Selected Highlights of Women’s History

United States & Connecticut
1773 to 2015

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Women have made many contributions, large and small, to the history of our state and our nation. Although their accomplishments are too often left unrecorded, women deserve to take their rightful place in the annals of achievement in politics, science and invention, medicine, the armed forces, the arts, athletics, and philanthropy.

While this is by no means a complete history, this book attempts to remedy the obscurity to which too many women have been relegated. It presents highlights of Connecticut women’s achievements since 1773, and includes entries from notable moments in women’s history nationally. With this edition, as the PCSW celebrates the 40th anniversary of its founding in 1973, we invite you to explore the many ways women have shaped, and continue to shape, our state.

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United States & Connecticut: 1773 to the Present

1773

Phillis Wheatley, brought as a slave to Massachusetts, publishes 39 poems in London, making her America’s first black poet to publish a book of poetry.

1777

Continental Congress adopts the Stars-and-Stripes, sewn by Betsy Ross of Pennsylvania, as the national flag.

At a time when the Hartford Courant is the oldest and largest newspaper in the country, Hannah Bruce Watson is named its first woman publisher. This role makes her one of the first female publishers in the United States.

Mary Katherine Goddard, while working with her brother as a printer, editor and publisher in Baltimore, Maryland, printed The Declaration of Independence.

1778

As a way of circumventing a regulation that forbade women from fighting as soldiers in the Revolutionary War, Deborah Samson enlists in the 4th Massachusetts Regiment disguised as a man. As a result, she becomes the first female Revolutionary War Soldier.

1789

Martha Washington serves as the first First Lady of the United States between the years 1789-1797. She defines the role of First Ladies for years to come and sets the precedent of their duties with her public role as hostess at formal dinners and public receptions held at the series of presidential mansions in New York and Philadelphia. In 1902, she becomes the first woman to be on a U.S postage stamp.

“If society will not admit of woman’s free development, then society must be remodeled.”

-- Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell

1792

Sarah Pierce founded the Litchfield Female Academy, one of the first major educational institutions for women in the United States. Over its forty-one year history the school enrolled more than 2,000 students, established a national reputation, and developed a highly challenging academic curriculum.

1795

Anne Parrish establishes the House of Industry in Philadelphia. Operated by women, for women, this organization becomes the first charitable organization for women in America by providing jobs for disadvantaged women in the area.

1821

Emma Willard of New York opens the Troy Female Seminary, the first American academic institution to provide women with an education comparable to that of a college-educated man.

1829

Maria Miller W. Stewart of Hartford, Connecticut, addresses a mixed-gender audience, the first American-born woman to do so. During her speech, Stewart is said to have “called on all Black Americans to develop racial pride, unity and self-improvement through the expansion of educational and occupational rights.”
1832
At a time when black men and women are denied virtually all rights afforded to white men, Prudence Crandall is a teacher who cares about equal education for women and, specifically, for black women. Crandall is sent to jail when she establishes a school in Canterbury, Connecticut and attempts to educate young black girls. Her trial captures the attention of many abolitionists.

1833
Oberlin College becomes the first coeducational college in the country. Early graduates include women’s rights leaders Lucy Stone and Antoinette Brown.

1836
Catherine Brewer Benson enters Georgia Female College (now Wesleyan College) and becomes the first woman to receive a college Bachelor’s degree.

1837
Mary Lyon of Massachusetts founds Mount Holyoke College, the first four-year, exclusively female college in the country.

1848
The Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Conference, organized by Lucretia Mott of Massachusetts and Elizabeth Cady Stanton of New York is held. Resolutions calling for women’s equality in education, inheritance, property rights, divorce, and custody rights are passed. Soon afterward, Stanton and Susan B. Anthony of Massachusetts meet, starting a political partnership that would lead the women’s movement into the next century.

1849
Amelia Jenks Bloomer edits and publishes Lily, the first prominent women’s rights newspaper.

Elizabeth Blackwell receives a medical degree from Geneva Medical College (now Hobart) in New York and becomes the first female doctor.

1850
The first national women’s rights convention is held in Worcester, Massachusetts and attracts over 1,000 participants from around the country. Harriet Taylor writes about the organized agitation of American women and urges that their example be followed in England. By the end of the year, a petition calling for the franchise of English women is presented to the House of Lords.

Selected Highlights of Women’s History from The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

Quaker physicians establish the Female (later Women’s) Medical College of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, providing women with the chance to study medicine. Due to public hostility and threats against them, the first students graduate under police guard.

Annie Smith Peck of Rhode Island, who shocked society by wearing trousers as she climbed mountains, is born. She later climbed Mts. Shasta (1888), Popocatépetl and Citlaltépetl (1897). Her climb of Mt. Citlaltépetl, at 18,406 feet, was the highest point in the Western Hemisphere that had been attained by a woman.

“Men their rights and nothing more; women their rights and nothing less.”
—Susan B. Anthony
1851
Sojourner Truth of New York delivers her inspirational “Ain’t I a Woman” speech, stating that “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again!”

Myrtilla Minder opens the first school to train African-American women as teachers in Washington, D.C.

1852
Uncle Tom’s Cabin, written by Hartford resident Harriet Beecher Stowe, is published. This work puts a human face on the atrocities of slavery and becomes a bestseller. Stowe’s friend and colleague, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, calls it “the most successful book printed by a man or a woman.”

1857
Elizabeth Blackwell, Emily Blackwell, and Marie Zakrzeska found the New York Infirmary for Indigent Women and Children, the first hospital staffed by women.

1858
To protest women’s lack of representation in the legal system, Lucy Stone refuses to pay taxes in Orange, New Jersey.

1859
Our Nig, by Harriet Wilson of New Hampshire, is the first novel by an African-American to be published.

Emeline Roberts Jones of New Haven, Connecticut is acknowledged as the first female dentist in America.

1860
Connecticut is one of the first states to enact laws prohibiting abortion.

Isabella Beecher Hooker is an activist who fights for the cause of women’s rights when many people believe that a woman’s place is only in the home. Hooker organizes the first convention in Connecticut to discuss the role of women in government and founds the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association. From 1870 until its passage in 1877, she continues to submit to the Connecticut legislature a bill to grant women the same property rights as men.

“There shall never be another season of silence until women have the same rights men have on this green earth.”
-- Susan B. Anthony

Harriet Tubman makes her 19th trip through the Underground Railroad to bring slaves to freedom in the north. She was born a slave in Maryland and was able to escape, later making it her mission to help others. For her daring and courage, she is known as the “Moses” of the Underground Railroad, helping her family and approximately 300 other slaves find freedom. She dies in 1913.
1861
Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton form The National Woman Suffrage Association, the first independent organization created and completely controlled by women. They dedicate themselves to working for the inclusion of women in the 15th Amendment. To commemorate her achievements, the Susan B. Anthony dollar of 1978 is the first U.S. coin to honor a woman.

Lucy Stone and her husband, Henry Blackwell, found the American Woman Suffrage Association. They work solely on state referendum campaigns and the possible inclusion of women in the 16th Amendment.

Philosopher John Stuart Mill publishes The Subjection of Women, an analytical essay on women's position in society. The work provides a liberal philosophy that helps to spawn the ideology of the woman's rights movement.

1862
Mary Jane Patterson becomes the first African-American woman to graduate from an American college when she receives a Bachelor of Arts degree from Ohio’s Oberlin College.

1863
Mary Ann Shadd Cary of Delaware establishes The Provincial Freeman, a newspaper that informs slaves about the possibilities of living in Canada. She becomes the first African-American newspaperwoman in North America.

1864
Mary Walker from Oswego, New York, an assistant surgeon during the Civil War, is the first woman to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Rebecca Lee Crumpler of Delaware graduates from New England Female Medical College and becomes the first African-American women to earn a medical degree.

1865
Due to the efforts of Josephine Griffing, the Federal Government establishes The National Freedman’s Bureau in Washington, D.C. to aid African-Americans who fled the city after the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation. A Connecticut native, Griffing also played a major role in organizing the Universal Franchise Association of D.C. and served as president of the area’s Women’s Suffrage Association.

1866
The American Equal Rights Association is founded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The organization works toward the universal goal of suffrage and its membership consists of White and Black men and women.

1867
The Cigar Makers Union becomes the first union to accept women and African-American members.

1870
Sarah Winnemucca, a Piute Indian from Nevada who speaks five languages, serves as an interpreter at Camp McDermitt in Nevada. She will later act as a representative of her people before the Secretary of State and President Rutherford B. Hayes. Her work later results in Congressional approval of a land grant in Nevada for Indian use.

Selected Highlights of Women’s History from The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
Arbella Mansfield of Iowa is the first woman admitted to the Bar.

Esther Hobart Morris is named the first female Justice of the Peace in the United States. She serves under this title for eight and a half months, handling twenty-six cases that are considered a credit to her position. Later in her career, she becomes renowned as a distinguished leader in the American women’s suffrage movement.

Maria Sanford, a native of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, becomes the first female professor in the United States.

Ada Kepley of Ohio becomes the first woman to graduate from an accredited law school, Union College of Law in Chicago.

