

Congressional Timeline Lesson Plan: “Minority Representation in Congress, 1937-1938”



SUBJECTS

American Government, Social Studies, U.S. History, Gender Studies



GRADE LEVEL

10-12



OBJECTIVES

This lesson will introduce students to selected demographic features of one of the early New Deal Congresses. It will ask them to identify the characteristics of women members of the House and Senate—what qualities and experiences they shared, how they differed. Students may also compare and contrast the female membership in 1937-38 with female membership today.



LESSON PLAN

Context:

The 75th Congress met in three separate sessions from January 3, 1937, to January 3, 1939, a period that coincided with the first two years of President Franklin Roosevelt’s second term.

Among the major laws passed in this Congress were the Judicial Procedures Reform Act, the United States Housing Act, the Wildlife Restoration Act, the Natural Gas Act, and the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act. More information about legislation enacted in this Congress is located at <http://www.congressionaltimeline.org>. Select the box labelled “75th Congress, 1937-39” for links to laws enacted during the period.

Democrats held commanding majorities in both the House (334 Democrats, 88 Republicans, 13 Other) and Senate (69 Democrats, 25 Republicans, 2 Other).

Minority Members. Among the Representatives and Senators were nine women and one African-American—the largest total minority membership in the nation’s history. Of the nine women, six served in the House, down from eight in the 71st, three were Senators, the most ever. The single African-American, Arthur Wergs

Mitchell from Illinois, was the first African-American elected to Congress as a Democrat (See Black Americans in Congress at <http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Black-Americans-in-Congress/>).

Lesson:

1. Divide the students into six teams, one for each of the following women members of the House of Representatives:

[Elizabeth H. Gasque](#) (Democrat, SC)
[Nan Wood Honeyman](#) (Democrat, OR)
[Virginia Ellis Jenckes](#) (Democrat, IN)
[Mary T. Norton](#) (Democrat, NJ)
[Caroline O'Day](#) (Democrat, NY)
[Edith Nourse Rogers](#) (Republican, MA)

2. The links above will take students to *Women in Congress*, created and maintained by the Clerk of the House of Representatives. The student teams should compile and report on the following information for their member:

- Birth and death dates
- Age upon entering office
- Length of time in office
- Party affiliation
- State represented
- Political experience before election to the House
- Legislative interests

3. As a class, have students compare and contrast the six individual women. Discussion questions could include the following:

- Who was the oldest and youngest member and what was their median age?
- How many years of political experience do these women have, and does that seem meaningful?
- Do they seem to have surmounted unusual obstacles to get to the House?
- Do these women tend to share legislative interests?
- Are their legislative interests broad-ranging or not?
- How successful were they in advancing their legislative interests—why or why not?

Extended Activities.

1. Conduct the same research for women Senators as described in #2 above and compare them with the women who served in the House.

[Hattie Wyatt Caraway](#) (Democrat, AR)
[Dixie Bibb Graves](#) (Democrat, AL)
[Gladys S. Pyle](#) (Republican, SD)

2. Select six male members of the House serving in the same Congress and compare their backgrounds and experiences with the women members.
3. Compare the women members of the 75th Congress with women members of the 102nd Congress.



RESOURCES

Women in Congress at <http://womenincongress.house.gov/>.
Biographical Directory of the United State Congress at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>.
Center for American Women and Politics at <http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/>.



CREDIT

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