**The Bra: A Peek in Woman’s History**

----------------------------------------------------Prologue---------------------------------------------------------

Nowadays, we generally tend to take for granted the world that is surrounding us. 20-storey skyscrappers disappear into clouds, cars buzz their way around the blocks, relentless robots are building cars in no time, and now we start having 3D printers that can reproduce human organs from scratch. All these incredible technology feats are not surprising us anymore. We seem to adopt technology as soon as it is released. Strangely enough, we do not react so open-mindedly when we see a woman without her bra. Our stereotypes associate women and bras as if this garment was an inherent part of the female body. So one day, we asked ourselves, ‘‘What really prevents us from changing this preconceived image’’? To be more precise, what exactly shaped our conscience in this way? These questions made us believe that at some point in history the paths of women and bras may have crossed each other and ever since, their constant intertwining has built the relation that they are having today. Tracing this relation’s roots was not an uphill struggle at all. Looking back into the American past with a simple Google search, we can discover that the term brassiere was coined in 1907 by the widely-known Vogue magazine. Digging a bit deeper into the US historic context, we stumble upon the Suffragette movement that experienced a rapid soar in popularity in the early 20th century. Its claim for the right to vote was highly controversial and met much opposition, but through its war effort (during World War I) and powerful lobbies and organizations this movement broke the conservative barriers.

Its aim was reached in 1919, when the Senate ratified the 19th Amendment and made the Universal Suffrage come true. But getting back to the bra, we have realised that it won a niche in fashion concurrently with the Suffrage Law. In other terms, women created their niche in society's hierarchy at the same time as the brassiere did it in fashion. The simple fact that only a brief search into the history of the brassiere offered so much insight into the woman's emancipation was truly intriguing. As we realised that the evolution of the bra might follow the same rhythm as the evolution of the woman's social status, a question came up:

**Why does the bra offer us the appropriate historical view on the woman's emancipation?**

In this project we will breach the intimacy between bras and women by setting them apart, breaking stereotypes and approaching them as two distinct entities that can explain each other’s evolution throughout decades. There certainly is a whole world to be unveiled in the analysis of this subject. Our main interest is to follow the timeline from the 1920s to the 1970s in the United States. But firstly, we will discuss the 19th century, a century that encompassed the emergence of the movements of the woman's rights and of the bra.

------------------------------------------------------------Part 1-------------------------------------------------------------

In order to understand how women were able to achieve the 1920's political victory we need to take a step backwards and throw a glance at the previous century, the 1800s.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Second Industrial Revolution shook up the society and the economy of the US. Innovations, new technological processes, and new machines appeared throughout the last half of the century. The U.S. reached its highest economic growth in the last two decades of the Second Industrial Revolution. The increased mechanization of the industry and the improvements to worker efficiency enhanced the productivity of the factories while undercutting the need for skilled labour. But the mechanization wasn’t the only change that the industrial revolution brought on the economic field: to fill the new factory jobs, immigrants poured into the United States in the first mass wave of immigration in the 1840s and 1850s. However, the US didn’t only experience an increasing number of immigrants but also a growing number of women working in the city’s homes and factories. The Industrial Revolution was partially fuelled by the economic necessity of many women to find waged work outside their home. Nevertheless, that didn’t mean that women enjoyed the same rights as men. They were unable to break the glass ceiling or join professions such as medicine or law and were, at that time, excluded from public life, not being allowed to vote in any form of election. Women had to deal with the manly society they were living in – a society where men were all-powerful and where women were considered to be inferior to them. The husband was considered the head of the household and had the final word. It is crystal-clear that females were victims of the society from every point of view, even in the domain that seems the most unconnected to their plight: fashion. In this part, we are going to look at the early stages of women’s emancipation (through the prism of fashion. Surprisingly enough, we will notice that its infancy corresponds to the first breakthroughs in breast supporters.

When we think of fashion we immediately relate it to women. But was fashion always on their side? Corsets are the very proof it wasn’t. In fact, women were fashion victims. They were obliged by the society to wear corsets because the image of a well-mannered woman corresponded to a very slim silhouette. That is why corsets were mainly designed to turn the torso into a fashionable cylindrical shape. They had shoulder straps; they ended at the waist; they flattened the bust, and in doing so, pushed the breasts up. And as time passed by, the corset gained other shapes. In the middle of 19th century, when the tight lacing first became popular, the most common one was the Victorian corset. This was the last “unhealthy” corset ever invented.

