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Year in Review

Controversy and turmoil make for great headlines. The year 1973 was filled with dramatic headlines. The events that took place, not only grabbed the readers’ attention, but truly stirred the emotions of the American people. This was a year of controversy, it was a year filled with dramatic headlines. The advances in technology pushed many people outside of their comfort zone. Hollywood was quick to follow by releasing Serpico, the true story of a New York Police Officer. The tension did not end there. The Watergate hearings rocked the political atmosphere, and opened the nation’s eyes to the truth of politics. Even as monumental as these events were, they cannot compare to the achievements gained in women’s rights. Even after years of having won equal rights Emily Warner was the first woman to take a position as a commercial pilot for a United States airline. Still more important, the U.S. Supreme Court finally gave women the right to choose abortion. Overall, 1973 is a year that is still discussed today and will never be forgotten.

Even with all of the monumental political changes that were taking place in 1973, one cannot ignore the creation of a single device that impacts the aspects of our lives today. Martin Cooper was thinking beyond his time when he placed the first call from a cell phone in 1973. Ironically, this call was placed to his competitor, Dr. Joel Engel, head of research at AT&T Bell (“Father of the cell phone”). Mr. Cooper worked as head of Motorola’s Communications Systems Division. He knew that with all of the recent rights movements that it was only a matter of time before people demanded the freedom of communication. Martin Cooper is quoted as saying, “People want to talk to other people - not a house, or an office, or a car. Given a choice, people will demand the freedom to communicate wherever they are, unfettered by the infamous copper wire. It is that freedom we sought to vividly demonstrate in 1973 (“Martin Cooper – History of Cell Phone”).” Even though the concept of cells phones was imagined prior to 1973, Cooper was the first to make this idea a reality. His hard worked has shaped our economy, our technology, our communication, and ultimately our lives.

With the changes that took place in technology it is not hard to believe that films were changing as well. It seemed as though Hollywood was embracing the drama by carrying the controversial themes over into films. One of the year’s best award winning movies was Serpico. This movie carried the feeling of betrayal and corruption by powers of authority. It tells the true story of a dedicated police officer, Frank Serpico, who opens the public’s eyes to the corruption of the New York Police Department (Hartell and Landers). This was an emotional movie that won over the public during a time of mixed emotions and is still celebrated today.

The story told by Serpico was scandalous in its own but it would not compare to the political scandal that would take place. In 1973, the political atmosphere in the United States was on the verge of change. History proves that people as a whole generally do not accept change easily, thus the controversy, but the Watergate Scandal was nearly impossible to hide from. This scandal actually began in 1972 when five individuals broke into the Democratic National Committee headquarters in Washington, DC; the Watergate Building. At the time no one had thought it would turn into such a historic event but this is where 1973 becomes crucial. Slowly over time, media outlets began to release details of the break in. As more details emerged a link was formed between the break in and our Republican President, Richard Nixon(Garay).

In 1973, the U.S. Senate voted unanimously to begin public hearings. These hearings began under a special select committee of the U.S. Senate, named after its Chairperson, Senator Sam Ervin on May 17, 1973. As much as the “Watergate Hearings” or the Watergate Scandal is controversial in itself, what happened as a direct result was just as controversial. There were no scripts to hide behind and no one could sweep this under the rug. All of the dirty details of the political parties were laid out before the American people. Regardless of the objections or the protests the entire trial leading to the first resignation of a United States President was broadcast to the general public (Garay).

All of the media outlets were dedicated to providing uncensored coverage. The major television networks of the time: NBC, CBS, and ABC, came together to provide unheard of coverage for this event (Garay). Americans had a right to this information and for the first time as a whole they used this right. History was made in 1973 and it was finally right there for all American households to witness. Government finally opened its doors to the media outlets (Zelizer 2). Americans were finally able to receive the truth. The Watergate hearings were the controversy the country needed to fuel the changes that would take place through the remainder of the 1970’s.

The change did not end with the political parties or the media outlets. In 1973, women finally reached a crucial milestone in women’s rights. What good were having rights when all women were able to do was talk about them? One woman decided to use these rights and in doing so she changed an industry forever. In 1973 Emily Howell Warner was hired as a pilot for Frontier Airlines (Wise and Witvliet 29). This was not an easy feat but it is one that will be remembered forever. She was the first female pilot to take what was previously known as a man’s job.

Emily Warner began her flying career in 1958. After earning her ratings and certificates she worked as a flight instructor for Clinton Aviation Company. It was not until 1967 that Warner decided to pursue a job in the airline industry. Even with all of her experience in the aviation field she spent years watching male coworkers accept positions that she was better suited for. After years of persistence and constant hounding of the airlines, she was finally provided an interview with Frontier Airlines. Even through all the obstacles that were presented Emily Warner was persistent and in doing so she paved the way for all female pilots (Wise and Witvliet 29).

As monumental as Warner’s achievement was for women’s rights it could not compare to the impact another woman would have in 1973. One of the most controversial court hearings in our entire history occurred in 1973. The United States Supreme Court heard the case of Roe v. Wade (“What happened in 1973”). At the time abortion was illegal in many states and women felt that their individual state laws violated their constitutional rights. The actual case of Roe v. Wade originated from Texas. It was filed on behalf of Norma McCorvey who believed that the Texas state laws violated her constitutional rights. For the hearing McCorvey was given the alias “Jane Roe”. After hearing the case, the Supreme Court would go on to vote and all but two members voted for the passing of legalization of abortion in the United States. This was historic for women across America. The verdict meant that the individual state laws on abortion were now null and void as they violated women’s constitutional rights. Even today this is still a controversial subject through the United States (Lewis).

Needless to say 1973 was an emotional year filled with dramatic headlines. The milestones that occurred in 1973 would become crucial events that would impact future generations. Whether it is the freedom to wireless technology, to watch an uncensored movie, to observe government proceedings, to take a professional position regardless of gender, or the freedom of choice none of this would be possible without the developments of 1973. The controversial struggles of this year may be taken for granted at times but will never be forgotten.

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