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AILEEN HERNANDEZ INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
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Aileen Hernandez
Union Organizer & Activist
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Interviewed by Betsy West
Total Running Time: 39 minutes and 22 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America
Kunhardt Film Foundation

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Aileen Hernandez
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BETSY WEST:

So I'd like to start of talking a little bit about your family and your upbringing.
Can you tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, and what was your
family like?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well, my family actually is from Jamaica. And so my mother and father didn't know each other in Jamaica, but they seem to have emigrated to the United States about the same time. And going into New York, what they had to do was find some way to connect to other people. And in those days, it was very easy because there was a Jamaican community that had been established. It was the days of the Renaissance, the Harlem Renaissance, and so they met, fell in love, apparently very quickly, and decided to get married.

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My mother's father had a shop down in Jamaica, and she got to come to the United States because when his first wife died, he married a young woman who didn't want to stay in Jamaica because she was very interested in the theater, and she was the person I was named for, Aileen. She was an actress and her name was Aileen Pringle. And my mother got to know her and got to like her. So when I was born, I was named after her.

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I have two brothers. Both of them were engineers. One of my brother has died. The older brother is still alive. And was just the three of us all along. We lived for a very short time in Harlem, because that's where you went when you came as an African American person from the United States. You go to Harlem because that's where they know that Black people can go. Well, my mother didn't like Harlem very much, because she was on a bus one day- She

was a seamstress and she didn't work outside of the home, but she did a lot of in the home sewing.

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One day, she was on the bus and she had made herself a very new dress, very stylish, and it had long sleeves. And she was standing on the bus, holding onto the top ring, and she apparently was right in front of this woman, who was on the bus. So suddenly, this young woman who was behind her said, "Ma'am, get your damn wing out of my face so I can see." My mother said, "What!" And she decided that was not a place to bring up children.

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So they started looking for a new place, and that was during the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt. And we were in the middle of what we are doing today, we were having a big, big problem in terms of economics. And the government decided to build a lot of houses in places where they had not built houses before, and to offer those houses to people who had not had an opportunity to find a decent home. And our decent home was found in Brooklyn.

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BETSY WEST:

You had two brothers. How were girls treated back then compared to boys? Was there a difference in your family?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Not in our family, and it was because of my mother. My mother was determined not to be looked at as if she were separate from humanity, because women didn't have the opportunity to do a lot of things that we're talking about now. But she grew up where she was pretty much treated sort of like a princess. Her father traveled a lot, and when her mother died, they got somebody to take care of her while he was doing the traveling.

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And so, she very seldom had an opportunity to see herself as being only a person who could do certain things, but she got trained in doing all of those. So she got trained in sewing and cooking and doing all of that, and her life was very different than many of the people that you would have expected, to be thinking about these issues now.

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BETSY WEST:

And her attitude toward you?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Her attitude towards me and my brothers was that we were to actually act as if there were no limitations on what we could do. So my brothers grew up learning how to cook and doing that, and I learned how to do all the things

that boys did. A lot of things in sports, a lot of things in learning how to fix things in the house, and all that sort of thing.

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BETSY WEST:

How about outside the house?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Outside the home was very interesting, because we lived in a neighborhood which was very diverse, which was not normal in those days. This was the early 30s, so we're talking about that. And what had happened was because they were selling these houses across the country, what we got was people who came from every background that you could think of. Our family turned out to be the only African American family in the community, so that's where I grew up in that atmosphere.

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And believe it or not, although we only talk about discrimination in the South, there was discrimination in the big city of New York as well. And so there were not connections with all the communities that were suddenly brought to Brooklyn, all of the group, but from very different places. And so we came in. Most of the people had no problems with that at all, but a couple of the people did. And at one point in time, they were passing a petition around in

the neighborhood to get our family out of there, because they didn't want Black people to be in the neighborhood.

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Well, very interestingly, my mother, when she heard this- 'Cause somebody came and told her. They obviously didn't knock on our door to get a signature. But somebody came and told her and she said, "I don't believe that." They said that's what's happening. My mother got me dressed. I was at home at that day, my other brother was in school. And my mother came, took me by the hand, got me dressed, got herself dressed, and walked me over to the house of the man who had started the petition.

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And knocked on the door, and said to the woman who opened the door, "Is this your name?" She pointed to it on the petition, and the woman said, "Yes." "Is this your husband's name?" "Yes." "I want to speak to your husband." But all in her Jamaican accent, I have to tell you that. I am not very good at it any more. And the man was sitting at the table and he was reading the newspaper, and when she came in and indicated who she was, he never looked up, never did anything, he was still in the newspaper.

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So my mother was telling him, "Did you send out this petition?" And he wouldn't look at her. She took her hand, knocked his hat off—he had a hat on in the house—she knocked his hat off and said, "When I'm talking to you man, I want you to look at me." And he was startled. And she gave him a lecture

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about our family and why we were there and all the rest, and then simply turned and went out.

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The next day, apparently it got into the school, so the principal of the elementary school that we all went to called a parents' meeting, and he said to the parents in the meeting, "If you are passing out a petition around the Clarks being in this neighborhood, I want you to know that if you don't let them live in the house where they already are, I will give them my house to live in, and find another place for me to live."

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And so, I said I learned something that day, although I was very little, I was only about 5 at that stage. I learned that there are all kinds of people and all kinds of communities, so you can't decide that because you had a bad situation with one person of a certain ethnicity, that from then on everybody in that ethnicity has to be knocked out.

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BETSY WEST:

Sounds like you were a good student.

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I liked school, and my mother had trouble with that. Because my brother who was older got to go to school before I did, and my mother frequently could

not find me because when my brother left for school, I would go downstairs and follow him to school. And so, she frequently had to go down to the school to bring me back. And I really did like school.

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BETSY WEST:

Now talk about your college experience. You really did start to experience both races, and men and sexism in college-

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Oh sure. I went-

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BETSY WEST:

Tell me about that.

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well, I went to the capital of the United States and discovered that it was totally segregated. My father took me down on the train, because he had to pay for my tuition and things. Although I had a scholarship, he had to come up with some money. So he took me down. We got on the train. I had never been on a train before because I had lived in Brooklyn all this time. And on

the train, we met a whole gang of Black people, all of whom happened to be working on the train.

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They were sleeping car porters, they were dining car waiters, and surprisingly, I learned in that trip, that they also- many of them had gone to Howard University, which is where I went to school, and had graduated from Howard University, and the jobs that they had were being on the train, in the dining car and in the sleeping car. And they were delighted to see me, which was interesting, because they were delighted that I was going to Howard University.