No matter the activities they were into, either work or leisure, women had to wear this garment to look beautiful at all times. Even pregnant women were not exempted from the fashion dogma. This type of religiousness in fashion brought up medical concerns. Some doctors supported the theory that corsetry was injurious to health. Tight corseting was likely to cause indigestion and constipation, not to mention dangerous medical complications like: kidney necrosis or pulmonary infection. Corsets actually got to the point where women were not able to support the weight of their upper bodies without them, so weakened and distorted did their ribcages and spines become over time.

In part as a response to the perceived dangers of tight lacing, but also due to women's increasing interest in outdoor activities, "health corsets"(also known as the Edwardian corsets) became popular during the late 19th century. Indeed, in 1884, Dr. Jaeger came up with wool sanitary corsets described as flexible and elastic, in purpose to be more suitable to the women’s new lifestyle.

During the late 1800s, women started to struggle against the ponderous pressure applied by the well-established social rules. Attempts to create health corsets (such as the proto-bra designed by Dr. Jaeger) is the proof that women gained territory and breached such rules. The first breast supporter had de facto started having a pulse in 1963, year when Luman Chapman patented it with the name "corset substitute".

Paradoxically, it is man who initiated the first few steps in the run for brassieres, a domain destined for women. However, it is still women who need to be given the credit for keeping the rhythm of this pulse by expanding the breast supporter’s heritage. Moreover, it is the female members of the society who paved their own way towards full emancipation. Without the acts of historic figures such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott, the Seneca Falls meeting (first women’s rights convention in the US) would have been a mere project. Instead, this event that took place on July 19th, 1848 had the force to create the public outcry necessary to make the society react and initiate the First Wave of Feminism. Consequently to the Seneca Falls assembly, more regional conventions for Women's Rights were conducted. Subsequently to the growing popularity of the feminist concepts, organisations like the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) were born. The later organisation was "brought to life" on May 15, 1869 by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and it was the first of its kind because it mainly targeted universal voting rights. Suffragette marches flooded the streets in the beginning of the 20th century and culminated, as mentioned previously, with the 1920 first United States presidential elections in which women were permitted to vote in all the states.

There is an inconspicuous link between emancipation and brassieres, but followed closely, this connection was to become more and more obvious. For example, each of the two closely-related concepts saw its infancy in the 1860s and then knew a great expansion in the first two decades of the 20th century. Moreover, they are complementary because emancipation stems from the **collective** need of women to be equal to men while the bra, from the needs of each female **in part**. Even the absence of a non-confining article of garment, such as the bra, was a symbolic proof that the women of the mid19th century were still far away from a non-confining era; the horizon was promising, though, because it foresaw freedom and equality of gender. We shall see that women’s surfacing needs and desires forced the bra to evolve and match the new demands.

-------------------------------------------------------Part 2. I. --------------------------------------------------------

The period prior to the 20th century was a prologue for the journey that women have accomplished after the 1920 elections. In this part we shall analyse the period between the 1920s and the 1945.

Situated between two international calamities, World War I and The Great Depression, the 1920s were like a hill between two deep valleys. They were years of prosperity and economic growth when America’s wealth more than doubled. Besides, due to the booming economy and higher wages, the nation entered in an affluent but unfamiliar “consumer society”. Thanks to the nationwide spread of advertisements and chain-stores, the majority of Americans started buying the same goods regardless of where they were geographically located. In addition, mechanized mass production started developing, which made products like cars, radios, and electrical appliances affordable to almost everyone, thus improving the daily life. America also witnessed a demographical shift during this period: more and more people left the countryside to live in the rapidly expanding cities and for the first time the urban population surpassed in size the rural one. The 1920s were though, above all, a hedonistic interlude characterized by riotous living and important cultural conflict. The younger generations rebelled, rejecting the Victorian traditions and way of life imposed by the elderly. America hence plunged into a “Cultural Civil War” in which the new cosmopolitan, modernist, urban culture battled against the older provincial, traditional, rural one. In order to win this combat, the modern society fielded one of its biggest guns: the flapper, a person enclosing the spirit of the Roaring Twenties. We shall see how flappers, supported by a flourishing brassiere business, helped change the obsolete conventions and continued the process of women’s emancipation that had already been put in motion in the previous century.