1871
Frances Elizabeth Willard of New York becomes president of Evanston College, making her the first female president of a college.

1872
Congress passes a law that gives female federal employees the same pay for the same work as men. (One hundred and thirty-two years later White women, on average, are paid 78 cents to every dollar White men are paid. African-American Women and Hispanic Women earn 57 cents for every dollar White men earn, and Asian American women earn 68 cents for every dollar White men earn).

Susan B. Anthony and eight other women are arrested for trying to vote for presidential candidate Ulysses S. Grant.

“Man cannot fulfill his destiny alone, he cannot redeem his race unaided... The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, because in the degradation of women the very foundations of life are poisoned at their source.”

--Lucretia Mott

Charlotte E. Ray becomes the first African-American, female lawyer in the United States when she is admitted to the bar of the District of Columbia. That same year, she graduates from Howard University Law School.

Victoria Claflin Woodhull of Ohio is the first female candidate for President of the United States. She champions such diverse causes as women’s suffrage, free love, and the Greenback movement.
1873
Ellen Swallow Richards of Massachusetts, after first receiving a degree from Vassar College in New York, is the first woman to attend the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She later becomes the first female professional chemist in the United States, and is credited as the founder of home economics. She is a pioneer in bringing chemistry into the domestic lives of women.

1874
The Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), an organization dedicated to fighting alcohol and the effects of drunkenness on American society, is founded. The group will later have the largest women’s membership of any organization. Under the leadership of Frances Willard, the group strongly endorses suffrage as a means for women to protect the home and family. This connection makes the liquor industry a powerful opponent to suffrage.

1875
In the case of Miner v. Hoppersatt, the Supreme Court rules that women are not entitled to vote, even though they are considered “persons” under the 14th Amendment.

1876
Julia Smith of Glastonbury, Connecticut is the first woman ever to translate the Bible into other languages. She translates it once from the Latin version, twice from Greek, and twice from Hebrew, printing them all at her own expense.

Sara Spencer becomes the first woman to address a U.S. presidential convention (Republican).

1877
Helen Magill White becomes the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in the United States when she graduates from Boston University with a doctoral degree in Greek.

1879
Belva Lockwood of Connecticut is the first female lawyer admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. After years of her lobbying, Congress eventually passes legislation permitting women to practice in all federal courts.

1881
Clara Barton of Massachusetts, a former schoolteacher and clerk in the U.S. Patent Office, founds the American Red Cross and serves as its President many years.

Spelman College, one of the country’s most prestigious schools for African-American women, is founded by Sophia Packard and Harriet Giles in the basement of the Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia.
1882
Mary Hall of Marlborough, Connecticut becomes the first female lawyer in the state. She continues to practice law in Hartford for more than four decades.

“Woman must not accept; she must challenge. She must not be awed by that which has been built up around her; she must reverence that woman in her which struggles for expression.”

-- Margaret Sanger

1886
Josephine Cochrane of Illinois patented the first automatic dishwasher. She formed her own company, Cochran's Crescent Washing Machine Company, which initially sold the appliance to hotels and restaurants. Cochran's Crescent Washing Machine Company eventually became the Kitchen Aid Company.

1887
Beatrice Fox Auerbach is born. Under her management, the Hartford department store G. Fox & Co. introduces several reforms in the workplace including sick pay, retirement benefits, and the five-day, forty-hour workweek. G. Fox & Co. also becomes the first major retail store in the country to hire African-Americans in significant jobs.

Susanna Medora Salter becomes the first woman elected mayor of an American town in Argonia, Kansas.

1889
Jane Addams, an advocate for the urban poor, founds the Hull House in Chicago, one of the first settlement houses in America. The Hull House provides programs such as day care and adult education and inspires many similar programs across the nation. Adams' lifelong humanitarianism is rewarded with the Nobel Peace Prize in 1931.

Connecticut grants Druggist (Pharmacist) licenses to women.

1890
Dr. Ida Gray, born in Clarksville, Texas, becomes the first female African-American dentist in the United States and for years runs a successful practice in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association merge to become the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

1891
Lydia Kamekeha Liliuokalani, the last ruler of the Hawaiian Islands, becomes Queen. Queen Liliuokalani is an opponent to annexation by the United States and is deposed in 1893.

1892
Basketball is introduced at Smith College, but with modified rules to accommodate women’s “fragile” bodies. The first intercollegiate women’s basketball game is played four years later between Stanford and the University of California at Berkeley.
1895
Lucy Terry Prince, a former slave from Rhode Island, is admired for her abolitionist poetry and having argued for her land rights in front of the Supreme Court. She successfully defends the land claim.

1896
Annie Jump Cannon of Delaware begins her work at the Harvard Observatory. Collaborating with Willamina Fleming, she undertakes the project of recording, classifying, and cataloguing all of the stars down to the ninth magnitude. Cannon devises a system of cataloguing stars by temperature and more than a quarter of a million stars are classified using her system.

The National Federation of Afro-American Women and the National League of Colored Women merge to form the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). The organization’s first goals include job creation, childcare and equal pay. Mary Church Terrell of Tennessee serves as the group’s first president.

“It irritates me to be told how things have always been done. I defy the tyranny of precedent. I cannot afford the luxury of a closed mind. I go for anything that might improve the past.”

--Clara Barton

Born in 1896, Ethel Waters embarks upon a professional arts career unlike any before her. She becomes the first African-American woman to perform in an all-white cast on Broadway, the first African-American woman to perform the leading role in a dramatic play, and one of the first African-American entertainers to perform on radio.

1897
“Gaelic Symphony” becomes the first symphony by a woman to be performed in the United States, and possibly, the world. The composer, H.H.A. Beach of New Hampshire, continues to write over 150 works throughout her life.

1898
Mable Osgood Wright, founder of the Connecticut Audubon Society, establishes the Birdcraft Museum and Sanctuary, the first bird sanctuary in the United States.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman of Hartford, Connecticut publishes Women in Economics, a piece that argues for the socialization of housework through the establishment of communal kitchens and nurseries so that women could work outside the home and become economically independent. She also publishes “The Yellow Wallpaper,” a short story about a woman’s mental anguish and progressive paranoia when subjected to the so-called “rest cure” for female depression.
1899
Hat maker Mary Kies, a Connecticut resident, becomes the first woman to receive a U.S. Patent for her method of weaving straw with silk.

1900
Women are allowed to compete in the Olympics for the first time in Paris, France. Nineteen women compete out of a total of 1,225 athletes. Soon thereafter, in 1920, female swimmers become the first American women to achieve full Olympic status.

1901
Emily Dunning Barringer of New Canaan, Connecticut graduates from Cornell University Medical School. Despite high marks on her qualifying exam for an internship at Gouverneur Hospital of New York, she is denied the position because of her gender. She reaps one year later with the support of political and religious figures and is accepted, becoming the first female physician to receive post-graduate surgical training in hospital service and the first female ambulance surgeon.

1903
Lillian Wald of New York helps to found the Women’s Trade Union League. The organization promotes feminism and trade unionism and involves middle-class and working-class women working together to improve the lives of employed women.

Mary Anderson of Alabama invents the windshield wiper. During a trip to New York City, Anderson noticed that streetcar drivers had to open the windows of their cars when it rained in order to see. As a solution she invented a swinging arm device with a rubber blade that was operated by the driver from within the vehicle via a lever. The windshield wipers became standard equipment on all American cars by 1916.

1907
Born and raised in Hartford and West Hartford, Connecticut, Katharine Hepburn grows up to become one of America’s most accomplished actresses and the first and person to win four Academy Awards for acting. She is later awarded the honor of being the nation’s leading screen legend of the 20th Century by the American Film Institute. She dies in 2003.

1908
In Muller v. Oregon the United States’ Supreme Court declares unconstitutional protective legislation that limits the number of hours a woman can work “in any mechanical establishment, or factory, or laundry.”

1909
The National Trade and Professional School for Women is founded by Nannie Burroughs of Virginia in Washington, D.C. The school’s motto is: “We specialize in the wholly impossible.”
1910

Madame C.J. Walker of Louisiana becomes the first female, self-made millionaire of any race. Her quality beauty products rival those of Helena Rubenstein of Poland and Elizabeth Arden of Canada, then New York.

Blanche Stuart Scott structures her aviation career around many first accomplishments for women. Throughout this career, she becomes the first woman to make a solo flight, the first woman in America to fly a long distance of 60 miles nonstop, and the first female test pilot.

Alice Stebbins Wells becomes the first female police officer in the United States when she joins the LAPD force in Los Angeles, California.

The Woman's Suffrage Party, a political party, forms in New York City.

Louisa Capetillo of Puerto Rico then New York creates Woman, the first Puerto Rican feminist magazine.

The governor of Illinois asks Connecticut native Dr. Alice Hamilton to act as special investigator for a new state commission on industrial disease. Dr. Hamilton's appointment results in a sweeping reform of working conditions and many states pass laws to provide compensation for disabilities caused by toxic fumes, gases, and dusts. She goes on to study industrial diseases in all 48 states.