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My high school was very interesting. And I was in a school in Brooklyn called Bay Ridge High School, it was an all-girls high school, and it was also very- they were very interested in trying to figure out how to handle the situation of girls having good educations. 'Cause in those days, it was assumed that girls would only do certain kinds of things. They might be teachers, they might be secretaries, they might be nurses, but they weren't going to be much else.

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And so, they set up the school to train a different kind of approach to girls. They decided what they needed to do was to use the IQ approach to decide who should go into this school within the school. And as a result of that, I wound up in this special program, which for the four years that I was in high school, separated the girls. So if you were a certain kind of girl who had a

certain kind of IQ, the assumption was you were going to get married immediately as you came out of high school.

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You were not going to go to college at all. So those girls got trained in that way. Then if you might want to go to school a little after that, to get a job like a secretary, you have to get trained in that. So there was a second group of girls who went through that. And then, the people who matched the IQ went into this very special school which did very interesting things. We did everything. They didn't limit us in any way in terms of our education.

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We got an opportunity to go all over the state of New York. I met people in those days that were like God to me at that stage. For example, Paul Robeson and his wife would come there periodically. I got to meet educators that I knew by name but I didn't realize I would ever get to meet them in my life. And that gave me an opportunity to broaden the possibilities for a young girl coming from Brooklyn New York in those days.

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BETSY WEST:

You get out of Howard, then how did you get on your career track?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

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I went to New York University to continue my education in political science. And while I was there, a lot of things were going on. Roosevelt was still in office. And what occurred was I'm sitting in the library at New York University doing a paper to get ready for another class, and I got tired of reading. So I decided to stop reading the books about the particular paper I was on, and to read, instead, a magazine I saw on the desk.

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By this time I was already into politics. I was doing a lot of work with politics. There were new groups coming together, and democratic groups and all kinds of groups, and I was part of that. And when I picked up this magazine, there was an article, and the article had an ad at the end of it and it said, "Are you an odd ball? Would you like a job that doesn't pay a lot of money but gives lots of satisfaction to you in terms of what you're doing in the society?" And I said, "They're talking to me."

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So I look at what the ad says, and it has a telephone number, and it says, "Call this telephone number if you're interested in this oddball job." So I call it, and it turns out to be the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which was run by David Dubinsky in those days, and that of course is the industry that makes all the clothing for women. And I applied for this particular job.

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And what they had decided to do was they had decided to set up a training institute, because they felt that they were at a disadvantage with the garment industry owners, because everything was going into technology and they

didn't have in the unions, people who had the skills to do the technology. And so, they decided to get young people to come into the ILGWU, get trained, and then be the people that can deal with the owners of the various activities that were going on.

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There were 32 people in the very first class of that; there were 4 women and 28 men. What was also true was that none of those people sitting in that room were really planning to become union people. I think there was just one young man whose father made it possible for him to get in. We got trained six months in the field and six months in school. And in the training of that school, we discovered that the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which had all of these things going on, had a lot of women working for them but most of them were in the special things that women did.

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Women were not the cutters. The cutters in the industry are the ones that cut out the patterns. They have all that beautiful material that they are paying a lot of money for. So men did that work. And what women did essentially was the finishing, mostly by hand. And all of those women, there was one woman on the board of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union. The union board had one woman out of 15. 14 of them were men. So even there, women were being discriminated against.

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BETSY WEST:

Tell me about coming out to California, work you did with women, meeting Eleanor Roosevelt, and getting involved with this- testifying before the Commission, and really, what the status of women was in your union?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

The status of the women in the union was very simple. They did certain kinds of jobs and the men did the other jobs, and it turned out that the jobs that the women did got paid less and the ones that the men did got paid more. So there was still discrimination no matter where you turned in terms of sex. Although there was a lot of movement going on at the same time for changing the discrimination generally in the society based on race, and the union was part of that, even though they worked very hard to get those laws passed that made a difference in terms of race.

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I got to meet Eleanor Roosevelt because she was selected as our graduation speaker at the institute that we were graduating from. And she made the speech, and I was the co-president with one of the men in that group, and we got to meet her and we had lunch with her and talked with her and got a picture taken with her at the same time. She was always my heroine. I always loved Eleanor Roosevelt.

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BETSY WEST:

And then she went on to Head of Commission, can you tell me about that?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

She did, because there was a decision made because women were beginning to push back, and they were making questions about whether or not women had a role in the society that needed to be addressed as well. And laws were being passed, fair employment practices laws in New York City for example, and New York State was the first state to come up with a law on discrimination in terms of race. And as a result of that, they were already a little bit ahead of people on discrimination.

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Nobody had a law saying discrimination against women, and some of the discrimination related to women cannot work more than a certain number of hours, they cannot lift more than a certain number of pounds—these were laws that were beneficial from the union point of view because they thought it was helping. They were getting jobs that women could do and they were getting women to work, and they could get them to join and get paid. So everything was sort of coming together, in my career view, when I look at it that way.

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I graduate. I'm asked where do I want to go to actually work for the ILGWU. And I say I want to go to California, which of course, a young woman at that time, well, you've lived in Brooklyn all your life, now you want to go 3000

miles away to California. So I went to California, working in the sportswear industry and doing work organizing. That means going out and trying to get people to join the union, the people who were in shops that were not unionized and were not getting good pay. Again, it's political. You are passing laws at the state level. And what you're doing, at the same time, is seeing that there is still stuff that has to be changed.

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BETSY WEST:

Tell me about the Civil Rights Act. It wasn't intended, originally, to help women? How did that happen?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well, a lot of people are still asking that question, how did this happen? What happened was it connected because in a lot of these places that we were talking about race, there were obviously also women as well as men, but they were still being discriminated against. There was no law that specifically said those special laws that the unions had put together were now not a benefit for women because they kept them from going into certain places. Nobody's going to hire you if you can't lift more than a certain number of pounds and you can't work more than a certain number of hours.

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So there begins to be a kind of conflict between people that work with each other for a long period of time. And so there was a decision to include- in the first law that was being passed at the federal level on non-discrimination, to include in that law discrimination against women, and it got through. And sometimes people think it got through because it was the right thing to do, and sometimes, it was actually being pushed to keep the law from being passed.

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BETSY WEST:

So it was to forbid discrimination?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

It was absolutely- to discriminate against women was now to be illegal. You could not do it any more. And so suddenly, the two things come together, and Eleanor Roosevelt is there again because the Commission is created to look into the question of discrimination against women. A big beautiful report comes out which really makes it clear that women are being discriminated against. And Pauli Murray shows up again because she's working with Eleanor Roosevelt, now on the commission.

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BETSY WEST:

And you testified.

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I testified the Commission, because as a union member, we went down to show our connection to the discrimination law that was being passed, and to talk about how it related to women as well. Those two issues suddenly came together.

