AMERICANCENTER

This month's theme
WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

MARCH 2011

Women's History: Winning the Right to Race

by Carey Rudell

In January, I ran in Mumbai's 6k Dream Run with my husband. Running with us were 22,488 people, an additional 11,000 in the half marathon, and 2,800 in the full marathon. Many of my fellow runners were women. I do not know the personal reasons these women had for running that day, but I signed up for the run because I find running to be an excellent way to improve my health, mood, and self-confidence. Races are a great way to set goals and make running more fun. In contrast to the quiet early morning runs my husband and I take, the Dream Run was raucous, filled with old and young, Indian and foreign, men and women all out to promote their causes or to simply have fun. There was a sense of unity as spectators cheered all of us on.

Only a few decades ago, I would not have been allowed to participate in such an event. Organized runs were exclusively for men, as many people believed that women could not engage in strenuous physical activity without damaging their psyches or reproductive systems. According to veteran runner Claire Kowalchik's excellent guide, *Running for Women*, the first officially recognized women's cross-country race in the United States was held only in 1965. The following year, Roberta Gibb Bingay completed the Boston Marathon unofficially. Women were not allowed in the marathon, so she jumped into the race from behind a bush. In 1967, Kathrine Switzer, a student at Syracuse University, became the first woman to run the prestigious Boston Marathon with an official racing number. When marathon organizer, Jock Semple, discovered that a woman was running in the event, he attempted to physically expel her and remove her racing bib. He was unsuccessful, however, and the young woman finished the race with a time of four hours and twenty minutes. Switzer went on to win the women's New York Marathon in 1974 with a much faster time of three hours and seven minutes. In 1971, the Boston Marathon was officially opened to women.

In the United States, the government recognized that women deserved to have as many athletic opportunities as men. In 1972, the U.S. Congress passed Title IX of the Education Act. Title IX declared that "No person ..... shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational programs or activities receiving federal assistance." Although it took some time to implement the new law, it was instrumental in opening up new athletic opportunities for young female students.

In the 1970s, women around the world began to have more chances to run competitively. In 1974, 45 women ran in the first International Women's Marathon, held in West Germany. In 1978, Kathrine Switzer continued her efforts to further women's running and helped to arrange an array of international women's races. However, it was not until 1982 that the International Association of Athletics Federation, the world governing body for track and field events, recognized women's world record times in 5,000 and 10,000 meter events. In 1981, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) voted to include the women's marathon in the 1984 Olympics. The victory was incomplete, however, since the IOC did not approve a complete roster of races for women, resulting in an imbalance in the number of competitive events for male and female athletes. The 10,000 meter event was added in 1988, and the 5,000 meter was finally offered in 1996.

In 1984, Joan Benoit Samuelson ran in the first women's Olympic marathon. She was not expected to do well since she had undergone knee surgery only 17 days before the marathon trials. Despite this setback, she won the gold medal in an amazing

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U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) Executive Director, Reema Nanavaty, listen as women artisans share stories of their involvement with SEWA programs that have helped them achieve economic self-sufficiency and leadership roles in the organization, at the Hansiba store in Mumbai, on July 18, 2009. (State Department Photo)

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H O L I D A Y S

None

A WORD FROM THE CENTER

Dear Readers,

My first experience celebrating International Women's Day was in 1995 when I was studying and working in Moscow, Russia. On March 8, all the men in the office brought in a rose for every woman in the office – soon I had a complete bouquet sitting on my desk! I remember thinking how nice it was that all the women were recognized in such a way.

We not only celebrate International Women's Day on March 8, but the entire month of March is recognized as Women's History Month in the United States. It is the one month of the year when we remember and celebrate women from all walks of life who have shaped our history.

In the U.S., we recognize the contributions of great women such as Harriet Tubman, born a slave in 1820, yet helped to establish the Underground Railroad and personally guided 300 slaves to freedom; Eleanor Roosevelt, who as a U.S. delegate to the new United Nations, helped draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; and Sandra Day O'Connor, the first female Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. The list is endless.

