

2009

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Recommended Citation

Nagengast, Emma (2009) "“We Must Get into the Arena”: The Feminism of Judge Sarah T. Hughes," *Historical Perspectives: Santa Clara University Undergraduate Journal of History, Series II*: Vol. 14 , Article 11.

Available at: <http://scholarcommons.scu.edu/historical-perspectives/vol14/iss1/11>

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"We Must Get into the Arena": The Feminism of Judge Sarah T. Hughes

Emma Nagengast

An ardent advocate of women's rights, Judge Sarah T. Hughes said, "The sooner we get to consider women as individuals rather than as women, the better it will be. All women are not alike, just as all men are not alike."¹ Contemporary American women continue to advocate for their full equality, a fight introduced in the 1800s. Many women, like their predecessors, use the legal system to force society to apply the Constitution's guarantee of equality. As an activist, lawyer, politician, and judge, Sarah T. Hughes paved the way for contemporary American feminists.

Hughes strenuously advocated women's rights. Born on 2 August 1896, she lived an atypical life for a woman of her time. Contrary to the norms for women in American society during the 1920s, she attended college. While working as a police officer, she studied law. Hughes stepped out of the prescribed domestic sphere and became an educated, working professional.² Her professional life continued to be unique. She paved the way for women in the legal profession. In 1935, Hughes was appointed judge of the fourteenth District Court in Dallas, becoming Texas's first female

¹ "Her Honor Takes the Bench," *New York Times*, 29 January 1965. Article accessed at: <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,839164,00.html>>.

² Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander *Major Problems in American Women's History*, 3rd ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003.)

district judge. That would not be the only barrier she would break for women; in 1961 President John F. Kennedy appointed her to the federal bench, making her the first woman to serve as a federal district judge in Texas.³ Hughes became nationally known on 22 November 1963 when she administered the presidential oath of office to Lyndon B. Johnson after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In a time of national tragedy Hughes stepped in and became the first woman to swear a president into office.⁴ While making remarkable advances as a woman and a judge, Hughes used her intelligence and passion for women's rights to pave the way to equality for all American women. Ruling in cases such as *Roe v. Wade* and *Shultz v. Brookhaven General Hospital*, Hughes ruled in favor of women's rights. Hughes used her career and the power of the law to advance the position of women in American society.

The feminist, political activist was born on 2 August 1896 to James Cooke Tilghman and Elizabeth Haughton. Sarah was not brought up in a life where her gender strictly defined her ability. Throughout her childhood, despite the family's modest circumstances, Sarah's mother constantly reminded her that

³ William Hicks, "Judge Sarah T. Hughes Collection," *University of Northern Texas Libraries*, Accessed at: <<http://www.library.unt.edu/archives/historical-manuscripts/historical-manuscripts-exhibits/hughes/>>.

⁴ Robert S. LaForte and Richard Himmel, "Sarah T. Hughes, John F. Kennedy and the Johnson Inaugural, 1963," *East Texas Historical Journal* vol. 27 (1989): 1.

she was capable of doing anything she dreamed.⁵ Sarah carried this mindset with her throughout her life. Also unique to Hughes's childhood was her early introduction to politics. When she attended the 1912 Democratic National convention in Baltimore, at the age of sixteen, Sarah was "exposed to Progressive rhetoric" and felt that one day she would like to be onstage at such a convention.⁶ Sarah Hughes always felt she had "politics in her blood."⁷

Sarah Tilghman's early desire to become involved in politics differed from the norm. Women stayed out of the "public sphere," including politics. Women's limited role in the political arena in the late 19th century was directly tied to their role as mothers; "ambitious" women worked to raise their sons and persuade their husbands to align with their political mindset.⁸ However, the Progressive Era brought change, which influenced Tilghman. Her parents fostered her ability to be a politically conscious citizen during her youth, creating a strong foundation for her later political involvement.

Many factors influenced the political and social stances that Hughes took throughout her career as a lawyer, politician, and judge. As a high school senior in 1912 Sarah Tilghman demonstrated her feminist ideals during a heated debate over women's suffrage.

