

Dear Friend,

March is Women's History Month, a time to discover and honor the contributions of women. Many have paved the way in every aspect of society, inspiring us in law, social justice, science and more.



New York State has played its part in the movement for equal rights, hosting the first women's rights convention organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony in Seneca Falls in 1848. We've fought for a woman's right to participate equally in society, to be protected from discrimination and to make her own health care decisions. This pamphlet highlights just a few of the women who have been trailblazers in more recent history. I hope you find their stories inspiring. If you have questions about this or any community issue, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rebecca A. Seawright".

Rebecca A. Seawright
Member of Assembly

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Inspiration: Women trailblazers of the 20th and 21st centuries



Courtesy of
Assembly Member
Rebecca A. Seawright

Women trailblazers of the 20th and 21st centuries

GOVERNMENT: Shirley Chisholm



"I have no intention of just sitting quietly and observing. I intend to focus attention on the nation's problems."

– Shirley Chisholm

Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) was the first female and first African-American major-party presidential candidate in 1972. Born in Brooklyn, Chisholm was the daughter of immigrants and worked in education before becoming involved in local politics, serving as a NYS Assemblymember from 1965 to 1968. She became the nation's first African-American Congresswoman in 1969, acting as a fierce advocate for children and education.¹

LAW: Sandra Day O'Connor

"The power I exert on the court depends on the power of my arguments, not my gender."

– Sandra Day O'Connor

Sandra Day O'Connor (1930-) became the first female U.S. Supreme Court Justice in 1981. She served for 24 years, acting as a key swing vote in many decisions. O'Connor was born in Texas, grew up in Arizona and attended Stanford University, earning a bachelor's in economics in 1950 and a law degree in 1952. In 2009, President Obama awarded O'Connor the Presidential Medal of Freedom.²



SPORTS: Kathrine Switzer



“All you need is the courage to believe in yourself and put one foot in front of the other.”

– Kathrine Switzer

Kathrine Switzer (1947-) paved the way for women to compete in marathons when she officially registered and ran the 1967 Boston Marathon,

withstanding physical and verbal attacks. Switzer earned degrees in journalism and public relations at Syracuse University, where she was a student when she ran the Boston Marathon. She went on to win the New York City Marathon in 1974 and is credited for making the sport of running open to women and girls, leading the successful drive for the Olympics to offer a women’s marathon race. She has received numerous awards and recognitions, including the New York State Regents Medal of Excellence and was named as one of Runner’s World magazine’s “Visionaries of the Century.”³

SOCIAL JUSTICE: Dolores Huerta

“Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.”

– Dolores Huerta



Photo by: Gage Skidmore

Born in New Mexico to Mexican-American parents, Dolores Huerta (1930-) was raised in Stockton, California, where her mother owned a hotel, giving discounts to farm workers. Huerta became a teacher and, seeing the impact of poverty on her students, decided to dedicate herself to economic justice. She subsequently met Cesar Chavez, and in 1962, they co-founded the National Farm Workers Association. Largely because of her lobbying and negotiating efforts, Huerta secured Aid for Dependent Children and disability insurance for farm workers in 1963. She is also credited with helping enact the Agricultural Labor Relations Act of 1975 in California, the first law of its kind in the United States to permit farm workers to organize into unions. She was awarded the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award in 1998 and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012.⁴

LITERATURE: Gwendolyn Brooks



“Reading is important – read between the lines. Don’t swallow everything.”

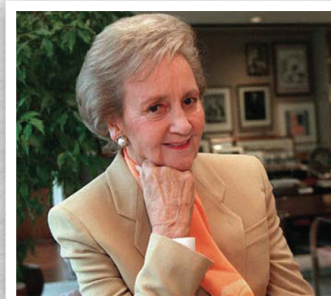
– Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) was the first African-American to win the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and was the first African-American woman to hold the position of poetry consultant to the Library of Congress. Born in Kansas and raised in Chicago by her father, a janitor, and her mother, a teacher and classically trained pianist, Brooks published her first poem at the age of 13. Brooks’ work often explored identity and justice for urban African-Americans in the mid-20th century. She published many volumes of poetry, a novel and an autobiography, winning the Pulitzer for her poetry collection, *Annie Allen*, published in 1949.⁵

BUSINESS: Katharine Graham

“Once, power was considered a masculine attribute. In fact, power has no sex.”

– Katharine Graham



Katharine Graham (1917-2001)

was the first woman to run a Fortune 500 company. Graham earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Chicago and became a reporter in the 1930s. She and her husband acquired *The Washington Post* from her father in 1948 and ran it together until her husband’s death in 1963, when Katharine took it over. Under her direction, it became the fifth-largest publishing empire in the world, with profits increasing by 20 percent a year over a 10-year period. Graham’s autobiography won a Pulitzer Prize in 1998.⁶

¹history.house.gov/People/Listing/C/CHISHOLM,-Shirley-Anita-(C000371)/

²biography.com/people/sandra-day-oconnor-9426834#synopsis

³kathrineswitzer.com/about-kathrine/kathrines-full-bio

⁴doloreshuerta.org/dolores-huerta

SPACE EXPLORATION: Sally Ride



“Young girls need to see role models in whatever careers they may choose, just so they can picture themselves doing those jobs someday. You can’t be what you can’t see.”

– Sally Ride

Sally Ride (1951-2012) became the first American woman in space in 1983 when she participated in the flight of the space shuttle *Challenger* as a mission specialist. She earned a doctorate in physics from Stanford University and joined the NASA astronaut program in 1978, working as a ground-based capsule communicator and helped develop a robotic arm for the space shuttle.⁷

MEDIA: Connie Chung

“I think men are allowed to be fat and bald and ugly and women aren’t. And it’s just not – there is no equality there.”

– Connie Chung



Photo by: Phil Konstantin

In 1993, Connie Chung (1946-) became the first Asian-American and the second woman to co-anchor a major network news program when she joined Dan Rather at CBS Evening News. She was born and raised in Washington, DC, the daughter of a Chinese diplomat. After receiving a degree at the University of Maryland in 1969, she started a career in journalism. She is an Emmy and Peabody-award winning journalist.⁸

⁵poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/gwendolyn-brooks

⁶biography.com/people/katharine-graham-9317709#synopsis

⁷nasa.gov/topics/history/features/ride_anniversary.html

⁸makers.com/connie-chung