

Status of Women in Federal Service

by Kay Coles James

Not too long ago, what I consider to be a quite fascinating historical document surfaced at the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. It is a dusty old copy of the Civil Service Commission's *Study of Employment of Women in the Federal Government, 1968*. This study dates back to the beginning of the Federal Women's Program, and occurred, coincidentally, during the year that a group of visionary women who were in government in 1968 joined together and formed an organization – Federally Employed Women – to end gender-based discrimination in civil service jobs.

As a student of history, I believe it is important to know where you have come from in order to understand where you are going. So I perused that document and compared the statistics from then to now. What I found was remarkable. To paraphrase that now famous advertising slogan from 35 years ago: *We've come a long way, baby!*

Shattering Glass Ceilings

Back in 1968, women represented 34% of the federal workforce. That number, however, tells only part of the story.

This was a time of limited horizons for women. Even the want-ads back then were segregated – one section for men's jobs; and another for women's jobs.

Women who thought about working were supposed to be teachers, or nurses or secretaries. If you were an African American woman, your horizons were even more limited. So it should come as little surprise that those women in the federal workforce in 1968 were concentrated in the lower grades, mostly in clerical positions. In the upper echelons of our government, women were almost invisible. Barely one percent held positions above grade 12.

Status of Women by Grade Levels, 1968 (Full-Time White-Collar Employment)

Grade Group (or equivalent)	Total Federal Employment	# of Women	% of Women in Grade Group	% of Total Women Employees
GS 1-6	1,113,059	525,381	47.2%	78.7%
GS 7-12	672,753	132,865	19.7%	19.9%
GS 13+	171,594	6,409	3.7%	1.0%
GS 16+	9,635	147	1.5%	0.02%
Ungraded*	6,464	2,579	39.9%	0.4%
TOTAL	1,963,870	667,234	34.0%	100.0%

* Primarily support staff to Federal judges and courts.

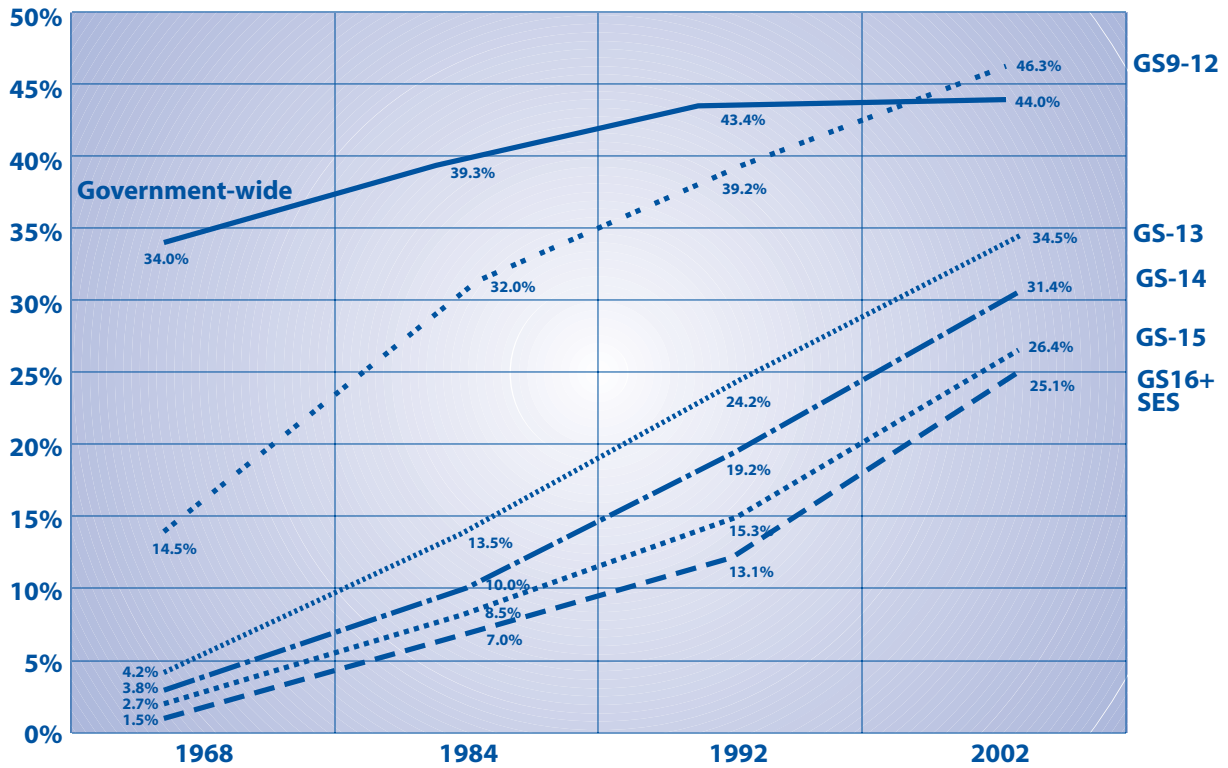
Source: *Study of Employment of Women in the Federal Government 1968*, U.S. Civil Service Commission.