⁵ Sarah T. Hughes interview by Fred Gantt (Gantt), 15 Jan. 1969. Interview 27C.2, transcript, North Texas State University Oral History Collection (NTOHC), Dallas, TX. 2.

⁶ Payne, 10.

⁷ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 11.

⁸ Jane Fishburne Collier, "Women in Politics," *Woman, Culture, and Society*, ed. Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), 93.

Tilghman “resolved that women should vote,” and led her team to victory.⁹ As a young, successful debater, influenced by her family’s involvement in politics and the Progressive era, Tilghman’s motivated, intelligent personality took shape. It was key to the success of her career and allowed her to advance the position of women.

Like many elite women of the early 1900s, Sarah Tilghman continued her education in an all female college. In September 1913 she enrolled in Goucher College in Baltimore. The education of the white elite women was mostly separated from men’s, and formed the groundwork of the women’s movement of the early twentieth century. College education was a significant stepping-stone to this transformation for some women, including Tilghman.

Just as educational opportunities were often segregated by gender, postgraduate career options were split by similar barriers. The 19th century women’s culture, centered around “reverence for the home and respect for the house wife, was rapidly dismantled.”¹⁰ While this advancement must not be overstated (“as late as 1930 only 11.7 percent of married women were gainfully employed outside the home”), some women were breaking out of their prescribed domestic sphere and into the public world.¹¹ Certain new careers in the public sphere, such as teaching and nursing, were seen as women’s professions. Tilghman became a teacher. According

⁹ Payne, 10-11.

¹⁰ Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 177.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

to Tilghman, "about the only thing a girl could do at that time was teach school. At least I thought that was about the only thing I could do."¹² This career path did not interest Sarah for long. Her personality lacked the patience for teaching, opportunities for advancement were limited, and she feared the monotony: "she told an interviewer years later—that if she remained there she might become a stereotypical old maid teacher."¹³ The career was too limited for her ambitious personality.

Tilghman's decision to leave her teaching career diverged from the normal path of the typical middle-class white woman in the early twentieth century. Following in the footsteps of her childhood hero, her older male cousin, she decided that she would study law.¹⁴ On 19 October 1919, she matriculated as a student of law at George Washington University in Washington D.C.

As a law student, Tilghman did not notice a divide between male and female students.¹⁵ George Washington University's law school was extremely advanced in gender equality; in 1921, 15 percent of the students were women.¹⁶ (Even years later, in 1947, women enrolled in American Bar Association-approved law schools constituted only three percent of all law students.¹⁷) During her years as a student Tilghman

¹² Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 1.

¹³ Payne, 17.

¹⁴ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 2.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁶ Payne, 22.

¹⁷ Gita Wilder and Bruce Weingarter, ed. *Databook on Women in Law School and in the Legal Profession* (Newton: Law School Admissions Council, 2003), 50.

was very involved in women's organizations on campus; she was one of "sixty-four members of the Women's Legal Club, dedicated to the promotion of a high standard of professional ethics and the preparation of women students for a fully and worthy participation in the American system of self-government," and a member of her school's women's legal fraternity, Kappa Beta Pi.¹⁸ Although she never personally felt discrimination as a woman, as a member of these groups she continually advocated equality between men and women at the university.¹⁹

In order to finance her study of law Tilghman applied for a position as a police officer in the District of Columbia.²⁰ Only nine years after Alice S. Wells of Los Angeles became the first American policewoman, Tilghman joined the force.²¹ Many women had fought to join the force as "part of a social movement with a special mission... to reshape their place in society and alter society's major social institutions, as part of a social crusade tied to larger reforms." Their goal was to "'save' wayward youth and helpless women from the evils of industrialism, alcohol, and other abuses."²² A main reason for this goal was the "girl problem" that arose in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Premarital pregnancy was on the rise, from 12.6 percent of all pregnancies between 1841 and 1880, to 24.4 percent between 1881 and 1910. Women sought to join the

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 2.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Susan Ehrlich Martin, *Breaking and Entering Police Woman on Patrol* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980), 21.

