

[About the NWHP](#)[Women's History Month](#)[News and Events](#)[Resource Center](#)[Information](#)

The National  
Women's  
History Project

# WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

[blog](#) | [web store](#)

[2012 Theme](#)  
[2011 Partners](#)  
[Past Women's History Months](#)  
[2011 Gazette \(may load slowly\)](#)  
[History of NWHM](#)  
[NWHM Brochure](#)  
[Get Ready](#)  
[1st Presidential Message, 1980](#)  
[Sample Proclamation](#)  
[Presidential Proclamation](#)  
[Press Release](#)  
[Press Kit](#)  
[Q&A about NWH Month](#)  
[In Their Honor](#)  
[Performers](#)  
[Authors & Presenters](#)  
[Test Your Knowledge](#)



## History of National Women's History Month

By Molly Murphy MacGregor, Executive Director and Cofounder  
National Women's History Project



### Local Celebrations

As recently as the 1970's, women's history was virtually an unknown topic in the K-12 curriculum or in general public consciousness. To address this situation, the Education Task Force of the Sonoma County (California) Commission on the Status of Women initiated a "Women's History Week" celebration for 1978.

The week March 8th, International Women's Day, was chosen as the focal point of the observance. The local Women's History Week activities met with enthusiastic response, and dozens of schools planned special programs for Women's History Week. Over one-hundred community women participated by doing special presentations in classrooms throughout the country and an annual "Real Woman" Essay Contest drew hundreds of entries. The finale for the week was a celebratory parade and program held in the center of downtown Santa Rosa, California.

### Mobilizing a Movement

In 1979, Molly Murphy MacGregor, a member of our group, was invited to participate in The Women's History Institute at Sarah Lawrence College, which was chaired by noted historian, Gerda Lerner and attended by the national leaders of organizations for women and girls. When the participants learned about the success of the Sonoma County's Women's History Week celebration, they decided to initiate similar celebrations within their own organizations, communities, and school districts. They also agreed to support an effort to secure a "National Women's History Week."

### Presidential and Congressional Support

The first steps toward success came in February 1980 when President Carter issued the first Presidential Proclamation declaring the Week of March 8th 1980 as National Women's History Week. In the same year, Representative Barbara Mikulski, who at the time was in the House of Representatives, and Senator Orrin Hatch co-sponsored a Congressional Resolution for National Women's History Week 1981. This co-sponsorship demonstrated the wide-ranging political support for recognizing, honoring, and celebrating the achievements of American women.

### A National Lobbying Effort

As word spread rapidly across the nation, state departments of education encouraged celebrations of National Women's History Week as an effective means to achieving equity goals within classrooms. Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Oregon, Alaska, and other states developed and distributed curriculum materials for all of their public schools. Organizations sponsored essay contests and other special programs in their local areas. Within a few years, thousands of schools and communities were celebrating National Women's History Week, supported and encouraged by resolutions from governors, city councils, school boards, and the U.S. Congress.

Each year, the dates of National Women's History Week, (the week of March 8th) changed and every year a new lobbying effort was needed. Yearly, a national effort that included thousands of individuals and hundreds of educational and women's organizations was spearheaded by the National Women's History Project.

**National Women's History Month**

By 1986, 14 states had already declared March as Women's History Month. This momentum and state-by-state action was used as the rationale to lobby Congress to declare the entire month of March 1987 as National Women's History Month. In 1987, Congress declared March as National Women's History Month in perpetuity. A special Presidential Proclamation is issued every year which honors the extraordinary achievements of American women.

**Presidential Message 1980**

President Jimmy Carter's Message to the nation designating March 2-8, 1980 as National Women's History Week.

*"From the first settlers who came to our shores, from the first American Indian families who befriended them, men and women have worked together to build this nation. Too often the women were unsung and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength and love of the women who built America was as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well.*

*As Dr. Gerda Lerner has noted, "Women's History is Women's Right." – It is an essential and indispensable heritage from which we can draw pride, comfort, courage, and long-range vision."*

*I ask my fellow Americans to recognize this heritage with appropriate activities during National Women's History Week, March 2-8, 1980.*

*I urge libraries, schools, and community organizations to focus their observances on the leaders who struggled for equality - - Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, Lucy Stone, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Harriet Tubman, and Alice Paul. Understanding the true history of our country will help us to comprehend the need for full equality under the law for all our people.*

*This goal can be achieved by ratifying the 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution, which states that "Equality of Rights under the Law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."*

