

**CULTURAL
AWARENESS**

OBSERVANCE



**Women's History Month
Resource Base**

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Women's History Month

Did You Know?



President Jimmy Carter, who officially recognized Women's History Month, signing Extension of Equal Rights Amendment Ratification, 1978. Photo credit: National Archives.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usnationalarchives/5532339436/in/album-72157626279496036/>

Women's History Month Began in 1978

Every March, we celebrate the women who helped to shape American history and the many contributions they've made to the society we live in. Women's History Month honors their achievements. The month-long event began as "Women's History Week" in 1978 as a local celebration in Santa Rosa, California, meant to coincide with International Women's Day on March 8. The event, which was organized by the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County Commission on the Status of Women, began to spread across the country.

In 1980, a collective of women's groups and historians, led by the National Women's History Alliance, lobbied for national recognition. Because of them, in February 1980, President Jimmy Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the week of March 8, 1980, as the first National Women's History Week.

In 1987, Congress passed Public Law 100-9, which designated the entire month of March as "Women's History Month," to request and authorize the president to proclaim the celebration, which has happened each year since 1995. Every year, the National Women's History Alliance publishes a yearly theme.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/womens-history/womens-history-month>



Official Department of Veterans Affairs portrait of Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher, 2023. Photo credit: Department of Veterans Affairs. <https://department.va.gov/staff-biographies/tanya-bradsher/>

Tanya Bradsher - 10th Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs

After a long Senate confirmation process, the Honorable Tanya Bradsher was sworn in as the 10th Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs on September 14, 2023. She is the first woman of color to fill the role. Nominated by President Joe Biden, she will help lead the Department of Veterans Affairs to deliver care and benefits to veterans.

Bradsher is a combat veteran who served for 20 years in the Army, earning numerous awards including the Legion of Merit and Bronze Star. She was a spokesperson on the White House National Security Council for the Department of Defense, Asia, Africa, the Western Hemisphere, counter-terrorism, and detainee policies. She has also served as the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs at the Department of Homeland Security and numerous other positions in government.

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2023-09-13/veterans-affairs-army-senate-confirmation-11370309.html>

<https://department.va.gov/staff-biographies/tanya-bradsher/>



*Lt. Lee in front of a Blue Angels aerial demonstration plane. Photo credit: U.S. Navy.
<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/navys-famed-blue-angels-aerial-acrobatics-team-selects-first-female-pi-rcna38695>*

Lt. Amanda Lee - First Woman to Become a Blue Angel Demonstration Pilot

In 2020, Lt. Amanda Lee became the first female demonstration pilot for the Blue Angels. Lee became part of the U.S. Navy Flight Demonstration Squadron for the 2023 air show season, flying F/A-18E/F Super Hornet planes. In 2019, Lee was part of the first all-female flyover for the funeral of Navy Capt. Rosemary Mariner, who was the first woman to command an operational naval aviation squadron.

The first woman to fly with the Blue Angels is Marine Maj. Katie Higgins, who flew a C-130 Fat Albert transport plane from 2014 to 2016. The Blue Angels were formed in 1946 by Admiral Chest Nimitz, the Chief of Naval Operations. The flight exhibition team was formed to raise public interest in naval aviation and boost Navy morale.

<https://theaviationgeekclub.com/meet-lt-amanda-stalin-lee-blue-angels-first-woman-f-a-18e-f-super-hornet-demonstration-pilot/>



Adm. Linda Fagan during the change of command ceremony at Coast Guard headquarters, 2022. Photo credit: U.S. Department of Homeland Security. <https://www.dvidshub.net/image/7248590/coast-guard-commandant-change-command>

Adm. Linda Fagan - First Female in Charge of an Armed Service Branch

In June 2022, Admiral Linda Fagan became the first woman to serve as commandant of the Coast Guard, the first woman to lead any branch of the armed services. Before her promotion, she was the first woman to become a four-star admiral in the Coast Guard after President Biden appointed her as vice commandant.

Fagan graduated from the Coast Guard Academy in 1985 and served as commander of the Coast Guard Pacific Area. She is the Service's first Gold Ancient Trident, which is an officer with the longest service record in the marine safety field. When Fagan joined the Coast Guard in 1981, women made up only 8% of the academy's student body. In 2022, women made up 40% of students at the Coast Guard Academy.

https://www.stripes.com/branches/coast_guard/2022-06-01/female-coast-guard-commandant-biden-6199310.html

The First Female Special Tactics Officer Joins Elite Unit

In June 2022, an Air Force captain became the Service's first female special tactics officer. The captain, who didn't wish to share her name, will be donning the elite red beret after she completed the intensive 3-month training course. The program teaches skills like land navigation, parachuting, and assault zone reconnaissance. Officers must also undergo 9-10 months of STO-specific training, honing abilities like airstrike coordination.

The special tactics officers make up a smaller organization within the Air Force Special Operations Command, roughly 1,000 operators in total. It is the Service's most decorated community since the Vietnam War. Four other women are currently progressing through special warfare training.

<https://www.airforcetimes.com/news/your-air-force/2022/06/24/air-forces-first-female-special-tactics-officer-earns-coveted-scarlet-beret/>



Col. Catherine Cherry receives the colors of the National Guard Professional Education Center, 2022. Photo credit: Sgt. 1st Class Jim Heuston, U.S. National Guard. <https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/News-Features/Article/3069123/national-guard-education-center-gets-1st-woman-leader/>

National Guard Professional Education Center Gains First Female Leader

In June 2022, Col. Catherine Cherry became the first woman to lead the National Guard Professional Education Center. Cherry is from Manhattan, Kansas. Through Officer Candidate School, she earned her commission as an aviation officer. In 2006, she was deployed in Iraq with the 36th Combat Aviation Brigade. Cherry was previously the deputy director of the Training and Exercise Directorate and the ARNORTH senior guard advisor with the U.S. Army North. The Professional Education Center, located at North Little Rock, Arkansas, was created in 1974. It instructs 370 courses on leadership and readiness every year to 10,000 students, most of whom are from the Army National Guard.

https://www.army.mil/article/257738/national_guard_education_center_gets_1st_woman_leader

Master Chief Information Systems Technician Angela Koogler – First Female Chief of the Boat in 2022

In August of 2022, Angela Koogler became the first woman to serve as Chief of the Boat in a Navy Submarine. Koogler served in the Navy for 20 years before becoming the senior enlisted leader of ballistic missile submarine USS Louisiana. Until 2011, women weren't allowed to serve aboard U.S. Navy submarines. Full on integration began in 2016.

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2022/08/31/first-woman-serve-chief-of-boat-submarine-reports-duty.html>



*Captain Somerville speaking at a ceremony at Naval Air Station Patuxent. Photo credit: Paul Lagasse, U.S. Navy.
<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3124887/first-woman-takes-command-of-naval-test-wing-atlantic/>*

Capt. Elizabeth Somerville - Commander of Naval Test Wing Atlantic

On August 11, 2022, Capt. Elizabeth Somerville became the Navy's first woman to command Naval Test Wing Atlantic. She took command alongside the wing's first female civilian director, Deb Salamon.

Somerville is an EA-6B Prowler and EA-18G Growler naval flight officer with more than 2 decades of experience in operational and developmental aviation. The Naval Test Wing Atlantic supports the test and evaluation of the Navy's principal aviation systems. The Naval Test Wing Atlantic is a component of the Naval Air Warfare Center Aircraft Division, which is the Navy's largest warfare center.

<https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/3124887/first-woman-takes-command-of-naval-test-wing-atlantic/>

Ada Limón - First Female Poet Laureate of Latino, Mexican Heritage

In July 2022, Ada Limón was named the 24th United States Poet Laureate. Limón was born in Sonoma, California, in 1976. She is self-described as polyethnic, partially Mexican, Indigenous, Scottish, and Irish. She is the first female poet laureate of Latino and Mexican heritage. She has written six books of poetry, including *The Carrying* (2018), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Bright Dead Things* (2015), which was a National Book Award finalist.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/ada-limon-named-24th-poet-laureate-us-rcna37621>



Adm. Michelle Howard shakes hands with Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Kenneth Terrell in Naples, Italy, 2017. Photo credit: U.S. Navy. <https://www.navy.mil/Women-In-the-Navy/Past/Display-Past-Woman-Bio/Article/3348168/admiral-michelle-howard/>

Admiral Michelle J. Howard - the First Woman Promoted to Four-Star Admiral

Admiral Michelle J. Howard was born in Riverside, California, in 1960 to parents Air Force Master Sergeant Nick Howard and Philippa Howard. In 1999, she became the first Black woman to command a U.S. Navy combatant ship, captaining the USS Rushmore. Prior to this achievement, she served on the submarine tender USS Hunley, the aircraft carrier USS Lexington, and the ammunition ship USS Mount Hood. She was a chief engineer who participated in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, eventually becoming executive officer on the USS Tortuga in 1996.

