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Women's History Month

The month of March is designated as "Women's History Month." It is celebrated on-line at <https://womenshistorymonth.gov> as a joint commemoration by some very notable institutions: Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution, and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Their purpose includes "encouraging the study, observance and celebration of the vital role of women in American history."

Women's History Month originated as a national celebration in 1981 when Congress requested the President to proclaim the week beginning March 7, 1982 as "Women's History Week." In 1987 that became "Women's History Month," and thereafter Presidents have issued regular annual proclamations. These proclamations "celebrate the contributions women have made to the United States and recognize the specific achievements women have made over the course of American history in a variety of fields."

It is a mark of real progress that there are so many accomplished and distinguished American women in so many fields, obviously much too numerous to even list in this space. But let me focus briefly on four women of modern times who have made history professionally and also reached the general public through books.

In 2020, the Nobel Prize in Chemistry was awarded to Jennifer A. Doudna, Professor of Chemistry and Molecular and Cell Biology at the University of California, Berkeley. The award was shared with Emmanuelle Charpentier of France. It was given "for the development of a method for genome editing" with a gene-editing tool known by the now familiar acronym CRISPR. Professor Doudna is also a researcher with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory. Her book on the subject, coauthored with fellow researcher Samuel H. Sternberg, is "A Crack in Creation: Gene Editing and the Unthinkable Power to Control Evolution" (2017). It is a wonderful and manageable read about a discovery that is as earthshaking as the title suggests.

Madelaine Albright, a naturalized American citizen after escaping despots in Europe before and after WWII, became U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations from 1993 to 1997 and the first female U.S. Secretary of State in history, from 1997 to 2001; she served in both capacities under President Bill Clinton. She is the author of "Madame Secretary: A Memoir" (2003) and, most recently, "Fascism: A Warning" (2019).

Doris Kearns Goodwin is one of America's best known historians. She won the Pulitzer Prize in history for "No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II" (1994) and has been acclaimed as well for her "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln" (2005).

And lastly I must mention the one woman who has perhaps influenced the general public more than any other. She is an actress (including playing in lead as Sethe in the

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same-named film version of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize winning "Beloved"), a film producer, an Emmy-award TV personality, and an entrepreneur (many times over). She is one of the wealthiest (and most philanthropic) women in America. She is Oprah Winfrey, who besides all other accomplishments, launched an on-air Oprah's Book Club for her viewers on the wildly popular "The Oprah Winfrey Show" and even authored self-help books. In 2010 she was a Kennedy Center honoree, and in 2013 she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

There is so much more to say about just these four that you will have to go read their stories. Your local Library is your go-to resource, as always. Oprah said so: "Getting my library card was like citizenship; it was like American citizenship."

Charles B. Greenberg
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