

American Women Writers: Pens Against Poison
by Cheryl Hipp

In the runup to the American Revolution, 12 of the 13 colonies sent distinguished men to meet at the Continental Congresses in Philadelphia from 1774 through 1781. As time went by, support for an independent country in the New World gained support. In the April of 1776 – only months before the Declaration of Independence was signed – John Adams, the future second president of the United States, was attending the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. He received a letter from his wife, Abigail Adams, who wrote:

“I long to hear that you have declared an independency. And by the way in the new code of laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make, I desire you would remember the ladies and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors.”

This is one of the earliest recorded pleas for women’s rights in American history. While Adams laughed at his wife’s request, calling her “saucy,” her words still resonate 234 years later. It wasn’t until 1920 – 144 years after Abigail’s letter to her husband – that the states ratified Amendment XIX to the Constitution, prohibiting the government from denying a person the right to vote because of gender.

Women were not the only group denied equal rights at America’s independence. After much debate on the topic, slavery was not outlawed in the new country. In 1852, Harriet Beecher Stowe published the novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. It follows the journey of a pacifist slave, Uncle Tom, from his first master, who, though kind, has financial troubles and must sell Tom, to Tom’s final master, who beats him savagely.

Stowe showed the cruelty of slavery clearly and convincingly. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* became the best-selling novel of the 19th century, and was used as antislavery propaganda in the North during the Civil War. Upon meeting Stowe during the war, Abraham Lincoln is said to have commented “So this is the little lady who started this great war.” Stowe was not the first author to address the issue of slavery, but she had the largest

impact, because readers empathized with her characters. Today, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is still read in high schools and colleges across the United States.

Eleanor Roosevelt also took an interest in civil rights, most notably women’s empowerment and universal human rights. Over the course of her husband’s presidency, she held 348 press conferences with female journalists (at the time, female journalists

(Continued on page 2)



In this September 2009 photo, actress and writer Carrie Fisher, who stars in *Wishful Drinking*, a one-woman show as well as the title of her memoir, is shown at the American Airlines Theater, New York. (AP Photo/Bruce Gilbert)

The American Center

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Office Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Monday through Friday)

H O L I D A Y S

March 1: Holi
March 16: Gudi Padwa

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Dear Readers,

Greetings from the American Center! January was a fantastic month of events and speakers, connections and culture, which I spent working as a Public Diplomacy Officer at the American Center. My first assignment was to accompany U.S. civil rights leader Dr. Otis Moss, Jr. and former Indian parliamentarian and scholar Rajmohan Gandhi on their tour of Mumbai. It was truly inspirational to see these leaders and role models interacting with enthusiastic students at universities and colleges in Mumbai. Engaging with so many students and young people across Mumbai was one of the highlights of my American Center rotation.

Big problems like the environment and worldwide poverty will find their solutions in the amazing talent that is rising with a new generation taking action across the globe. India of course, is a huge part of that new generation. During my month at the American Center, Kathleen Rogers, President of Earthday Network, connected with Indian students who are engaging their communities and becoming leaders in protecting the environment right here in Mumbai. And Patrick Triano, Director of the AmeriCorps VISTA program to fight poverty in America, teamed up with a number of local organizations to share strategies on fighting poverty and responding to disasters. After only a month of participating in these fruitful exchanges, I am hopeful and confident about the power of cultural exchange and collaboration to change our world.

Many thanks to the Indian and American staff, and members of the American Center, who are full of energy and ideas. I had such a good time and was back at the American Center last month for Mumbai Mondays, to give a talk on my own Irish-American heritage.



John Drew Giblin
U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai

(Continued from page 1)

were not welcome at typical press conferences). Eleanor used these conferences to discuss social issues impacting women, such as poverty and education. She also wrote a newspaper column, "My Day," which chronicled her daily life as First Lady and elaborated on social issues. By engaging American women about politics and social issues in an age where the vast majority of women were housewives restricted to household affairs, she helped make it culturally acceptable for women to think beyond the homestead and become politically active.