After being promoted to rear admiral, she commanded Task Force 151, a counter-piracy-unit. She led a force that battled Somali pirates to prevent the capture of a merchant ship, which became the inspiration for the film *Captain Phillips*. In 2014, Adm. Howard became the first woman to be promoted to the rank of four-star admiral, overseeing command of U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa and Allied Joint Forces Command Naples. When she was promoted, she was the highest ranking woman in the Armed Forces and highest ranking Black woman in Navy history. She retired in 2017 after about 36 years of service.

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/howard-michelle-janine-1960/>

<https://www.navy.mil/Women-In-the-Navy/Past/Display-Past-Woman-Bio/Article/2958922/adm-michelle-howard/>

Representative Mary Peltola Made Alaskan History

In September 2022, Mary Peltola became the first Alaskan Native and first woman representing Alaska to serve in the U.S. Congress. Peltola is a Yup'ik woman from the Yukon-Kushkokwim delta.

At age 24, she won her first state election. She represented the Bethel region, worked as a Manager of Community Development and Sustainability for the Donlin gold mine project, and served as Executive Director of the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission.

<https://peltola.house.gov/about>

<https://www.alaskasnewsresource.com/2022/09/01/peltola-become-first-alaska-native-first-female-congresswoman/>

Women Make Up About 28% of the 118th U.S. House of Congress



Democratic Women of the 113th Congress in front of the Capitol Building, Washington, DC, 2017. Photo credit: Nancy Pelosi. <https://flickr.com/photos/11461909@N06/8342801079>

In 2023, women composed 28.7% of the 118th U.S. House of Congress. There are 92 Democratic women and 33 Republican women. In the U.S. Senate, 25 out of 100 members are women. There have been 393 total female members of Congress, just 3.2% of all representatives in U.S. history.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/01/03/118th-congress-has-a-record-number-of-women/>



*Col. Nicole Mann before her launch to the International Space Station, February 2022. Photo credit: Norah Moran, NASA.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/nasa2explore/52233650906/in/album-72177720300742973/>*

Col. Nicole Mann - First Native American Woman to Go to Space

On October 5, 2022, Col. Mann launched to the International Space Station, commanding NASA's SpaceX Crew-5. Mann is a former fighter pilot who flew combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. She's been awarded two Air Medals, two Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, and two Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals. She is a member of the Wailacki of the Round Valley Indian Tribes of Northern California.

The first Native American man in space was John Herrington in 2002. The first American woman in space was Sally K. Ride in 1983.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/nicole-mann-says-she-is-proud-be-first-native-american-woman-space-2022-08-26/>

<https://www.nasa.gov/astronauts/biographies/nicole-a-mann/biography>



Picture of Lt. Susan Ahn Cuddy. Photo credit: U.S. Navy. <https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/2586537/navy-lt-susan-ahn-cuddy-carved-the-path-for-asian-american-women/>

Lt. Susan Ahn Cuddy - First Female Gunnery Officer in the Navy

Born in 1915 in Los Angeles, California, Susan Ahn Cuddy was the oldest of five children to parents who were the first married Korean couple to immigrate to the United States. At the time, Korea was under forced Japanese rule. Cuddy's father traveled back to Korea several times to help the independence movement and protect the nation's cultural identity; he was eventually imprisoned in Korea for anti-Japanese activism. He died there in 1938.

Cuddy, inspired to be freethinking and independent by her father, eventually went to San Diego College for sociology. During this time, World War II was beginning to negatively affect attitudes toward Asians and Asian Americans, which greatly increased after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Still, Cuddy wanted to serve her country and fight for her father's legacy against Japan. In 1942, she enlisted in the Navy.

Initially, she was rejected from the Women's Reserve of the U.S. Naval Reserve because of her race. However, she was accepted as an enlisted member after reapplying months later. During her training, she gained experience as an aerial gunnery instructor, which prompted the Navy to send her to gunnery school to learn how to use various weapons. She became the first female Navy gunnery officer. Soon, she was promoted to lieutenant, working with codebreakers because of her ability to speak Korean.

After the war was won, Korea was independent from Japan, and Cuddy continued her work as an intelligence analyst. She worked on top secret projects for the Defense Department on Russian affairs. In 1959, she returned to Los Angeles to support the city's growing Korean American community, promoting civic engagement and acceptance across communities. She continued this work until her death in 2015 at age 100.

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Feature-Stories/Story/Article/2586537/navy-lt-susan-ahn-cuddy-carved-the-path-for-asian-american-women/>



Press photo of Billy Jean King and Bobby Riggs, 1973. Photo credit: Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

“Battle of the Sexes” Won by Billie Jean King

The highly publicized “Battle of the Sexes” tennis match took place on September 20, 1973, between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs, two of the top ranked players in tennis at the time. Riggs, a self-proclaimed male chauvinist, boasted that women were inferior and that they couldn’t handle the pressure of tennis, claiming that no woman could beat him even at his age of 55 years old.

The huge media event was witnessed by 30,000 spectators and 50 million over television. Billie Jean King beat Riggs 6-4, 6-3, 6-3. Her accomplishment was seen as a victory for women’s rights, legitimizing women’s professional tennis and female athletes.

Billie Jean King, born in 1943 in Long Beach, California, grew up a star softball player before her parents encouraged her to try tennis. By age 17, she won the women’s doubles title at Wimbledon. She’d garner a total of 20 wins across singles, doubles, and mixed doubles over her career. She was the first female athlete to earn more than \$100,000 in prize money in a single season; however, there were still many disparities in pay between men and women at the time, which King advocated against.

Billie Jean King also established a sports foundation, magazine for women, and a team tennis league. She became the first woman to head up a professional co-ed team as the coach of the Philadelphia Freedoms. She retired from tennis with 39 Grand Slam career titles, being deemed by many as the single most important person in the history of women’s sports.

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/king-triumphs-in-battle-of-sexes>

Solange Knowles - First Black Woman to Compose for the NYC Ballet

In September 2022, R&B singer Solange Knowles became the first Black woman to compose a score for the New York City Ballet. The ballet choreography was designed by Gianna Reisen, and the score was performed by the City Ballet Orchestra and a soloist from Knowles’s ensemble. Solange Knowles is the younger sister of Beyoncé Knowles, an influential pop star. She made two albums, 2016’s *Seat at the Table* and 2019’s *When I Get Home*. She is from Houston, Texas, and has used her art and platform to amplify societal issues, like the Black Lives Matter movement.

<https://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/3605307-solange-knowles-becomes-first-black-woman-to-compose-score-for-nyc-ballet/>



Justice Jackson takes Judicial Oath in the Supreme Court building, 2022. Photo credit: Supreme Court of the United States. https://www.supremecourt.gov/publicinfo/press/oath/oath_Jackson.aspx

Justice Ketanji Jackson - First Black Woman on the Supreme Court

In June 2022, Ketanji Brown Jackson was sworn in as first Black woman on the Supreme Court as the Court’s 116th justice. Ketanji Brown Jackson was born in Washington, DC. Before joining the Supreme Court, Jackson served as a judge on the DC Circuit, where she issued over 500 opinions. She also served as Vice Chair and Commissioner on the U.S. Sentencing Commission. Jackson is the first Supreme Court justice since Thurgood Marshall to have represented indigent criminal defendants as a public defender.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/06/30/1108714345/ketanji-brown-jackson-supreme-court-oath-swearing-in>

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/kbj/>



USS Abraham Lincoln in San Diego, 2020. Photo credit: U.S. Navy. <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/2061707/uss-abraham-lincoln-arrives-in-san-diego-after-record-setting-deployment/>

Capt. Amy Bauernschmidt - First Woman to Command a U.S. Aircraft Carrier

In 2021, Captain Amy Bauernschmidt took command of the USS Abraham Lincoln, becoming the first woman to lead one of the 11 aircraft carriers in the U.S. Navy fleet. The aircraft carrier holds 90 aircraft and about 5,000 people. In early 2023, she was nominated for the rank of rear admiral.

