

Process Paper

How did we choose our topic?

We discovered the topic of female flight attendants in an exhibit in Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington D.C., where our group had traveled for the National History Day 2015 competition. It highlighted the objectifying regulations and uniforms forced upon flight attendants. We pondered how by fighting the sexism they encountered at their workplace, flight attendants exchanged their previous sexualization for empowerment. As we continued researching, we discovered how they explored women's unionization and were avid Title VII activists. To find a topic we are passionate about and that is so well-suited for the theme is rare, so we quickly chose it as our topic.

How did we conduct our research?

Our research as well as our discovery of the topic began at the Smithsonian, where we read general information and took personal photos of uniforms from various decades. We continued our research by searching our topic on the internet to discover basic information and further develop our opinions. As personal advocates for women's rights, we knew we would be arguing against the stewardesses' objectification. We took a trip together to the University of California Los Angeles libraries, where we found several topical books. We then conducted personal interviews with many women, including Dusty Roads, a former flight attendant who was closely involved with the stewardesses' feminist movement, Patricia Friend, former President of the Association of Flight Attendants, former flight attendants Judi Bianchi and Sara Nichols, and finally, the office of feminist activist Gloria Steinem. In addition, over spring break, our group-member Kate went to NYU to access three boxes of materials from their Stewardesses for Women's Rights archive. We featured photos from this collection throughout our website.

Why did we choose our category and how did we create our project?

We created a website for this year's History Day project. Because we used Weebly for our project last year, we knew we would be able to navigate the site easily and efficiently. Using a website is convenient in a group with busy schedules, as we can collaborate and work effectively without always having to meet. During one of our first meetings, we decided on a theme for our website and divided the sections among us. After we started conducting our research, we began to piece together our arguments by using pictures, quotes, and text, and revised our sections until our project was complete.

How does our topic relate to the theme?

Although it may not appear so at first glance, stewardesses of the 1960s and 1970s are a prime example of this year's theme, Explore, Encounter, and Exchange. Stewardesses encountered both sexism and objectification in the air as well as resistance and ridicule to their cause and profession. However, through their fight they successfully managed to exchange their sexualization for empowerment. This change in their uniforms, airline regulations, and attitude made society explore and redefine traditional concepts of working women. Although their fight for respect for themselves and their profession continues today, the legacy of their past victories is evident in society's modern views of working women, the absence of the stewardess sex objects of the 1960s, and the empowerment that women have obtained.