1911

Harriet Quimby of New York becomes the first woman to qualify for an American aviation pilot’s license.

Katherine Gibbs founds the first secretarial school in Massachusetts. The female students learn not only secretarial skills, but also about business and the liberal arts.

1912

Juliette Gordon Low of Georgia forms the first American unit of Girl Guides. This organization later becomes the Girl Scouts of America.

1913

Katherine Houghton Hepburn, born in 1878, organizes the Hartford Equal Franchise League. For the next 12 years, she devotes herself to the fight for women’s suffrage, attending street rallies and parades, picketing the White House, and debating the right to vote in Carnegie Hall. After the ratification of the 19th Amendment, she begins campaigning for birth control and eventually serves as the legislative chair of the American Birth Control League. She dies in 1951.

1914

Alice Paul of New Jersey and Lucy Burns of New York form the Congressional Union (later known as the National Women's Party). The group organizes parades, large scale demonstrations, and establishes a weekly publication titled The Suffragist. In 1915, they caravan from California to Washington and collect over 500,000 signatures petitioning for women’s suffrage.
The National Federation of Women's Clubs, an organization whose membership included more than 2 million Black and White women, endorses the suffrage movement.

After appearing against the U.S. Attorney, John W. Preston, for the Northern District of California in the White Slavery case, Annette Adams becomes the first female federal prosecutor. Immediately following, Mr. Preston invites her to be his 4th assistant U.S. Attorney.

Mary Phelps Jacobs of New York patents the first brassiere in the United States under the name Caresse Crosby. Two silk handkerchiefs were tied together to make the brassiere, with ribbons for straps.

Representative Heflin of Alabama and Senator Sheppard of Texas introduce a joint resolution, at the request of a Miss Anna Jarvis, naming the second Sunday in May as Mother’s Day. The resolution passes in both Houses. In President Wilson’s proclamation that follows, he orders that the flag be displayed on all government buildings in the United States and foreign possessions.

Mary Jobe Akeley purchases a 45-acre tract of land in Mystic, Conn., and establishes Camp Mystic for girls, a place where young women would “develop their bodies and minds.” The camp operated for 14 years, until it was closed in 1930, a casualty of the Great Depression.

1916
Margaret Sanger of New York and her sister, Ethel Byrne, open the first birth control clinic in the United States. The clinic stays open only 10 days before it is shut down and both women are tried and imprisoned. Sanger continues her fight and goes on to found the American Birth Control League, which later becomes Planned Parenthood. Sanger is considered by many to be the founder of the Birth Control Movement.

Jeannette Rankin of Montana becomes the first woman elected to the U.S. Congress. A committed pacifist, Rankin is the only member of Congress to vote against U.S. entry into both World Wars.

1917
Sharpshooter and former star of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show, Annie Oakley of Ohio tours World War I Army camps, giving lessons to the soldiers.

Kate Gleason becomes president of the First National Bank of East Rochester, New York making her the first female bank president in U.S. history.

Emma Goldman of Lithuania, then New York serves 15 days in prison for distributing information on contraception.

Loretta Walsh becomes the first Yeoman in the United States Navy.

Georgia O’Keeffe, a native of Wisconsin, launches her first art exhibition in New York. She is one of America’s most celebrated female artists, renowned for her images of nature inspired by her love of the New Mexico landscape. Having been influenced by the strong women in her family and encouraged to succeed in her career as an artist, she is viewed by many as a symbol of a creative, independent woman who refuses to compromise her work.

The National Women’s Party begins picketing the White House for suffrage on July 14.
1918
Women are deemed a necessity in the workforce to replace the male labor that was lost due to fighting World War I overseas. Women take on jobs in heavy industry, mining, chemical manufacturing, and automobile and railway plants. In addition, they run streetcars, conduct trains, and do almost everything that men did before they were called to war. At this time, approximately 1,400,000 women are in the paid labor force, most of whom will be forced out and back into domestic roles at the war’s end.

1919
Therese Bonney, a war photographer from New York during World War II, founds the first American illustrated press service in Paris.

Opha M. Johnson is the first female to enlist in the United States Marine Corps Reserves.

Dr. Alice Hamilton of New York becomes the first female professor at Harvard Medical School. She teaches as a Professor of Industrial Medicine and conducts research on toxic substances in the workplace.

1920
On August 26, the Nineteenth Amendment is ratified and women are granted suffrage under the United States Constitution.

Congress establishes The Women’s Bureau as part of the Department of Labor. Its purpose is to set standards and policies that promote the welfare of wage-earning women, improve their working conditions, increase their efficiency, and advance their opportunities for profitable employment.

The American Civil Liberties Union is formed. Its social reformers include: Jane Addams, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn of New York, and Helen Keller of Alabama.

“Perhaps some day men will raise a tablet reading in letters of gold: ‘All honor to women, the first disenfranchised class in history who unaided by any political party, won enfranchisement by its own effort alone, and achieved the victory without the shedding of a drop of human blood. All honor to the women of the world!’”

--Elizabeth Cady Stanton

1921
Lillian Gilbreth, an engineer from California, becomes an honorary member of the previously all-male Society of Industrial Engineers.

Edith Wharton, a native of New York, becomes the first woman to win a Pulitzer Prize for her novel The Age of Innocence. She is known for her witty and beautiful accounts of American upper class society. Along with her work in the literary world, Wharton is also active in organizing efforts for rescuing refugees in World War I.
1922
Georgia Senator Thomas E. Watson dies in office and 87-year-old Rebecca Latimer Felton is appointed to fill the vacant seat. Felton becomes the first female U.S. senator but serves just two days before relinquishing her seat to Senator Walter F. George in a his special election.

1923
The Connecticut chapter of Planned Parenthood is formed.

At the 75th anniversary celebration of the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention, Alice Paul introduces the “Lucretia Mott Amendment.” Believing that this Equal Rights Amendment was necessary for freedom from legal sex discrimination, Paul phrases the legislation as “Men and women shall have equal rights throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction.” The amendment is introduced in every session of Congress until it finally passes in 1972.

1924
Ora Washington of Pennsylvania becomes the first African-American woman to win the American Tennis Association singles title.

Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming and Miriam Ferguson (Texas) become the first and second female governors. Both replace their husbands.

1925
Maria Tallchief, regarded by many as the greatest American-born ballerina of all-time, is born on the Osage Reservation in Oklahoma.

Margaret Mead of Pennsylvania sets out for the American Samoa where she begins her historic studies in anthropology. Mead is the first anthropologist to look at human development in a cross-cultural perspective, stressing the importance of learning from the diversity of the human race. She publishes over 40 works and is the president of several major scientific associations. She receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom following her death in 1978.

Vivien Kellems begins manufacturing cable grips, used for pulling electrical cable cars through underground conduits. The Kellems Company is established in Westport, Connecticut and its business grows exponentially due to government demands during World War I.

1926
Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt of Hartford, Connecticut dies. A civic leader, philanthropist, and one of the first women in America to establish a major art collection and gallery of her own, Colt bequeaths her collection to the Wadsworth Atheneum upon her death.

Violette Neatly Anderson of Illinois is the first African-American woman to practice law in the Supreme Court.

American swimmer Gertrude Ederle of New York becomes the first female to swim across the English Channel, breaking the previous record by more than two hours. Ederle was greeted in America with a ticker tape parade, attended by more than two million people.
1927
Mary Goodrich Jenson, a Hartford native and long-time Wethersfield resident, becomes the first woman in Connecticut to earn a pilot’s license.

P.E.O. Sisterhood takes ownership of Cottey College in Nevada, Missouri, making it the only nonsectarian college owned and supported by women.

1928
Zora Neale Hurston of Florida becomes the first known African-American to graduate from Barnard College in New York City. She goes on to become the foremother of a generation of African-American women writers. Unlike many of her male contemporaries, Hurston refuses to focus her writing on the oppression of the black people, instead following the tradition in which she was raised and celebrating the richness of her culture.

1929
Amelia Earhart of Kansas founds the Ninety-Nines (the number of charter members), an international organization of female pilots. Three years later, Earhart becomes the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean, adding this accomplishment to her many records for speed and altitude.

Virginia Woolf of England publishes A Room of One’s Own, an expansion of two lectures presented at Cambridge. She examines the societal prejudices against women’s education, writing, and freedom. With over 500 publications Woolf is one of the most prominent female writers of all time, and her radical ideas still resonate today.

1930
Dr. Martha Wollstein of New York becomes the first female member of the American Pediatric Society.

1931
The Association of Southern Women Against Lynching is founded by Jessie Daniel Ames of Texas.

1932
Babe Didrikson Zaharias of Texas, who is often considered the best female athlete in history, wins three gold medals in track and field events at the Los Angeles Olympics. Also an accomplished golfer, Didrikson Zaharias won 31 LPGA titles, including two U.S. Open Championships in her career.

