

Women's History Month 2014



*CELEBRATING
WOMEN OF
CHARACTER,
COURAGE, AND
COMMITMENT*

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2

Each year, the National Women's History Project selects a theme that highlights achievements by distinguished women in specific fields, from medicine and the environment to art and politics.

The 2014 theme, *Celebrating Women of Character, Courage, and Commitment*, honors the extraordinary and often unrecognized determination and tenacity of women.

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3

These role models, along with countless others, demonstrate the importance of ***writing women back into history.***

Their lives and their work inspire girls and women to achieve their full potential, and encourage boys and men to respect the diversity and depth of women's experiences and accomplishments.

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4



Admiral Michelle Howard
Vice Chief of Naval Operations

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5

Michelle Howard recently became the highest ranking woman in the history of the U.S. Navy—and the U.S. military, period.

Senators confirmed Howard for the Navy's number two post in December 2013, making her the first female four-star admiral in the Navy's 238-year history.

Her promotion to Vice Chief of Naval Operations will also make her the first Black woman to attain four-star rank in Pentagon history.

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6

Howard knew—at the age of 12—that she wanted to attend the U.S. Naval Academy, even though women couldn't apply. In 1978, when Howard entered the Academy, she was one of seven Black women in a class of 1,363.

She rose through the ranks. In 1993, when the Navy changed its policy allowing women to serve on combat vessels, Howard became the first female executive officer on an American warship, the USS Tortuga.

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7

She was later named commander of the USS Rushmore, a 15,000-ton amphibious assault vessel with a crew of 400 sailors and more than 350 marines.

Howard became the first female captain of the Rushmore and the first Black woman to command a Navy combat vessel.



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8

Less than a week into her new job, Howard learned that the cargo ship Maersk Alabama had been hijacked by Somali pirates.

Howard spent two days trying to peacefully end the standoff. Finally, she called in a team of Navy SEALs who shot the pirates and brought Captain Richard Phillips back to safety.

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9

Anu Bhagwati, a former Marine captain who now serves as executive director of the Service Women's Action Network, describes the way Howard has inspired a younger generation of minority women:

“Anytime a woman, especially a woman of color, is promoted, it helps all of us. Looking up and seeing women like you, you cannot underestimate the incredible value of that moment.”

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10



Jaida Im
*Advocate for Survivors of
Human Trafficking*

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11

According to the FBI, the United States not only faces an influx of international victims but also has its own homegrown problem of interstate sex trafficking of minors.

Although comprehensive research to document the number of children engaged in prostitution in the U.S. is lacking, an estimated 293,000

American youths currently are at risk of becoming victims of commercial sexual exploitation.



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12

In 2009, Freedom House founder Jaida Im discovered that modern-day slavery existed in her own backyard. Human trafficking was rampant in California.

Im was overwhelmed by the enormity of the problem and her lack of knowledge about the issue. While questioning the impact one person could make against the second-largest international crime, she was still convinced to act.

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13

Freedom House established *The Monarch* for women in August 2010 in San Mateo County, the first residential shelter and long-term aftercare program of its kind in Northern California.

Freedom House upholds the core values of love, honesty, compassion, professionalism, and teamwork. The staff works closely with law enforcement and community partners to expose human trafficking, and to provide victims with the care and services they need to rebuild their lives.

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14

In fall 2013, Freedom House opened *The Nest* to serve girls ages 12-17 that had been rescued from human trafficking.

It provides a place where these girls can recapture their interrupted youth in a loving family setting.

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15



Caroline Kennedy
U.S. Ambassador to Japan

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16

Caroline Kennedy, daughter of John F. Kennedy and Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, is the prolific author of 10 books, including a text on the Bill of Rights and a collection of her mother's favorite poems.

In 2013 she became the U.S. Ambassador to Japan.

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17

Japan is one of the United States' most important trading and military partners. Since the end of World War II, the United States has consistently appointed renowned American political leaders to serve in this capacity.

Kennedy is the first U.S. female ambassador to Japan, an accomplishment that dovetails nicely with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's call for "*a society in which women shine*" and more female leaders.

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18

Kennedy brings a third generation of her family into the U.S. diplomatic corps.

Her grandfather, Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's ambassador to Britain, while her aunt, Jean Kennedy Smith, was ambassador to Ireland under President Bill Clinton.

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19



“I am...proud to carry forward my father's legacy of public service. He had hoped to be the first U.S. president to visit Japan. So it is a special honor for me to be able to work to strengthen the close ties between our two great countries.”

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20



Malala Yousafzai
Advocate for Education

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21

Malala Yousafzai was born on July 12, 1997, in Mingora, Pakistan. Malala voiced her passion for education, and became a symbol of defiance against Taliban subjugation.

After the Taliban began attacking girls' schools, she gave a speech “*How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?*” in September 2008.

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22

In 2009, Malala began blogging for the BBC about living under the Taliban's efforts to prohibit girls' education. In order to hide her identity and protect her family, she used the moniker Gul Makai. However, her true identity was exposed.