The flapper is an informal word that describes a fashionable young woman’s intent on enjoying herself and flouting conventional standards of behaviour in the 1920s. Because this “new woman” disdained the older customs and yearned liberation and freedom, she also refused to wear a corset, symbol of the old times. Its replacement - the brassiere - is a garment that best represents the woman of the 1920s. To be more explicative, flappers used to be young women with bobbed hair and shorter skirts; they drank, smoked, drove automobiles and were consequently considered by the older society “unladylike”. This woman therefore sought liberation from the past and the bra was there to offer it. At first, bras were a little more than bust bodices that only offered extra breast separation and those available for purchase actually were plain camisoles that offered no support whatsoever. As a result, none of the bras gave much shape, but that was not an issue. Contrary to the decayed Victorian style, the most wanted silhouette of the decade was that of a flat-chested-15 year-old and, as a consequence of the boyish allure in vogue at the time, few ladies desired anything more than a stopper of bust wobbling. The new garment gave women something the corset could never give them: mobility and thus freedom, a convenience that came in handy quite often because flappers needed entertainment.

At that time, a freshly new artistic phenomenon arose: the Jazz, a music genre immoderately loved by the majority of the social classes, especially the middle class. Jazz supported the younger generation’s pursuit of happiness and freedom and its desire to be different, allowing society to evolve and become more like we know it nowadays – no wonder that this decade (1920-1930) was nicknamed “The Jazz Age”. Jazz was, at first, a type of music brought to life by African Americans but it soon expanded and white Americans started having their share of performances, especially on the radio – a product of consumerism and innovation. Brass bands became then one of the essential ingredients for a Great Gatsby style party, a moment of extravagance complemented – of course – by dance, in other words by Charleston. Charleston was a vivid, vigorous and overall very energetic way of body movement which required high body flexibility. This is where the brassiere, then called "step-ins”, steps in. By allowing freedom of movement the bra gave the ‘new woman” the possibility to dance without constraints and therefore to break free. In symbolic terms, the brassiere assured the flapper's emancipation.

So far we have seen that culturally, with the help of the bra, the modern woman embraced a new silhouette and a new cultural reference thus managing to separate herself from the old traditions and rural customs. But woman also wanted liberation through work. In the 1920s though, married women did not hold jobs in any great numbers – the exception being married black women who were often forced to work out of destitution – and only around 10% of married white women worked outside of the domestic area. However, among single women, there was a huge increase in employment during this era and in the vast world of the manufacturing industry and office work – like in dancing – mobility was paramount. Thanks to its characteristics, the brassiere granted women the possibility to work much more easily and comfortably. Women then worked as teachers, social workers, nurses, librarians, and textile mill workers, besides a number of other types of jobs which opened up with the development of the corporate office, such as typists, filing clerks, stenographers, and even some secretarial roles.

Albeit its primitive form, the bra allowed women to completely change their attire and adopt an all new body shape, rejecting in turn the Victorian traditions. The new garment also permitted them to move much more freely which helped them both in the winning of the “Cultural Civil War” and the finding of liberation through work. However, we might say that bras were restrictive in the sense that only flat-busted women such as the flappers wore it. But through the constant innovation of the breast supporters, the product was enhanced and become available to a bigger share of the market. In 1935, entrepreneurs William and Ida Rosenthal introduced cup sizes (A to D sizing system) and bras for all stages of a woman's life. Subsequently, their idea took the bra to its next stage: the creation of a brassiere which supported and conformed to the breasts contrary to flattening them as the flapper style had done. What they did was to bring the whole concept of the bra more closely to the one we presently have. It is in fact this continuous evolution of the brassiere that shows the ability of the society to recreate itself and broaden its sight by changing its mentality.

In other words, the bra helped women emancipate because it opened people's eyes. Therefore, it supported the woman's ascent on the social ladder and brought her social status closer to the one we know it today.

