



November 27, 2017

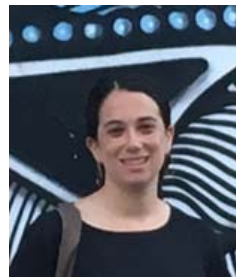
Legal History Consortium Workshop: Suzanne Kahn

Time: 12:00pm - 1:30pm

Location: Faculty Lounge

Between 1967 and 1979, the United States' divorce rate doubled. The rapidly rising divorce rate created a widespread crisis among women who had relied on their husbands for economic support and access to social insurance benefits such as Social Security and health insurance. In response, a now-forgotten strand of the 1970s feminist movement, which I call "the feminist divorce reform movement," emerged and organized itself around securing women's place in the United States' marriage-based insurance system. This paper, part of a larger project on this movement, examines divorce's decreasing political salience as more and more women entered the permanent workforce. In the 1970s, one-third of married American women were in the paid labor force. By 1985 that number had shot up. Even women with young children were now as likely to be found in the workforce as at home: around 50 percent of mothers with children under three and roughly 70 percent of mothers with children over six were in the labor force. In response, feminists who had once focused on shoring up the marriage-based insurance system turned their efforts toward securing women's place in the employment-based insurance system. In this paper I consider how legislative battles over the Family and Medical Leave Act, universal child care, and welfare reform fit into a longer history of feminist activism dedicated to creating a social insurance system that protected women from the economic vulnerabilities created by their carework obligations.

Suzanne Kahn received her Ph.D. in American History from Columbia University in 2015. Her dissertation, "Divorce and the Politics of the American Social Welfare Regime, 1969-2001," was awarded the American Society for Legal History's 2016 Cromwell Dissertation prize. She has received fellowships from the William Nelson Cromwell Foundation, the ACLS, and the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. She currently works as a research analyst at SEIU 32BJ.



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