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BETSY WEST:

Now, in the wake of the Civil Rights Act, you got a new job. Can you tell me about that?

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AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

The Fair Employment Practice Law that was passed—but it later got called the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, that's when they put it together—all got done in 1963, essentially. That was the first law that was passed to give women a little bit of a step forward, I would guess, was in 1963. They did have a law which had a section about women being able to get certain kinds of jobs, but not all kinds of jobs. A lot of jobs were left out for women.

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By the time we get to 1964, and this law is being introduced by the Kennedy administration, and people are now debating it as to whether or not it's going to go on, the unions are down there and they are going to Congress and saying, "Yes, let's go along." So, I go, to go down and actually speak at Congress about the need to make this change, and to also put women into the process. And there is a decision that they have to add a section to the law, which did not include women originally.

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It was the traditional law which said no discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, or national origin, and now, up comes somebody with an addition. Discrimination against women is now to be illegal too, or as they put it, it was not just women, it was sex, as they relate it to women in those days. And the law is introduced by somebody that was not really very good on fair employment against race. And it gets introduced and everybody thinks it's not going to pass. But it passes.

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Suddenly, women are now under the law as well. but a lot of people never thought and neither did the equal employment opportunity commission which was put together by then. By this time I'm working not with the union any more. I'm working with the fair employment practice commission. not the new one with the sex discrimination. I'm working with the fair employment practice commission in California. I'm assistant director. And how did I get to be assistant director. The union recommended me to become part of that. So I'm assistant director on the fair Employment Practice

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commission. I'm working on the law of fair employment practices, related to race and ethnicity no, none on women and suddenly we are pushing a federal law for equal employment opportunity. And that comes up in 1964. we are beginning to work on this. we get that passed through all of the committees and then it gets stuck because somebody introduces sex. And so the new law does include sex discrimination.

BETSY WEST:

huge big deal

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

It was a huge big deal. Nobody had done that. there were only two states in, at that time that had even discussed that and they had not been going on for very long on this issue of g, of gender discrimination. One of them was the state of Hawaii.

BETSY WEST:

what happened with you and the law

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

when the new law gets passed, I am working for California fair employment Practice Commission. and they are getting ready to set up the commission that is going to be the part of the new law. There are five people to be on that commission. they had already come up with the four men that they had put

on. They had come up with that. And were getting ready to do the fifth one and recognized suddenly that there were no women. in that group of five and they decided that they had to have some women with all the pressure that was coming down on them. How they actually did it I don't know. But I like to s, I like to tell the story that I, I got appointed to the commission because I actually met all of the requirements and all in one person. I, I was a woman, I was an African American, I was a had a last name of Hernandez by this time s I'm also Latino. The reason I'm making this funny is that's what the press always asks me. how did you happen to get appointed to the commission. Cause they had never heard of me from any place. And so I had to justify my being appointed from those great qualities that I had and not, not the fact that I actually knew something about fair employment and was doing this.

BETSY WEST:

what you heard at commission

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Part of the process was although the law had passed, it was going to take a year before it actually went into effect. And so during that year they were going to have to get the commission moving, get the c, the actually agency set up and they were looking for people to be on the commission. and they have started doing that so then they, then they realized suddenly that here's all this issue now about women. And we don't have a woman.

BETSY WEST:

get on commission

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

we, we're getting complaints from every place at this point in time and the Fair Employment Practice commission and the EEOC and the, and the NAACP had gotten a lot of cases in place and ready to go on the issue of race. Nobody had done anything on the issue of, of discrimination against women and they suddenly had to do something. And what we got were originally the first case that I remember that we really had a big discussion about sex discrimination was the airlines. The airlines were charged by the women who had been going on this discriminatory approach for a long time were complaining. The women in the, in the airlines, the stewardesses who were there. Those stewardesses decided that they needed to use the law. And so they filed a complaint of discrimination that they weren't getting paid the same amount of money. They couldn't do certain things. They were being limited in how they were being selected. They were being selected not on their, their skills, but on their beauty. WE had a, an airline in California at that point in time which had women in, in short skirts. On the airline, practically way above their knees and the women didn't like that. they were professionals. They were women who thought they had a job to do and were not to be treated. they also didn't have certain benefits. They couldn't be married and stay on the airlines. They couldn't lose, they couldn't gain any weight and stay on the airlines.

BETSY WEST:

had to retire

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

They would retire at very young because when they were no longer beautiful in the eyes of the people they were gone. So all of these things were so ridiculous and the commission got this complaint. But they were so loaded down also with all the complaints that came in on race, that they didn't do much about it and so we had to really start doing it. coming up to say is this about a violation of the law. The unions begin to fall away from a, answering me that question. Because essentially they were dealing with the race issues that they were familiar with, they were not the discrimination against women. Many of the unions were discriminating against women. women could not work in a whole lot of industries because the unions would not permit them to do it. women don't do that kind of job. So what you get is a kind of conflict between what do you do. Do you do the cases of race discrimination. Do you do the cases of, of discrimination on the gender. It would seem very important for me to get across at this point the courage of the women who filed the complaints because they filed them and almost always got fired as a result of them. And then, then to have a double complaint of discrimination at that stage. And they knew that it was going to take a long time to get a decision because there was no history as to how you

had to address things. So all of that had to be done and they had to be the ones that had to wait to go throughout.

BETSY WEST:

attitude of fellow commissioners

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Interestingly when, when we got to the commission we were asked you know how do we get the commission to get going. We were, had a year to do this. they didn't do anything on it until practically a month before the year was over. And so now the commission is , is in place because I am finally hired as the one women among five people who were going to be on the commission. and so we had to get people assigned to do work. Ordinarily in a year you would have everything in place. you'd have your jobs, you would have them, they didn't have it. so the commissioners became the ones who had to do it. And so we assigned it by who had some skill. I was the only one that had any experience in equal employment Opportunity Law because I had been working with the Fair Employment Practice commission in California by that time for over 2 years. and I guess that was one of the reasons I got appointed finally because I did have that background and the law also was limited because it said if you can find a commission that has had experience in certain areas. We ought to get people who have know about this. And we came together. we started to take each of these areas separately. I got the particular area that I got. The original thought was that I would do the sex

discrimination thing and I said no. What I'm going to, I would like to do what I have to do which is to figure out how the state agencies for fair employment practice would work with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission now at the federal level. And the reason I did that was I knew I needed at least another commissioner who would be able to do this so I suggested one of the other people to take on the issue of sex discrimination but I of course would work with them on it. And we did indeed hire some people who had some skill. The commissioner who took on the sex discrimination end of it was a great guy. But he was Graham. Graham came in and he was the person who took it on. And we said in my office, we will help you on all the issues. Because we're the only women here at this stage of the game. So we worked on that. we got to look at those cases and to try to actually get the people who were helping to train our commission we had to get them to understand what sex discrimination was all about. the issue that came forth besides the airlines was the newspapers. Newspapers had ads that were dealing help wanted male, help wanted female. And we decided that the two of us that were working on sex discrimination that that was discrimination that we could not do that. And we'd need to do something about it. And it was a fight for a long period of time.

