

Advocacy Report

March 8th, International Women's Day and Women's History Month

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The theme for International Women's Day, 8 March, is "Time is Now: Rural and urban activists transforming women's lives" and in the United States, there has been an overwhelming tide of women activists endeavoring to improve conditions for women.

During the 19th Century, even though women were considered citizens of a 'free' county, they had no rights, especially married women. Considered physically weak and delicate and mentally frail, women were married early in life becoming literal slaves within their own homes with no right to own property or sign contracts and definitely were not allowed to vote. That was left to the men!

Early American women activists put aside their bustles to try to put an end to that! We can all relate to our grand dames of women's liberation such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe. And they were no stranger to protest marches, petitions, and demonstrations that finally led to the passing of the nineteenth amendment by both houses in 1920.

The right to vote however, did not solve the problem of gender inequality as women did not obtain the right to hold public office until the 1970s and the Equal Rights Amendment, first proposed in the 1920s, with its tumultuous history still has not been ratified. To add insult to injury, the Constitution still does not explicitly guarantee for women the rights granted to men. Women are still a minority in political office in the United States despite the work done by women in trying to prove that they are equal to men.

This might explain the inequality in pay between the genders, why so many elderly American women, nearly 75 percent, live in poverty, a problem compounded by the fact that women live longer than men and the lack of judicial standards for deciding legal cases when it comes to pay equity. Domestic violence and violence in general against women including sexual harassment, sexual violence and rape still predominate the landscape and is a fact of life for 1 in 4 women. Only recently has there been an overwhelming response to sexual harassment with the #MeToo movement.

In addition to the March 8th celebration of International Women's Day which honors women's achievements worldwide, this year is also the 30th anniversary of the passage of the law-making March Women's History Month in the United States in celebration of women's contributions to society. The 2018 National Women's History Month theme is "Nevertheless, She Persisted: Honoring Women Who Fight All Forms of Discrimination against Women" a reference to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's remarks after he objected to Senator Elizabeth Warren's

reading of a letter from civil rights leader Coretta Scott King. For the list of women being honored in 2018, go to <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/national/national-women-history-month-what-when-did-begin-who-being-honored-this-year/jWxQxse6TMNUAdW7w58YQM/>.

But as impressive as the above list might seem it also the ordinary women who create movements around specific areas of injustices that need to be righted and endlessly march, protest, demonstrate and petition transforming momentum into action, to empower women in all settings, rural and urban.

So on March 8th and throughout the entire month of March, let's all celebrate the women activists past, present and future who have worked and will continue to work relentlessly to claim women's rights. We still have such a long way to go.

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