Contrast that with the image of the President's Cabinet as they entered the House chamber this year for the State of the Union – Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman; Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton; Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao; and Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency Christine Todd Whitman. From National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice to Domestic Policy Advisor Margaret La Montagne, women in President George W. Bush's administration are more integrated and involved at the senior levels than ever before.

They are not alone. Over the course of the past three-and-a-half decades, women have been shattering glass ceilings to advance steadily and dramatically into upper grades of the federal government. The following chart compares the representation of women in grades 9 and above by grade level for four different fiscal years: 1968, 1984, 1992, and 2002. We still have work to do at the senior levels, but the progress is striking. Between 1968 to 2002, governmentwide representation rose from 34.0% to 44.0%; GS 16 + SES representation rose from 1.5% to 25.1%; GS 15 from 2.7% to 26.4%; GS 14 from 3.8% to 31.4%; GS 13 from 4.2% to 34.5%; and GS 9-12 from 14.5% to 46.3%.

Status of Women in Federal Service

Advancement of Women into Upper Grades, 1968-2002



Greater Diversity in “Women’s Work”

In 1968, the federal government hired its first woman Tug Boat Captain, the first female Structural Engineer, and the first female Customs Inspector. By the end of FY 2002, women made up 34.8 percent of federal employees in Professional occupations.

Women continue to occupy the overwhelming majority of traditional “female” positions such as Librarian and Nursing. However, as the chart that follows indicates, women are successfully bridging the gender gap in many additional professions in today’s government. A majority of Accountants are women (54.3 percent at the end of FY 2002, compared to only 6.7 percent in 1968) as are 42.7 percent of the government’s General Attorneys (up from only 6.1 percent in 1968). While the positions women hold in the federal workforce are certainly more diversified than in 1968, occupations such as Engineering and Investigation remain male strongholds.

Women not only have made great strides within the civil service, they also are playing a growing role in our military. At the beginning of the war in Iraq, more than 210,000 women were serving on active duty, about 15 percent of the total — more women in positions of greater responsibility than at any time in our nation’s history.

As we seek to attract more qualified women into the federal workforce, certainly one source of recruits should be these brave women who answered duty’s call and are part of the campaign against tyranny in Iraq and wherever they are needed. Many will want to continue serving their country when their military mission is complete. So we have encouraged all federal department and agency heads to extend every effort to recruit and hire these bold and courageous women into the civil service upon their return. Veterans’ Preference, which OPM is aggressively enforcing, permits the fighting men and *women* of our country who stood in line to sign up and protect us and protect our freedoms to take their well-deserved place at the head of the line when it comes to government jobs.

Status of Women in Federal Service

Representation of Women by Job Classification, 1968 and 2002

Occupation	1968			2002			% Difference Representation Rate (1968-2002)
	Full-Time Workforce	Women	Women	Full-Time Workforce	Women	Women	
		#	%		#	%	
Eng. & Architecture							
Genl. Eng. (0801)	13,061	35	0.3	16,718	1,922	11.5	3,733.33%
Civil Eng. (0810)	17,596	61	0.3	10,971	1,338	12.2	3,966.67%
Electronic Eng. (0855)	15,719	69	0.4	19,578	1,679	8.6	2,050.00%
Electronic Tech. (0856)	21,778	78	0.4	8,984	479	5.3	1,225.00%
Accounting & Budget							
Accounting (0510)	20,182	1,352	6.7	11,401	6,195	54.3	710.45%
Accounting Tech. (0525)	13,280	9,557	72.0	13,066	10,265	78.6	9.17%
Medical, Dental, Phys.							
Med. Officer (0602)	9,854	542	6.5	9,237	2,643	28.6	340.00%
Nurse (0610)	22,068	21,475	97.3	41,009	35,195	85.8	-11.82%
Supply							
Supply Cler./Tech. (2005)	26,849	16,572	61.7	11,749	6,010	51.2	-17.02%
Inventory Mgmt. (2010)	14,345	5,311	37.0	5,077	3,096	61.0	64.86%
Legal & Kindred							
Gen. Attorney (0905)	10,044	611	6.1	18,959	8,100	42.7	600.00%
Claims Clerk (0998)	10,734	9,662	90	3,958	3,100	78.3	-46.80%
Personnel Mgmt.							
Pers. Mgmt. Spec. (0201)	9,149	2,397	26.2	17,192	12,280	74.6	184.73%
Pers. Cler. & Asst. (0203)	9,160	7,603	83	9,097	7,534	82.8	-0.24%
Investigation							
Criminal Invest. (1811)	12,818	13	0.1	36,850	5,902	16.0	15,900.00%
Food Inspector (1863)	5,285	163	3.1	3,439	1,643	47.8	1,441.94%
Customs Inspector (1890)	2,890	49	1.7	8,551	1,868	21.8	1,182.35%
Equip., Facil. & Svc.							
Equipment Spec. (1670)	14,078	95	0.7	6,117	585	9.6	1,271.43%
Library & Archives							
Librarian (1410)	3,619	2,552	70.5	1,463	1,097	75.0	6.38%
Library Technician (1411)	2,732	2,033	74.4	1,488	1,148	77.2	3.76%
Vet. Medicine (0701)	2,398	27	1.1	1,807	413	22.9	1,981.82%

