

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910455513603321
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Titolo	Bound by our Constitution [[electronic resource]] : women, workers, and the minimum wage / / Vivien Hart
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Princeton, N.J., : Princeton University Press, c1994
ISBN	1-282-75213-8 9786612752131 1-4008-2156-8 1-4008-1201-1
Edizione	[Course Book]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (272 p.)
Collana	Princeton studies in American politics
Disciplina	344/.0121 342.4121
Soggetti	Minimum wage - Law and legislation - United States - History Sex discrimination in employment - Law and legislation - United States - History Wages - Women - Law and legislation - United States - History Women - Employment - United States - History Minimum wage - Law and legislation - Great Britain - History Sex discrimination in employment - Law and legislation - Great Britain - History Wages - Women - Law and legislation - Great Britain - History Women - Employment - Great Britain - History Electronic books.
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. [185]-246) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- CONTENTS -- PREFACE -- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS -- CHAPTER ONE. Constitutional Politics -- CHAPTER TWO. No Sweat: Work and Women, Britain, 1895-1905 -- CHAPTER THREE. Low-Paid Workers: The Trade Boards Act, Britain, 1906-1909 -- CHAPTER FOUR. A Sex Problem: The Politics of Difference, U.S.A., 1907-1921 -- CHAPTER FIVE Police Power: The Welfare of Women, U.S.A., 1907-1921 -- CHAPTER SIX. Gender Trap: Protection versus Equality, U.S.A., 1921-1923 -- CHAPTER SEVEN. Due Process: The Welfare of the Economy, U.

Sommario/riassunto

What difference does a written constitution make to public policy? How have women workers fared in a nation bound by constitutional principles, compared with those not covered by formal, written guarantees of fair procedure or equitable outcome? To investigate these questions, Vivien Hart traces the evolution of minimum wage policies in the United States and Britain from their common origins in women's politics around 1900 to their divergent outcomes in our day. She argues, contrary to common wisdom, that the advantage has been with the American constitutional system rather than the British. Basing her analysis on primary research, Hart reconstructs legal strategies and policy decisions that revolved around the recognition of women as workers and the public definition of gender roles. Contrasting seismic shifts and expansion in American minimum wage policy with indifference and eventual abolition in Britain, she challenges preconceptions about the constraints of American constitutionalism versus British flexibility. Though constitutional requirements did block and frustrate women's attempts to gain fair wages, they also, as Hart demonstrates, created a terrain in the United States for principled debate about women, work, and the state--and a momentum for public policy--unparalleled in Britain. Hart's book should be of interest to policy, labor, women's, and legal historians, to political scientists, and to students of gender issues, law, and social policy.
