History and Grassroots Movements: Changing America’s Landscape One Person at a Time

What is it that drives a person to fight for something he or she believes in? For women like Susan B. Anthony, Alice Paul, and Doris Christopher, their drive ranged from belief in social equity to a personal desire to spend more time with their children. Susan B. Anthony and Alice Paul were both leaders in the Women’s Suffrage movement in the United States; the groundwork each of these women laid helped pave the way for the landscape of women’s rights today. Doris Christopher is the owner of Pampered Chef, Ltd., a multi-level marketing company that sells kitchen appliances; her vision has given rise to a number of women wanting to work yet stay flexible in their schedules for their children’s sakes. These two movements are far from similar in their scope; the Women’s Suffrage movement was riddled with hardship, protest, and personal suffering while Christopher’s marketing movement was just a business plan that gave rise to opportunity. Even though the Women’s Suffrage movement and the Pampered Chef multi-level marketing movement vary in intensity, each movement illustrates how even one single person can change a social landscape in America.

The Women’s Suffrage movement is a movement that cannot be attributed to just one person at one time; however, key figures in history gave the movement the attention it deserved. From the beginnings of what is now called the United States of America, women were not considered public figures like men were. Women were relegated to what was termed the ‘private sphere’ and were
champions of the family and the home. Even when the country declared its independence in 1776 and began its legacy of democracy, slaves’ and women’s rights were not considered. Monica Davey and Bryan Brown, in their article “The Quest for Women’s Equality” agree stating, “Women had no voice in the government that came about after the American Revolution.” So, from the beginning of this independent country, women had no say. Fast-forwarding even to the middle of the nineteenth century, women were still fighting for a voice. One critical article lays out milestones in women’s rights history, and mentions in “1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton is among the organizers of the Women’s Rights Convention…which calls for women’s suffrage” (Davey, Brown). In 1848, the country was divided on both slaves’ and women’s rights and groups like this convention helped to begin illustrating the problems with oppression of women specifically. Susan B. Anthony, a supporter of Stanton’s, brought life to this convention with her tireless efforts; for decades after the creation of this group, Anthony fought for rights for women even in the face of adversity. Some of her former supporters even harbored resentment in her moving forward in the face of the fight for slaves’ rights, but she made a convincing argument: “Anthony countered the accusations [that women’s rights would endanger the slaves’ rights discussions] by asserting that if reformers linked these two great causes, then the moment in history called by some ‘the Negro’s hour’ could be the woman’s hour as well” (Bilhartz). Indeed, linking these two under a notion of ‘individual’s rights’ should have been logical. However, even by 1914, “only 12 of the then 48 states” allowed women to vote (Davey, Brown). This lack of acknowledgment of women from a majority of the states led to pickets and demonstrations in favor of women’s rights. In fact, a new radical leader of Women’s Suffrage and feminist movements, Alice Paul, furthered the work that began the century earlier. She picketed the White House in 1917 asking an important question: “Why should American women support the war to make the world safe for democracy…when they have no democracy since they cannot vote?” (Schnell). This question prompted further action from President
Woodrow Wilson, and continued support for women’s rights helped pass the 19th Amendment guaranteeing voting rights to women in 1920. Overall, this movement changed the landscape of American history for individuals looking to participate in their country’s democracy.

The Women’s Suffrage movement, as widespread as it is now known to be, began as a vision from few, but expanded to include communities and social activist leaders that made it the successful campaign it was and still is. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were both women with a vision for equal rights, but it is when they joined together that their ideas began to take form. Terry Bilhartz writes in his encyclopedia entry that “The two women developed an instant friendship that led to a strong partnership in reform work.” Working together, the two women were able to create a wider community of support. Reaching out to many different communities, these women established a variety of organizations to further reach audiences: one article notes that Anthony and Stanton organized the National Woman Suffrage Association and joined together with George Francis Train, a millionaire, to publish a radical newspaper entitled The Revolution, and Anthony organized associations like the Working Woman’s Association (Bilhartz). Each of these new ventures produced more widespread supporters by reaching out to people in many areas of the public forum. Though neither of these women lived to see the ratification of the woman’s voting right in 1920, their beginning efforts led to heroic efforts by later feminist suffragists like Alice Paul. Alice Paul also banded together a community of support to continue the work Anthony and others had started. She further enlisted community connections lobbying in Congress and leading a march on the White House in 1917. Her training with other communities enabled her to overcome obstacles for her largest march: “Paul’s training in British circles enabled her to overcome opposition from…police, who wanted her marchers to parade…in front of the foreign embassies (instead of picketing the White House)…[but] She stood her ground…[and] won the debate the first of many such victories resulting in the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment.
to the Constitution” (Schnell). Because she had been trained in such situations and because she had the backing of those circles and her supportive Quaker family, she was able to move her march forward. Her revival of the National Woman’s Party, a larger supportive community, helped give life to other bills such as the Equal Rights Amendment. Supporters of this cause participated in marches, jail-ins, fasts, and picketing, illustrating a wide acceptance and support for this purpose. The small grassroots movement for women’s rights outside of the home grew from a vision of a few strong minded women and their close ties to communities that would band together to overthrow this oppressive patriarchal society to today’s fight for gender equality in effect today in America.