BETSY WEST:

a fight

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

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Within the commission . I, I shouldn't say fight. A discussion a dis, a disagreement in the commission as to where the emphasis should be.

BETSY WEST:

some of your fellow

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

They mostly said you know we are focusing on the sex d, discrimination because it was put into the law but we don't have very much information about it. and we've got all these 2000 cases coming in from the African American and the Latino community. The Asian community and that's our first p, priority.

BETSY WEST:

their attitude

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

and then the commission was falling apart. Franklin Delano Roosevelt left the commission to run for governor so he's off the commission and we had in the law at that stage that you didn't automatically reappoint somebody to that. You had to wait until you had the opportunity to do it. and then to find the person that might fit into it. and, and we had terms. Every one of the commissioners had a term. I happen to have the longest one because I had the shortest one originally. The first one was one year but you have five year

terms. the first year was gone and I had one year so I got the immediate reappointment and I, I now have five years and I was the only one that had any information about sex discrimination.

BETSY WEST:

didn't stay long

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I did not stay long at the EEOC for a number of reasons. Number one, we went to war in the United States, the war started again. I'm talking about actual war at this stage and the interests moved from Equal opportunity to fighting a war. President Johnson came in with a real intent. He was very good. A real intent to do something about the sex or the race discrimination but he got side tracked on war.

BETSY WEST:

And so you quit

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I quit because we were not moving on any of these cases. Everybody was debating on all the issues because they couldn't agree on them. and each time you lost a commissioner because another year had gone by. we got down to 3 members of the commission at one point in time. And one of the people among that three was determined not to have the airlines upset because we

were going to change all these laws because we had already decided by this time. sometimes by a 3 to 2 vote, but we sometimes but we had decided that these things had to be changed. That the airlines needed to be told that they could not do this any longer and that the newspapers had to be told that they could not do this any longer. And they resulted in cases against the, those issues.

BETSY WEST:

decided but wasn't happening.

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

It wasn't happening because it was not being followed through and we didn't, we didn't even have a lot of staff at that stage. They waited too long to get the staff in place.

BETSY WEST:

frustrating

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

It was totally frustrating. And, and Dick Graham who had been so good on the sex discrimination issue, he lost his position altogether and apparently power that he didn't get reappointed so he was gone. And these large numbers of cases were coming in but so were the women that began, were beginning to file. When women started filing they came in, in large numbers and so there

were quite a lot of discrimination cases that came in at that stage and we had to make decisions. And we weren't making them.

BETSY WEST:

tough decision to quit

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

No. no it was a, I, I had learned a long time ago that if you do your best to get something done and if it's not moving you don't stay there and keep waiting for it to move. You go out somewhere and start pushing them to move.

BETSY WEST:

getting involved

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well again it's, it's strange because the commission again was back in place. And the commission, our commission, the Equal Employment Opportunity commission was invited to come to the Women's commission to tell them about what was going on in terms of the law. And we get down and I find a whole lot of my friends down on the women's commission sitting there, as well as the people I knew from the EEOC. And we spoke at that meeting. And This was in 1965. and in 1965 we spoke to this commission of women. our commission spoke to them and we started to respond to the women asking us questions about why certain things were not moving and what was going

on and all the rest of it. and it was very clear that we needed to do something to make it stronger, to get some more people on there, and to get more decisions actually being made.

BETSY WEST:

Quit EEOC

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well first, first of all I quit the, I didn't quit the EEOC until after. What, I was on the EEOC doing those cases, testifying, have the chase, the cases actually move actually move through the Equal Employment Opportunity commission. and not doing very well because it was not following through. We would get all these decisions practically agreed upon and then nothing would occur. Part of it was because it was not going back to president Johnson for the decision making. He was deep into the war and so it was going into places where nothing was ha, occurring. **Some of our commissioners were not taking action** and I think partially because they were getting pushed by some of the employers who didn't want to make the changes that we're talking about. And so everything was slow, at a stand still and it was ridiculous and we were at a meeting where this was going on. And Betty Friedan who had just finished her book on discrimination against wo, women. The Feminine Mystique and about her experience at Smith College. And what was going on there. it was really her study was what had happened to the women of Smith, who graduated from Smith and then could not get

certain kinds of jobs. So it sort of came together. she wrote the book, she was out on file, came to this meeting, heard what was going on with the EEOC. There were a lot of women who had been working on these issues forever coming from every state of the union to this women's commission and at that meeting there was a decision to have lunch together. a group of people came around a table. I'm sitting on a platform so I can't go and sit down with them and have lunch. But they get together and they say something has to be done. Pauline Murray is in the room and she's sitting there with Betty Friedan as well. there were women who were a head of commissions in their states by this time as well. so in a very small group of people there's about 15 people probably who made the lunch agreement and then agreed to meet again for action. And then we as a commission were also trying to, to get our points of view across to the country. we did not have any power whatsoever in terms of suing or sending people to jail or.

BETSY WEST:

back to lunch group

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well that, that's the point. They were sitting at lunch. They couldn't get a lot done because a, a conference was going on and agreed to meet at another meeting. So they go up to Betty Friedan's room and they all sit down and they agreed that there needs to be action taken that the women need to rise up and say something or else nothing is going to occur. And so they start

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planning how to do this. it's going to have get this as a national level, get women from all kinds of places and they were lucky because women had come from all kinds of places to this particular conference so they had representation accidentally from all over the country. And the group grew a little bit, started with about 5 at lunch, got to 15 or so in the evening and there was an agreement that in October they would have a national conference and create a new organization and they immediately started to draw up the document. So NOW's document of coming together set the stage for a conference to be held in October and that NOW would go into position. Betty Friedan came out with came up with the name.

BETSY WEST:

name of the organization

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

that's what I was about to say. Betty Friedan came up with the name National Organization for women. she and Pauline Murray and 2 other people worked on the, on the, the actual declaration if you want to, the declaration of women's war against this going on. And they finally had an organization. And I by this time have had it up to here without getting anything going. I'm doing what everybody else is doing and meeting with the women. and I'm meeting with these women now and they are coming to me, to meet with me to see what could happen. So I'm involved in the middle of it at this stage of the game.

