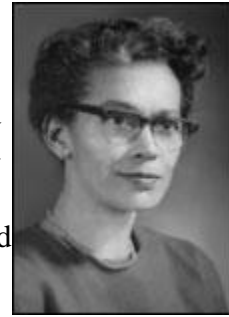
Phineas Indritz, 1916-1997

A lawyer, passionate civil rights leader, and feminist, Phineas Indritz argued the U.S. Supreme Court cases which struck down racial and religious covenants in housing in 1948. In October 1966, Indritz, who worked closely with U.S. Rep. Martha Griffiths, was one of the twenty people elected to NOW's first National Board and one of the original members of NOW's Legal Committee with Marguerite Rawalt, Mary Eastwood and Caruthers Berger. Twelve years later, he authored the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which was one of NOW's significant victories, as well as state legislation prohibiting discrimination against women. As an attorney, Indritz was instrumental in a number of important civil rights cases, including *Shelley v. Kraemer* in the Supreme Court (with Thurgood Marshall, who later was elevated to that Court) opposing racially restrictive housing covenants. He also wrote an amicus brief in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Ks.*



Pauli Murray, 1910-1985

A civil rights worker, feminist activist, lawyer, poet, author, and teacher, who became an Episcopal priest at age 66, Dr. Pauli Murray helped convince Betty Friedan that the country needed an “NAACP for women.” Murray was the only woman in her 1944 graduating class at Howard University, and was rejected by Harvard Law School because she was female. In 1965, Murray was the first African American to be awarded a doctorate in Juridical Science from Yale, and that same year, she declared that, “If it becomes necessary to march on Washington to assure equal job opportunities for all, I hope women will not flinch from the thought.” Ruth Bader Ginsburg, now a Supreme Court justice, credited Pauli Murray and Dorothy Kenyon with the Fourteenth Amendment legal theories that Ginsburg used successfully in the 1970's to advance women's rights. Murray was the author of many of NOW's early documents and contributed to the visionary NOW Statement of Purpose.



Marguerite Rawalt, 1895-1989

Dr. Marguerite Rawalt was one of four members of NOW's Legal Committee in 1966, along with Phineas Indritz, Mary Eastwood, and Caruthers Berger. That year, the Legal Committee was authorized to take action on behalf of airline stewardesses, who were required to be young and single and to challenge “protective” labor laws that applied only to women, one of the first sex discrimination complaints ever filed with the EEOC. In 1968, Rawalt and Indritz, acting as NOW attorneys, won a lawsuit voiding Pennsylvania's Muncy Law, which required longer prison sentences for women than for men convicted of the same crime. Before coming to NOW, Rawalt was president of the Business and Profession Women/USA from 1955-1956. In the 1940s, she served as president of the National Association of Women Lawyers, and before that, was president of the Federal Bar Association. In 1961, she was appointed by President Kennedy to the President's Commission on the Status of Women.



Sister Mary Joel Read

Sr. Mary Joel Read was one of the NOW founders who participated in the weekend of meetings in June, 1966, and was one of the 28 who signed the initial telegram to the EEOC Commissioners: “We respectfully urge the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to rescind its ruling permitting employment advertisements in newspapers under separate Help Wanted Male and Help Wanted Female column headings and to adopt in its place the language recommended by Representative Martha Griffiths, which appears in the Congressional Record for June 20, 1966.” She was also on the first NOW national board. Sr. Joel Reed served as President of Alverno College in Milwaukee from 1968 to 2003, making her, at the time, the nation’s longest sitting college president. During her thirty-five year tenure she earned a well-justified reputation as a notable educational reform advocate and a woman who has dedicated her life to the advancement of women. She received an honorary doctorate from Marquette University in 2003.



Alice Rossi, 1922-2009

In 1963, Alice Rossi stirred the academic feminist community when she presented a paper at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences conference entitled, “Equality Between the Sexes: An Immodest Proposal.” A leading feminist scholar and the author and editor of works on family, kinship, sex, and gender, Rossi was a member of NOW’s first National Board elected in October 1966. Three years later, Rossi, who received her doctorate from Columbia, confronted the American Sociological Association’s leadership and prompted the emergence of the “status of women in sociology” as a public issue. Rossi chaired the first NOW Task Force on the Family in 1967, and later served as president of the American Sociological Association in 1983.