----------------------------------------------------------Part 2. II. ----------------------------------------------------------

As a consequence of the economy’s "oscillating" nature, the boundless economic prosperity of the 1920s was brought to a halt by a period of vast economic struggle: The Great Depression. This economic free fall episode began on the 29th of October 1929 – more specifically on Black Tuesday when the American nation was struck by the Wall Street Crash – and after this catastrophic event the situation only got gradually worse for the following 4 years. Consumer spending and investment dropped, industrial output declined, and the unemployment level arose as failing companies laid off workers. In other words unemployment soared by 25% and 13 million people were left jobless, industrial production dropped by 45%, the entire American banking system reached the brink of collapse as more than 5,000 banks went out of business and, to top all that, investment went down by 98%. President Franklin D. Roosevelt came up with The New Deal, a series of reform measures to help overcome the worst outcome of the Great Depression, but the economy didn’t fully recover until 1939, when World War II started with the invasion of Poland by the Nazi army and the U.S. economy was kicked into high gear as the production of army supplies boomed. Even though the 1930s witnessed a high unemployment rate, in the case of female workers the situation looked somewhat differently. Therefore, in this part we shall firstly analyse why women were hit by The Great Depression in a dissimilar manner to men. Following this line of thought we shall see, most of all, how women leveraged the bra to gain more territory into the men's world.

In the eyes of women, the Depression’s face looked slightly lighter than in men’s because the male dominated heavy industries (like steel, rubber, and chemicals) which suffered much more damage than light industries - such as manufacturing - where women were mainly employed; and better still, manufacturing industries recovered much faster during the Depression than heavy industries. Besides, women had better wage-earning opportunities than man in non-industrial work like for instance teaching, nursing, domestic service, and office work. Due to the harsh living conditions more and more women needed to join the work force to ensure their family's survival. The 1930s thus saw, according to census figures, a 50% increase in the number of married working-women. But how could women join the workforce in such high effectives? They could do so because the bra was one of their most valuable assets.

As we have previously seen, the brassiere offered women their much needed mobility and comfort, allowing them to perform all types of clerical and manufacturing jobs. In 1930 nylon and elastic fibres were introduced making bras cheaper and, as a first, the cup-sized system (measures from A to D) that was created in 1935 conferred the bra even more comfort. Without this garment women could have worked only if they had nothing under their shirts because corsets were far too restrictive for factory work. Women thus saw their roles in the household enhanced and the bra also allowed women to perform more jobs than before but with the larger employment possibilities that they had, women began to be seen as intruders who took the men’s jobs. Back then, men considered themselves breadwinners but when they lost their jobs or saw their incomes reduced, they found themselves incapable to take care of their families. Even though women were entering the work force only in the traditionally female employments, a series of disputes commenced as they were seen as male competitors. The bra then permitted women to gain a position of power over men, position which reduced the social gender gap and eventually, led women to take a further step in the emancipation process.

Nevertheless, women were still considered inferior to their husbands and yet again, step by step, this image of the woman changed. So how did women manage to strengthen their role in society?

Due to the ever higher number of employed females, the bra market expanded and the vast majority of women started wearing these garments. This explains the average of 6 bras a year per person that were purchased in the urban area. Because women were such in need for bras and the demand was so high, who else was better to create the supply other than women themselves? More and more women created their own brassieres (and garment companies, therefore adventuring in this niche business. This is the first time women became bourgeois entrepreneurs and took the lead in this economic sector. An iconic example is Olga Erteszek. She fled Poland in 1941, afterwards she crossed Russia, then Japan and finally landed in California where she built an undergarment company worth millions out of nothing. Regardless of the economic hardship of the time, women became not only entrepreneurs but also developers. Dozens of improvements made to the bra were patented in that period of time. The bra industry thus only got bigger and bigger, gained importance and didn’t seem to be very touched by the crisis either, since retail store transaction only fell by 15%. Thanks to the bra, women joined men in being entrepreneurs and consequently acquired more independence. Then came the war and women’s importance only got greater. What could be a plausible explanation?

In 1941, when the U.S. entered (in) World War II, around 350,000 women were part of the war effort. They either worked in the factories, replacing the men who went fighting, or joined them as part of the Woman Army Corps. The percentage of the working women in the U.S. increased by 10% between 1940 and 1945 and in the aviation industry 65% of the workforce was female (310,000 women). Women made the war machine run smoother. After the war – when men came back home and regained their place in the workforce – women returned to domestic labour and housekeeping. Politicians left their bunkers and offices and started to establish the new world order. In 1945, the United Nations Organization was put in place and was given the mission to avoid a third large-scale massacre. Among many of the decisions taken with the purpose of keeping peace and order in the Human playground, the U.N. passed Resolution 58 in which all the participant states were urged to grant women political rights and adopt anti-discriminatory laws – a salute for the women’s implication in the war effort. Moreover, it was a salute that ended what historians call the *First Wave of Feminism.*

The end of World War II was merely the beginning of a new era, an era where equality was not only a formality but a time when women would stand in the front line without either being aided by men or dependent on them. In this world there are no strings attached, no puppeteering; in this balanced society, women are not discriminated against but embraced as capable, self-reliant, responsible citizens.