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BETSY WEST:

throw my hat in

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

well no I didn't I, I was not going to do that. I was going to stay on the commission and do all of this but it finally got to the point where nothing was moving and they invited me to come and talk with them because they wanted me to know that they were going to do this. so NOW gets formed, 15 people throw in 5 bucks a piece and start a whole organization.

BETSY WEST:

one of 15

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

No. I could not do that and be on the commission. that would not be, be appropriate.

BETSY WEST:

the moment you joined

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I joined a, I actually joined when I left the commission which was one, about September I left the commission and decided that I was going to leave. And

actually did not go to the first meeting, the conference that they had that first meeting in October 'cause I was still on the commission payroll. And I decided it was not important for me to go to that meeting but what happened was we also pushed to actually have the commissions decision on the airlines go through before I left. I was not going to leave until we got that going cause it was so important to have that done. We get that actually accomplished. And now Franklin Delano Roosevelt is gone. He's gone up to run for governor so we are down to 3 people on the commission. we can't make a decision cause you need to have 3 people and we didn't have agreement. One person that continued to argue against that happening continued to argue against it and so we could not pass it. So when Franklin Delano Roosevelt left, the president had to appoint a new commissioner. He did appoint a new commissioner. I agreed to stay on until that, we could make that decision happen and so it does occur and by the time I leave in October and start back to California, we do have NOW has been created. I don't go to the NOW conference obviously that's not appropriate and I'm leaving the commission. so I'm getting a lot of pressure about why, why am I leaving. The press comes down to talk to me all the time. why are you leaving, what's going on and they said oh well why, why are you going. Why don't you stay on the commission. I said I don't think that's appropriate. Because I am deciding that we need to have a real pressure to get this issue of sex discrimination of gender discrimination really on, on the front of the issue as well. we have no decision making there. we have a lot of decision making on race because it's been going on for 20 years and from all the other places. We need to be on it. so I agreed. They

asked me the NOW people asked me to join and so I joined. And I start back to California and on the way back the press stops me every place I am going and they ask me what's going on here, what are you doing. I said where are you going, what are you going to do. I said I haven't made up my mind what I'm going to do in terms of my work. And I said what you don't. I said no. I'm going home and I'm going to go fishing.

BETSY WEST:

along

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

the first story I did was, why am I leaving in the press, was the, the person who asked me why am I leaving and I say I'm going fishing, I don't know what I'm going to be doing. Wrote the story up and said at the end of it she said she's going fishing. For what. A husband. So.

BETSY WEST:

becoming president of NOW

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well first, the first thing that they did was we were in law, we were actually sued over a period of time and I was testifying about how this occurred. How did we manage to get this pushed through. Was this legal or not. So Betty Friedan and I were with lawyers for about six months about this. she is the

new president of NOW. I as the one woman on the commission and so we're talking to each other a lot obviously. And Betty Friedan wants me to be vice president. She says you should come out and be vice president. I said no. I am not going to come onto this until, until this law suit is all signed. That gets done finally. We get the suit agreed upon. Then we have to move forward on this other issue. And we need to get this movement across the country. it started in the east. And it had to go across the country to be a movement. Otherwise it would be a new York movement. And so I get back in and they want me to become a vice president. I said no I can't do that. but I am willing to be vice president west and do the west. And cause I can't do this. I've got to get my cell organized. So that's how we worked with each other and we started to build a movement from there.

BETSY WEST:

what was she like

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

very interesting. Very bright. She's a Smith graduate, but very difficult to work with on a number of issues and so there's a lot of tension going back and forth and I become sort of the person that people are coming to, to settle some of these. But we were worked together very well all along.

BETSY WEST:

how difficult

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

It's her personality. Her personality was such that she was difficult to work with in that she wants things done instantly but you can't, which could not be done. She was not always very gentle when she talked to people but she was very clear about what she thought out to be done about the movement so we had no disagreement on that. and we all worked together and of course there was no money. So nobody is getting paid for anything.

BETSY WEST:

how did you manage

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

we're all crazy, that's the first part of it, that we wanted to do this so we just worked day and night to move forward on all of these issues. And people took up the things that needed to be done. Every one of these groups, and again the commission of the that the women had was very valuable at that point in time because they came to together across the country so we knew that we could get some support. Mostly voluntarily in all of these areas of the country.

BETSY WEST:

hit a nerve

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

it hit a nerve and it really made a difference. People suddenly began to look and think about the things that were going on.

BETSY WEST:

what kind of things

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

well all kinds of things. If you say that there's a discrimination and there is something that we can do through the law then how are you going to do this, how are you going to do it. the EEOC didn't have any power. Even if they agreed with everything that we were talking about they could not make it happen because they couldn't sue anybody. They couldn't do any of those things. We were only educating so it was, it was tough. It was actually trying to educate an entire country.

BETSY WEST:

change attitudes

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

change attitudes, change families, change people divorcing because there were issues that they had to argue about over the dinner table about who was going to do something. And to have the, the media misinterpret many of the things that went on as we went through the process as well so that it's all of

this was a part of it. And it was a revolution. It was essentially a major revolution for the country. that was very similar to the whole issues around the civil rights revolution that took place earlier in the game.

BETSY WEST:

becoming president

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well I don't think it was very symbolical because there were not very many black women in the movement. They, they were doing these things with the civil rights movement. Not through the women's movement at that point in time. so there were not a lot of black or Latino or Asian women who were part of that initial group of women. In fact it was very eastern oriented. To a great degree. Much of it came through New York, rather than through other places.

BETSY WEST:

why

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

cause they were operating on their communities which was not just women being discriminated against. It was all of that community being discriminated and not having a lot of time meant you put your energy where most of your

concern was about and there was black women and men Latino valley Latino women and men working on this, Asian women and men

BETSY WEST:

women's movement too narrowly focused

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Yes. I think pretty well because it was all about issues. That did not necessarily take into consideration the fact that there was discrimination of the against the men of the, of the of the Latino and black and Asian community as well so it was dividing to a lot of women. Where could they put their energy and they put it where they thought they needed to put it at that time.