Still, she continued to speak out about the rights of all women to an education. She was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize in 2011. That same year, she was awarded Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize.

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23

When she was 14, Malala and her family learned that the Taliban had issued a death threat against her.

Though Malala was frightened for the safety of her father—an anti-Taliban activist—she and her family believed that the fundamentalists would not dare harm a child.

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24

In October 2012, a Taliban fanatic boarded her school bus and shot her in the head.

The shooting left Malala in critical condition. A portion of her skull had to be surgically removed.

She was transferred to England for follow-on medical care. Though she would require multiple surgeries—including repair of a facial nerve to treat paralysis—Malala returned to school in 2013.

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25

Malala remains a staunch advocate for the power of education.

In 2013 the European Parliament awarded her the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought. She was also nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize.

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26



“The terrorists thought they would change my aims and stop my ambitions, but nothing changed in my life except this: weakness, fear and hopelessness died. Strength, power and courage were born.”

—Malala Yousafzai

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27



Roxcy O'Neal Bolton

20th Century Women's Rights Pioneer

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28



Bolton's involvement in community issues began in the 1950s. She was deeply moved by Eleanor Roosevelt's address at the 1956 Democratic National Convention, and was motivated to action by the disparity between what women were obviously capable of accomplishing and the fact that *“all the men were making the decisions.”*

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29

Bolton joined the National Organization for Women (NOW) soon after its founding in 1966. She championed NOW's message to county commissioners, town councils, and university presidents, arguing the case for equal rights for women, and campaigning for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

She personally convinced U.S. Senator Birch Bayh to hold the first hearings on the ERA before Congress in 1970.

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30

In 1971, the Playboy Plaza Hotel in Miami Beach made the mistake of including Bolton on its mailing list, and offered its facilities for NOW's meetings. Bolton's response became one of her most pointed missives.

The letter began, *“Your colossal gall is exceeded only by my tolerance, despite the stress on my good nature...”* And ended with *“How would you like to walk around with a wad of cotton on your rear end?”*

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31

Bolton founded Women in Distress in 1972. Now operated by the Salvation Army, Women in Distress offers temporary lodging, legal assistance, counseling, and caring support to battered women and those with substance abuse problems.

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32

She also helped establish Commissions on the Status of Women in state and county governments, fought for more women in policy-making positions, pushed for creation of the Women's Institute at Florida Atlantic University, and led a sit-in at the University of Miami protesting the unequal treatment of female students and faculty.

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33

Bolton's extensive efforts included working to end sexist advertising, convincing National Airlines to provide maternity leave to—instead of firing—pregnant flight attendants, and persuading the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to name hurricanes after both women and men.

She also initiated the Rehabilitation Program for Young Prostitutes in the Miami-Dade area, offering educational opportunities to incarcerated women, to help keep them off the streets and drug free.

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34

Bolton's perseverance prompted a Joint Resolution of Congress in 1971 that designated August 26th as Women's Equality Day, and prodded the President to issue an annual proclamation to commemorate that day.

That Joint Resolution—and the resulting 1972 Proclamation issued by President Richard Nixon—represented symbolic victories of the very real gains made by women.

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35

Bolton fought for laws protecting rape victims, and for legislation to more efficiently prosecute rape crimes. She persuaded the Florida legislature to revise existing sexual assault statutes to establish degrees of rape.

The legislation unified all sexual assault violations under a single law, which would enable a far greater number of prosecutions for acts that would otherwise go unpunished, while affording greater protections to the victims.

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36



In 1974, her continued efforts helped establish the Rape Treatment Center at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami—later renamed the Roxcy Bolton Rape Treatment Center—the nation's first hospital-based rape treatment center.

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37



Bolton has never wavered in her struggle for equal rights. Her many years of pioneering equal rights activism have earned her numerous awards, including her 1984 induction into the Florida Women's Hall of Fame for *“forcing police and prosecutors to make rape crime a priority.”*

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38

The 2014 Women's History Month theme ***Celebrating Women of Character, Courage, and Commitment***, illustrates how the determination and tenacity of a small group of women influenced society during the past few decades.

These women have written profoundly important chapters in contemporary American history.

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39



Moreover, their heroic efforts have placed today's young woman in a historically exceptional position, where they are better empowered to influence laws and policies, and further ensure the equal treatment of not only women, but all individuals.

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40



“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

—Helen Keller

Resources

- <http://www.navyhistory.org/2013/12/vice-admiral-howard-and-the-wind-of-change-for-military-women/>
- <http://www.nwhp.org/whm/honorees2012.php>
- http://www.floridamemory.com/photographiccollection/photo_exhibits/roxcy/bio.php
- <http://www.biography.com/people/malala-yousafzai-21362253>
- http://www.fbi.gov/stats-services/publications/law-enforcement-bulletin/march_2011/human_sex_trafficking

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