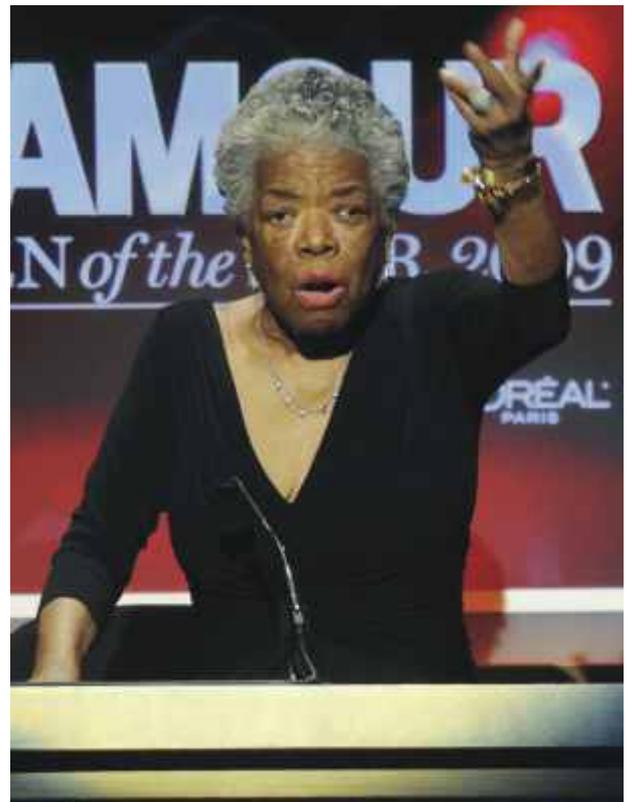
Eleanor continued to be active in the political community after her husband's death in 1945. In 1945, she was selected as a delegate to the United Nations General Assembly. There,

she served as chairperson on the United Nations Human Rights Commission, and put pen to paper to help draft the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Though the declaration is not binding, it serves as a foundation for a growing number of international treaties, national laws, and institutions protecting and promoting human rights.

In 1962, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist, published her book *Silent Spring*. It documents the poisonous effects of pesticides on wild life, especially birds. DDT, a common pesticide used by farmers in the United States at the time, made eggshells very fragile, and our national bird, the bald eagle, was becoming extinct because it could not reproduce successfully. The title of the book evokes the image of a spring day, silent because there are no more birds to sing due to the impact of uncontrolled pesticide use. Carson's book is widely credited with starting the American environmental movement.

Clearly, while women's voices have not always been welcome in the public sphere, they have been heard. The words of Abigail Adams and Eleanor Roosevelt continue to resonate as the women of today continue to demand equal pay for equal work. Stowe's heartrending portrayal of slavery has influenced the persuasive writing of many authors since her day, including Rachel Carson, whose image of a day without birds, an eerie silent spring, has helped make environmental activism a priority for people the world over.

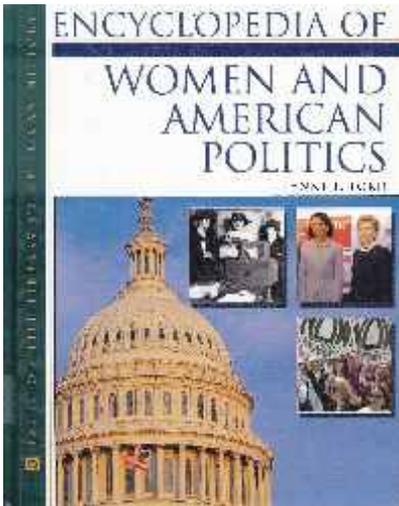
Cheryl Hipp works at the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai



Poet Maya Angelou accepts a lifetime achievement award during *Glamour* magazine's 2009 Women of the Year awards at Carnegie Hall in New York, November 9, 2009. (AP Photo/Henny Ray Abrams)

NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

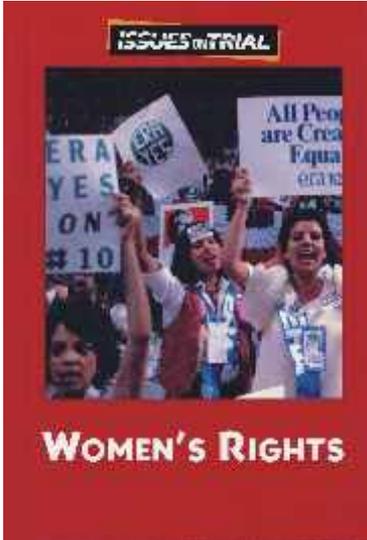
Select Resources Available on Women's Issues



