

# Equal pay for equal work

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY L. MAREN WOOD

*Some North Carolinians on Equal Pay* (n.p., 1918?).

## As you read...

During the early twentieth century, there were few professions open to women. Teaching was one of the few respectable options for educated women. The number of public schools had expanded, increasing the demand for teachers and, in turn, opportunities for women to have careers. Women were also beginning to work as clerks, shop assistants, and to a lesser extent, nurses.

But in all professions, including teaching, women were paid less than men, even though they had the same education. And once a woman married, she was expected to give up her job because it was assumed that she no longer needed the income.

While the movement for women's suffrage grew in the early twentieth century, female teachers across the United States tried to end wage discrimination. This pamphlet, published by a teacher named Julia Dameron, told readers about the wage inequality and pointed out that respected men, too, were calling for change. The views expressed in this pamphlet are common today, but they were radical at the time.

In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act, which made it illegal for employers to pay women less than men for the same work or to discriminate against women in hiring and promotion. Despite this law, women still are often paid less than men who are employed in the same line of work.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What were the different arguments made in favor of equal pay?
2. According to these writers, how had wage inequality been justified? Why were women paid less?
3. What were the professions of the men who wrote in favor of equal pay? Why do you think they were selected for this book?
4. What were the economic reasons for why women needed to be paid a better salary?
5. Some people argued that all teachers needed to be paid a better wage. What reasons did they provide?
6. What arguments do you find most convincing? Least convincing? Why?
7. If Julia Dameron had asked you to provide a paragraph in support of paying female teachers an equal salary, would you agree? What arguments would you make?

**FOREWORD.** — Last spring the writer, who has spent her life in the class room and knows very few of the prominent men and women of our state, sent a request to some of our influential men and women for a statement in support of equal pay for equal work. Many

of our prominent men and women failed to get this request because of the writer's ignorance and because of lack of time. The women of the state, however, have been very much encouraged by the hearty support of equal pay given by the men and women whose statements appear in this pamphlet. They consider this a most encouraging report. The men and women who are interested in the educational progress of the state realize that they cannot secure and keep a strong enthusiastic corps of teachers until this injustice has been removed. The women teachers have been much encouraged by the frankness with which men in all professions and vocations acknowledge the injustice of unequal pay, and by the earnestness with which they pledge themselves to help eradicate this evil. The teachers wish to use this opportunity to thank each contributor for his contribution.

— Julia Dameron.

I take pleasure in responding to your request for a statement favoring equal pay for equal work to teachers in the public schools.

I do this the more readily because it can be done in few words as well as in many. Public school money is or should be paid only for work done. The price paid should be based solely on quantity and quality. The personality of the teacher should have nothing whatever to do with it except as this personality may affect the work either in quantity or quality. If a woman does as good work as a man and does as much of it, then she should be paid as much. If she does not do so much or does not do so well, she should be paid less. If she does better or does more, then she should be paid more. This principle, I think, applies to all work of whatever kind. When we understand fully that money is paid for work and not on the basis of any kind of favoritism we will act on this subject just as we do when we buy cloth or food or land or any other commodity.

— P. P. Claxton, U. S. Commissioner of Education, April 24, 1918.

I can see no valid reason for discrimination in compensation between male and female teachers when there is no difference in the ability, fitness and character. I know that the women teachers of North Carolina are doing a tremendous work for a salary totally inadequate and insufficient, and will be pleased to do whatever I can towards promoting their advancement.

— O. Max Gardner, Lieutenant Governor and President of Senate, Raleigh, April 12, 1918.

Your letter of the 16th inst. affords me an opportunity that I gladly welcome. With all my heart I'll lend a hand whenever I can to "abolish prejudice." I hate all prejudice — class prejudice, national prejudice, race prejudice, and certainly "sex prejudice" too.

And in your proposition that "justice demands that the salary of the teacher be regulated not by sex but the amount and quality of the service rendered" I also most heartily concur. Women do not get justice and they ought to have it; teachers do not get justice and they ought to have it — and most of all women teachers do not get justice and I wish I could do even a little bit to help them to get it.

My observation is that when women teachers have paid living expenses, gone to teachers' meetings and summer schools, as superintendents expect, and perhaps as the law requires, they must start the next school year with nearly empty pocketbooks.

When women teach, and especially continue to teach for a term of years, they unquestionably diminish the likelihood of marriage, and as years advance their tenure of position becomes more uncertain, and often, after a life of hard toil and self-renunciation, they approach old age with the prospect of dependence and perhaps an old ladies' home. It is a crying shame, and neither the justice nor the manhood of the state ought to allow it to continue.

Can I further serve you in pressing your cause? I'll do all I can.

— N. Collin Hughes, Chaplain of State Farm, Halifax, April 24, 1918

The proposition that the amount of pay for teaching should be regulated by the amount and quality of the service, seems to me to be self-evident. Sex is not a reasonable standard for determining either the amount or the quality of service. Equal pay to women for equal work has had to contend against economic sex prejudice and a superabundance of competing labor. Both of these factors are being gradually eliminated.

The pay of all good teachers must be raised or the profession of teaching beaten to pieces on the grim necessity of making a living wage.

No other matter of public policy is more important than this critical matter of stabilizing the profession of teaching. I am glad that you plan actively to arouse public sentiment in regard to it.

— Edward K. Graham, President University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, April 11, 1918.

In a certain high school in this state I am told there is a woman principal who is paid a salary of \$80.00 a month. Under her is a young man doing, of course, less important work, who is receiving for his service \$100 a month. Discrimination so senseless and cruel against a capable and efficient teacher because she is “only a woman” is a good reason for the growing power of the woman suffrage movement in this country.

I am glad to lend my voice to the propaganda which has for its object the righting of the wrong to the womanhood of our state. The compensation for service should not be regulated by sex.

I have heard the argument advanced that men are entitled to more pay for the same service than women because, being the head of the household, their expenses are necessarily greater. This is no argument at all. Being the head of a household does not enter into the matter. Salaries are supposed to be compensation for service rendered, and not a bonus for the support of a family.

I hail with joy the movement that is on for increasing the pay of teachers generally, and while we are engaged in the business of raising the teacher's pay to at least a living wage, we should also break down the sex barrier, and abolish the senseless practice of lifting the burdens from the shoulders of the physically strong and laying them the heavier upon the shoulders of the physically weak, just because they are weak.

— Archibald Johnson, Editor of *Charity and Children*, Thomasville, April 10, 1918.

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