[About the NWHP](#)[Women's History Month](#)[News and Events](#)[Resource Center](#)[Information](#)

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[2011 Partners](#)  
[Past Women's History Months](#)  
[2011 Gazette \(may load slowly\)](#)  
[History of NWHM](#)  
[NWHM Brochure](#)  
[Get Ready](#)  
[1st Presidential Message, 1980](#)  
[Sample Proclamation](#)  
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[Press Release](#)  
[Press Kit](#)  
[Q&A about NWH Month](#)  
[In Their Honor](#)  
[Performers](#)  
[Authors & Presenters](#)  
[Test Your Knowledge](#)



## 2011 Press Release

For More Information:

Contact the National Women's History Project [WWW.NWHP.ORG](http://WWW.NWHP.ORG) or call 707-636-2888.

### March is National Women's History Month.

This celebration, designated by Joint Resolutions of the House and Senate and Proclamations by five American Presidents, is an opportunity to honor and celebrate women's historic achievements.

Each year National Women's History Month employs a unifying theme and recognizes national honorees whose work and lives testify to that theme. For 2011, the theme is **Our HISTORY is Our Strength**. This year, instead of recognizing national honorees, local communities, organizations and institutions throughout the country are asked to honor women within their own communities or organizations.

Our HISTORY is Our Strength pays tribute to the millions of women who helped create a better world for the times in which they lived as well as for future generations. Knowing the challenges these women faced, grappled with, and overcame can be an enormous source of strength to all of us. During today's difficult times, Our HISTORY is Our Strength can serve as an important reminder to our nation that adversity can be overcome.

The stories of women's achievements are integral to the fabric of our history. Learning about women's tenacity, courage, and creativity throughout the centuries is a tremendous source of strength. Until relatively recently, this sphere of women's history was overlooked and undervalued. Women's achievements were often distorted, disdained, and denied. But, knowing women's stories provides essential role models for everyone. And role models are genuinely needed to face the extraordinary changes and unrelenting challenges of the 21st century.

Discovering the remarkable achievements of women helps diminish the tendency of some modern-day pundits to dismiss and trivialize who women are and what they accomplish. In celebrating women's historic achievements, we present an authentic view of history. The knowledge of women's history provides a more expansive vision of what a woman can do. This perspective can encourage girls and women to think larger and bolder, and can give boys and men a fuller understanding of the female experience.

What is your school, community or organization doing to celebrate National Women's History Month this March? For more information and resources to commemorate multicultural women's history and to celebrate **Our HISTORY is Our Strength**, visit

[WWW.NWHP.ORG](http://WWW.NWHP.ORG)



## Test Your Women's History IQ

1. Who was the U.S. Secretary of Labor who worked to secure legislation for unemployment relief, public works, Social Security, minimum wage, maximum hours and the prohibition of child labor?
2. Who organized the first pickets at the White House in 1916 and 1917 and was imprisoned and force fed?
3. Who was only 16 years old when she became one of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in 1957?
4. Who was the U.S. Congresswoman who presided over the first government sponsored National Women's Conference in Houston in 1977?
5. Who published "Silent Spring," which documented the dangers of air pollutants and pesticides on animals, people, and land?

### Answers to Women's History IQ Test:

1. Francis Perkins
2. Alice Paul
3. Minnijean Brown Trickey
4. Congresswoman Bella Abzug
5. Rachel Carson

## *Our HISTORY is Our Strength*

## Learn More

### Learn more about women's history

The National Women's History Project (NWHP) web site at [WWW.NWHP.ORG](http://WWW.NWHP.ORG) provides information about women's history, Women's History Month in March, Women's Equality Day in August, and related women's history resources and materials.

Our online **Women's History Resource Catalog** features multicultural posters, books, videos, and educational materials for all ages. You will find information about women from all walks of life who have helped shape our nation.

We invite you to join the **NWHP Network** which gives you a 5% discount in our Webstore and supports our work to expand the recognition and celebration of women's accomplishments.