Hattie Wyatt Caraway of Arkansas becomes the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate. While in office, she also becomes the first woman to chair a committee, conduct Senate hearings, and preside over Senate sessions.
President Herbert Hoover appoints Mary Woolley as a delegate to the Conference on Reduction and Limitation of Armaments in Geneva. This appointment makes her the first woman to represent American interests at an important diplomatic conference.

“I was taught that the way of progress is neither swift nor easy.” --Marie Curie

1933
Mary McLeod Bethune of South Carolina serves under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the director of the Division of Negro Affairs of the National Youth Administration and assists the Secretary of War in selecting officer candidates for the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps during WWII. She is the only African-American, female advisor during the 1930s.

Nellie Tayloe Ross, former governor of Wyoming, becomes the first female director of the U.S. Mint.

Rachel Taylor Milton founded the Urban League of Hartford and later receives the B'nai Brith's “Woman of the Year” award.

Ruth Bran Owen becomes the first female foreign diplomat for the United States.

Frances Perkins of Massachusetts becomes U.S. Secretary of Labor, making her the first female Cabinet member in the United States. During her 12-year tenure, she establishes the Labor Standards Bureau, strengthens state labor law enforcement, and is the chief architect of the Social Security Act. The Department of Labor Headquarters is named after her.

1934
Lettie Pate Whitehead becomes the first American woman to serve as a director of a major corporation when she is hired by the Coca-Cola Co.

1935
Hilda Crosby Standish, as the medical director of Connecticut's first birth control clinic in 1935, establishes herself as a pioneer in the field of sex education and family planning. Her long and distinguished career spanned several decades, featuring teaching appointments, trusteeships and lecturing for Planned Parenthood and other organizations.

1937
Anne O’Hare McCormick of England then New York is the first woman to receive a Pulitzer Prize in Journalism for her work as a foreign correspondent.

Professor Jean Broadhurst at Columbia University identifies the measles virus bodies. Until her discovery, doctors could only diagnose the virus when the rash appeared.

1938
Democrat Crystal Bird Fause of Pennsylvania is the first African-American woman to be elected to the House of Representatives.

A women's tennis star from California, Helen Wills Moody captures the last of her 19 Grand Slam singles titles, including eight Wimbledons, seven U.S. Opens and four French Open crowns.
The Walsh-Healy Act creates a federal minimum wage. This wage does not apply to all workers—it generally excludes women and racial minorities.

Julia de Burgos publishes her first collection of poems. The Puerto Rican poet is widely admired as the greatest female poet of the island. Her writing continues to speak to many for her ideas on nationalism and social justice, as well as the way she calls on women to support liberation of their homeland.

Ella Fitzgerald of Virginia records her first hit song. She is one of the most famed and beloved musicians of all time, singing jazz alongside her many fellow male musicians. She is also admired for her work fighting for equal pay for black performers. She is the first woman to receive the Whitney M. Young, Jr. Award of the Los Angeles Urban League, and is the first woman and pop singer to receive the Lincoln Center Medallion.

1939
The Birth Control Federation of America begins its abominable “Negro Project,” designed to control the population of people deemed less fit to raise children, rather than to provide women of color with a means to gain more control over their own reproductive rights.

Jane Bolin of New York is appointed as a judge of the Domestic Relations Court by New York City Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia. This makes her the first female, African-American judge in the United States.

Sara B. Crawford, a resident of Westport, Connecticut, is elected the first female Secretary of the State in Connecticut.

Hattie McDaniel becomes the first African-American to win an Academy Award for best supporting actress in “Gone with the Wind.”

1940
Dorothy Vredenburgh Bush of Washington, D.C. becomes the first female secretary of the Democratic National Committee. She goes on to oversee nine national conventions.

Bernie M. McPherson wins a National Award for developing a most cost-effective welding process for weapons sites. She later becomes the first female member of the American Welding Society.

1941
Chase Going Woodhouse of Canada becomes the first Democratic woman to serve as Secretary of the State in Connecticut. Three years later, she is elected to represent Connecticut’s Second District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Annie G. Fox, who died in the attack on Pearl Harbor, becomes the first woman to receive the Purple Heart.

1942
Kathryn Betts Haggerty becomes the first non-military policewoman in Connecticut.
Clare Booth Luce of New York wins a seat in the United States House of Representatives and becomes Connecticut’s first female Congresswoman. Luce goes on to serve two terms in the House and in 1953 is appointed Ambassador to Italy by President Dwight D. Eisenhower. With this appointment, Luce becomes first female ambassador to a major country.

Upon being hired to work for the Special Services Department in Hartford, Evelyn Jennie Briggs becomes one of the first two state policewomen appointed in Connecticut. In 1946, she is elected President of the Connecticut Policewomen’s Association.

Susanne K. Langer, a philosopher and pioneer in the field of aesthetics from New York, publishes her book, *Philosophy in a New Key: A Study in the Symbolism of Reason, Rite, and Art*. The book helps to solidify her position as a leading figure in the philosophy of art.

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you look fear in the face. You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” -- Eleanor Roosevelt

1943

Because of World War II and the draft, many minor league baseball teams are forced to disband. In response, P.K. Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, founds the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League. The Racine Bells win the first World Championship of Women's Professional Baseball.

Lt. Edith Greenwood receives The Soldiers Medal for her heroism at a military hospital in Yuma, Arizona during World War II. She is the first woman to earn the honor.

Lt. Elsie S. Ott is awarded with the Air Medal for her duties as an air evacuation nurse. She is the first female to receive the award.

1945

The Equal Pay for Equal Work bill is introduced into Congress. It passed in 1963. Women industrial workers who replaced the men who left to fight overseas during World War II begin losing their jobs in large numbers to returning servicemen.

As the winner of a Fine Arts Commission contest, Dr. Selma Burke from North Carolina is awarded the task of creating a portrait for the Roosevelt dime. Because the coin is inscribed only with the engraver’s initials, Burke is never properly credited for the portrait.

Eleanor Roosevelt from New York is named as a U.S.delegate to the United Nations. She eventually chairs the commission that is responsible for drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. She is also a driving force behind the creation of the national Permanent Commission on the Status of Women and in 1961 is appointed Commission chair by President John F. Kennedy. She died in November, 1962.
1946
Dorothy Shaver from Arkansas is the first woman to assume the presidency of a major department store, Lord and Taylor.

The United Nations establishes the Commission on the Status of Women.

Emily Green Balch receives the honor of being the first woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. While awarding her the prize, the chairman of the Nobel Committee states, “She has shown that the reality we seek must be won through hard work in the world in which we live, but she has shown us more than this; that one does not become exhausted and that defeat gives new courage for the struggle to those who have within them the holy fire.”

Conneticut native Ann Petry’s book The Street is published. It quickly becomes the first book by an African-American woman to sell over one million copies.

1947

Margaret Fogarty Rudkin, from Fairfield, Connecticut and founder of Pepperidge Farms, opens the company’s first modern bakery. Pepperidge Farms becomes affiliated with Campbell’s Soup Company in 1968 and sales soar into the millions.

Gerty Radnitz Cori wins the Nobel Prize in Science for dissolving the enzymes that convert glycogen into sugar and then back again to glycogen. This work that brought researchers closer to understanding diabetes enabled her to become the first American woman to receive this honor.

Explorer and cartographer Barbara Washburn of Massachusetts becomes the first woman to climb Mount McKinley.

1948
After four terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine becomes the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate in her own right. In 1964, she becomes the first woman to run for U.S. presidency in the primaries of a major political party (Republican). She comes in second to Barry Goldwater.

1949
Georgia Nesse Clark becomes the first woman treasurer of the United States.

Eugenie M. Anderson becomes the first woman to serve as a United States Ambassador when she is appointed envoy to Denmark by President Truman.

1950
The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) is established. It remains the longest running women’s sports association in the world, celebrating its 50th anniversary in 2000.

1951
Lillian Vernon of Germany and then New York becomes the first woman to found a company that is traded on a stock exchange.
Lucille Ball of New York becomes the star of the television show “I Love Lucy” and one of the leading female comedians and entertainers in history. She later becomes the first woman to head her own production studio, Desilu Studios. She dies on April 26, 1989.

1952
Andrea Mead Lawrence of Vermont is the first American, male or female, to win two gold medals in skiing at the Olympics.

Virginia Apgar creates and publishes the first standardized method for evaluating a newborn’s transition to life outside the womb. This method, known as the Apgar score, becomes a vast advancement in the knowledge of childbirth and benefits women everywhere.

1953
Jacqueline Cochrane, a native of Florida, becomes the first woman to break the sound barrier. She is also the first woman to take off and land on an aircraft carrier and the only living woman depicted in the American Aviation Hall of Fame. She dies in 1980.

After a successful fight against polio, Tenley Albright becomes the first American to win the World Figure Skating Championship.

1955
Singer Marian Anderson of Pennsylvania debuts at the Metropolitan Opera, becoming the first black woman in the company. She is later named a delegate to the United Nations and receives the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Medal of Honor from President Carter. She dies on April 8, 1993.