Building Diversity into the Pipeline

As of September 30, 2002, women represented 44.0 percent of all federal workers, slightly below their representation in the civilian labor force (46.6 percent). Overall comparisons by race and national origin (shown in the table below) suggest that only two groups of women – Hispanic and white women — are underrepresented governmentwide compared against their CLF rate.

Comparison of Women in the Federal and Civilian Workforces by Race/National Origin

	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American	Total
CLF*	33.0%	6.0%	5.2%	1.9%	0.4%	46.6%
Federal workforce	27.3%	10.9%	2.9%	1.9%	1.1%	44.0%

*Derived from 2002 Civilian Population Survey.

Status of Women in Federal Service

Hispanic underrepresentation is a long-standing challenge for the federal government – for both men and women. President Bush has made encouraging the full participation of Hispanics in public service a priority. As his agent and advisor for human capital management, OPM has taken the lead on aggressive communications and outreach efforts. The Interagency Task Force on Hispanic Employment in the Federal Government brings together senior federal officials to identify barriers and showcase effective agency practices on outreach, recruitment and accountability. The most recent statistics suggest that federal agencies are hiring Hispanics at a greater rate than their on-board percentage, a portent of improvement for the years ahead.

Examining representation of women by grade levels and race/national origin reveals a different picture. The higher one moves up the ranks, the greater the disparity in representation by race and national origin. As shown in the table that follows, for example, white women make up 27.3 percent of the total workforce and 20.6 percent of those at Senior Pay levels. The corresponding figure for African American women is 10.9 percent of the overall workforce, but drops to 2.7 percent in the Senior Pay grades.

**Women by Grade Groups and Race/National Origin
(September 30, 2002)**

	Total Women	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	Native American
Blue Collar	9.6%	4.8%	3.4%	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%
GS 1-4	69.1%	36.0%	20.1%	5.1%	4.1%	3.7%
GS 5-8	66.7%	37.7%	19.4%	5.1%	2.5%	2.0%
GS 9-12	46.3%	30.1%	10.3%	2.9%	2.0%	1.0%
GS 13-15	32.4%	23.1%	6.0%	1.3%	1.6%	0.3%
Senior Pay	25.1%	20.6%	2.7%	1.0%	0.6%	0.3%
TOTAL	44.0%	27.3%	10.9%	2.9%	1.9%	1.1%

*Percentages were rounded independently and may not add to totals.

Bridging this glaring disparity in the government’s leadership ranks may very well be the greatest challenge remaining when it comes to women’s participation in the federal workforce. One strategy for building diversity into the leadership pipeline is the new governmentwide Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (CDP) announced by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management in April.

Designed to attract and recruit minorities and women and train them in the skills necessary to serve in the senior ranks of government, OPM’s CDP will bring together a diverse cadre of potential executives from participating domestic and defense agencies and the private sector. Recruitment will be consistent with the merit system principles – the foundation for all we do.

The development model for the CDP will provide candidates a unique and rich experience. Through exposure to leadership experiences, feedback and positive mentoring, the OPM CDP will contribute to the government’s efforts to create a high-quality Senior Executive Service leadership corps that reflects the rich diversity of America. We are now working on a complete implementation plan, and expect to announce the application process by October 1, 2003.

Conclusion

Women have indeed come a long way since 1968, but there still are job series, and agencies, where they are not well represented, particularly at the higher ranks. This is especially true for individual groups of women by race and national origin.

In addition to OPM’s governmentwide efforts, workforce and succession planning and diversity management is a must at every agency if we are going to maintain our gains and make greater progress in the years ahead. In 1968, there were few opportunities for women and minorities in corporate American and in the nonprofit sector; the federal government was one of the few places they could go and at least get a foot in the door. Today, top employers line up at the doors of our best and the brightest young women as they come out of college; they have so many opportunities that we have to work harder than ever to compete and get them into government.

The days when the only women in the office were the “lady clerks” have long gone. Thanks to FEW and other pioneering women, our daughters can look forward to a future full of possibilities in government service.