Bauernschmidt grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and joined the U.S. Naval Academy in Maryland. Six months before her graduation in 1993, Congress passed legislation allowing women to serve on U.S. Navy combatant ships. Afterwards, she attended the Naval War College and served in the U.S. Secretary of State's Office of Global Women's Issues. She became trained in flight, science, and engineering at the Navy's Nuclear Power School before briefly commanding the amphibious transport dock, USS San Diego.

As of December 2021, only 20% of the Navy's active duty force are women.

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/16/asia/us-navy-woman-aircraft-carrier-commander-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

<https://www.stripes.com/branches/navy/2023-02-22/bauernschmidt-navy-admiral-9212191.html>

Nobel Prize in Economics Awarded to Claudia Goldin for Research on Gender Gap

In October 2023, Claudia Goldin, an accomplished Harvard professor, won the Nobel prize in economics for research that seeks to explain why women around the world are less likely to work and to earn less money when they do.

Goldin is just the third woman to be awarded the prize and the first woman to be the sole winner. Research establishes that only about half of the world's women have paid jobs, compared to 80% of men. Goldin's work explored the reason behind this and other gender disparities; she connected the labor market to dynamics in the home, stating that some women underestimate their employment opportunities or are compelled to follow gendered expectations. Her research compiles 200 years of data to greater understand the history of the employment of women and pay disparity.

Prior to this accomplishment, she was the first woman offered tenure in the Economics Department at Harvard. Born 1946, she grew up in a Jewish family in New York City and taught at Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania before going to Harvard in 1990.

<https://apnews.com/article/nobel-prize-economy-224c204c0cc20843636e5525d6a61673>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/nobel-prize-harvard-professor-claudia-goldin-economics-b2427243.html>

Adm. Lisa Franchetti - First Female Member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

In November 2023, Admiral Lisa Franchetti was confirmed by the U.S. Senate to become the first woman to lead the Navy. She will serve as a Pentagon Service chief, holding a seat on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Prior to her nomination and confirmation, Franchetti was the vice chief of operations for the Navy and has commanded at all levels. She was the second woman to be promoted to four-star admiral, serving multiple deployments and heading the U.S. 6th Fleet and U.S. Naval Forces Korea.

<https://apnews.com/article/military-nominations-senate-tuberville-holds-0c3a5441fb94887fdb0e1b1b65a399f5>



Juliette Gordon Low and her goddaughter Anne Hyde Clarke Choate, 1915. Photo credit: Bain News Service, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ggbain.24369/>

Influential Women Will Be Featured on Quarters in 2025

The U.S. Mint has celebrated important and underrepresented figures as part of the American Women Quarters Program, which was authorized by Public Law 116-330, beginning in 2022. Each year, the Mint has announced several women to be featured, including the slate of honorees for the final year of the program, 2025. These women include the following:

- Ida B. Wells, a pioneering investigative journalist who cofounded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. She fought for suffrage and civil rights, speaking out against the gross injustices Black people faced through her writing and social work.
- Juliette Gordon Low, the founder of the Girl Scouts organization in 1912. She devoted her life to giving all girls the chance to develop leadership and advocacy skills, growing the Girl Scouts into an international organization. She also advocated for women’s suffrage and civic responsibility.
- Dr. Vera Rubin, an astronomer who changed our understanding of how the universe works. Breaking barriers as one of the only women in her field, she pioneered work on galaxy rotation, provided evidence of dark matter, and pushed for wider representation of women in the science community and equal pay.
- Stacey Park Milbern, an activist for people with disabilities. Born with congenital muscular dystrophy, she helped write and pass a North Carolina law requiring disability curriculum. She founded an organization to serve marginalized communities and was appointed to the President’s Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities in 2014.
- Althea Gibson, an athlete that accomplished a long list of firsts throughout her career. She was the first Black athlete to break the color barrier at the highest level of tennis, won 11 Grand Slam titles, and was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame and the International Women’s Sports Hall of Fame. She was also the first Black woman to compete in the Women’s Professional Golf Tour.

<https://www.usmint.gov/news/press-releases/united-states-mint-announces-2025-american-women-quarters-program-coins>

Women's History Month

People



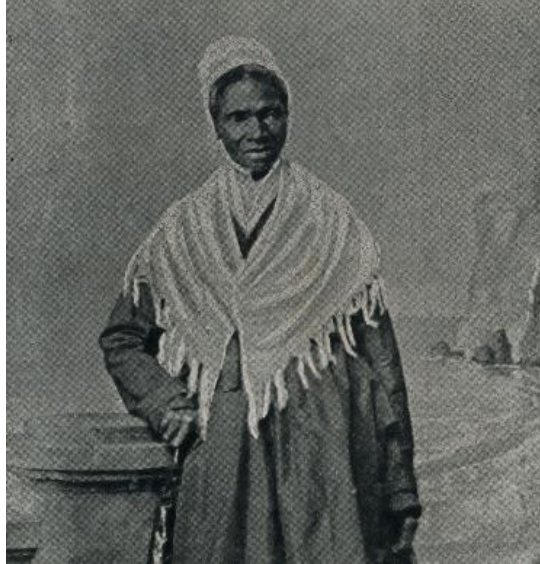
The Vietnam Women's Memorial, the first memorial in the Washington to honor women's military service, erected in 1993. Library of Congress. Photo by Carol M. Highsmith.

Director Kathryn Bigelow Depicts Service Members in Her Films

Kathryn Bigelow was born in November 1951 in San Carlos, California. She became interested in visual arts from a young age, eventually going to the San Francisco Art Institute and studying at the Whitney Museum of Art in 1972. She earned her master's degree in film theory from Columbia University in 1979.

As a filmmaker, she explored themes of violence and service in several of her works. Her most famous film, *The Hurt Locker*, depicts the experiences of American soldiers in Iraq. Despite some inaccuracies, the film received wide praise. Bigelow became the first woman to receive an Academy Award for best director in 2008 for *The Hurt Locker*. In 2012, Bigelow directed *Zero Dark Thirty*, which depicted the efforts to find Osama Bin Laden.

<https://www.biography.com/filmmaker/kathryn-bigelow>



Printed photo of Sojourner Truth in the Miller NAWSA Suffrage Scrapbooks, 1897-1911. Photo credit: Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbcmil.scrp1000203/>

Sojourner Truth Fought for Abolition and Women’s Rights

Sojourner Truth was a major figure for abolition and women’s rights in the 19th century. Her work with other titans of both movements earned her an invitation to meet Abraham Lincoln in 1864.

Born as Isabella Bomfree in Ulster County, New York, in 1797, Truth endured the harsh physical labor and violence of slavery until 1827. She escaped with her infant to an abolitionist family, who bought her freedom and helped her sue for the return of her son Peter after he was illegally sold into slavery in Alabama.

By the 1830s, Truth was living in New York City, where she became a public speaker and preacher. She met other abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass, inspiring her to give speeches about the evils of slavery. This and her autobiography, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, brought her to national prominence. In the 1850s, she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and began speaking for the women’s rights cause as well.

Her famous speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” challenged prevailing notions of racial and gender inferiority and inequality. She strongly believed that suffrage should occur for Black people and all women simultaneous, which separated her from other abolitionists at the time. She helped enslaved people escape to freedom, urged people to join the Union cause in the Civil War, and helped freed Black people find jobs and build lives after the war. For her efforts, she was invited to the White House and became involved with the Freedmen’s Bureau. Until her death in 1883, she lobbied against segregation and continued her activism.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/sojourner-truth>



*Portrait of Dr. Mary Walker between 1873 and 1916. Photo credit: Library of Congress, C. M. Bell.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016713273/>*

Dr. Mary Walker Remains the Only Woman to Receive a Medal of Honor

Mary Walker was born in 1832 in Oswego, New York, to an abolitionist family. She became a medical doctor at Syracuse Medical College before beginning her own private practice. When the Civil War began in 1861, Walker wanted to join the Army as a surgeon but was denied because of her sex. Because of her credentials as a doctor, she did not want to accept a lower position as a nurse. Instead, she joined the Union Army.

Despite the barriers, she worked for free at a temporary hospital at the U.S. Patent Office in Washington, DC, and organized the Women’s Relief Organization, which allowed the families of wounded soldiers visit them. In 1863, she moved to Tennessee to be a War Department surgeon after her credentials were finally approved. The following year, she was captured by Confederate troops and held prisoner for 4 months. After her return, she became a director at a hospital for female prisoners in Kentucky.

Dr. Walker was a fierce supporter of women’s rights. She wore unconventional clothing for better mobility, even wearing men’s clothing. She was arrested several times for impersonating a man. In 1865, she was awarded a Medal of Honor by President Andrew Johnson, becoming the only female honoree out of the almost 3,500 recipients in history.