1957
Anne W. Wheaton of New York serves under Eisenhower as the first presidential spokeswoman until 1961.


1958
Ethel Percy Andrus of California founds the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), an organization that addresses the needs of mature Americans and lobbies government officials on their behalf.
“Because of their age-long training in human relations -- for that is what feminine intuition really is -- women have a special contribution to make in any group enterprise.”

-- Margaret Mead

1959
Lorraine Hansberry of Illinois wins the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for “A Raisin in the Sun.” This is the first play to appear on Broadway that was written by an African-American woman.

Ann Dervartanian, of Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), became the first woman to attain E-9, the highest ranked position within the military.

1960
The Food and Drug Administration approves the birth control pill for sale in the U.S. This safe and convenient form of birth control plays a major role in the “sexual revolution.”

Wilma Rudolph of Tennessee becomes the first African-American woman to receive three gold medals in the Olympics. Her numerous accomplishments help to break down racial and gender barriers in previously all-male track and field events. She dies in 1994.

Margaret Connors Driscoll of Bridgeport is appointed as the first female chief judge of the Connecticut Juvenile Court. She dies at the age of 85 in 2000.

NASA’s first female astronauts begin training; however, the program is cancelled in 1962 after a Congressional subcommittee hearing, despite commendable performance by the women.

1961
To challenge Connecticut’s ban on birth control, Estelle Griswold of Hartford, Connecticut and Dr. C. Lee Buxton open a birth control center to dispense contraceptives. Their arrest and conviction lead to the 1965 Supreme Court decision of Griswold v. Connecticut, which overturns Connecticut’s law and leads to the definition of a constitutional right to privacy. She dies on August 13, 1981.

Esther Peterson, the director of the Women’s Bureau of the Dept. of Labor, considers it to be the government’s responsibility to take an active role in addressing discrimination against women. With her encouragement, President Kennedy convened a Commission on the Status of Women. The report issued by that commission in 1963 documented discrimination against women in virtually every area of American life. State and local governments quickly followed suit and established their own commissions for women, to research conditions and recommend changes that could be initiated.

1962
Rachel Carson of Pennsylvania publishes The Silent Spring, a book that becomes the foundation of the modern environmental movement and leads to the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency. She dies on April 14, 1964.
1963
Congress passes the Federal Equal Pay Act, promoting equal pay for equal work and taking the first step against sex discrimination.

Betty Friedan of Illinois publishes *The Feminine Mystique*. Considered a catalyst for the women’s movement and one of the most influential American books in the 20th century, *The Feminine Mystique* discusses the emptiness and frustration many women feel in their traditional roles as housewives and mothers. In 1966 she founds The National Organization for Women (NOW). She died on February 4, 2006.

In spite of racial harassment, Fannie Lou Hamer, the daughter of a sharecropper in rural Mississippi, passes her voter registration test. She later leads a demonstration to gain access for African-Americans to the Democratic National Convention. She dies on March 14, 1977.

Katherine Graham of Washington, D.C. steps in as publisher of the Washington Post and successfully runs the paper for 10 years. She later wins a Pulitzer Prize for her autobiography *Personal History*. She dies on July 17, 2001.

Annie Dodge Wauneka of Arizona becomes the first American Indian to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She is the first woman delegate elected to the Navajo tribal council, and is a leader in the practice of blending modern medicine and traditional healing to dramatically reduce death rates.

1964
Title VII of the United States’ Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, or national origin. This act also establishes the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. In its first five years of existence, the committee receives 50,000 sex discrimination complaints.

Volleyball is introduced as the first Olympic team sport for women.

Rita Moreno of New York, a native of Humacao, Puerto Rico, makes her acting debut in the film *West Side Story*. Moreno later becomes the first woman to win all four of the biggest awards in show business: an Oscar (film), a Tony (Broadway theater), an Emmy (television), and a Grammy (recording).

1965
Patsy Mink of Hawaii is the first Japanese-American woman to be elected to Congress.

Patricia Roberts Harris of Illinois is appointed ambassador to Luxembourg and becomes the first female, African-American ambassador. She dies in 1985.
1966
Barbara Jordan of Texas becomes the first woman ever elected to the Texas Senate. Jordan remains in the Senate until 1972, when she becomes a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. She later receives national recognition during the House Judiciary Committee’s hearings on the impeachment of President Richard Nixon.

Constance Baker Motley of New Haven, Connecticut is appointed U.S. District Judge, Southern District of New York. This makes her the first female, African-American, federal judge. She died in 2005.

1967
Ann Uccello is elected mayor of Hartford, Connecticut, becoming the first female mayor of a capitol city in the United States. She later goes to Washington where she serves as the Director of the Office of Consumer Affairs.

Disguising herself in a baseball cap and applying under the name “K. Switzer,” Katherine Switzer of Virginia becomes the first woman to run the Boston Marathon.

Muriel Siebert of Ohio becomes the first woman to own a seat on the New York Stock Exchange.

1968
Barbara Watson of New York becomes the first woman to head a State Department Bureau when she is named assistant secretary in the State Department Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs.

Shirley Chisholm of New York becomes the first black woman elected to the U.S. Congress. In 1972, she is a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination and wins 152 delegates before withdrawing from the race. Chisholm is also credited with founding the National Women’s Political Caucus.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission rules that sex-segregated help wanted advertisements in newspapers are illegal. The Supreme Court upholds this ruling in 1973, and it becomes easier for women to apply for previously male-exclusive jobs.

1969
In the Bowe v. Colgate-Palmolive ruling, the Supreme Court finds that women meeting the physical necessary requirements can work in formerly male-dominated jobs.

Esther Rome of Norwich, Connecticut founds the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective. This group focuses on the key health issues related to women from a feminist perspective. The next year, she becomes the editor of Our Bodies, Ourselves. Now in its fifth edition, this book is empowering millions of women to take charge and educate themselves about their health and sexuality.

A native of Arizona, Joan Ganz Cooney’s show Sesame Street debuts. A product of her research on the use of television for preschool education, Sesame Street is still popular today.

“Perhaps some day men will raise a tablet reading in letters of gold: ‘All honor to women, the first disenfranchised class in history who unaided by any political party, won enfranchisement by its own effort alone, and achieved the victory without the shedding of a drop of human blood. All honor to the women of the world!’” —Elizabeth Cady Stanton
1970
Elizabeth P. Hoisington and Anna Mae Hays of Pennsylvania are promoted to the rank of brigadier general, making them first female generals in U.S. history.

San Diego University establishes the first Women’s Studies program in the country.

Diane Crump, who was born in Milford, Connecticut, becomes the first female jockey to race in the Kentucky Derby.

On the 50th anniversary of women’s suffrage, NOW organizes its first Women’s Strike for Equality and Justice. Fifty thousand people march in mass demonstrations in New York.

Oceanographer, conservationist, and entrepreneur Dr. Sylvia Earle of New Jersey leads the first team of women aquanauts on a two-week exploration of the ocean floor. In 1979, she walks untethered on the sea floor at a depth lower than any other person before or since.

1971
Cheryl Frank and Jacqueline Flenner open the nation’s first battered women’s shelter in Urbana, Illinois.

1972
Reed v. Reed, the first sex discrimination suit to reach the Supreme Court, is decided in favor of the woman.

Billie Jean King of California a professional tennis player, becomes the first female athlete to win more than $100,000 in a single season. She wins an additional $100,000 in 1973 when she defeats Bobby Riggs in a singles match billed as the “Battle of the Sexes.”

The Equal Rights Amendment is passed by the Senate and recommended to the states for ratification. Originally drafted by Alice Paul, it reads that, “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on the account of sex.”

Title IX of the Education Amendments Act of 1972 is passed. According to the legislation, “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded in any way from practicing in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal assistance.”

Gloria Steinem of Ohio creates Ms. Magazine, the first magazine owned, edited, and published by women, for women.

Susan Lynn Roley and Joanne E. Pierce become the first female FBI agents.

The first emergency rape crisis hotline opens in Washington, D.C. By 1976, 400 independent rape crisis centers are operating nationwide, offering counseling, self-defense classes, and support groups.

Gloria Steinem

Chien-Shiung Wu of China, then California, is appointed to an endowed professorship as the Pupin Professor of Physics at Columbia University. A pioneering physicist, she is the first woman to win the prestigious Research Corporation Award, the Comstock Prize from the National Academy of Sciences, and the first living scientist to have an asteroid named after her.

Joanne Kulawiz of Orange, Connecticut becomes the first woman appointed to trial bench in Connecticut. In 1998, Governor John G. Rowland nominates her to the Appellate Court. She dies in April 1999.

Billie Jean King

Gloria Steinem

Chien-Shiung Wu

23
1973
Under Sec. 46a-1 of the Connecticut General Statutes, The General Assembly of Connecticut establishes the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) to “study all matters concerning women.” It becomes the lead umbrella agency in the state for women’s health and safety, economic security, and the elimination of gender discrimination.

The Connecticut Women’s Education and Legal Fund (CWEALF) is founded.

The Prudence Crandall Center opens in New Britain. It is the first women’s shelter in Connecticut.

The U.S. military is integrated when the women-only branches are eliminated.