However, it is not only women in the U.S. that have shown tremendous courage, commitment, and influence. In 2007, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice instituted The International Women of Courage Award to recognize the exceptional courage and leadership of women around the world. This annual award honors the courage of extraordinary women worldwide who have played transformative roles in their societies. Democracy, prosperity and security are not possible globally without the empowerment of women. If women cannot participate in the political process, there can be no real democracy. If women are deprived of economic opportunity, development is crippled. If women are not educated, they cannot pass knowledge to their children and there is no true security for the next generation.

The Award has been given to women such as Reem Al Numery of Yemen, who was forced to marry her 30-year-old cousin at the age of 12 and is now an influential activist against child marriages; or Dr. Begum Jan of Pakistan who established a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization to empower the voice and role of women in traditional communities of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in northwest Pakistan; or Sonia Pierre from the Dominican Republic who fights against the marginalization and discrimination of the ethnic Haitian community in her country.

Vital Voices' Susan Davis (extreme left), Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao, U.S. Ambassador to India Timothy J. Roemer, and U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, Melanne Verveer, participate in a panel discussion moderated by CNN International's Zain Verjee at the Vital Voices Women's Empowerment Summit in New Delhi, on September 15, 2010. (State Department Photo/Public Domain)

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finish with more than a one-minute lead. In 1986, Samuelson received the Sullivan Award as the top amateur athlete in the United States. Both men and women were eligible for the award and Samuelson became the seventh woman in 56 years to receive the honor. Although plagued by injury, Samuelson went on to set records in women's running and she continues to participate in races.

Gradually, more and more races were opened to women. Today, it is commonplace for women to run races alongside men. In 2009, 41 percent of all marathon runners were women, up from 10 percent in 1980. Races and running clubs exclusively for women have sprung up all over the world, from Los Angeles to Singapore. Women are also running longer races. Ann Trason, an ultra marathon champion, ran 100-mile races faster than most men, sometimes winning the events outright. Mainstream newspapers and magazines, as well as running publications, have clearly recognized women's involvement in running and regularly feature stories about professional female runners, such as Ann Trason, and the specific concerns of athletic women.

Like me, many women have found that running makes them feel stronger and more powerful. For this reason, many people are encouraging young girls to run as a way to boost their self-confidence and body image. One organization, Girls on the Run, offers a running curriculum designed to empower young women through running. Since its formation in 1996, in Charlotte, North Carolina, nearly one million young girls around the world have participated in the program.

Women have made tremendous advances in education, science, and law that often overshadow their physical achievements. However, securing the right to participate in athletic competitions creates role models for young women and encourages them to be active and to test their own physical barriers. Although I may never run a marathon, watching the video of Joan Benoit Samuelson win the 1984 Olympic marathon helps me get up early in the morning and run my two or three miles.

Carey Rudell works at the U.S. Consulate General, Mumbai

NOTES FROM THE AMERICAN LIBRARY

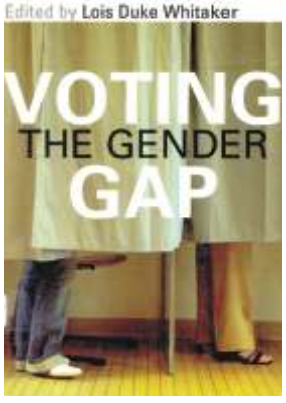
Select Resources Available on Women's Issues

Divas on Screen: Black Women in American Film
by Mia Mask
University of Illinois Press, 2009

In this book, the author describes African-American women's stardom in historical and industrial contexts by examining the star personae of five African-American women: Dorothy Dandridge, Pam Grier, Whoopi Goldberg, Oprah Winfrey, and Halle Berry.

