



Source: /amnestyusa.org

March 8th is International Women's Day, and March is Women's History Month. As we celebrate all that women have accomplished in the struggle for gender equality, I paused to consider the following question:

## **WHY ARE THERE NO MAJOR NATIONAL HOLIDAYS CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF WOMEN?**

“Why don’t we have a federal holiday named after a woman in the United States?”, posed a librarian friend of mine over coffee with two other female “older” baby boomers.

None of us had an answer. Aroused and bemused by her question, we discussed and deliberated about our choices of a nominee. Rosa Parks eventually won our vote. I volunteered to pursue the inquiry, offering to initiate a petition drive through Change, MoveOn, ForceChange, or WeThePeople (President Obama’s), popular websites for those seeking change.

The conversation soon drifted into the more mundane: why was it becoming more difficult to fall asleep at night, how to handle sleepovers from young grandchildren, good resources for newly-single women, and the like.

Back at home, I was still intrigued by the original question. Why isn’t there a single national holiday named after a woman here in the United States? Our ten national holidays often celebrate men and their accomplishments. Not one recognizes a woman.

Why hadn’t I, a former women’s conscious-raising group organizer and strong *Sisterhood Is Powerful* proponent, ever raised it to myself? After six decades on this earth, I’m ashamed to admit I never realized that we have no national holidays (other than Mother’s Day, an observance) that acknowledges a woman. And it really is too bad, when you think about the many women who are deserving of this honor. Women, it seems, get postage stamps (Maya Angelou most recently in February 2015), maybe a coin, or ships named in their honor and little more. Talk about inequality!

Donning the hat of a pseudo private investigator, I eagerly sought information about the reasons there is not one national holiday established to acknowledge and honor the relentless sacrifices, the dedication, the contributions and attributes of American Women.

My inquiries lead me to some unusual places and interesting discoveries.

### (1) WE ALREADY HAVE A WOMAN'S EQUALITY DAY, BUT IT'S A PROCLAMATION, NOT A LAW.

---

August 26th is Women's Equality Day. I didn't know that. Most Americans don't even know what it is, and aside from commemorations by a few female leaders on Capitol Hill, it is hardly noticed. But it marks one of the most important days of the last century for women — the day the final state ratified the 19th Amendment in 1920 — and women were granted the vote. Since 1971, the U.S. President issues a proclamation each year. We can thank U.S. Rep. Bella Abzug (D-NY) for introducing a Congressional Resolution to ensure this historic event would be commemorated each year on this date. Women's Equality Day also symbolizes the continued fight for equality, justice, peace, and development for women from various nationalities, ethnicities, cultures, religions, economic and political backgrounds.

Has Women's Equality Day ever been observed by anyone anywhere in the United States?

### (2) WE EVEN HAVE AN INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY ON MARCH 8<sup>TH</sup>, BUT IT IS NOT WIDELY CELEBRATED IN THE USA.

---

Those of us in the United States may not have heard about International Woman's Day (Hallmark doesn't bother making cards dedicated to it). Even though the celebration was born in this country, it has always done better elsewhere because it was sustained as a communist, socialist holiday, particularly after the Russian Revolution.

In its various incarnations, ranging from a communist holiday to a U.N.-sponsored event, International Women's Day has been celebrated for over 100 years. It first emerged from the activities of labor movements at the turn of the twentieth century in North America and across Europe.

The holiday was conceived to aid the international movement for women's suffrage and more generally to raise awareness of women's struggles for equality. This holiday, however, came about from the unrest of women who were looking for social and political change in the world and, most importantly, equal rights.

In 1975, the U.N. began sponsoring International Women's Day. Many countries around the world celebrate the holiday with demonstrations for equal rights, educational initiatives and customs, such as presenting women with gifts and flowers. In some, like Russia, it is a national holiday and appears to be growing in stature.

As for efforts to achieve official recognition in the United States of America, Rep. Maxine Waters introduced legislation (H.J. Res. 316) in February 1994 to officially recognize March 8th of that year as International Women's Day. The bill was subsequently referred to, and remained in, the House Committee on Post Office and Civil Service where it died.

(3) IT'S REALLY NOT ENOUGH TO REMEMBER THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF NOTABLE WOMEN FOR ONLY ONE DAY OR EVEN A WEEK. IN 1987, A NATIONAL WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH WAS DECLARED IN THE UNITED STATES. IT'S IN MARCH. WHILE ONLY ANOTHER PROCLAMATION, IT'S THE CLOSEST THING WE HAVE THAT RECOGNIZES THE SPECIFIC ACHIEVEMENTS WOMEN HAVE MADE OVER THE COURSE OF AMERICAN HISTORY IN A VARIETY OF FIELDS

---

Women's History Month has its origins as a national celebration in 1981 when Congress passed Pub. L. 97-28 which authorized and requested the President to proclaim the week beginning March 7, 1982 as "Women's History Week." In 1987, the National Women's History Project successfully petitioned Congress to expand the celebration from a week to an entire month — March — in perpetuity. Since 1995, Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama have issued a series of annual proclamations designating the month of March as "Women's History Month." These proclamations celebrate the contributions women have made to the United States.