Encyclopedia of Women and American Politics

by Lynne E. Ford
Facts on File, 2008

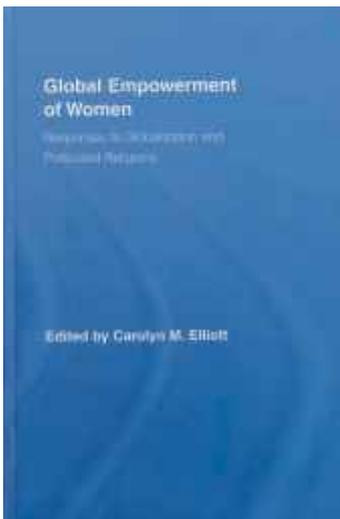
This encyclopedia contains more than 500 alphabetically-organized entries, and provides balanced coverage of the people, issues, and events that shape any discussion of women in American politics. It provides a biography for every woman who has served in the U.S. House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Supreme Court. Appendixes include a chronology of highlights in women's political history, as well as additional statistics and primary documents.



Issues on Trial: Women's Rights

Edited by Justin Karr
Greenhaven Press, 2008

Contentious issues such as the death penalty, civil liberties, and reproductive rights touch on people's deeply held beliefs. Each *Issues on Trial* series captures the passion and depth of those debates, examining how the courts have helped to shape each issue through their rulings. In addition, the book features bibliographies, a comprehensive index, and a list of organizations to contact.



Global Empowerment of Women: Responses to Globalization and Politicized Religions

Edited by Carolyn M. Elliott
Routledge, 2008

This is an edited multidisciplinary collection of original studies on women's empowerment by international feminist scholars from 20 countries from all regions of the world. The scholars, part of the Fulbright New Century Scholars Program on Global Empowerment of Women have dealt with opportunities for women in the context of globalization to show how initiatives at national and global levels are transformed by local cultures and power structures. The studies presented range from globalization and neoliberal governance; religion and citizenship; and gender violence; to sexual autonomy and global politics.

Ask a Librarian: Please write to the American Library at libref@state.gov for research queries related to information on U.S. international relations, education, law and legislation, English language, and literature.

Latino Flavor in the United States Discussion led by Susan Quintana

Monday, March 22
American Center Auditorium

6:00 p.m.

Come celebrate Latino colors with Susan Quintana. With music and dance, you will be transported to areas of the United States greatly influenced by Latin-American culture.

Susan Quintana grew up in a Mexican-American household close to the United States-Mexico border. She majored in Economics at the University of Texas and mastered in Economic Development and Security Studies at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. She speaks Spanish, Hebrew, and some Arabic. She enjoys cooking and assisting her mother to administer an NGO in Texas. She is an amateur percussionist by training and has done freelance performances in the past. She is enthusiastic about illustrating U.S. diversity.



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Rachel Carson was a quiet woman who stirred extraordinary controversy that persists decades after her death. Her 1962 book *Silent Spring* brought worldwide attention to the harm to human health and the environment wrought by mishandling of the powerful pesticide, DDT, fomenting the environmental movement. In the 100th anniversary year of Carson's birth, this publication examines how occasionally in history a book with a powerful idea can bring about peaceful but dramatic change in a democratic society.



Author Isabelle Allende attends the 2009 Freedom Awards in Los Angeles on October 2009. (AP Photo/Katy Winn)

FILMS THIS MONTH

American Center Auditorium
3:30 and 6:30 p.m.

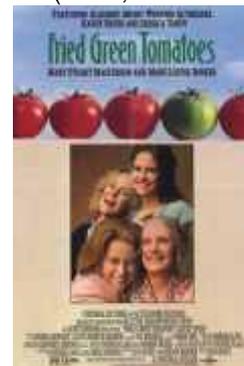
Friday, March 12

Wonderful, beautifully acted "dramedy" about a frustrated housewife (Kathy Bates) who is transfixed by the tales spun by an elderly woman (Jessica Tandy) who lives in a nursing home. The stories involve two independent women (Mary Stuart Masterson and Mary-Louise Parker) who ran a popular café in Alabama in the 1930s and whose friendship survived a number of incredible events. Cicely Tyson costars.

Friday, March 26

Oscar-winning performance by Nicole Kidman as author Virginia Woolf in this poignant tale of three women from different times bound by a common thread. In 1929, Woolf battles mental illness as she begins her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Two decades later, housewife Julianne Moore finds solace from her dreary life in Woolf's book. And present-day literary editor Meryl Streep is a contemporary Clarissa Dalloway, coping with mortality as she plans a party for her AIDS-stricken writer friend. With Ed Harris and Claire Danes.

Fried Green Tomatoes
(1991, 137 mins)



The Hours
(2002, 114 mins)



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Admission to all American Center programs, restricted to persons over 16, will be on a first-come, first-served basis. The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.