BETSY WEST:

March for equality

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

it was, it was a surprise to me. I was vice president at that point in time and there was a lot of argument about, because Betty Friedan was sometimes very difficult to work with, they decided that they did not think it was a good idea for her to stay as president forever. That was not something that should be done. so that should be a change, there should be an election and that was not very, Betty did not take that very well. I think she really wanted to stay in

that position to keep going cause she hadn't accomplished all the things that she wanted. I was the only person that she had thought, she agreed after a lot of pressure, since she didn't want to leave at all. but that she would leave if I would take on the position so I decided although I was still trying to get myself a job and do the things I needed to do. I said yes. And got elected. And while, while I'm getting elected, Betty Friedan is giving her last speech to the group and she says for the first time I ever heard it that essentially what we should have is a march on the world. the world. Is that women should march against the, we have to get this movement into the front, public eye and I was the one that she agreed could come in and help do it. So she said this at the last meeting of the, of the board as she was going out. she announces that there is going to be a march on a specific day and I had not heard that before. I'm coming in as the new president. So she's not going to have to do this. she did it in New York. And most of the movement was focused as it being in New York, a big march, cause New York is a big state with a lot of people. The big march was in New York. When I came in I said we need to have this across the country. so what I would like to do is not stop the march in New York but what we need to do is to get everybody marching in the country. so I'm going to suggest that chapters of now that are coming into existence in all of these states do it in their states. Don't everybody go to New York. to try to march. But we do it every place and so what we did was we actually worked it that way and actually it was marching across the country and things happened in places that nobody ever heard of before. Because women knew about the

march. Publicity went out and they got involved in it. And it happened across the country.

BETSY WEST:

huge

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

it was a huge it went way past new York. It was all over and people did very creative things in the process as they went through.

BETSY WEST:

relationship between older and younger women

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

well you're on the wrong, you're on the wrong line if you assume that the older women were not radical. They were very radical. They had gone through life dealing with this so they were very radical. And the way they worked it out was that they began to issue papers on all these issues that nobody had ever talked about before, about marriage about jobs, about being a mother. All the you know having control over your own body. All of these issues just sort of came up in all of these places and marvelous work papers, put together by brilliant women and that it got passed through the NOW line until now it became very involved in every thing in life. and women joined depending on what their issues were. The issues that came up later were the

issues of not only gender but you know homosexual issues as they called it in those days. And that became an issue because of people not understanding that at all.

BETSY WEST:

Was that divisive

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

with some people it was divisive and with others it brought people together.

BETSY WEST:

Explain that

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I think it has to do with you yourself where you decide the line comes through on what's equality. What makes equality between men and women for example. And one of them has to be the control over you, the control over your own body. So women were very interested in the issues about not being able to have health issues addressed at all, having actually laws that prohibited you from doing your own deciding in those areas. That made it illegal for you to do it.

BETSY WEST:

lesbian issue

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

yeah Betty was one of those. Betty Friedan was not interested in this and the reason she was not interested in doing that was she felt that before the movement had grown it would have a problem challenging those issues.

BETSY WEST:

which issues

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

the issues of homosexuality. She thought that that would not encourage more women to join. She was wrong. She it actually turned out that she was very wrong on it because there were so many women who were actually not saying anything about their sexuality but they were concerned about this.

BETSY WEST:

issue of minority women

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well even the, even in the way that we normally would expect women to come together about the general issues, one of the questions that came up was how do we get the movement knowing in the country so there was talk about the press and the media and how do we handle that, what are the issues that we want to put out there and who's going to say them. and that I

think caused a little bit of a problem because not everybody knew everything. Everybody did not know every issue that was going to come up. they came up, they came up as we went along. And so the issues that we addressed at that point in time were the issues around jobs, opportunities for women, how the image of women in the media et cetera and one of that was to look at the media and recognize that almost everything in the media was obviously all on white women. You never saw anything with women of color. And even now did not do anything about that originally. so we hired an agency to come down and come up with a plan of action. For doing this. and they did a whole series of ads for us and we looked at them to decide which ones we wanted to use. and many people remember them. that was the one that the man and they said what, hire him he's got great legs. Because that was the way they said that women were always being asked to be beautiful and that's how they got hired. And it became pretty clear that we needed to address the issue of abortion and all of those came up. She was children and the decision and who makes the decision and who makes the decisions on having children. And the brought us an ad. And here was an ad that of this baby, a beautiful little baby, white baby sitting in the middle of the ad and it said this child have a right. Why does this child not have opportunity. And their ad was because she is a woman she's not getting it. But there's only this one child and that's it so some of us were arguing that what we needed to have was a group of children of all kinds, all different races and ethnicities but all for the same thing. Why is this child not having a good life and the answer should have been they're women but they're women of all colors. And we couldn't get the ad done. We

had an argument over that because they said they told us that that would not be a good ad because it would, what would be the focus. They would not recognize that it was about women that you were talking and we disagreed. So we started disagreeing on how to address this so that it addressed the women of color.

BETSY WEST:
other issues

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well sterilization was a big part of the issue because although there were lots of things being talked about, about women's right to have children as their decision there was not right for everybody. What had happened was all kinds of laws were being passed at that point in time where poor women particularly were being left out of most of the health issues and that when a woman who was poor went into a hospital for any kind of medical attention, she sometimes came out of that hospital having been sterilized. because they didn't want to pay for that child. This was poverty. She didn't have a right to have children if she couldn't afford to have children and so there were very serious issues about whether we wanted to have abortion as a big issue in the women's movement and the decision was never made by anybody as an individual but the women of color had a great deal of difficulty deciding to go for women making that decision and having a government decided that that was the right of them.

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

one of the problems I think was the difference between what was described as the privileged women who were running this movement. This was not a movement across all ethnic lines nor is it nor all economic lines. There were women who were poor and there were women who were rich. The people they are seeing are the people who are privileged women. it's Betty Friedan growing graduate from Smith College. It's all of those women who can afford to travel back and forth on these meetings and all the rest. So it's, it's how the organization was created and how it was molded to bring women in who would not have been part of it otherwise. And so as I said women of color were preoccupied. they had a lot of things that they had been working on for many, many years that related to their gender yes, but mostly to their race and ethnicity. That's what was causing their problems. when married it was their husbands that were not bringing in the money and so they had to work and they had to work at all kinds of jobs like the garment industry. and others in order to bring their families together. And then the difference between what was happening. If you make abortion illegal, as that was going on at that time and how women goes in doesn't want the abortion that's not what she's there for. She's there for something else but to suddenly find that she's lost all ability to have children because they have sterilized her while she's in the hospital. So there were those conflicts and the lack of understanding of the women. you couldn't have been on the commission for example if you didn't have money. Cause you traveled back and forth and there were very few

women who were in poverty who were sitting on that commission. they were being represented by other people, but they were not sitting there themselves to say what was of concern to them.

