

Empoweress



Hello all and welcome to my blog, Empoweress! My name is Katie, I am a student at Michigan State University, and I am here to share empowering stories of women in leadership from ancient history to just yesterday. Stay tuned for inspiring content and amazing stories!

Women's History Month | March 2021 | Post #1

RUTH LEGER SIVARD

ECONOMIST, SOCIOLOGIST, TRAILBLAZER

I recently attended an empowering Women in Leadership virtual event which featured three incredible and inspiring women working primarily in Economics and Finance, all alumni of Michigan State University. The talk included inspiring stories of their own leadership experiences and barriers they overcame in their pursuit of success. This talk encouraged me to start this blog focusing on empowering leadership stories!

Since March is Women's History Month, I wanted to kick off this blog by sharing a story I discovered in a book last semester.

I am studying Economics and Statistics, thus I am always specifically inspired by women who have forged paths in these industries, such as the women in the leadership virtual event. Therefore, the story of Ruth Leger Sivard immediately appealed to me.

Ruth Leger Sivard studied Sociology and Economics in the 1930's and became the chief economist for the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) in the 1960's under the Nixon Administration during the height of the Cold War. Here, she published the *Worldwide Defense Expenditures* in 1964 which reported worldwide spending on militaries and defense in a time of extreme armament.

Ms. Sivard, in true sociologist fashion and brilliance, realized these numbers would be more contextualized if she also reported expenditures on other social indicators such as health care and education. Her report in 1966 included this new data, bringing attention to the vast disparity between military spending and social services across the globe.

She used such indicators as Female Literacy and Infant mortality and noted facts such as “25 percent of the world’s scientific talent was devoted to defense” (New York Times). Her personal website notes that her report became the most requested of ACDA’s publications.

However, in 1970, the Secretary of Defense complained that her comparisons of social and military spending were making it difficult to gain congressional support for the immense military budget and embarrassing America and its allies. Due to these complaints, the inclusion of social spending was deleted from the reports following.

In response, Ruth Sivard quit her job and founded her own publishing non-profit called World Priorities Inc.. Here, she continued to publish her report individually, now titled *World Military and Social Expenditures* from 1974 to 1996. One New York Times article from 1986 reported that certain members of the government remained her loyal customers and quoted her saying “They say military spending doesn't have anything to do with social needs. I have always thought that the two were related”.

In addition to her reports on military and social spending, she also published reports about women in the worldwide economy and the energy crisis. In a forward to Ms. Sivard’s report on women in the world economy, Hillary Clinton, then the First Lady of the United States, wrote the following: “Too often a deafening silence still sounds when women’s concerns are raised. Ruth Leger Sivard’s report, *Women...a World Survey*, should inspire all of us to redouble our efforts to further women’s progress around the world”.

Ruth Leger Sivard quit her job to pursue what she was passionate about and what she perceived to be the right thing to do. She used her knowledge and experiences to further the cause of women worldwide and exemplify the change that women with passion can ignite.

Stories like hers are often overlooked; it took a bit of digging to find some of the information I featured here. As an Economics and Statistics student, her leadership in the field and demonstration of true courageousness in the face of criticism inspires me to continue no matter the barriers I may face. She paved the way for women to thrive in that field and used her voice to take a stand in an age of egregious military spending.

In my college career thus far, I have also focused on government expenditures: Currently, I am writing about public education funding in Michigan and conducting research on the effectiveness of COVID-19 small business grants. Having role models such as Ruth Leger Sivard is incredibly empowering; to know that women have succeeded in the same field I am planning on entering and knowing women can be leaders in starting these conversations.

I am looking forward to finding more inspiring leadership stories through this blog, and I hope you are empowered by the story of Ruth Leger Sivard!

Works Referenced

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