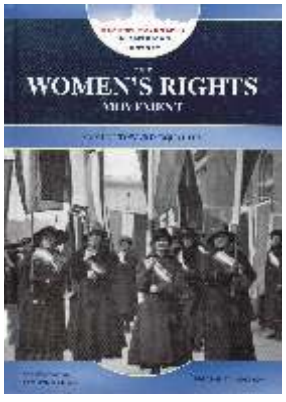
Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society
The University of Chicago Press, Autumn 2010

Recognized as a leading international journal on women's studies, *Signs* publishes articles of interdisciplinary interest addressing gender, race, culture, class, and/or sexuality either as central focuses or as constitutive analytics. Symposia engaging comparative, interdisciplinary perspectives from around the globe to analyze concepts and topics of import to feminist scholarships are also published.



Voting the Gender Gap
Edited by Lois Duke Whitaker
University of Illinois Press, 2008

This book's focus is on the gender gap in voting – the difference in the proportion of women and men voting for the same candidate. It features original articles by both academics and practitioners who have studied the gender gap and how it affects American politics.



The Women's Rights Movement: Moving Toward Equality
by Shane Mountjoy
Chelsea House Publishers, 2008

This title, from the book series *Reform Movements in American History*, describes women's rights throughout American history. It discusses American women's rights during the temperance and abolitionist movements; describes the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others in the fight for political equality for women.

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.

MUMBAI MONDAYS

New York, New York: A Virtual Walking Tour of the World's Greatest City
Discussion led by Nancy VanHorn

Monday, March 21 **6:00 p.m.**
American Center Auditorium

Join native New Yorker Nancy VanHorn on a tour of New York's architecture and neighborhoods. From the Brooklyn Bridge to the World Trade Center, New York's architecture has always reflected its inhabitants. We'll look at some of the city's key architectural milestones and how they helped shape the city's character.

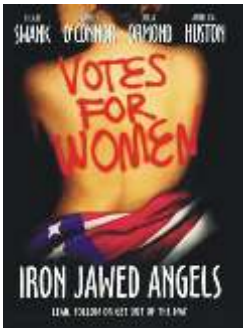
Nancy VanHorn was born and raised in Manhattan. She attended Brown University, receiving a B.A. in Slavic Studies with highest honors. Mrs. VanHorn has organized political training programs in Russia, helped set up a radio station in Kosovo, and coordinated communications for an oil consortium in The Netherlands and Kazakhstan. Before coming to India, Mrs. VanHorn was a Management Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv, Ukraine, and speaks Russian and Ukrainian. She and her husband, who is also a diplomat, live in Mumbai with their two sons.

FILMS THIS MONTH

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

Friday, March 18

Iron Jawed Angels
(2004, 125 mins)



Engrossing HBO drama chronicles the real-life struggles faced by early 20th-century feminists fighting for their rights during the women's suffrage movement. Hilary Swank stars as Alice Paul, founder of the National Women's Party and author of the first equal rights amendment, who led the highly publicized hunger strike that earned her and her fellow activists their reputation as "iron jawed angels."

Friday, March 25

Mona Lisa Smile
(2003, 120 mins)

Julia Roberts, a new art history professor at Wellesley College in 1953, immediately draws attention at the elite women's school for her progressive teaching style and views. Among the students affected by her are Kirsten Dunst, a spoiled, nasty young woman with traditional attitudes; Julia Stiles, torn between marrying or going to law school; and rebellious party girl Maggie Gyllenhaal.

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This year, Secretary Clinton will honor another group of women who have shown exceptional courage and leadership in advocating for women's rights and advancement. I can't wait to find out who these remarkable women are.

History is full of women who have helped shape society and secure a better future for themselves and for their children. Most of these women work in anonymity, are not given awards,and may not even be appreciated for their work. I hope you spend some time this month to reflect on progress made by women, to call for change, and to celebrate acts of courage and determination by ordinary women who have played an extraordinary role in the history of their countries and communities.

Happy International Women's Day!

You can read more about women who have contributed to the development of the United States in the publication *Women of Influence* at http://www.america.gov/publications/books/women-of-influence.html

Sincerely,

Angela Gemza
Cultural Affairs Officer

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Admission to American Center programs, restricted to persons over 14, unless otherwise specified, is on a first-come, first-served basis. The auditorium doors will open 30 minutes before the start of the program.