1974
Little League Baseball, Inc. decides that girls are now eligible to compete in all of its 9,100 leagues.

The Coalition for Labor Union Women is founded.

The Women’s Educational Equity Act, drafted by Arlene Horowitz and introduced by Rep. Patsy Mink (D-HI), funds the development of nonsexist teaching materials and model programs that encourage full educational opportunities for girls and women.

Adrianne Baughns-Wallace of New York becomes the first female television broadcaster in Connecticut as well as the first African-American woman broadcaster in New England. In 2000, she is inducted into the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame. The Hartford Courant calls her “the most watched woman in Connecticut.”

1975
Ella Grasso of Connecticut becomes the first woman in U.S. history to be elected governor in her own right. Considered a liberal Democrat always looking for ways to economize, she once returns a $7,000 raise she cannot legally refuse to the state treasury. Grasso endears herself to her constituents during the 1978 blizzard when she stays at the State Armory around the clock, directing emergency operations and making frequent television appearances. She dies in 1981.
Edythe J. Gaines of North Carolina becomes superintendent of the Hartford school system, making her the first African-American and one of the first two women to become the superintendent of a Connecticut school.

Elizabeth Ann Seton of New York is canonized and becomes the first American-born saint of the Roman Catholic Church.

New federal rules requiring equal treatment of males and females in admissions, financial aid, classrooms, dress codes, and auxiliary activities are put into effect.

“For women there are, undoubtedly, great difficulties in the path, but so much more to overcome. First, no woman should say, ‘I am but a woman!’ But a woman! What more can you ask to be?” -- Maria Mitchell

1976

The United Nation’s “Decade of Women” begins.


Barbara Walters of Massachusetts becomes the first female co-anchor of the evening news and at the time, is the highest-paid news broadcaster. Walters would later help shape prime-time magazine shows and appear on ABC’s 20/20.

Sarah Caldwell of Missouri becomes the first female to ever conduct at the Metropolitan Opera House.

Helen M. Frankenthaler of Darien, a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the National Council for the Arts, and the National Academy of Design as well as an honorary member of The Royal Scottish Academy, as inducted into the Connecticut Women’s Hall of Fame.

1977

Hanna Holborn Gray is named president of the University of Chicago. Not only does this appointment make her the first woman to serve as president of this university, it also makes her the first woman chief executive of any major coeducational university in the country.

1978

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act is passed, preventing employers from firing or denying a woman a job because she is pregnant or forcing her to take a pregnancy leave if she is willing and able to work.

Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon wins the National Book Critics Circle Award, making her the first African-American woman to win the honor.

Connecticut police agree to arrest husbands for spousal abuse even if the wife does not bring charges.

Competing on the uneven bars, Marcia Frederick of Milford, Connecticut becomes the first American woman to win a gold medal in the World Gymnastics championships in Strasbourg, France.

Ellen Bree Burns is nominated by Jimmy Carter and confirmed by the Senate to become the first woman appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court. Later, she serves as the first female chief judge from 1988-1992 and assumes senior status on September 1, 1992.
Ellen Ash Peters of Germany, then West Hartford, is the first woman to be named a justice of the Connecticut Supreme Court. She is named Chief Justice six years later.

Geraldine Ferraro of New York is elected to Congress. She spearheads efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment and sponsors the Women's Economic Equity Act of 1984. Later that year, she becomes the first female vice-presidential candidate for a major party (Democratic).

1980

Election polls bring light to the “Gender Gap.” For the first time, women report different political priorities than men.


Paula D. Hughes of Greenwich, Connecticut is the first woman to be appointed to one of the seven seats on the U.S. Postal Service Board of Governors. She is known as the Postal Governess.

Edna Noemi Negron Rosario of Hartford, Connecticut establishes the first family resource center and school-based health clinic in the nation.

Casa de Esperanza opens a shelter for battered Latinas in the Twin Cities in Minnesota.

President Carter issues the first Presidential Proclamation asking the United States to recognize the importance of women’s contributions. Seven years later Congress and the President declare March as National Women’s History Month.

1981

Sandra Day O’Connor of Arizona, who early in her career was not hired by law firms because of her gender, becomes the first woman to be named to the U.S. Supreme Court. She also serves as assistant Attorney General, an Arizona State Senator, and a judge on both the district and state levels before being appointed to the highest court in the nation.

After serving as Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy adviser in his 1980 campaign, Jeane Kirkpatrick is nominated as the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. She becomes the first woman to hold this position and is famous for her “Kirkpatrick Doctrine,” which advocates U.S. support of anticommunist governments around the world.

1982

The deadline for the ERA ratification expires. Only 35 of the necessary 38 states vote to ratify it; therefore it does not become an amendment.

Maya Lin, a Chinese-American woman from Ohio studying architecture at Yale University, enters and wins a contest designing the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. The structure, once deemed highly controversial, continues to be admired in Washington, D.C.

At the age of nineteen, Julie Krone is the first woman jockey to win a major racing title. In 2000, she is the first female jockey to be inducted into the National Museum of Racing and Hall of Fame.
1983

Dr. Sally K. Ride of Encino, California is America’s first female astronaut. She spends six days in space during her first flight and her second mission lasts 197 hours. Later she becomes part of the Presidential Commission that investigates the Challenger explosion.

Antoinette L. Dupont becomes the first woman appointed to the Connecticut Appellate Court and is named Chief Judge a year later.

At the young age of twelve, after writing a letter to the former Soviet Premier Yuri Andropov, Samantha Smith from Maine is invited to Moscow to discuss her concerns regarding nuclear weapons. She is known as “America’s Youngest Ambassador.” Tragically, she dies just two years later in a plane crash.

1984

Jody Cohen from New Jersey and now West Hartford comes to Connecticut to serve as Associate Rabbi and Educator to Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford. While there, Cohen establishes the first synagogue-run day care center in North America.

Sandra Cisneros of Illinois publishes her best-known work, *The House on Mango Street*. Well known for her short story collections that depict many of her childhood experiences, the book is about her Mexican father and Chicana mother and examines the issues of poverty, cultural suppression, self-identity, and gender roles.


Oprah Winfrey of Mississippi is the host of *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which becomes the number one talk show in the nation.

1985

Wilma Mankiller becomes the first female chief of the Oklahoma Cherokee Indian Nation. She is responsible for 139,000 people and a $69 million budget.

Penny Harrington becomes the first woman police chief of a major U.S. city in Portland, Oregon.

Tracy Thurman of Connecticut is the first woman to win a civil suit as a battered wife. This sets the stage for major reform of state statutes regarding domestic violence.

Joan Glazer Margolis is the first woman appointed United States Magistrate Judge for the District of Connecticut.

Denise L. Matthews of Old Saybrook, Connecticut becomes the first woman to graduate at the head of her class at a military academy. She graduates from the Coast Guard Academy in New London and, given her pick of assignments, elects to serve on a buoy tender in Honolulu.

Libby Riddles of Wisconsin becomes the first woman to win the 1,135-mile Iditarod.

Betty C. Tianti of Connecticut is the first female president of a state AFL-CIO federation. In 1988, she becomes Connecticut’s first female Commissioner of Labor.

Nancy Melendez of Connecticut becomes the first Latina elected to the Hartford City Council, winning 22.66% of the Democratic vote.
1986

National Women in Sports Day is created by a joint congressional resolution to fight gender discrimination in sports.

The United States’ Supreme Court rules that sexual harassment violates federal law and is a form of illegal job discrimination.

New York’s Amy Eilberg becomes the first woman ordained rabbi by the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly.

Ann Bancroft of Minnesota, a teacher, athlete, and respected polar explorer, is the first woman to travel across the ice to the North Pole. In 1992, Bancroft continues her record-breaking adventures by leading the first American women’s team east to west across Greenland on skis.

1987

The U.S. Census Bureau reports that the average woman earned only 64% of the median male income in 1984.

Katherine Y. Hutchinson is the first woman appointed Connecticut Family Support Magistrate.

Carrie Saxon Perry of Hartford is elected mayor of Hartford, Connecticut and becomes first African-American woman to be elected mayor of a New England city.

Johnnetta Cole becomes the first African-American woman to serve as President of Spelman College in Atlanta. During Cole’s presidency, Money magazine lists Spelman as the number one historically Black college, the number one women’s college and the number seven college of any kind in the United States.

Lt. Regina Rush-Kittle becomes the first African-American woman to be hired by the Middletown Police Department and the first African-American woman to reach the rank of sergeant and lieutenant in the Connecticut State Police.

Suzanne Cutler of Colchester, Connecticut is the first woman in the nation to be named executive vice president of the Federal Reserve Bank.

Regina Rush-Kittle (third from left) with fellow State Troopers. (PCSW’s Trescia Younger is in back row, center.)
1988
Sarah Fulcher of North Carolina finishes the world’s longest continuous solo run. Certified by the Guinness Book of World Records, she ran 11,134 miles around the perimeter of the United States, averaging a marathon every day for 14 months.

Maria Sanchez, a native of Puerto Rico and a resident of Hartford, becomes the first Latina elected to the Connecticut State Legislature.