²² Ibid, 21-22.

police force, in part, to "clean up" the sexual rebellion taking place during the Progressive Era.²³ Tilghman's work as a police officer reflects these original goals: "It was a matter of patrolling the cafes and the dance halls and skating rinks to see that there were no girls who should be taken into custody."²⁴ Later Tilghman looked back in irony on her career as a police officer: "This was before women had the right to vote... So the women leaders who were trying to get women the right to vote picketed the White House while I was there, and I was one of those assigned to see that there was no disorder."²⁵ Tilghman found herself patrolling the morality of young women and controlling women demanding their voice through the vote, when she herself supported women's freedom and right to vote.

Attending law school at night and policing Washington D.C. during the day, Tilghman was distinct from other contemporary women's lives. She had separated from the norm and would later—as a politician, lawyer, and judge—break barriers for all women.

A month before graduation, 13 May 1922, Tilghman married George Ernest Hughes Jr. After law school the couple moved to Texas, George's home state. Sarah Hughes became very passionate about Texas politics. The couple "roomed and boarded with a family who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan," and after this face-to-face experience with racism she decided to campaign for any candidates who were anti-Klan. This

²³ Janis Appier, *Policing Women* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 25.

²⁴ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

marked the beginning of Hughes's involvement in Texas politics.²⁶ In Dallas the Klan had a stronghold as a political party: "all public officials were Klansmen."²⁷ Hughes's dedication to remove the racist political party from politics was an ambitious goal, but it was the goal that would keep her in politics fighting for equality for many years to come.

Upon receiving the right to vote, Hughes was one of the many women to become more politically active. "Beyond suffrage and the first trickle of women into elective office, the political achievements of public womanhood at the local and state level were extraordinary during the Progressive period."²⁸ Hughes was very active in women's groups and in Texas's political scene.

In her first seven years in Dallas, Hughes campaigned for democratic candidates in "every" election.²⁹ Her speeches were mostly to "get the women's vote" for her candidates.³⁰ She was a member of the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, the Business Professional Women's Club, and the Zonta Club, a "classified club of business and professional women." Women's clubs like these were an avenue by which many upper class women got involved in politics. By joining clubs, women were able to step farther out of the domestic sphere and into the public eye, out from the margins and into the center of

²⁶ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 6.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Matthews, 174.

²⁹ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 7.

³⁰ Frantz, 2-3.

progressive social reform.³¹ Hughes encouraged women to vote for democratic candidates, to get involved in politics, and to run for public office.

As a white, educated, middle-class woman, Hughes was privileged to be a member of women's clubs and promote civil rights. She recognized the importance of equality for racial minorities. However, the social changes she desired were not going to occur if politics did not change. Hughes decided to go beyond campaigning for others in order to create the social changes in which she so passionately believed. She said, "That's the way you have to do. These women who just think they're going to get things by sitting back and waiting for them are wrong! You've got to work for things. You can't get them by just sitting back and waiting."³² In 1930, Hughes ran for a seat in the Texas Legislature.

During her campaign she experienced some opposition from both women and men because she was a woman stepping into uncharted public territory. In 1921 there were thirty-three women in state legislatures –and approximately 10,000 men. Ten years later, women like Hughes were still a minority in politics.³³ Criticized because of her sex Hughes faced tough competition. A telling incident during her

³¹ Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Differences in the Political Cultures of Men and Women Reformers During the Progressive Era," *Major Problems in American Women's History*, ed. Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 271.

³² Sarah T. Hughes interview by Ronald E. Marcello (Marcello), 23 Aug. 1979. Interview 489 transcript, NTOHC, Dallas, Tx. 28.

³³ Matthews, 174.

campaign occurred when she was shaking hands with a young woman, saying she hoped the young woman would vote for her. The young woman replied, "Indeed, no, I won't. You shake hands too hard."³⁴ The idea of a woman in public office was extremely unfamiliar. Most women had internalized the societal prescriptions and remained within the domestic sphere. In a subsequent political campaign her male opponent gave a speech and said, in response to Hughes, that he would "slap her in the face and send her back to the kitchen," and the crowd "simply went wild."³⁵ Despite the widespread prejudices, Hughes was elected in 1931.