BETSY WEST:

you wrote a letter

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

A new election came up after I had left my, I was president from 1970, 70 through 1971. That's what I agreed to do because I was trying to run a business at that time. and so the election issue came up and so everybody was indicating who was a really going to run, want to run, not to actually run but want to run. SO a lot of names came up, a lot of people decided that they would run. The new people coming in had to have teams because there were all kinds of offices that had to be filled in so everybody who was running for the presidency, also had a team that they were working on. And the person at that time that was running for the presidency had pulled her team together. And there were no women of color on the team, in fact nobody had any women of color on the team. We had, we in this case when I'm talking about we, women of color who were in NOW had decided that we needed to come together in order to find a way of getting more connection between the women who were who were mostly white and the women who were women of color. And so we, I recommended that we set up a workshop to train women who were rich and who had privilege about some of the issues that

were different for the women of color than they were for the women who were white. And we, we set them up and we had to have these workshops and we trained a lot of people, got one of the issues where is the break between those separate groups of women. and we had some workshops on it. nobody was running in NOW who was black or Latino or Asian for that. that's not something they're doing. The people who were running are not thinking about that again. The person who was running for the presidency at that time decided to put her group together and as I said there was no women of color on her group. And so she got elected I said why, why it did not happen. Why didn't you put somebody on your team because if somebody of color had been on your team, that person would have been elected as well. And the point was made that they, they didn't have the time to do that, couldn't get it done. And so I said if you can't have the time to recognize the differences in women that need to be addressed as well as the things that are similar that's not going to be a good way for the movement to go. So I wrote a letter and told them exactly that. That I thought it was unfortunate that when asked about it, she said well she had to have people that she could trust, people that she knew and could trust. I said I think that's the wrong thing for NOW to say and I am not going to be involved. In this any more.

BETSY WEST:

you quit

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I quit.

BETSY WEST:

that point, wrote the letter

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

and then I got letters written back to me.

BETSY WEST:

the letter was

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

No, I'm not, I didn't quit the movement and I didn't quit NOW but I was not just going to be involved and sit there and let things like let the things like that happen and not say something about it. And I, I explained this to one of the African American groups that was meeting at that period of time and I said I thought it would be a good idea not to bring new people into NOW because that's they were trying to do, bring a whole lot of new people in. Until we got a commitment from NOW to make sure that women of color would be encouraged to be part of it.

BETSY WEST:

explain that what that is

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

one of the problems that any woman of color because discrimination goes across all of these lines. There has been discrimination in this country against Asians, against Latinos. Against black women for a long period of time. so women are in a movement where their men do not have power. And part of families has to be at that point in time, people were talking about families being mostly men and women together. They have a double job. They have the double job of dealing with the discrimination that they feel as women and the discrimination that they feel and have as, as people of color within their own community. So women worked harder in, in the minority communities that, they call them minority communities. Wrongly because jointly they are larger than many of the a They call them minority communities, wrongly because jointly they are larger than many of the

BETSY WEST:

what did you call

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Women in the middle. These are the women who are actually doing both. They are working overtime and not getting paid for overtime but and so there is always that d, that difference as well.

BETSY WEST:

look back on accomplishment

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

The women's movement has accomplished a whole lot more than many people do. Mostly because well mostly because women have used more of their talents as a result of the women's movement. And have therefore, given those talents to the entire community. So there are lots of laws that are now on the books that are addressing issues that would not have been addressed if there was not

BETSY WEST:

what it's accomplished

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

we've had, we've had the talent of women the being able to use be used in a lot of different places that they were absent from in the past. And you see this is a societal change. there is a major change in the society in terms of many things. Not everybody has, has had that change but a lot of women and men have had it.

BETSY WEST:

hasn't benefited working class women

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

NO I think a lot of those a lot of the issues is that working class women and minority women and women of any kind have made a difference in the society and have benefited from it and the society has benefited. I always said when I spoke on the issue of what NOW is all about was that I thought that the women's movement would be as beneficial to men as it was to women. I came up through an elementary school that never had a man anywhere to be seen in elementary school. All the teachers were women. I don't think that's an appropriate way to teach and I think that there's been a big change in that. you are now finding men working in all kinds of ways.

BETSY WEST:

why do you think movement

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Well Phyllis Schlafly who is a woman who gained a lot of notoriety because we opened the door. the women's movement opened the door for her to have a speaking table and there was a lot of fear I think in the society when NOW came in and started saying all these quote revolutionary things. It sounded like the whole room was going to fall apart, if women weren't going to do the things they usually did. And she benefited from that cause she got all the media. It wasn't that she was doing very much but they, everybody always went we can have 2000 women walking on a picket line talking about the women's movement and the need for equality. And they would give her equal time. she one person with one point of view, would get a lot of me, equal time

on all of the media. TV, radio, newspapers, wrote the stories. And she became a person because of the National Organization for Women having some few words to say that got into the press, that got into the press without jokes. And she got all the approach and she, she's a woman of the past, way back in the past. And I don't even want to say that because there were a lot of women in the past that were absolutely fantastic. Women who did a lot of things.

BETSY WEST:

Work family challenge women face

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I don't know that anybody gets grown up thinking that you're not going to get married. Because that was the approach that girls were supposed to marry. And get taken care of by men. that's the way that happened. But what I think is that basically it has changed. It has changed a lot then and I don't think everybody assumes that marriage is for them. neither men nor women. you know they think that they can have a perfectly good life as a single person too.

BETSY WEST:

what kind of expectations

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

it's hard. I think that has to be done on an individual basis because there is a big difference between the romance period and the actual living period together and when there is equality in terms of other things, then there has to be equality in the marriage as well and that doesn't suddenly become something different. And so it takes a very interesting man and a very interesting woman to make sure that their marriage is going to be good. I, I am impressed negatively by what I see all the time on all these stories about our politicians who get all the press about how many women they've had behind the scenes with their wives and all the rest of it. so a lot of things have changed. You know men used to be able to get away with that. they can't any more. the laws have changed there too.

BETSY WEST:

expectations about roles, balanced worked for you

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

from my point of view, I think marriage is a relationship that you create as you go along. It's not something that comes in a package and you simply heat that and it works. So it's a matter of, of two people who have been separate individuals coming together to have a relationship that works for both of them and that's still hard to do in this society. There are lots of things that just don't work under those, if they're both people working outside the home then there are things that have to be done inside the home that you find a new way to do. So there are some things that have, have occurred on that

level. The man I married was with the international ladies garment workers union so we knew and what we were doing at the time we got married. When I got into a lot of these things, in the Latino community it's not very acceptable at that time it was not very acceptable at that time for the wife not to be available at all times. So that's the stress on it. so it's really a matter of how you work it out one by one. And it's a choice that you make. And there are other choices for you if you want to make them and so I, I think it's harder now to decide whether or not you want to be married because especially because all of these things have opened up for both group, both people. it takes a while for men to understand that they have a new opportunity as well as some changes in terms of being served by women. That's usually what you, you heard that you were served by your wife.