Susan Estrich becomes the first woman to run a national presidential campaign when she heads the campaign for Democrat Michael Dukakis. She later becomes the first female president of the Harvard Law Review and the youngest woman to be tenured at Harvard Law School.

Vivian Anderson Castleberry founds Peacemakers, Incorporated where she serves as the chairwoman of Peacemakers’ First International Women’s Peace Conference. The conference is attended by over 2000 women from 57 countries.

Juanita Kidd Stout serves as the associate Justice of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania until 1989. She is the first African-American woman elected to any judgeship in the United States and the first to serve on the Supreme Court of any state.

1989
During the invasion of Panama in 1989, Captain Linda Bray becomes the first female to lead U.S. troops in battle. In this battle, she commands the 988th Military Police Company and orders her assault team to fire on soldiers of the Panamanian Defense Forces who refuse to surrender their positions at a dog kennel. Although she anticipated a routine operation, the battle turns into a three hour, infantry-style fire fight.

Former state senator Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is elected to Florida’s 18th District in a special election. She is the first Hispanic woman and Cuban-American elected to congress.

1990
More women than ever before are in combat support roles. Nearly 10% of the armed forces in the Middle East are women.

Captain Marsha Evans of Illinois becomes the first woman to command a Naval Station. In 1998 she becomes National Executive Officer of the Girl Scouts of the United States of America. In 2002 she becomes President and CEO of the American Red Cross.

Commander Rosemary Mariner is the first woman to assume command of an aviation squadron.

Ellen Ochoa becomes the first Latina astronaut.

Commander Darlene Iskra of California becomes the first woman to command a U.S. Navy Ship - the U.S.S. Opportune.

Antonia Novello of Puerto Rico is the first woman and the first Hispanic to become the Surgeon General of the United States. She was among the first public figures to recognize the need to focus on women with AIDS and on neonatal transmission of HIV.
1991

**Anita Hill** of Oklahoma brings charges of sexual harassment against Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas, introducing sexual harassment to the public consciousness.

Master Chemist **Gertrude Belle Elion** becomes the first woman inducted into the National Inventors Hall of Fame. Her name appears on 45 patents. Her research accomplishments include six different drugs used to combat several serious medical conditions including leukemia, organ transplants, viral herpes and AIDS.

**Barbara Kennelly** of Hartford is appointed as one of the three Chief Deputy Majority Whips in the U.S. House of Representatives, making her the highest-ranking woman in the House. Kennelly is the first woman in history to serve as Deputy Majority Whip and the first to serve on the House Intelligence Committee. She serves six years on the House Intelligence Committee and is the first woman to chair one of its subcommittees. In 1995, Rep. Kennelly becomes the Vice Chair of the Democratic Caucus.

1992

**The American Medical Association** issues guidelines to physicians recommending that they ask female patients if they have been abused. These guidelines are in response to the prevalence of domestic violence cases.

**Carol Moseley-Braun** of Illinois is the first African-American woman to be elected to the U.S. Senate.

Connecticut passes an act that requires employers to train their managers about sexual harassment.

**Lucille Roybal-Allard** of California becomes the first Mexican-American woman to be elected into the House of Representatives.

**Nydia M. Velazquez** is the first Puerto Rican woman elected to Congress, representing New York’s 12th district. Born in Yabucoa, Puerto Rico, she is the former director of the Department of Puerto Rican Community Affairs in the United States for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

**Mae Jemison** of Alabama becomes the first African-American woman to enter space.

**Millie Deegan** of New York is inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. She achieved great notoriety for her skills in all sports, especially baseball and softball. She dies on July 22, 2002.

1993

An act concerning the gender and racial composition of the membership of Connecticut state boards, commissions, committees, and councils is passed.

**Take Our Daughters to Work Day**, a project of the Ms. Foundation, debuts in Connecticut. It is designed to build girls’ self-esteem and open their eyes to a variety of career possibilities for women.

During the Clinton Administration, **Dee Dee Myers** becomes the first woman appointed as the White House Press Secretary.

**Janet Reno** of Florida is the first female Attorney General of the United States. A graduate of Cornell University and Harvard Law School, she is the former State Attorney in Florida.
Beverly Sills of New York, renowned Soprano at the New York City Opera, becomes the first woman, the first performing artist, and the first former head of an arts company to chair the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. With a deaf child and a child with mental retardation, Sills is also known for the passion she put into her work as the national chair of the March of Dimes Mother’s March on Birth Defects.

1994
The University of Connecticut's President's Commission on the Status of Women finds that gender distribution in employees at UConn is lacking. Although women make up 49% of employees, the majority of women hold clerical and low ranking positions. Women fill only 30% of faculty positions, and of that only 15% are full professors.

Shannon Faulkner of South Carolina becomes the first woman to attend the Citadel, a previously all-male military training facility.

Lt. Kara Hultgreen, born in Greenwich, Connecticut is recognized as the first woman, fully qualified combat pilot, and, sadly, the first woman combat fighter to die in service.

Nancy Wyman becomes the first woman in Connecticut’s history to be elected State Comptroller. Wyman demonstrates great leadership throughout her term by advocating for issues concerning women, children, and the elderly. Wyman's success is evident as she is re-elected in 1998 and again in 2002, and goes on to become Lieutenant Governor.

After serving in the state House of Representatives for ten years, M. Jodi Rell is elected Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut, the first Republican woman to hold the position.

1995
Rebecca Marier graduates as the first female valedictorian of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

Ruth J. Simmons becomes the first African-American president of a “Seven-Sister” school when she is installed as the president of Smith College.

Ann Fudge becomes the first African-American woman to head a major corporate division when she is named president of Maxwell House Coffee Co.

UConn Husky Rebecca Lobo is named the Sportswoman of the Year (in the team category) by the Women's Sports Foundation. Lobo was the first player in the Big East Conference ever to earn first team all American honors for both basketball and academics.

1996
The United Nations fourth World Conference on Women’s Issues is held in Beijing, China.

The nation’s first ever women’s professional basketball game is played by the American Basketball League’s New England Blizzard at the Hartford Civic Center.

Mary Kay Ash is the only woman featured in Forbes Greatest Business Stories of All Time, when her company Mary Kay, Inc. is one of the twenty companies profiled in the book.

1997
Madeline Albright of the Czech Republic, then Colorado, is sworn in as Secretary of State under President Bill Clinton. She is the first woman to hold this position and becomes the highest-ranking woman in U.S. government.
Aida Alvarez of Puerto Rico and then New York becomes the first Puerto Rican and the first Latina to be an administrator of the United States Small Business Administration (SBA).

Born in St. Paul, Minnesota in 1942, the Hon. Gabrielle Kirk McDonald becomes the third African-American woman federal judge in the United States, she later becomes the President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (1997). The mission of the tribunal is to seek justice for victims of ethnic and religious persecution, especially in Croatia and Bosnia. She is currently the Iran-U.S. Claims Tribunal Judge.

The first all-female music festival, the Lilith Fair, is launched by musician Sarah McLachlan as a way to celebrate the talent of women in the music industry and to prove that women musicians can sell out concerts around the country. The festival runs successfully for three straight summers.

1998
Having previously served three terms in the state legislature, Susan Bysiewicz of Middletown is elected Secretary of the State in Connecticut.

Denise Nappier of Hartford breaks multiple barriers as she becomes the first woman and first African-American to be elected state treasurer. Throughout her term, Nappier improves the state college savings program, making it among the nation’s best. She also continuously supports small, women, and minority owned businesses by offering them opportunities to work with the Treasury’s investment managers.

1999
Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin becomes both the first openly gay person and the first woman from Wisconsin to be elected to Congress.

In Connecticut, an act requiring health insurers to cover prescription birth control is passed. This new law requires that whenever a health insurer covers a prescription, they must also cover all FDA approved contraceptive methods.

Lt. Col. Eileen Collins of New York becomes the first woman to command a space shuttle mission.

Julie Su, the litigation director of the Asian Pacific American Legal Center, sets the precedent on behalf of garment workers which leads to further progress toward eliminating sweatshops.

The U.S. Women’s National Soccer Team wins the World Cup, defeating China 5-4 in a penalty kick shoot out after regulation ends in a 0-0 tie. The team’s victory helps elevate women’s soccer to the global stage and earns them the title of Sports Illustrated’s Sportswomen of the Year.

Lorraine Weil becomes the first woman appointed United States Bankruptcy Judge for the District of Connecticut.

2000
Hillary Rodham Clinton of Illinois is elected to the U.S. Senate. Sen. Clinton becomes the first First Lady to be elected to the Senate and the first woman elected statewide in New York. Sen. Clinton is recognized around the world as an advocate for democracy, religious tolerance, and human rights. She ran unsuccessfully for president in 2007, but then went on to become Secretary of State.
Jackie Joyner-Kersee of Arkansas is voted *Sports Illustrated*'s Women's Greatest Female of the 20th Century. Kersee, a member of the first generation to benefit from Title IX, participated in both basketball and track in high school. She went on to win three gold, one silver and two bronze medals over four consecutive Olympic games for track and field events.