----------------------------------------------------------Part 3. I. ----------------------------------------------------------

At the end of five horrendous years of war, a new world order rose. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers who had left their Motherland to fight in World War II, came back to build their country. The decade that followed was characterized by a booming economy that saw full employment, high wages and a rapid expansion of cities. The soldiers were reintegrated in the system and employed in fully-mechanized factories. The high salaries and the engineering feats of the time made the prices plummet and the products more accessible to middle-class families thus plunging America more deeply in consumerism. Marketing played a huge role in the consumer society as it persuaded people, through cleverly convincing advertisements, to buy certain products or subscribe to particular brands. In the 1950s, people were lured by the image of a product and the ad industry seized every opportunity to use images and appearances to achieve their targets. More than just a mere tool in those times, advertising is a means that suits our needs to discover, with historical accuracy, this period of time. In this part of our project, we will focus on publicity, especially the bra advertisements, in order to see the real image of the 1950s and the slow pulse of a new social movement that was waiting to break the ice: the Second Wave of Feminism.

When soldiers came back from the front, they replaced women in factories but while the majority returned to the domestic lifestyle, the female labour force did not completely fade away. By and large, the role distribution in American families was this: the man earned the money that was needed to finance the family while the housewife had to take care of the domestic space and keep her husband happy. Many have objected to this distribution of jobs, mainly because women were confined in a social and physical place that did not leave them much choice and free will. Betty Friedan writes in *The Feminine* *Mystique,* "As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children . . . lay beside her husband at night--she was afraid to ask even herself the silent question, ‘Is this all’?" What Friedan accused was a vicious American Dream that made women suffer. As the reality was not far from her observations, we can answer: that was certainly not all.

Being at the core of domestic activities, women had substantial influence on making decisions because they were the primary consumers of domestic goods (cleaning supplies, food items, beauty/personal care goods). The fact that women had leverage within the family led advertising companies to realise that it was specifically women they needed to target. Betty Friedan noted years ago that, "seventy-five percent of all consumer advertising budgets is spent to appeal to women." The figures are right. Therefore, choices were made by women and them being the cornerstone of the American family, every decision they made was important for the entire family. It was quite a limited role and women depended a great deal on men. But women's roles and wishes did not stop there: brassieres do show that.

In fact, what appealed most to women were bras and the advertisements related to them. The Maidenfrom Company launched a brilliant ad campaign in the 1950s in order to promote their brassieres. Their sales sky rocketed. Their strategy was this: each ad depicted a woman visibly dressed in a Maidenform bra who used the "I dreamed I was ... in my Maidenform bra" line. The puns in the caption, the smile of the woman, the lively background scenes were all very alluring. What mattered most, however, was the message that was conveyed. Women could relate to the dreams and beliefs of the women depicted in the images who, for instance, wanted to "go on a safari", "ride a roller coaster", "be a fireman" etc. These "bradvertisements" are the proof that women's endeavours and surrounding universe did not stop there. The ads used these ideas because marketing men knew women could relate to such messages and that the world depicted in the posters was, in fact, a tangible alternative to being a dedicated housewife. Even if many women yet did not dare get out of their "confined" habitats, more and more raised their voices to speak their minds. Some went public by entering the political sphere: "I dream I won the election in my Maidenfrom Bra". For instance, Margaret Chase Smith was the first woman elected to both Houses of Congress. Known as "the conscience of the Senate," Smith gained a reputation for courage and independence, values to which many women aspired. What is more, the 1950s saw an important increase in the woman's labour force: in 1950, wives earned wages in only 21.6 percent of all families. By 1960, 30.5 percent of wives worked for wages. And that figure would continue to increase. Full- and part-time working wives contributed about 26 percent of the total family income. The social dogma started to change because women started gaining their own life and therefore, bought their liberty and independence. And this is not all.