Unlike the serious movement of women’s rights, the multi-level marketing movement of Pampered Chef, Ltd. exists as an illustration of another American grassroots movement that has evolved and created itself a place in the American landscape. Pampered Chef, Ltd. is a company that uses independent sales representatives to sell kitchen tools, appliances, and accessories to people in their homes. Much like the once popular ‘tupperware’ parties of decades back, Pampered Chef parties include representatives going into people’s homes and demonstrating cooking techniques with the kitchen products hoping to entice the attendees to purchase items. This company builds its success on representatives who then recruit other sales representatives, all supporting the same company. In 2007, “70,000 independent consultants put on Kitchen Shows globally,” touts an article in Investor’s Business Daily (McKernan). This huge growth in consultants is mostly attributed to the opportunity for flexible hours: each associate sets his or her party schedule and can work as much or as little as he or she would like although the Pampered Chef company does require minimum personal sales. And while many people jump on this sales wagon because they think it is a get rich quick scheme, others, like representative Robin Miller Kegerise, illustrate the nature of the business: “Your business is what you make of it…If you are willing to work really hard in the early stages, you may not have to work as hard
later on. But you will still have to work” (qtd. in Roha, Kennedy). Overall, the company serves as a conduit by which many people can either buy products, make money selling those products, or enjoy a party that illustrates these products; the Pampered Chef company is just one of America’s multi-level marketing schemes.

Even this company’s growth has followed a grassroots movement pattern to success and it has illustrated another small movement’s ability to affect the masses in today’s American landscape. One woman initiated what is known as the Pampered Chef company today. An article by Ellyn Spragins elaborates on the success of this woman and her ability to “tap deeply into women’s emotional pull toward home, hearth, and community.” Doris Christopher is this woman, and her desire to work to help pay for college coupled with her desire to have flexible hours to be at home when her children needed her sprung her into action. Her ability to tap into women and community first had to start at home: although she knew what her customers wanted, an article states she “didn’t have a business background to draw from while…[her] husband, Jay Christopher…did” (McKernan). It is this initial partnership and strong tie that helped launch the initial business plan. So how does this initial tie between a husband and wife turn into a workforce of more than 70,000? This is where community ties fit in to grow this business. Spragins’ article elaborates on the process: “A host who opens her kitchen to friends for a party is likely to receive $250 to $300 worth of the Pampered Chef products for free. To become a kitchen consultant you pay $90 for a starter kit of tools, worth $350…Recruit more kitchen consultants, and you’ll earn between 1% and 4% on their sales as you climb the ladder.” In essence, the initial consultant asks a friend to do a show with people that consultant may not know, and then those friends want to have parties for their other friends not at that party, and the cycle continues. These communities of women getting together to have a social time with each other and to eat good food turns into business
opportunity. The business spreads like wildfire. Today, Pampered Chef is a household name that is as American as apple pie.

The projected lasting power of this multi-level marketing business of Pampered Chef seems to be in line with that of other multi-level marketing businesses like Mary Kay or Tupperware. These two businesses are a part of American lingo just as Pampered Chef now seems to be. And the company does not seem to be going anywhere soon. Although consultants truly have to work to be their own success stories, this company provides an opportunity and atmosphere for that success. A former Mary Kay consultant, Sheila O’Connell Cooper, who is now a Pampered Chef COO says, “The people who sell our product also want to do something that’s joyful and that they can feel good about” (qtd. in Spragins). A job like this offers mothers or fathers who want to spend more quality time with their children the chance to contribute to the household earnings, and by being able to do this on their own time, they appreciate their job more and enjoy their job more; they feel good about the social communities they are participating in and contributing to. The future outlook of this company remains high in the world of business too: Andrea Tortora, from Direct Selling News online, confirms the Pampered Chef company as a current trendsetter. She states, “Companies with annual sales roughly between $300 million and $1 billion are shaping the future of the U.S. channel. DSN research has identified more than 30 companies believed to be approaching, within or recently exceeding that range” (Tortora). Pampered Chef is among these thirty companies that are continuing to be a part of American direct multi-level marketing successes. The future of Pampered Chef is in the hands of the communities that build it and the communities that continue to make American homes ‘Pampered Chef’ kitchen friendly.

Grassroots movements truly shape the landscape of Americans’ lives. Social injustices like the lack of women’s rights were fought against through the vision of few and banding together of many. It took many years and the friendships of several key players to help persuade the various communities of
women and politicians to join and amend the wrongs done to women in America. On the other hand, social communities can also move the landscape of stay-at-home parent jobs. A partnership and investment of a husband and wife team turned a small at-home shopping business into a global multi-level marketing business where the success of one depends on the community of others. These instances of the growth of grassroots campaigns illustrate that throughout history, one small voice can truly change a landscape.
Works Cited