Hughes was a dedicated public servant. Coming into the predominately male world of politics, Hughes joined three other females in the Texas legislature—two representatives and a senator. These four women in the House for the 41st session would be among only six women to serve throughout the 1930s.³⁶ Her goal was simple: "be a good legislator."³⁷ She achieved this by facing the problems of the time, representing the people, and also pushing legislation in which she was politically invested. The majority of the problems the state faced at this time were economic: "thousands of people were out of work" and there was no "state welfare."³⁸ Hughes spent most of her time opposing "bad" legislation rather than promoting what she considered good legislation.³⁹ She was dedicated to serving the public and promoting

³⁴ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 13.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 14.

³⁶ Payne, 48.

³⁷ Gantt, 15 Jan. 1969, 18.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 17.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 19.

what she thought to be in the people's best interest.

When Hughes was asked what she considered to be her most important contributions as a member of the Texas House of Representatives, she responded, "my opposition to the West Texas Land Bills." These bills would have "taken more and more of the permanent school land away from the state," giving it to "either oil companies or land owners."⁴⁰ Hughes's "hardest fight" was getting the state income tax bill approved.⁴¹ The majority of the legislation Hughes worked for was social welfare legislation.⁴² This general interest allowed Hughes to act as a feminist. She "introduced a bill ... to make the acknowledgement of a married woman the same as that of a single woman or of a man."⁴³ Although it was not introduced immediately, in 1934 Hughes was also the co-author of the constitutional amendment giving women the right to serve on juries. Disappointed when it did not progress in that session, she nevertheless understood that "legislation of that kind takes a long, long time before it can finally be adopted."⁴⁴ She also brought the status of women equal to men in divorce cases and in the workplace. She introduced a bill that would require either parent to support children in the case of a divorce, and also introduced a minimum wage law for women (to match the existing minimum wage law for men).⁴⁵ During her career as a legislator Hughes was dedicated to serving the people who elected her, but

⁴⁰ Ibid, 20.

⁴¹ Ibid, 21.

⁴² Ibid, 22.

⁴³ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 23.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 24.

she was also dedicated to advancing the position of all American women.

Hughes continued to pave the way for women: in 1935, Sarah Hughes was the first woman to be appointed state district judge in Texas. As a state district judge, Hughes tried a wide variety of cases, except for criminal cases; the majority concerned divorce, automobile collisions, and workers' compensation. Hughes recognized her ability to impact the lives of individuals and make positive change. She deemed juvenile cases as the "most important to her," because "you might be able to change the life of a delinquent if you actually worked at it hard enough and if you had the cooperation—and we generally did—of the Probation Department."⁴⁶ The power of knowing you "had the life of a child in your hands and it was up to you to try to decide what would ultimately be best for the child" at times worried Hughes, but ultimately the possibility of positively changing one life continued to drive her career.⁴⁷ To Hughes changing individual lives was a form of bettering society as a whole. Her career remained focused on social welfare issues.

As a judge, Hughes was breaking barriers for women, and she did not stop there. She continued to be a presence in the political realm and in the public eye. During her time as a state district judge Hughes continued to advocate for an increased presence of women on juries. The constitutional amendment she coauthored during her time in the Texas legislature remained a priority to Hughes. The Business and Professional Women's Club, of which Hughes was an

⁴⁶ Gantt, 28 Feb. 1969, 3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

active member, adopted the bill as one of its legislative projects. The bill did not get passed, but again Hughes did not get discouraged.⁴⁸ In her words, the opposition felt that "it [the jury] wasn't any place for women. Women were subject to their emotions too much, and they would have to change all the facilities at the court house... it would cost too much. They [women] were needed at home."⁴⁹ Hughes recognized that her bill did not fit societal norms. People would have to become accustomed to this new idea before they accepted it. She worked to form a state committee consisting of both men and women to get voters familiar with the idea of women serving on juries. She also reached out to many bigger women's organizations, such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs, Parent and Teacher's Association, and League of Women Voters, successfully organizing people behind these portions of the women's movement in Texas.⁵⁰ In 1953 her dedication and determination paid off: the bill finally passed. Again, Hughes's presence in the public eye and her dedication to the feminist movement advanced the position of women in society, and gave them a stronger voice.