Susan Cogswell of Torrington becomes the first female Insurance Commissioner of Connecticut. She was previously the Connecticut Insurance Department’s Chief of Staff.

2001

Jane Swift of Massachusetts becomes the first female governor of the state of Massachusetts, the first pregnant governor in history, and at age 36, the youngest governor in history.

The U.S. Congress that convenes in January of 2001 has a record number of 74 female members. The House of Representatives has 61 female members and the Senate has 13 female members.

ESPN’s list of the top North American athletes of the century includes many women. Among them are Martina Navratilova, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Wilma Rudolph, Chris Evert, Billie Jean King, Althea Gibson, and Bonnie Blair.

Shawna Robinson, a native of Iowa, is the first female to start a NASCAR Winston Cup race since 1989 and the first female to finish one since Janet Guthrie in 1980. In her 17 years in the sport, she sets two NASCAR Busch Series Grand National Division track records, and is the first woman in NASCAR history to win a pole position in the NASCAR Goody’s Dash Series. Robinson is also the first woman to win a NASCAR touring event.

Having led a long and illustrious career in public service, Elizabeth Dole of North Carolina is elected to the U.S. Senate. Dole was Federal Trade Commissioner from 1974 to 1979, the U.S. Secretary of Labor in 1983 and in 1989, was appointed Secretary of Labor by President George Bush. In 1990, she assumed presidency of the American Red Cross and held the position until 1999 when she unsuccessfully ran for the U.S. presidency.

Between 1998 and 2008, women’s participation in the labor force is expected to increase by 15% while men will see an increase of only 10%. As a result, women will increase their share of the labor force from 46% to 48%. By 2013, women make up nearly half the labor force.

Since 1984, the number of women in graduate schools has exceeded the number of men.

U.S. Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi of California is elected Democratic leader of the House of Representatives by an overwhelming majority. This makes her the highest-ranking woman in the history of the U.S. Congress and the first woman to lead a major political party. She goes on to become the nation’s first female Speaker of the House.

In Connecticut, women make up 31% of the State Legislature. Females hold 8 of 36 seats in the Senate and 49 of 151 seats in the House of Representatives.

Halle Berry of Ohio becomes the first African-American woman to receive an Oscar for Best Actress.
Linda Spoonster Schwartz, RN, MSN, DrPH, FAAN of Ohio is appointed Commissioner of the Department of Veteran’s Affairs. She is the first women in the 140 year history of the Veterans’ Affairs to serve as Commissioner. Dr. Schwartz was a member of the United States Air Force (1967-1986) and served both on Active Duty and as a Reservist. She was the first woman veteran to receive the prestigious Connecticut Department of Veterans’ Affairs Commendation Medal. She was also the first woman to receive the National Commendation Medal of Vietnam Veterans of America for Justice, Integrity and Meaningful Achievement.

Theresa C. Lantz of Manchester, Connecticut is appointed as the sixth, and first woman, Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction. Commissioner Lantz began her career in corrections as a front line correctional officer in the Washington, D.C. prison system in 1976. During that assignment she became the first woman correction officer in that department to work inside the maximum-security men’s housing unit. At the time of her appointment, Commissioner Lantz was one of approximately a half dozen women state correctional commissioners in the United States.

2004
After Gov. John G. Rowland’s resignation in 2004, M. Jodi Rell is sworn in as Connecticut’s 87th Governor. Her most important priorities include bolstering homeland security efforts, improving educational opportunities for all children, improving the state’s economy and job outlook and “demanding the highest ethical standards of everyone serving in state government.”

2005
Condoleezza Rice of Alabama becomes the first female African-American Secretary of State. Prior to this appointment, she served as the first female National Security Advisor to the President of the United States. Before entering the political arena, Rice served as Stanford University’s Provost.

Sheryl Swoopes, a famous WNBA player, becomes the first openly gay superstar in American pro team sports.

Rosa Parks of Alabama passes away. She was arrested in 1955 for not relinquishing her bus seat to a white man. Her decision to remain seated served as a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement and its efforts to bring an end to institutionalized segregation in the South.
Danica Patrick bursts into the racing scene with a fourth-place finish at the 2005 Indy 500, in which she becomes the first woman racer ever to hold the lead.

2006

Katie Couric of Virginia, then New York, becomes the first solo female anchor of a major nightly newscast, the CBS Evening News. She starts her career working as a reporter for various different newscasts until she begins her tenure as a co-anchor of NBC’s the Today show.

Maureen Weaver becomes the first woman to serve as a managing partner of a large Connecticut law firm when she is named chair of Wiggin and Dana’s Executive Committee.

Esther Torres is appointed as Warden of the Willard-Cybulski Correctional Institution in Enfield, Connecticut. She is the Connecticut Department of Correction’s first Hispanic woman appointed to the position, and the third female Warden.

Effa Manley of Pennsylvania becomes the first woman inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. She was the co-owner and business manager of the Newark Eagles, a Negro Leagues team, from 1936 to 1948. She used her position as a platform to further the fight for civil rights.

Brigadier General Susan Helms of Portland, Oregon becomes the first woman to command the 45th Space Wing of the Patrick Air Force Base. She is a former astronaut.

Katharine Jefferts Schori, Bishop of Nevada, becomes the first woman to head the Episcopal Church and is the first female to be elected head of any major Christian denomination.

Vivien Crea becomes the Vice Commandant of the Coast Guard, and the first woman to ever be second in command of a military faction. She is also credited as the first female aircraft commander and commander of a Coast Guard air station.

Kelly Zweifel of Wisconsin becomes the first woman to win the National Reining Horse Association (NRHA) Derby. She is also the first rider to ever win the NRHA Open, Intermediate, and Limited Open divisions in the same derby.

Tricia Saunders of Arizona becomes the first woman inducted into the Wrestling Hall of Fame. She is also the only female wrestler to win more than two world titles.

Musician Miriam Burns becomes the first female music director and conductor of the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra. She is one of the few female full-time conductors in the professional orchestra field.

2007

Frances E. Allen wins one of the most prestigious prizes in computing, the $100,000 Turing Award. She is the first woman to win this award in its 40-year history as a result of her work at IBM Corp. where she optimized techniques for the performance of compilers.

Eliza Garfield becomes the first female Captain of the Amistad, located at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut. The Amistad, a replica of the old slave ship, crosses the Atlantic to England and then proceeds to the old slave coast of Africa before returning to Connecticut. It is a journey of 14,000 miles that commemorates the 200th anniversary of the British Parliament’s vote in 1807 that outlawed the slave trade.
Michelle Robinson Obama, a Harvard-educated lawyer from Chicago becomes the first African American First Lady of the United States upon the election of her husband, Barack Obama, as president.

Women dominate the national Congressional elections, out-voting men by at least 6 percent, and sending a record 20 women to the U.S. Senate.

Nora R. Dannehy is named acting U.S. attorney for the District of Connecticut and becomes the first woman to hold the position.

On January 29, 2009 Congress signs into law the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, restoring worker protections against pay discrimination by allowing individuals who face pay discrimination to seek rectification under federal anti-discrimination laws.

Rebecca Lobo becomes the first Connecticut player to be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame.

The Connecticut Bar Association selected its first ever female executive director, Alice Bruno.

Although still nowhere near parity, women gain strides in the corporate world, with around 16 percent representation on the board of directors of major corporations. Women now head up such American Fortune 500 companies as Yahoo, IBM, Sam’s Club, HP, Petrobras, Avon, and Time Inc.

Serena Jameka Williams (born September 26, 1981) becomes the World No. 1 for the first time on July 8, 2002, and regained this ranking for the fifth time on November 2, 2009. She is the only female player to have won over $40 million in prize money. Among active players, male or female, she holds the most major titles amid singles, doubles, and mixed doubles.

Kathryn Bigelow becomes the first woman to win an Oscar for Best Director. Her film “The Hurt Locker,” about an army bomb squad in Baghdad, garners six Oscar awards.

For the first time in Connecticut’s legislative history, two African-American women, Sen. Toni Harp and Rep. Toni Walker, are selected to chair the powerful Appropriations Committee.
Selected Highlights of Women’s History from The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

2013
After several failed attempts, Congress finally passes the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA).

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1973, celebrates its 40th anniversary as an effective, nationally recognized advocate for women’s rights, especially in the areas of economic security, health and safety, and the elimination of gender discrimination.

2011
The U.S. Navy base in Groton welcomes its first class of female officers selected for assignment to submarines.

Carolyn Kuan is selected as the Hartford Symphony Orchestra’s new music director, becoming the first woman to hold that position in the HSO’s 68-year history.

2013

The University of Connecticut’s Women’s Basketball Team wins a record-setting 90 consecutive games — more than any other team in NCAA history.

The University of Connecticut selects its first female President, Dr. Susan Herbst.

Rear Adm. Sandra L. Stosz becomes the first female superintendent of the Coast Guard Academy in New London. She is the first woman to lead a U.S. military service academy.

Lynn Malerba becomes the first female chief of the Connecticut Mohegan Indian Tribe.

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March, 2015