We said that the bra was an advertising tool but we should not ignore the fact that the bra is, first and foremost, a garment. Along with the utility in the daily life of women and its physical perks, the bra is a symbol of fashion and sexuality. Women had been deprived of elegance during the war since they wore dull and drab uniforms that confined them to the same appearance. Hence the reaction of the 1950s is explicable: women compensated for the war years by fully embracing sexuality. Movie stars provided glamorous examples of idealized figures. Audrey Hepburn typified the petite woman and Marilyn Monroe and Jayne Mansfield set the pace for women who aspired to voluptuous curves. Many women intended to look like these popular figures that stood as models for "proper sexuality". This renewed emphasis on feminine sexuality produced brassiere designs to harmonize with body-revealing décolleté styles. For instance, Brigitte Bardot introduced the underwire “barely there” bras. The Bardot neckline, named after her, is a wide open neck that exposes both shoulders. More parts of the bust needed to be exposed to the clear sight. The fashion history has shown that by the 1950s glamour was what women wanted the most: they wanted to be seen in the society. They stressed the point that they needed not hide behind house walls and kitchen aprons.

And the bra became their ticket to access another society even though this ticket would be, at times, torn and tossed away in the period that fully launched the Second Wave of Feminism.

-----------------------------------------------------------Part 3. II. ---------------------------------------------------------

During the 1940 and right after WWII, the American population saw a massive increase in the birth rate. These so-called baby boomers grew up to be the generation that shaped the 1960s, a period described by fundamental changes in the American society. On one hand, there was the Civil Rights Movement that had begun in the 1950s and sought for almost a decade equal rights for black and white people alike. On the other hand, grass movements such as the New Left came with a radical political agenda that rejected hierarchy and bureaucracy. Opposed to the same political and social performances, the counterculture or the "hippies" had however a different view on the world: they wanted peace and love to reign. But if there was one more thing that marked a critical turning point in this tumultuous American decade, this was the Second Wave of Feminism. Many people look at 1960s feminism as a striking movement because they have a preconceived idea about rebellious and potentially dangerous riots where women claimed their lawful rights: the burning of the bra is one of those catchy images that stick to one's memory. Nevertheless, the bra is a powerful symbol which needs proper analysis in order to unveil the "truthful" historical facts and the scale at which these events have actually taken place. How unruly was this feminist outburst in fact?

Modern feminist thought traces its roots to a book, ‘The Second Sex’, published by a famous French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in 1949. The book traced the assumptions, customs, educational practices, jokes, laws, and modes of speech that educate young women in such way that they believe that they are inferior beings. A decade and a half later, Betty Friedan made another important contribution to the development of the feminist ideology. In The ‘Feminine Mystique’, she analysed and criticized the role of educators, psychologists, sociologists, and the mass media in conditioning women to believe that they could only find fulfilment as housewives and mothers. And there were sound reasons for the two authors’ discontent. In the United States, although women comprised about half of the nation's voters, there were neither female Supreme Court justices nor governors. Lower pay for women doing the same work as men was commonplace. Six states gave fathers preference in the custody of young children after a divorce. Popular television shows like "I Love Lucy" often depicted women as stupid or foolish, jealous of other women, irresponsible about money, and overly anxious to marry. To respond to this outrageous status quo, Betty Freidan created an organization called NOW or the National Organization for Women that intended to enforce the law prohibiting sex discrimination. The organization pledged "to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society." Alongside NOW, other more radical feminist groups emerged during the 1960s among college students who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left.

Mass-media served very well the ends of the radical women. These radical groups appeared on the front pages of the nation's newspapers when they staged a protest of the Miss America pageant. The pageant is the birth place of the well-known "freedom trash can" in which women could throw "old bras, girdles, high heeled shoes, women's magazines, curlers, and other instruments of torture to women". The scale at which the act in itself was perpetrated remains a myth more than a fact, a story that the media pumped it up on the news headlines to give readers some thrill. The truth is that "bra-burning" neither defined nor figured prominently in feminist protests of the 1960s. The Miss America pageant was a very isolate case in the United States (and even that is questionable) and only Canada did see another kind of freedom trash can. This confirmed episode took place near Toronto City Hall on March 8, 1979. And it is important to ask ourselves why the bra is such a hard piece to fit in history's complex puzzle.

On one side, bras hold a special role in the feminist philosophy because it was an easily identifiable symbol of the "inferior" role attributed to the second sex. Some feminists felt that brassieres were sex objects meant to benefit men because they reduced women to a pair of breasts instead of a real person. Moreover, some women asserted that bras confined them like an animal in its cage. In the more radical feminist view, this restrictive garment was worn for the sake of conforming to society's views and it symbolically blocked women's path to liberty and even equality. "If men did not wear bras, why should women do?" was a frequently asked question.