BETSY WEST:

look down on feminism

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I think young women have already gotten all the benefits from that thing. And I don't think and I don't think that they like the word feminist because they think it's the opposite of what it sounds like. It's not about women but women, feminists sound like these women that were really not women. they just want to really be men and that's what it's all about. I am horrified by what has happened in terms of women's clothing. And I look at women and I see two things. The skirts go up and down as part of fashion all the time and

they go way up at some points in time. when you look and you say what is going on. Or how do women of today, young women or old women of today wear those shoes. You know how do, how do you walk around on stilts. And do something. and, and so then you're out and you then go to all the gyms and take all the exercise and do that. and then you put on those shoes. And you say you are now not able to walk you need somebody to walk you around. At this stage of the game.

BETSY WEST:

try to look sexy

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Yeah I think it's fine if that's your choice, but don't complain about why your ankles are falling apart and why your feet are going , you have to live that lie. So I think we have choices and some of our choices personally I don't think are the best choices that we are making.

BETSY WEST:

is that painful for you

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

It's not painful to me because I'm not in the shoes. But it does, it does irritate me periodically to rely on how you look all the time because that was one of the issues that women always had to look pretty and do this, get their hair

placed and all that. and part of it is to make a choice about what you want to wear and how you want to go about it. so I am not pleased that everybody goes down the same lines any more. Because fashion tells them to go there but I am delighted by the things that women have brought into the communities now. That there is really an opportunity for both men and women to make choices that are truly their own choices and not choices that somebody has decided is what they should be doing.

BETSY WEST:

most meaningful advice

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I think one of the, the things that has made me who I am today is because I was always told when I was growing up that I had choices. Even when really I didn't have a whole lot of them at that time. that it was what I did that would make a difference in my life and if I wanted my life to go a certain way, I had to stand up for things that I believed in. I had to be willing to work on those issues, not just say that somebody else had to give them to me. and that made a difference. I think that was the thing that me change so many things, take so many different kinds of courses. I am on practically every organization in the city and county of San Francisco and across the world. I have learned more internationally than I ever would have learned if I had not gotten that time and training. To open things, not to close the opportunities. But to open opportunities to go directions and to places.

BETSY WEST:

advice you would give

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I would say the same thing back to them. try things. Don't feel that you have to follow some other kind of approach. The world is out there. you have all kinds of things that are there for you to take a look at and to do things about. and do them. do, live life to the fullest.

BETSY WEST:

want to be

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

when I, when I was growing up m mother taught me a lot of things and one of the things she taught me was poetry. And I don't know where she got it from but she always did that and then she'd teach me and so she was always teaching me something to sing. Or, or do that. And so I always started that I wanted to be a movie star and I wanted to sing and I wanted to do this and read poetry and I remember whenever company came over, I was dragged out to entertain the company. And there was one thing that was taught me. and it's a little poem that went when I was 2 years old my mother gave me a petticoat all trimmed in gold. A penny in my pocket, a dolly in my hand. Ain't I cute in my bathing suit. And you know I loved coming out to do that

whenever there was company. So I was in the Howard players. So I did the, I was an actress for a short very short period of time because I learned that the discrimination in the society meant that I didn't have all the choices I wanted. no matter how much I wanted to sing when I was growing up there was no place for me to sing. because that was not what some what was an opportunity for everybody.

BETSY WEST:

what accomplishment

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I think having been able to stretch my life in so many different ways. My particular background and the opportunities that opened up for me to have choices that has made me proud. And the fact that it was not something that was just for me, that it was something that opened up things for a lot of people who were in the same problem.

BETSY WEST:

first job

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

My very first paying job I guess it was the ILGWU.

BETSY WEST:

which is

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

the International Ladies garment workers union was my first, they didn't pay me very much but it was a job and it was an actual job where pay came back to me.

BETSY WEST:

three adjectives.

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Nuts. For, fortunately energetic. And inquisitive. I like finding out things that I don't know about as much as building on the things that I do know about.

BETSY WEST:

what person

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I never met. Eleanor Roosevelt.

BETSY WEST:

you never met

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Almost everybody. You know I, I have been very lucky growing up in this movement of all these changes that are going on so that there are lots of people that I only meet through the media or through something like that or at a conference. And all of them have had an impact on my life.

BETSY WEST:

did you meet

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Oh yeah. I met Martin Luther, Martin Luther king and I was very impressed by him the first time I ever saw him. because the first time I ever saw him was in that amazing picture when the woman in Harlem stuck the knife into his heart and he sat there on a chair and never moved, never did anything. I said this is an unusual person. and he also intrigued me for a lot of reasons. He didn't just do one thing. When he opened up in terms of doing the civil rights movement related to African Americans it took him into all kinds of other places. When he was killed he was working for people who were poor. He was working on union, he was, he was doing it all you know it was not that he changed. He kept doing it but there was always something that got added as he went along. And I thought his getting the, the prizes that he's gotten across the world were really required. He should have gotten them. because he did things that I hope everybody does. Just don't look at yourself but look at all the things around you that you can be part of.

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

BETSY WEST:

do for fun

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

oh everything. Everything. I love sports. I have done that most of m life and I love music and I love theater and all the rest of it. so I try to do as much as I can in between the things I have to do because I have to make a living.

BETSY WEST:

early bird

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

night owl

BETSY WEST:

Spontaneous

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

you don't need to ask me that. obviously spontaneous

BETSY WEST:

Diplomatic

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

KUNHARDT **FILM** / FOUNDATION

I'm direct but I'm diplomatic at the same time. I don't think you have to hit somebody in order to get, in fact it's hard to do that. hit somebody and still want them to respond to you.

BETSY WEST:

type A

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Relatively easy going.

BETSY WEST:

Math

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

That's again easily told. Mostly verbal.

BETSY WEST:

patient

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Both.

BETSY WEST:

Prada

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

on some, in between. My mother made a lot of my clothes so I had a lot of choices in there, they could be both.

BETSY WEST:

prepare

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I do both. I prepare when it's necessary to do that but there are lots of times when I just go and that's it.

BETSY WEST:

skilled

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I'm actually very domestically skilled. I cooked and I do all those things.

BETSY WEST:

late

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

Mostly ten minutes late because I'm running all the time.

KUNHARDT **FILM** FOUNDATION

BETSY WEST:

book smart

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I am very book smart. I've got a huge collection of books and I love to read and I start, I used to read under the covers, when my mother said sleep go to sleep, but mostly, mostly that

BETSY WEST:

iPad

AILEEN HERNANDEZ:

I, I, I understand the value of technology but I am also horrified by what has happened with technology in terms of one to one relationships with people. I think we do a lot of stuff but we don't actually connect with each other very much any more.

END TC: 00:39:22:00