

Presidential Documents

Proclamation 7170 of March 1, 1999

Women's History Month, 1999

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

A little more than a century ago, an editorial in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* opposing women's suffrage and criticizing women in the work force so infuriated a young reader that she wrote a letter in protest. Her articulate response prompted the newspaper's editor to offer her a job, and thus Elizabeth Cochrane—later known as Nellie Bly—began her career in journalism. A pioneer of investigative reporting, she exposed the brutal conditions in the care of the mentally ill, reported on poor working conditions in factories, and wrote of the indignities suffered by women in prison. This year, as we reflect on America's past in preparation for our celebration of the new millennium, we recognize that the talent, energy, intellect, and determination of countless women like Nellie Bly have shaped our destiny and enriched our society since our earliest days as a Nation.

From the women who organized the East India Company tea boycotts before the Boston Tea Party to Deborah Sampson, who fought as a soldier in the Revolutionary War; from Angelina and Sarah Grimké, who spoke out against slavery to Harriet Tubman, who risked her life as a conductor on the Underground Railroad; from suffragist Carrie Chapman Catt to sharecropper Fannie Lou Hamer, who faced violence and endured intimidation to become a leader of the Civil Rights movement; from environmentalist Rachel Carson, who changed our way of looking at the world, to physicist Chien-Shiung Wu, who changed our way of looking at the universe, women's history is truly America's history. That is why I was pleased to establish in July of last year the President's Commission on the Celebration of Women in American History, whose recommendations will help us to better understand and rejoice to appreciate the role and accomplishments of women.

During Women's History Month, we honor the generations of women who have served our Nation as doctors and scientists, teachers and factory workers, soldiers and secretaries, athletes and mothers. We honor the women who have worked the land, cared for children and the elderly, nurtured families and businesses, served in charitable organizations and public office. And we remember the good friends we have so recently lost—women such as Bella Abzug, Marjory Stoneman Douglas, and Florence Griffith-Joyner—whose achievements and example continue to light our lives.

But we must do more than remember. We must build on the legacy of the millions of women, whether renowned or anonymous, who have contributed so much to the strength and character of our Nation. We must ensure that women have equal access to the education and opportunities they need to excel. We must guarantee that women receive equal pay in the workplace. We must promote policies and programs—including affordable, high-quality child care—that enable working women to succeed both on the job and in their homes. And we must work to ensure that women have the comfort of knowing they can retire in security. Women who have gone before us accomplished so much, often in the face of hardship and discrimination; we can only imagine what women will accomplish in the future if we break down the remaining barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, WILLIAM J. CLINTON, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim March 1999 as Women's History Month. I encourage all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities, and to remember throughout the year the many heroic women whose many and varied contributions have enriched our lives.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this first day of March, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-nine, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William J. Clinton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "W" and "C".