However, on the flip side of the coin, another sun revolves around the world. Beginning with the 1950s and continuing with the 60s, many women had in fact openly expressed their femininity. Contrary to those who started working as truckers (a job reserved only to men at that time) and who rejected make-up or epilating, many women supported the fact that the two sexes are in fact different, both in physique and mentality. Nevertheless, this did not indicate that they condoned women being treated as inferior individuals or individuals without full citizenship rights (as in nowadays' conception). This category of female citizens was moderate and more open-minded. Focusing once more on the bra, their views on life can be completely understood. They viewed bras as empowering, confidence-boosting and as a means to express their sexuality, an inherent part of femininity. Feminists were worried about objectification, but it is obvious that these other women used the benefits of the bra to serve their ends. Freed from the fear of pregnancy (new contraceptives were introduced in the 1960s), they wore provocative apparel. Bali and Hollywood Vassarette, two brassiere-manufacture giants, showcased bras that maximised cleavage and made "sure you were seen in all the right places". Without much impact on the market, the Wonderbra was created by Louis Poirier for a Canadian bra company in 1964. It wasn't until the 1990s, however, that the Wonderbra revolution took off, but the ‘90s decade was already a time when the tradition of wearing the bra was deeply engraved in the women’s mentality.

All in all, as much as we generally like to think that only a great revolution with heavy casualties has the force to change the status quo, the Second Wave shows us that the claim is only partially right. The movement was a civil act of disobedience that encompassed rare, low-scale moments of aggressiveness. Women mostly raised their voices through protests and organizations and made their cause seen by the public and by the political sphere. However, most of the women had a more *gentle* touch to it. They led their battles by asserting their femininity, through their apparel, and at the same time, they strengthened freedom and equality.

--------------------------------------------------------Epilogue---------------------------------------------------------

Our aim is to prove that there has always been a tight connection between the bra and women ever since the process of emancipation started. We took the United States for example because it was the most relevant to our subject. In studying the US case, we avoided establishing a strict cause-effect relation between the two, because in fact, they depend on each other. Therefore, it is right to say that the bra is a gauge for women’s emancipation status.

Should we take the period the corset was progressively replaced with the bra, we will all be aware of the first signs of women challenging the social dogma. Later, in the 20s, the bra was widely introduced to a new-born consumer society, indicating the start of a new social revolution, subsequent to a political breakthrough: the Universal Suffrage. Along with the development of the brassiere industry, the 1930s marked the women’s entry in the economy as employers. Women were mainly hired in the fashion industry which, during the Great Depression, was barely touched by unemployment, contrary to other man-dominated sectors. Entering the workforce was what led women to liberate themselves from financial constraints and gain authority in the family and, generally, in the society. However, they had to wait until the 1960s to obtain full rights and fully defend themselves from gender discrimination. In this period, the bra played once again a major role.

This was the last and largest step that Americans saw in women's emancipation process. Since then, a Third Wave of Feminism took place and sociologists even talk about a Forth one that is occurring at the moment. As the world has already entered the era of Globalization, we cannot attribute these social movements solely to the Americans because few civilized countries escape them nowadays. And even so, where is this Forth Wave to be found? Are we Europeans failing to see a blatant revolution? Are we living life blindfolded? Or is it just the usual media artificial bubble that has created this Wave?

We should be sceptical about both. On one hand women are not generally discriminated against men(when talking about civilized countries) and often, they even succeed more than men due to their better educational performances. On the other hand, western societies promote sex appeal on a large scale: we see slim silhouettes and ample bosoms devoid of personality. Many girls aspire to be these so-called ‘models’ and they persecute themselves for not being skinny, not having curvy lines and even more important, not having the perfect-sized and perfect-shaped breasts. For this last reason, many pre-teen girls crave to wear a bra even before the proper age comes.

Isn’t then the bra an indicator of the type of society we live in? Maybe paying more attention to this garment enables us to analyse the current situation. We are subject to a hyper-consumerist society where largely everything is based on appearances and shallowness. Women are especially affected by this matter since they try to conform to fashion, to man’s likes and dislikes or generally speaking, to society’s tastes. So, to a certain extent, the bra is contributing to a process of recession from the point of view of gender equality and maybe, a reverse mode in the emancipation process. Only time will tell; or else, our own grandchildren who will have learnt it in their history classes.