In 2023, Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia was renamed Fort Walker in her honor.

https://www.army.mil/article/183800/meet_dr_mary_walker_the_only_female_medal_of_honor_recipient

<https://www.stripes.com/theaters/us/2023-08-25/fort-walker-ap-hill-confederate-army-11162161.html>



Portrait of Harriet Tubman sometime between 1871 and 1876. Photo credit: Harvey B. Lindsley, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2018645051/>

Harriet Tubman Helped Those Escaping Slavery

Harriet Tubman is one of U.S. history's most important activists, soldiers, and leaders. Born Araminta Ross sometime between 1820 and 1822 in Dorchester County, Maryland, Tubman started life enslaved along with her eight siblings. Her resistance started at age 12 when she defended an enslaved man from punishment when he tried to escape; she was then hit in the head with a 2-pound weight, leaving her with a lifetime of severe headaches and narcolepsy.

She changed her name to Harriet Tubman after marrying her husband, John Tubman, a free Black man, in 1844. In 1849, she and two of her brothers escaped north, but her husband refused to join and remarried 2 years later. Tubman escaped using the Underground Railroad, which had been established in the late 18th century by abolitionists. Soon, Tubman was returning to the South, using the network of escape routes and safe houses to aid dozens of enslaved people reach freedom. She and those she helped were never caught; her success led to slaveowners posting a \$40,000 reward for her capture or death.

Tubman participated in other antislavery efforts, including supporting the 1859 raid on the Harpers Ferry, Virginia, arsenal by John Brown. The information she learned while transporting people from the South to the North made her an important spy, scout, guerrilla operative, and nurse for the Union Army during the Civil War. She would pose as an inconspicuous older woman and learn from the enslaved people about Confederate troop positions and supply lines. For this, she is considered the first African American woman to serve in the military.

After the war, she raised funds to help newly freed Black people, joined Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in the fight for women's suffrage, worked with Sarah Bradford on an autobiography, and took care of the elderly at the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged. Tubman died in 1913 and was buried with military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery in Auburn, New York.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/harriet-tubman>



*Toni Morrison in her New York home, 1980-1987. Photo credit: Bernard Gotfryd, Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2020731964/>*

Toni Morrison - First Black Woman to Earn the Nobel Prize in Literature

Toni Morrison was one of the most accomplished literary figures in American History. Morrison was born on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio. Morrison, a Black woman, grew up in an area that was partially integrated, yet she faced harsh racial discrimination. When she was two years old, her landlord burned her family's home down while they were inside because they couldn't pay rent.

In 1949, Morrison began college at Howard University, where she joined the school's traveling theatrical group. While touring, she met many other writers, activists, and artists. She also witnessed the terrors of Southern segregation. Eventually, she taught at Howard University before moving to New York. There, she became an editor for the textbook division of Random House publishing. After two years in that division, she began editing fiction and works by African American writers.

Morrison published her first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, at the age of 39. She wrote several other critically acclaimed novels throughout the rest of her life, including *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), and *Beloved* (1987). She earned a National Book Critics Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, the National Book Foundation's Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and became the first Black woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. After several accomplished decades of writing novels, plays, and children's books, she died due to complications of pneumonia in 2019.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/toni-morrison>



Harriet Beecher Stowe (middle right) with several family members, 1875. Photo credit: T.R. Burnham, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2021653730/>

Harriet Beecher Stowe Taught the Nation About the Horrors of Slavery

Harriet Beecher Stowe was an influential abolitionist and author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, published in 1852. Stowe was born on June 14, 1811, in Litchfield, Connecticut, to a family of important preachers and ministers. She attended Hartford Female Seminary of Catherine Beecher, her stepmother. This institution taught women many of the same courses that men took. Stowe taught there herself from 1829 to 1832.

Her first book, *Primary Geography* (1833), celebrated diverse cultures and landscapes on the Western frontier of the United States. In 1836, she met her husband, Calvin Stowe, and had seven children with him. She wrote many articles for a prominent women's magazine, *Godey's Lady's Book*, and wrote 30 books to support her family and pursue her love of writing. After the loss of her son in 1849, she became an avid abolitionist and defender of human life. After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, she wrote her famous novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

Uncle Tom's Cabin depicts the horrors of slavery in a way that many Americans from Northern States weren't aware of. It sold over 300,000 copies in the United States in its first year alone. She used her fame to petition an end to slavery, before and during the Civil War. Today, the legacy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is considered controversial because of its depiction of African Americans as faithful, submissive servants. It reinforced many stereotypes of Black people.

Before her death in 1896, she contributed to the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art and Hartford Art School of the University of Hartford.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/harriet-beecher-stowe>

<https://www.ferris.edu/HTMLS/news/jimcrow/tom/homepage.htm>

Wilma Mankiller Led the Cherokee Nation to Greater Prosperity

Born on November 18, 1945, in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, Wilma Mankiller would become the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, marking the first time a woman was elected as chief of a major Native American tribe.

Her last name, “Mankiller,” refers to a Cherokee military rank, similar to captain or major. Growing up in her family’s ancestral home with no modern appliances or utilities, Mankiller was relocated to San Francisco, California, at age 11 when the Bureau of Indian Affairs aimed to move Native Americans off of Federal lands. As an adult, she became inspired to pursue activism when a group of Native Americans occupied Alcatraz Island in the San Francisco Bay to protest taking of Indian lands. She was also emboldened by women’s rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Mankiller became the director of Oakland’s Native American Youth Center and supported Native Americans vying for rights and sovereignty. After moving back to Oklahoma, she founded the Community Development Department for the Cherokee Nation, improving health care, housing, education, and access to services. Organizing the Cherokee community in Bell, Oklahoma, Mankiller and the residents were able to build a 16-mile waterline.

In 1985, Mankiller was elected as the principal chief of the Cherokee Nation, serving in the role for 10 years. Under her leadership, the population of the Cherokee Nation doubled, three health centers and a center for drug prevention opened, and she started a Head Start program for young children.

She was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1994, awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998, and represented on the U.S. quarter in 2022.

<https://womenshistory.si.edu/blog/wilma-mankiller-led-first-woman-principal-chief-choerokee-nation>

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/wilma-mankiller>

Sherian Cadoria Led the Army as the Highest Ranking Black Woman for Her Time

Born in Marksville, Louisiana, in 1940, Sherian Cadoria was a trailblazer in the U.S. Army. Entering the Army in 1961, she became a first lieutenant in the Women’s Army Corps. In the 1970s, she transferred to the Military Police Corps, becoming the first woman to command the all-male Military Police Battalion at Fort McClellan, Alabama. She was promoted to brigadier general in 1985, becoming the highest ranking Black woman in the Army at the time of her retirement in 1990.

<https://horatioalger.org/members/detail/sherian-grace-cadoria/>



Bella Abzug at a demonstration for Iranian women's rights, New York City, 1979. Photo credit: Bernard Gotfryd, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/gtfy.00208/>

Bella Abzug Supported Women Around the Globe

Born in 1920 in New York City, Bella Abzug was an important activist and politician who fought for women's rights. Beginning her public speaking career giving speeches at her family's synagogue as a teenager, Abzug became involved in leadership and law at Hunter College and, eventually, Columbia Law School. She worked as lawyer for 25 years, specializing in civil rights, labor, and tenants' rights.

In the 1960s, she was involved in peace movements and organized the Women Strike for Peace and the National Women's Political Caucus. After running for office on a peace and feminist platform, she joined the House of Representatives in 1971 as one of only 12 women representing the country. Serving three terms in office, Abzug fought for social and economic justice.

She left the House of Representatives to run for a seat in the all-male Senate, but she lost. Similarly, she ran for mayor of New York City, but the outcome was the same. Despite this, she continued to advance women's rights. In 1977, she presided over the first National Women's Conference in Houston and headed the National Advisory Committee on Women.

Abzug soon founded the organization Women USA to support grassroots political action. She also became involved in the United Nations, helping women internationally with the Women's Environment and Development Organization, which she was the president of. Even after her death in 1998, Bella Abzug's leadership, charisma, and values of equal rights have continued to inspire women around the globe.

<https://jwa.org/womenofvalor/abzug>

<https://www.history.com/topics/womens-history/bella-abzug>



Fannie Lou Hamer, the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party delegate, at the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey, 1964. Photo credit: Warren K. Leffler, Library of Congress. <https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/ds.07134/>

Fannie Lou Hamer Faced Many Challenges While Fighting for Civil Rights

Fannie Lou Hamer was one of the most influential voices for civil rights and a fierce advocate for economic opportunities for African Americans. Born in 1917 in Montgomery County, Mississippi, Hamer grew up in poverty to a large family of sharecroppers.