**WWW.NWHP.ORG**

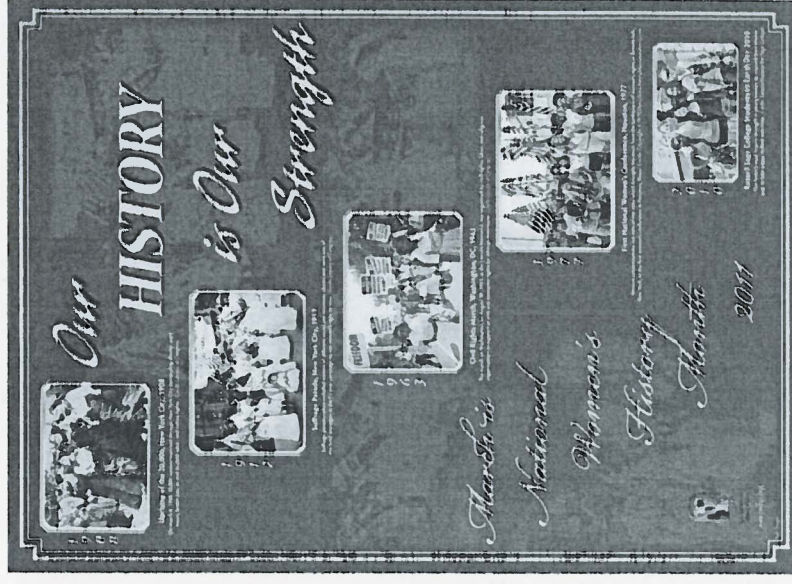
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*National Women's  
History Project*

*The National Women's History Project is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, educational organization committed to recognizing and celebrating the diverse and historic accomplishments of women by providing information and educational materials.*

## National Women's History Month 2011



The stories of women's achievements are integral to the fabric of our history. Learning about women's tenacity, courage, and creativity throughout the centuries is a tremendous source of strength.



# Our HISTORY is Our Strength

March is celebrated as **National Women's History Month** in thousands of schools, communities and workplaces across the nation as well as on military bases throughout the world.

This celebration, designated by Joint Resolutions of the House and Senate and Proclamations by six American Presidents, is an opportunity to honor and celebrate women's historic achievements.

Each year **National Women's History Month** employs a unifying theme and honors women around the country whose work and lives testify to that theme.

For 2011, the theme is *Our History is Our Strength*. To date, we have recognized National Honorees, but this year local communities, organizations and institutions are invited to honor women within their own communities or organizations.

*Our History is Our Strength* pays tribute to the millions of women who helped create a better world for the times in which they lived as well as for future generations. Knowing the challenges these women faced, grappled with, and overcame can be an enormous source of strength to all of us. During today's difficult times, *Our History is Our Strength* can serve as an important reminder to our nation that adversity can be overcome.

Women have played and continue to play a crucial role in several important movements throughout U.S. history:

- \* The Labor Movement which began as early as 1765 when women formed the first society of working women.
- \* The Women's Suffrage Movement which was launched in 1848 at the first women's right conference held at Seneca Falls, NY.
- \* The Civil Rights Movement in which women held a variety of roles from leadership to organizers to participants.
- \* The Women's Rights Movement which was re-energized in the 20th Century with what is called the Second Wave.
- \* The Environmental Movement in which women played a key role from the early 19th century and which was officially launched on Earth Day, April 22, 1970

Here are some women who participated in these movements:

Frances Perkins, U.S. Secretary of Labor, began her advocacy for the labor movement when she witnessed the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in 1911. Appointed to the Cabinet in 1933, Perkins worked hard to secure legislation to enact unemployment relief, public works, Social Security, minimum wage, and the prohibition of child labor.

Alice Paul, represented the last generation of suffrage leaders, and brought fearlessness and tenacity to the fight for women's right to vote. She organized the first pickets at the White House in 1916 and 1917. Along with dozens of women, Paul was imprisoned, went on a hunger strike, and was force fed. After winning the vote, she worked to enact the Equal Rights Amendment.

Minnjean Brown Trickey was only 16 years old when she became one of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Central High School in 1957. Along with eight other African-American teenagers, she defied death threats, hostile white demonstrators, and even the Arkansas National Guard, to attend the all-white high school. Brown-Trickey's courage helped change the lives and education of all students throughout the country.

Bella Abzug, one of the most recognized and bold leaders of the 20th Century's Women's Movement, was elected to the U.S. Congress at the age of 50. She presided over the first government sponsored National Women's Conference at Houston in 1977. With great joy, Abzug took part in the last leg of the relay which had carried a torch from Seneca Falls, site of the first women's rights convention, into the stadium at Houston.

Rachel Carson is known as the founder of the contemporary environmental movement. In 1962, Carson published "Silent Spring," which documented the dangers of air pollutants and pesticides on animals, people, and land. Her writing boldly challenged the practices of agricultural scientists and even the government. Carson called for a change in the way humankind viewed the natural world.

*Our HISTORY is Our Strength*