Drawing national attention to the need for women in public office, Hughes was endorsed at the Democratic National Convention as a vice presidential candidate in 1952. The Business and Professional Women's Club raised funds and organized for women to be nominated in both democratic and republican conventions: Senator Margaret Chase Smith for the

⁴⁸ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 4-5.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 4.

Republicans and Judge Sarah T. Hughes for the Democrats.⁵¹ Hughes admitted, “I am not so naïve as to believe that this year there will be a woman Vice President, but we must get into the arena.”⁵² Hughes continually encouraged women to get involved in politics and government: “Women have the right to vote, the right to serve on juries in all but six states and the legal right to hold public office, but even these gains do not make them full citizens. Their lack of real influence in government is demonstrated by the few women holding public office.”⁵³ Her nomination as vice president symbolized her strong belief that in order for women to achieve equality, they needed to be a part of the political system that governed their lives. She said, “[Women] care, but not enough,” and urged that women become ‘full citizens’ of the nation, not only in the privileges granted to them but in the use made of those privileges.⁵⁴ Hughes spoke mainly on behalf of white women who were recognized as full citizens. However, she added: “All legal discrimination must be removed.” She advocated the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and its inclusion in the platforms of the two major parties.⁵⁵ She believed, “‘Women must be accepted by men as full partners,’... To do this ... they must create favorable public opinion on the contribution that women can make as ‘co-pilots’ and not ‘back seat drivers.’”⁵⁶ By stepping into the

⁵¹ Ibid, 26.

⁵² Emma Harrison, “2 Women Endorsed For Vice President,” *New York Times*, 1 July 1952, 15.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

political arena in this way, which was unfamiliar for women, Hughes hoped that women would recognize what it means to be "full citizens" and become part of government and policy making.

Sara Hughes hoped to be an example to other women capable of holding political office. She also asserted that to be recognized as human and full citizens meant more than just equality in the law. She challenged the ideas of equity feminism, which holds that women should have full legal equality with men and once that is achieved nothing more should be demanded.⁵⁷ Hughes knew the importance of legal equality, but believed that until women were represented in government, giving them a real voice in the decisions that impact their communities, they would not achieved their equality.

While her work during this time was directed primarily towards encouraging women to run for government offices and be involved in politics, Hughes's judicial work also continued to impact many American women. In January 1961 Hughes was appointed as the Federal District Judge for the Northern District of Texas, once again breaking barriers as a woman. She credited her appointment to her political affiliation with Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Texas Senator Ralph W. Yarborough, and Texas Congressman Sam Rayburn, underplaying her own accomplishments. She recalled a car ride in Dallas with President John F. Kennedy and Vice President Lyndon Johnson. "Mr. Johnson... said to Mr. Kennedy, 'Now here is a woman you should appoint when you

⁵⁷ Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 132.

have the opportunity to some position.”⁵⁸ Being an active woman in politics, Hughes took advantage of her connections to in order to become appointed. However, she also credited “work of the Business and Professional Women Clubs.”⁵⁹ By being an active face in the political sphere Hughes was recognized on the national level and promoted to a federal judgeship.

As a federal judge, Hughes presided over cases that continue to impact the lives of American women. In *Shultz v. Brookhaven General Hospital*, the Court addressed a situation in which male “orderlies” were paid more than females “aides.” The males were not superiors in merit, education or seniority. Their work was equal to the women’s in skill, effort, responsibility and performed under similar working conditions.⁶⁰ Hughes concluded, “The pattern of sex based wage discriminations evidenced in this case is prohibited by the Equal Pay Act.”⁶¹ The term “Equal’ as used in the Equal Pay Act of 1963 does not mean identical, but that insubstantial differences in the skill, effort and responsibility requirements of particular jobs should be ignored. The job requirements are to be viewed as a whole.”⁶² Brookhaven General Hospital was guilty of “violating the provisions of ... the Act and from withholding payment of minimum wage compensation due employees under the Act.”⁶³ Hughes again mandated

⁵⁸ Frantz, 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 13.

⁶⁰ *Shultz v. Brookhaven General Hospital*, 305 F. Supp. 424 (1969). Legal Research, LexisNexis Academic, <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/>>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

that women be treated equally in comparison with their male coworkers. Gender was not a basis for discrimination.