In 1961, Hamer received a hysterectomy without her consent while she underwent surgery to remove a tumor. This procedure, performed by a White doctor, sterilized her; this was a widespread racist practice to reduce the Black population. Despite this, Hamer and her husband adopted two daughters.

That same year, Hamer was inspired to fight for the right to vote after attending civil rights meetings by the Non-Violent Coordinating Action Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In 1962, she led 17 volunteers to register to vote, but they were denied because of a literacy test, harassed, and fined because the bus they traveled on had “too much yellow on it.” Her landowner then demanded she withdraw her registration, and, when she refused, she and her family were kicked out of their home.

Hamer supported her family by participating in meetings and rallies, gospel songs for activist audiences, and projects to desegregate, register voters, and provide community relief. For being present during a sit-in at a lunch counter, she was arrested, beaten, and jailed.

After her release, she helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and fought to secure representation in the Democratic Party throughout the 1960s. She tried to run for the Mississippi House of Representatives but was barred. Still, until her death in 1977, Hamer continued traveling around the country garnering support for civil rights, working to secure food for struggling families, and supporting low-income housing developments.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2021/02/stunned-by-her-thunder-fannie-lou-hamer/>

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/fannie-lou-hamer>



*Amelia Earhart in an airplane, 1936. Photo credit: Harris & Ewing Collection, Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2016882728/>*

Amelia Earhart Set Several Aviation Records

Amelia Earhart was born in Atchison, Kansas, in July of 1897. From a young age, she often defied traditional gender roles. She played basketball, repaired automobiles, and attended college for a brief time.

During World War I, Earhart served as a Red Cross nurse's aide in Toronto, Canada. At this time, she watched the pilots of the Royal Flying Corps train. After earning her National Aeronautics Association license, she set several aviation records. In 1922, she became the first woman to fly solo above 14,000 feet. Earhart was also the first person to fly solo from Hawaii to the continental United States. She was the first woman to fly nonstop across the continental United States by herself from Los Angeles to Newark, New Jersey. In 1932, she became the first woman to pilot a plane solo across the Atlantic Ocean.

She was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross by Congress. She was the first woman to receive this military decoration. In 1929, she formed the Ninety-Nines, an organization to advance female pilots across the globe. The organization, which still exists, represents female pilots from 44 countries. In July 1937, Earhart attempted to fly across the globe, which led to her disappearance somewhere over the Pacific Ocean. Her plane wreckage was never found, and her disappearance is one of the greatest unsolved mysteries of American history.

She remains one of the greatest, bravest pilots in American history. In 2022, Amelia Earhart was honored in the U.S. Capitol building Statuary Hall Collection. The Statuary Hall features 100 statues of notable Americans, two from each state.

<https://www.history.com/topics/exploration/amelia-earhart>

<https://www.npr.org/2022/07/28/1114183893/amelia-earhart-statue-joins-the-u-s-capitols-statuary-hall>



*Gloria Steinem at news conference, Women's Action Alliance, 1972. Photo credit: Warren K. Leffler, Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004672751/>*

Gloria Steinem Sought Women's Equality Through Writing and Activism

Gloria Steinem was an influential journalist and activist of the women's rights movement of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. She cofounded several organizations to empower women and was presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

Born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1934, Steinem studied government at Massachusetts after many years of taking care of her mother who struggled from mental illness. After graduating in 1956, she traveled to India to study and research on the Chester Bowles Fellowship. There, she developed an interest in grassroots activism.

Despite being relegated to "women's lifestyle" columns, she began a journalism career in New York. She sought to write about social and political issues, gaining attention in 1963 for going undercover to report on the working conditions at Hugh Hefner's Playboy Club. The exposé revealed an unglamorous, sexist culture behind the organization; the piece was a hit, but she still struggled to be taken seriously. Because of this, she went on to help found *New York* magazine in 1968.

There, she reported on subjects that mattered to her, including the women's liberation movement, abortion, feminism, and other social issues. In 1971, Steinem founded *Ms.* magazine to cover the women's movement. She became well known for her lectures and demonstrations to support gender equality and elect pro-equality women into office.

She also cofounded a number of organizations including the Women's Action Alliance, Women's Media Center, Voters for Choice, and the Ms. Foundation for Women. She also helped to establish Take Our Daughters to Work Day in 1990.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/gloria-steinem>



Oprah Winfrey visits evacuees from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, 2005. FEMA Photo Library. Public Domain.

Oprah Winfrey Built Influential Media Franchises

Oprah Winfrey was born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, before moving to Milwaukee to live with her mother. She endured many hardships during her young life: poverty, sexual abuse, and being sent to a juvenile detention home. After she moved in with her father, she focused on readings and writing, becoming a star student. At Tennessee State University, she became involved in speech communications, performing arts, and television broadcasting.

In 1976, Oprah Winfrey hosted her first talk show, *People Are Talking*, in Baltimore. Then she successfully reinvented a Chicago morning show, *AM Chicago*, in 1984. A year later, this show was renamed *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. She quickly grew to national prominence, earning several Daytime Emmy Awards after the first few years of broadcasting. She became the youngest person to earn the International Radio and Television Society’s “Broadcaster of the Year” award.

Oprah continued to grow and thrive in the media industry, earning a long list of impressive accomplishments. Winfrey portrayed Sofia in Steven Spielberg’s film adaptation of *The Color Purple*. She became the first woman to own and produce her own talk show after her show’s parent company changed production houses. After her show began emphasizing spiritual values, health, and self-help, she established a national database of convicted child abusers and testified before a U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee for a National Child Protection Act. She was named one of the most “100 Most Influential People of the 20th Century” in *Time* magazine, and received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences. She became a partner of Oxygen Media, Inc., and publisher of several magazines. In 2003, she became the first African American to become a billionaire. She became head of the Oprah Winfrey Network in 2008.

Oprah has donated over \$20 million to the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, and millions more to various charities. She was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2013.

<https://achievement.org/achiever/oprah-winfrey/>

Kathrine Switzer Fought for Women’s Inclusion in Running

Kathrine Switzer was born into a military family stationed in Germany in 1947. In 1967, Switzer registered for the Boston Marathon as “K.V. Switzer” and didn’t indicate whether she was a man or woman. After the race began, the director realized Switzer was a woman and tried to remove her by force. Still, she continued to complete the race, igniting the women’s running revolution during a time when most people didn’t think women were strong enough to run 26.2 miles.

Because of Switzer and the efforts of other activists, women were officially allowed in road races in 1971. In 1977, Switzer founded the Avon International Running Circuit, which created running programs in 27 countries for over 1 million women; this effort is credited to the creation of the women’s marathon competition at the Olympic Games.

Kathrine Switzer went on to varied career as a sports commentator, author, fitness expert, and public speaker. In 1998, she was a member of the inaugural class of the National Distance Running Hall of Fame, one of four “Visionaries of the Century” by Runner’s World Magazine in 2002, and inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame in 2011. She still works and makes public engagements today.

<https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/kathrine-switzer/>



General Clarke speaks at her retirement review, WAC Center, Fort McClellan, 1981. Photo credit: U.S. Army, The Women's Army Corps, 1945-1978. https://history.army.mil/html/books/030/30-14-1/cmhPub_30-14.pdf

Mary E. Clarke - First Woman Promoted to Major General

Mary Elizabeth Clarke was born in December 1924 in Rochester, New York. After some time as a secretary and a defense worker, she enlisted in the Women's Army Corps (WAC) in 1945. Clarke was then sent to Berlin, Germany, serving with the Berlin Brigade during the Berlin Airlift crisis. In 1949, she was commissioned as a second lieutenant and traveled to Tokyo as a commanding officer of a WAC unit. Afterwards, Clarke worked in several States, for the Office of Equal Opportunity, and at the Pentagon. She rose through the ranks of the WAC to colonel, then department director of the WAC Advisory Office, then brigadier general, and became the final director of the WAC before it was dissolved in 1978.

That same year, she was promoted to major general, becoming the first woman to attain the rank. With this promotion, she oversaw the U.S. Army Military Police and Chemical Schools and was the first woman to ever command a major military installation. After 36 years of service, she retired in 1981, setting the bar for the longest Army career at the time.

<https://home.army.mil/greggadams/redesignation/clarke>



*Congressional Portrait of Patsy Takemoto Mink, 1994. Photo credit: Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.78319/>*

Patsy Mink Pushed Women’s Rights Forward in Congress

Patsy Mink was the first woman of color elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, the first Asian American woman to serve in Congress, and the first Asian American to run for president. She also wrote a number of important bills that expanded diversity and inclusion programs for women and minorities.

Patsy Matsu Takemoto was born in 1927 in Paia, Hawaii. Originally planning to be a medical doctor, Mink instead applied to law school after being denied from medical school. In 1951, after marrying her husband, John Mink, she graduated from the University of Chicago’s law school but struggled to find a job because of her interracial marriage. She returned to Hawaii to practice law, becoming the first Japanese American to do so there. After some experience working as a private attorney for the House of Representatives of the territory, she decided to campaign for Congress once Hawaii became a State in 1959.

After an initial failed campaign, she won a seat in the Hawaii State Senate in 1962 then won a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1964 without the support of her party. She was a trailblazer fighting for gender and racial equality, affordable childcare, and bilingual education. Mink was one of the authors and sponsors of the Title IX law, which forbid discrimination on the basis of sex for education that receives Federal funding. In 1974, she also passed the Women’s Educational Equity Act to promote gender equality in schools.

Mink remained in politics, ran for U.S. president with the Oregon Democrats, served as Assistant Secretary of the State for Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. Afterwards, in 1990, she was reelected to the U.S. Congress, served six terms, and formed the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus. After her death in 2002, the Title IX law was renamed the Patsy T. Mink Equal Opportunity in Education Act.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/patsy-mink>



*Picture of Ada Deer, unknown date. Photo credit: Tami Heilemann, Department of the Interior.
<https://www.doi.gov/blog/celebrating-interior-women-leadership>*

Ada Deer Defended Native American Rights

Ada Deer was an important Native American activist in and outside of government born in Keshena, a town on the Menominee Reservation in northern Wisconsin, in 1935. She was the first Menominee to graduate from the University of Wisconsin in 1957 and the first Native American to receive a master's degree in social work from Columbia in 1961.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Ada Deer fought hard to reverse a Government policy that disbanded tribes as sovereign entities, which forced Native Americans to assimilate into mainstream society. She helped to create the advocacy group Determination of Rights and Unity for Menominee Stockholders to prevent the sale of tribal land. In 1973, the decision was overturned with the Menominee Restoration Act, which restored the tribal government and was largely credited to Ada Deer. Soon, she would become the first female leader of the Menominee Nation, serving from 1974 to 1976.

Deer went on to teach at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, focusing on social work and a new American Indian studies program. In 1992, she became the first Native American woman to run for U.S. Congress in Wisconsin. Despite her loss in that election, she was appointed to Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Indian Affairs by President Clinton. There, she was praised for granting greater authority to tribal governments and repairing relationships with Native American leaders.

Before her death in August 2023, she worked on prison reform in Wisconsin, entered the National Native American Hall of Fame, and served the Native American Rights Fund.

<https://www.nps.gov/people/ada-deer.htm>

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/obituaries/2023/08/21/ada-deer-dead/>



*Dr. Mabel Lee between 1920 and 1925. Photo credit: Bain News Service, Library of Congress.
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014715831/>*

Mabel Ping-Hau Lee Pushed for Women’s Rights in China and the United States

Mabel Ping-Hau Lee was feminist activist who fought for voting rights in the United States and China. Born in 1896 in Canton, China, Mabel Lee was one of the few Chinese women to live in the United States at the time; this was mostly due to anti-Chinese immigration laws, such as the Page Act of 1875 and 1882 Exclusion Act, which denied Chinese people access to naturalized citizenship. Despite this, Lee and her family immigrated to New York City, where her father was a Baptist minister. Being a teacher for a Baptist church was one of the few occupations that allowed for Chinese people to immigrate to the United States. There, Mabel was raised by her parents to value modern ideals of equality and education.

After the Chinese Revolution of 1911, many women gained the right to vote; this spurred active involvement from Chinese women in the United States to also fight for suffrage. The following year, Mabel, then 16 years old, was invited to ride in the honor guard leading a massive suffrage parade in New York. The entire Lee family participated in the suffrage movement to change negative perceptions about Chinese people. Attending Barnard College, Lee became a public figure who embodied the fight for women’s equality in China and the United States, giving speeches and advocating for Chinese students; she was even featured in the *New York Times* in which she promoted girls’ education, civic participation, and women’s rights for both nations.

In 1921, after the passage of the 19th Amendment, Mabel Lee became the first Chinese woman in the United States to earn a doctoral degree in economics. Unfortunately, prejudice remained, and immigration laws further restricted people from Asia; it would remain this way until the end of World War II. Despite Lee’s contributions and achievements, she found few opportunities for work. She worked in administration for the First Chinese Baptist Church in New York and remained active in the community until her death in 1965.

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/mabel-ping-hua-lee-how-chinese-american-women-helped-shape-the-suffrage-movement.htm>



Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Patricia Harris, President Jimmy Carter, and New York Mayor Beame tour the Bronx. Photo credit: White House staff. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/176392>

Patricia R. Harris Supported Civil Rights and Infrastructure Improvements

Born in 1924 in Mattoon, Illinois, Patricia Roberts Harris was a woman of many firsts who championed civil rights and social justice. She was the first Black woman to serve the Nation as ambassador, the first Black woman to become dean of a law school, and the first Black woman to serve in a Presidential Cabinet.

Harris graduated from Howard University in 1945 and from George Washington University's law school about a decade later. She was then admitted to the District of Columbia Bar and practiced before the Supreme Court. In the early 1960s, Roberts was appointed cochair of the National Women's Committee for Civil Rights by President John F. Kennedy. She also returned to Howard University as an associate Dean of Students before becoming a full law professor in 1963. Two years later, she was appointed Ambassador to Luxemburg before briefly serving as Dean of Howard Law School in 1969.

In 1977, she was appointed as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development. There, she supported housing rehabilitation and fixing slums through funding and business incentives. In 1980, she became the Secretary of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Before her death in 1985, she was a full-time professor at The George Washington University National Law Center.

<https://www.womenofthehall.org/inductee/patricia-roberts-harris/>

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/higher-standard-patricia-roberts-harris>



*Dolores Huerta sits with Andrew Young, an activist who worked with Martin Luther King, Jr., discuss social justice at the Summit on Race in America, 2019. Photo credit: Jay Godwin, LBJ Library.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/lbjlibrarynow/40602661333/in/album-72157690788773333/>*

Dolores Huerta Organized Labor to Create Better Conditions for Latinos

Born in 1930 in Dawson, New Mexico, Dolores Clara Fernandez Huerta became one of the most influential labor and Chicano civil rights activists of the 20th century. Huerta learned the importance of activism through her working-class community; her and her family's experiences with discrimination elsewhere also shaped her desire to make a difference.

In the 1950s, Huerta taught school for a short time after receiving an associate teaching degree. However, she noticed so many hungry children that she decided to help them by organizing farmers and workers. She cofounded the Stockton chapter of the Community Service Organization, which focused on voter registration and economic improvements for Hispanics, and the Agricultural Workers Association. By 1962, she worked closely with activist César Chávez to form the National Farm Workers Association, the predecessor of the United Farm Workers' Union, which Huerta was the vice president of until 1999.

Huerta organized workers, negotiated contracts, and fought for safer working conditions, unemployment and health care benefits, and greater legislative representation. She also worked to elect more Latinos and women to office. In 1998, she received the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/dolores-huerta>



Ruth Bader Ginsburg at her Senate confirmation hearing for the Supreme Court, 1993. Photo credit: R. Michael Jenkins, Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2019630723/>

Ruth Bader Ginsburg Left a Proud Mark on the Supreme Court and the Nation

Ruth Bader Ginsburg was born on March 15, 1933, in Brooklyn, New York. She attended Cornell University and then Harvard Law School, where she was one of only nine women in the class of 500 students. She faced harsh gender discrimination in her classes, eventually transferring to Columbia Law School in 1958 for her final year.

After serving as a clerk for Judge Palmieri of the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York from 1959 to 1961, she became a research associate at Columbia Law and then a professor of law at Rutgers University. While there, she served as general counsel for the ACLU and on the National Board of Directors. She was appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit in 1980 by President Jimmy Carter.