The case that Hughes would later recognize as her most important case nationally was *Roe v. Wade*. This case declared unconstitutional the Texas abortion law, which provided that a woman could have an abortion only if her life was endangered.⁶⁴ Hughes concluded, "The fundamental right of single women and married persons to choose whether to have children is protected by the Ninth Amendment, through the Fourteenth Amendment. The Texas Abortion Laws infringe upon this right."⁶⁵ The court faced a controversial debate about a woman's control over her own body. The outcome:

The court found that the Texas Abortion Laws unconstitutionally vague and overbroad, the laws violated the fundamental right of women to choose whether to have children, and the state failed to show that the Texas Abortion Laws were necessary to support a compelling state interest. The court dismissed the married complaint and the application for injunction.⁶⁶

Hughes, along with the two other judges on this case, made a decision that continues to impact women in the United States. Before the case Hughes was in

⁶⁴ Marcello, 23 Aug 1979, 16.

⁶⁵ *Roe v. Wade*, 314 F. Supp. 1217 (1970). Legal Research, LexisNexis Academic, <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/us/lnacademic/>>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

favor of permitting abortion.⁶⁷ Through the power of the court, Hughes ensured that this “privilege” remained. Hughes later said, “It was just unconstitutional, that’s all. It was a privilege for a woman to decide what she wanted to do, and it was an invasion of that privilege.”⁶⁸ Hughes’s action on the bench made symbolic statements about a woman’s role in government, but she also influenced major decisions that changed the way women’s day-to-day lives were lived.

As a judge, Hughes was able to influence cases that had an impact on all Americans. Of the 412 federal judgeships in 1965, only three positions were held by women, including Judge Hughes.⁶⁹ As a female judge, she was clearly an exception, but she utilized her rare position in politics to improve social welfare, particularly for women, and ensure that these protections were integrated into the law. *Shultz v. Bookhaven General Hospital*, and *Roe v. Wade* are only two of the many cases over which Hughes presided that improved social conditions for women. Her legal philosophy, as she explained it, was not “interested in the technical aspects of law. I am in [interested] the way it affects human beings,” which is illustrated by the types of cases over which she presided.⁷⁰ Although Hughes believed women needed more than legal equality and recognition, her work as a judge enabled her to ensure that this minimum requirement for equality was upheld.

⁶⁷ Marcello, 23 Aug. 1979, 17.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁹ “Her Honor Takes the Bench.”

⁷⁰ LaForte, 4.

Judge Sarah T. Hughes was an exceptional woman of her time, and used her legal position to improve the status of American women. Influenced by her family as a young girl, she took an interest in politics, an interest that would drive her career. When she made the decision to continue her education at law school, her rejection of a career as a teacher in order to search for something more symbolized her divergence from prescribed societal norms. Once Hughes began breaking barriers as a woman, she encouraged other women to do the same.

Hughes recalled her term within the Texas legislature as the most important time in her career. She was dedicated to listening to the voice of the people, and she strongly encouraged all citizens to voice their opinions and become involved in politics. She pressed women to pursue the changes they demanded, by becoming feminists and working to improve social conditions. She defied the norms by being a woman in politics. She dedicated her career to listening, but knew that unless women were also working to make their voices heard they would not be represented in politics. She was an example of her own message: she became active within politics and vocalized her concerns; she was able to get elected and make significant changes.

Already breaking barriers by becoming an elected official, it was Hughes's work as a judge that had the greatest impact on American women on a whole. Hughes ruled in cases based on principles that continue to be debated: whether or not women have the right to control their reproduction and whether equal women's work is deserving of pay equal to their male counterparts. Hughes asserted women's rights and

their autonomous power as individuals. She was a legal visionary and her rulings continue to be relevant.

As a politician and judge Sarah T. Hughes fought to improve social welfare for all, a goal that could not be accomplished without working to eradicate both racism and sexism. She called to members of society who wanted change, specifically women, to voice their demands. “We must get into the arena!” she demanded. Hughes was a major player within political arena. Her life, career as a legislator, and work as a judge illustrate how one woman can model for others how to break barriers and advance feminism in the United States.

Emma Nagengast is a senior History major at Santa Clara University. Her area of study is American history.