After 13 years serving on the Court of Appeals, she was nominated to the Supreme Court by President Bill Clinton. She was the second woman and first Jewish woman to serve on the Supreme Court. While on the court, she advocated for gender equality and women’s rights. In *United States v. Virginia*, she contributed to the ruling that women could not be denied admission to the Virginia Military Institute. She wrote several important dissenting opinions, such as *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, which denied a woman’s pay discrimination claim. In 2009, Ginsburg worked with President Obama on the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act to fight unequal pay for women.

On September 18, 2020, Ginsburg died while still sitting as a judge on the Supreme Court. In 2022, the U.S. Navy named the USNS Ruth Bader Ginsburg (T-AO 212) after the late justice. Also in 2022, she will have a statue built in her honor on Capitol grounds in Washington, DC.

<https://www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/ruth-bader-ginsburg>

<https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-navy-name-ship-after-late-supreme-court-justice-ruth-bader-ginsburg-2022-04-01/>

<https://thehill.com/homenews/house/600110-house-passes-bill-to-honor-ginsburg-and-oconnor-with-capitol-statues/>

Women’s History Month

Events & Initiatives



A Space Force cadet participates in 2021 graduation ceremony at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. Photo credit: Trevor Cokley, Air Force. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3326203/military-celebrates-womens-history-month/>

Women’s History Month Theme in 2024 Celebrates Diversity

National Women’s History Month takes place every year during the month of March. The theme for 2024 celebrates “Women Who Advocate for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion,” recognizing women throughout history who eliminate bias and discrimination from our lives and institutions for a better future.

This month in particular, the spotlight is on women who are committed to embracing everybody and excluding no one in the common quest for freedom and opportunity. Women are at the forefront of reevaluating the status quo and play an important role in driving the Nation into the future. Today women are developing innovative programs and projects in corporations, the military, the Federal Government, and educational organizations to combat injustices.

<https://nationalwomenshistoryalliance.org/2024-whm-theme/>



*Bessie Coleman and her plane, 1922. Photo credit: Cradle of Aviation Museum.
<https://www.cradleofaviation.org/history/history/women-in-aviation/bessie-coleman.html>*

Bessie Coleman Celebrated as the First Black Woman to Earn a Pilot's License

Bessie Coleman was born in 1892 to a family of sharecroppers out of East Texas. She became interested in planes after hearing stories from pilots and soldiers in World War I. After flight school, where she was the only person of color, she became a stunt flier at air shows. She was known as “Queen Bess,” and she encouraged other Black people to learn to fly. She died in 1926 in a plane accident.

In 2022, American Airlines ran a flight with a crew of all Black women to celebrate Coleman’s legacy. The flight flew from DFW International Airport to Phoenix.

<https://www.dallasnews.com/business/airlines/2022/08/22/all-black-american-airlines-crew-honors-flying-pioneer-bessie-coleman/>

Barbie Dolls Introduced “Inspiring Women” Series

Barbie dolls have been a common toy for young girls since they first launched in March of 1959. The dolls were first created by Ruth Handler and her husband. In 2016 and 2019, the toy company Mattel released Barbie dolls with a wider variety of body shapes to increase diversity and inclusiveness. Barbie dolls were once controversial for enforcing unrealistic body and beauty standards.

In 2018, Mattel presented an ever-expanding line-up of Inspiring Women Barbie dolls for children to learn about important women and celebrate role models. The first line of Barbie’s Inspiring Women line included Amelia Earhart, Frida Kahlo, and Katherine Johnson. In 2022, the series has expanded to include Madam C.J. Walker, the nation’s first self-made female millionaire. Billie Jean King, Rosa Parks, and Dr. Jane Goodall have all joined the line-up among many others.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/08/27/1119699259/madam-c-j-walker-barbie>

<https://www.history.com/news/barbie-through-the-ages>

30x30 Initiative to Recruit More Women Into Police Force

The 30x30 Initiative is coalition of police, researchers, and professional organizations with the goal to increase the number of women police officers by 2030. The program aims to increase the number of women in police training programs to 30%. Close to 200 agencies have signed onto the project. As of 2021, women make up only 12% of police officers and less than 3% of police leadership.

According to University of Wisconsin law professor Keith Kindley, research shows that more women in the police force leads to less excessive force, fewer instances of discretionary arrests, especially of non-White residents, and improved communication. Despite this, some social justice leaders remain critical of the initiative, citing systemic issues independent of gender.

<https://www.npr.org/2022/07/31/1111714807/increasing-women-police-recruits-to-30-could-help-change-departments-culture>

<https://30x30initiative.org/>

First Lady Jill Biden Honors 2023 Girls Leading Change

In celebration of International Day of the Girl, First Lady Jill Biden honored 15 young women leading change across the United States with the first “Girls Leading Change” event. The honorees were selected in collaboration with the White House Gender Policy Council:

- Breanna and Brooke Bennett, age 16, began providing period supplies to girls in public housing in Alabama with their organization, Women in Training.
- Jazmin Cazares, age 18, is an activist for gun violence prevention. After the death of her sister at a shooting in Uvalde, Texas, she traveled the country advocating for tighter background checks and risk protection order laws.
- Mona Cho, age 15, dedicated herself to combatting online harassment and abuse for teens and kids. She serves on the Beach Cities Health District’s Youth Advisory Council and the Youth Health & Safety Committee in Redondo Beach, California.
- Julia Garnett, age 17, is fighting for educational freedom in schools and libraries. At her school, she successfully advocated for student representation on book review committees before providing testimony before Congress on book banning.
- Logan Hennes, age 16, is combatting antisemitism through the American Jewish Committee, having hosted speakers to promote advocacy.
- Anja Herrman, age 17, is a disability rights activist who has led grassroots efforts for equity and inclusion. She is a member of the Personal Protective Equipment for People with Disabilities Coalition and the youngest appointed member of the Village of River Forest’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Group in Illinois.
- Leela Marie Hidier, age 18, is a climate social justice advocate and published author of a novel, *Changes in the Weather*. She currently works for a nonprofit and has spoken at community centers, schools, and the Maine State House.
- Elisa Martinez, age 17, is dedicated to civic engagement in the Latino community. She volunteers as a poll worker to help Spanish-speaking people understand their rights and with the Trial by Peers program to advocate for juveniles.
- Gabriella Nakai, age 17, is a Navajo and Choctaw leader dedicated to food security, working with Native American Connections to address homelessness.
- Zahra Rahimi, age 17, was born in Afghanistan and has helped refugee resettlement in her local community of Alexandria, Virginia.
- Gitanjali Rao, age 17, is an inventor and scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She developed an important contamination detection tool.
- Avery Turner, age 17, is dedicated to supporting teens in the military, serving as director of an organization that promotes belonging in the military community.
- Sandra Ulah, age 18, was a founder and president of her school’s Black student union. She also served on the Youth Council of Lake Mary, Florida.
- Rania Zuri, age 18, is the founder of the LiTEArary Society, a nonprofit organization that has provided books for over 28,000 disadvantaged preschool children.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/11/first-lady-jill-biden-announces-girls-leading-change-honorees/>

Women Still Lag Behind Men in STEM Fields Despite Gains

According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, women make up only 29.3% of the Federal Government employees in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) positions. Women make up only 27% of STEM roles across the entire private sector. Leadership in these fields, including senior management, executives, and programming and team leads, is 74.1% male. The report found that the average gender pay gap is around \$4,300 per year.

<https://www.govexec.com/workforce/2022/07/eoc-women-still-lag-behind-men-governments-stem-workforce/374522/>



Military Women's Memorial in Arlington, Virginia. Photo credit: Rudi Williams, U.S. Military, Public Domain.

Honor Flight of Only Women Travel to Washington

In 2022, over 100 female veterans traveled from Florida to visit Washington, DC, and memorials to Service members there. The Honor Flight network is responsible for the trek. The organization flies veterans to visit memorials for free. This particular instance was the first time the organization provided the service for an all-women flight.

The group included veterans from the Iraq War, Gulf War, and Vietnam War, among others. They visited the Military Women's Memorial, WWII Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and others.

<https://www.stripes.com/veterans/2022-06-01/honor-flight-women-veterans-memorials-6198989.html>



*Four members of the 6888th Battalion. Photo credit: U.S. Department of Defense.
<https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>*

African American Female Battalion of WWII Honored

In February 2022, the U.S. House voted to award a Congressional Gold Medal to the only Black unit composed of only women. The 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion sorted and routed mail for millions of Service members and civilians during World War II.

The battalion was responsible for solving a mail crisis during their time in England. They served as role models for generations of Black women in the military, despite their lack of recognition. In 2018, a monument to them was built at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

<https://www.stripes.com/veterans/2022-06-01/honor-flight-women-veterans-memorials-6198989.html>

Army to Launch Women’s Initiatives Team

The Army is launching the Women’s Initiatives Team. The advisory team, which began receiving applications from full- and part-time soldiers and Army civilian employees, will analyze current policies and practices and advocate for programs and resources for successful retention, empowerment, and advancement of women in the Army. Out of 834 initial applications, 30 members were selected and will report to the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. Their first general body meeting was in August 2023, and they will reopen applications in summer 2024.

<https://www.armytimes.com/news/your-army/2022/12/28/new-womens-initiatives-team-seeking-soldiers-men-and-women/>

https://www.army.mil/article/268839/army_selects_first_members_of_the_womens_initiatives_team



Guest speakers and audience members pose at the Army Women's Museum at Fort Gregg-Adams, Virginia, 2023. Photo credit: Ericka Gillespie, Army.

Celebration of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act at Fort Gregg-Adams

On June 13, 2023, the Army Women's Museum partnered with the Department of Veteran Affairs for two panels and a luncheon to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. Signed into law by President Harry Truman, the bill made women a permanent presence in the military. Even though women have served their country in conflict since its founding, they participated in the military only during times of war and had to overcome many barriers to receive equal treatment.

The 75th anniversary was honored at Fort Gregg-Adams, Virginia, with guest speakers Christine Knighton, a retired colonel who was the first woman in the Army to command a tactical combat arms battalion, and Joyce Henderson, a retired lieutenant colonel with 23 years as a military human resources office chief military personnel officer, among others.

https://www.army.mil/article/267576/army_womens_museum_celebrates_womens_armed_services_integration_act



(From left to right) Norah O'Donnell, moderator, Adm. Linda Fagan, Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost, Gen. Laura Richardson, and Adm. Lisa Franchetti. Photo credit: Staff Sgt. John Wright, Air Force.

Female Four-Star Officers Conduct Panel for Women's History Month

To celebrate Women's History Month in 2023, the military's top female leaders met to discuss the progress that has been made for gender equality in the Armed Forces, as well as changes that still must be made.

Taking place at the Military Women's Memorial in Arlington, Virginia, the panel included Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Linda Fagan, Air Force Gen. Jacqueline Van Ovost, Army Gen. Laura Richardson, and Navy Adm. Lisa Franchetti. Each woman was promoted to general or admiral within the last 3 years. The discussion went through their careers and the challenges they faced coming up as female Service members. Some noted that they do not always enjoy being the "first" in their respective positions, emphasizing the importance of recruitment and retention to move beyond breaking glass ceilings.

While they reflected on the great accelerating progress made in the Armed Forces, they highlighted some important areas of improvement. Access to childcare, specialized equipment and uniforms for women, having women's voices heard, and fighting cultural discrimination and sexual abuse would elevate women in the military.

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/your-military/2023/03/07/beyond-firsts-female-4-stars-discuss-changes-for-women-in-service/>

National Museum of the U.S. Army Honors Women in 2023

The U.S. Army Women's Foundation Hall of Fame inducted six women into its prestigious ranks. These are women who have broken barriers or gone above and beyond their duty. The Army Women's Foundation is a nonprofit organization established in 1969 to provide honors, scholarships, and special recognition for women in the Army. The inductees from the 2023 ceremony include:

- Colonel M. Tia Johnson, who retired from the Army after a 30-year career. In 2002, she became the first African American woman to become a colonel in the U.S. Army Judge Advocate Generals' Corps. In 2022, she was the first Black woman to serve on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Armed Forces.
- Flora D. Darpino, who retired from the Army after serving as a general officer and military lawyer. She served as the 39th Judge Advocate General, being the first woman to hold the position.
- Lieutenant General Susan Lawrence, a leader in defense information technology and communication systems. She heads the Armed Forces Communications & Electronics Association International.
- Rebecca S. Halstead, a retired brigadier general of the Army, who founded her own consultancy company, STEADFAST Leadership. She served in the military for 27 years and specializes in inspirational speaking and development programs.
- Velma L. Richardson, a retired brigadier general of the Army, who served as the deputy commanding general of the Network Enterprise Technology Command. She also served with Lockheed Martin to manage strategic direction of small business and college outreach and development.
- Command Sergeant Major Debra L. Strickland, an Army combat veteran, mentor, and coach. Her 36-year career saw her serve as the first female reserve advisor for the Readiness Group in Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

<https://www.awfdn.org/hall-of-fame-and-special-recognition-awards/us-army-womens-hall-of-fame-inductees/2023-hall-of-fame-inductees/>

Women's History Month

Quotes

“We must use our lives to make the world a better place to live, not just to acquire things. That is what we are put on the earth for.”

“We as women should shine light on our accomplishments and not feel egotistical when we do. It's a way to let the world know that we as women can accomplish great things!”

“We just have to convince other people that they have power. This is what they can do by participating to make change, not only in their community, but many times changing in their own lives. Once they participate, they get their sense of power.”

Dolores Huerta

https://www.azquotes.com/author/22152-Dolores_Huerta

“I was the conductor of the Underground Railroad for eight years, and I can say what most conductors can't say; I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.”

“I had reasoned this out in my mind, there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other.”

Harriet Tubman

https://www.azquotes.com/author/14834-Harriet_Tubman

“It is easy enough to vote right and be consistently with the majority. But it is more often more important to be ahead of the majority and this means being willing to cut the first furrow in the ground and stand alone for a while if necessary.”

“We have to build things that we want to see accomplished, in life and in our country, based on our own personal experiences . . . to make sure that others . . . do not have to suffer the same discrimination.”

Patsy Mink

https://www.azquotes.com/author/24425-Patsy_Mink

"Think like a queen. A queen is not afraid to fail. Failure is another stepping stone to greatness."

"The key to realizing a dream is to focus not on success but on significance—and then even the small steps and little victories along your path will take on greater meaning."

"Every time you state what you want or believe, you're the first to hear it. It's a message to both you and others about what you think is possible. Don't put a ceiling on yourself."

Oprah Winfrey

<https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/oprah-winfrey-19-inspiring-power-quotes-for-success.html>

"Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."

"A gender line . . . helps to keep women not on a pedestal, but in a cage."

"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made. It shouldn't be that women are the exception."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg

<https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/17-powerfully-inspiring-quotes-from-ruth-bader-ginsburg.html>

"Sometimes you will learn the most and grow the most in a situation or job you did not want to be in or to do. Not every job I've done in the Navy is a job I wanted, but I learned and took everything out of every job I could."

Captain Amy Bauernschmidt

<https://www.cnn.com/2022/05/16/asia/us-navy-woman-aircraft-carrier-commander-intl-hnk-ml/index.html>

“If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it.”

“I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.’”

“Freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another.”

Toni Morrison

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/3534.Toni_Morrison

“After midnight, the moon set, and I was alone with the stars. I have often said that the lure of flying is the lure of beauty, and I need no other flight to convince me that the reason flyers fly, whether they know it or not, is the esthetic appeal of flying.”

“Flying may not be all plain sailing, but the fun of it is worth the price.”

“My ambition is to have this wonderful gift produce practical results for the future of commercial flying and for the women who may want to fly tomorrow’s planes.”

“Women must try to do things as men have tried. When they fail, their failure must be but a challenge to others.”

Amelia Earhart

<https://ameliaearhart.com/quotes>

“A woman is like a teabag—you can’t tell how strong she is until you put her in hot water.”

“The air is the only place to be free from prejudices.”

“The age of a woman doesn’t mean a thing. The best tunes are played on the oldest fiddles.”

“Life can only be understood backwards but it must be lived forwards.”

Bessie Coleman

<https://www.anquotes.com/bessie-coleman-quotes/>

“I have often been asked whether I am a woman or an athlete. The question is absurd. Men are not asked that. I am an athlete. I am a woman.”

“Reputation is what others think about you. What's far more important is character, because that is what you think about yourself.”

“When you oppress people either by gender, by race, by sexual orientation, when you do that and the doors become ajar, they will fly open and they will come and they have.”

Billie Jean King

https://www.azquotes.com/author/8027-Billie_Jean_King

“A feminist is anyone who recognizes the equality and full humanity of women and men.”

“Feminism has never been about getting a job for one woman. It's about making life more fair for women everywhere. It's not about a piece of the existing pie; there are too many of us for that. It's about baking a new pie.”

“Once we give up searching for approval, we often find it easier to earn respect.”

Gloria Steinem

https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/57108.Gloria_Steinem

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