---

**OTHER DESERVING CANDIDATES:**

At this point in my journey, I began to seriously question if Rosa Parks was the ideal candidate to be celebrated each year. Surely she is worthy, but perhaps as a civil rights leader she might also be considered too controversial for some. Besides, I learned, she already had her own day: February 4<sup>th</sup> in California and December 1<sup>st</sup> in Ohio. Helen Keller would also be an obvious choice, but her day was spoken for as well. In 1980, President Jimmy Carter, per presidential proclamation, authorized her celebration on June 27<sup>th</sup>. Amelia Earhart Day is celebrated in some places on July 24<sup>th</sup>. Daisy Gatson Bates Day, a state holiday in Arkansas, honors the life of this civil rights activist who played a key role in an integration crisis at Little Rock Central High School. Sally Ride Day was created in honor of the birth date (May 26<sup>th</sup>) of the first American woman in space.

Who could argue with the nomination of Susan B. Anthony, one of the first wave of female suffragettes? She is remembered for creating the first women's movement in the United States and leading that movement for more than 50 years. But I learned that she, too, was already claimed: the states of California, Florida, Wisconsin, New York, and West Virginia honor her on February 15<sup>th</sup>, her birthday.

Far more disillusioning, I also learned that a prior attempt to celebrate Ms. Anthony's legacy with a federal holiday had failed. On February 11, 2011, Representative Carolyn Maloney of New York introduced the "Susan B. Anthony Birthday Act" (H.R. #655) to the 112<sup>th</sup> session of Congress to honor her birthday as a U.S. national holiday on the third Monday of February. The bill was referred to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform where it died.

So instead Susan B. Anthony was dubiously honored with her likeness on a silver dollar minted from 1979 to 1981, and again in 1999, but it never was in wide circulation. Stamps with her image were issued twice (1936, 1955). She has a museum; aprons, mouse pads, and buttons carry her image. Recently, an expensive designer handbag was even named in her honor.

Well, if Susan B. Anthony failed to capture the nomination by Congress, who could? I consulted the website of the National Women’s Hall of Fame, which is dedicated to recognizing and celebrating the achievements of great American women of yesterday and today. Created in 1969 in Seneca Falls, the small village where the fight for women’s rights began, the Hall of Fame inducts and showcases women — there are about 250 — who have made valuable and enduring contributions to our nation in a variety of fields and endeavors.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, there is no shortage of American women who deserve to have a day named in their honor. In fact, PBS profiled many amazing female trailblazers in a three-hour documentary, *MAKERS--Women Who Make America*, which premiered in 2013 and has added new chapters that aired in 2014.<sup>2</sup> Harvard University Press published *Notable American Women*, a five-volume biographical dictionary that has more than 3,500 pages in which leading scholars in the field offer 2,284 biographical sketches that span four hundred years.<sup>3</sup> Various magazines, such as *Time*, *Esquire*, and *Fortune*, have each published “definitive” lists of women who have shaped the world. YouTube has a Women’s History channel.<sup>4</sup> Numerous websites, blogs, and timelines widely exist that chronicle women who have contributed importantly to the advancement of our society as well as the advancement of women in America.

#### **THE HISTORY OF PUBLIC HOLIDAYS IN THE USA AND “HALLMARK HOLIDAYS”: THE PROBLEM**

Perhaps the answer to the mystery about the lack of a true Woman’s Day lay elsewhere. Just what did it take to enact federal legislation that would create a specific day to honor one woman? A lot, I discovered.

For constitutional reasons, the United States does not have federal holidays in the sense that most other nations do, i.e., days on which all businesses are closed by law and employees have a day off. Rather each of the 50 states has jurisdiction over its own holidays.

Eleven days are proclaimed by the federal government as holidays for federal government employees, and most states observe these holidays on the same dates (commonly called *legal* or *public* holidays). Creating permanent federal holidays is traditionally the purview of Congress. The President and Congress designate by law the holidays to be observed in the District of Columbia and *by federal employees* throughout the United States. Federal offices, banks and schools typically are closed on legal federal holidays. However, the federal government cannot declare a holiday to be observed by the entire country. Instead each state governor has the authority to specify the holidays for the state. States and cities are free to adopt federal holidays or not, just as they are free to propose and approve their own holidays. No private employer is forced to stick to federal holidays, either.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.greatwomen.org/about-the-hall/our-history>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.makers.com/documentary>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/collection.php?cpk=1189>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/user/WomensHistory/featured>

There are eleven such federal holidays, ten annual and one quadrennial holiday: New Years, Martin Luther King Day, Presidents' Day (the federal holiday is still officially called Washington's Birthday, but present usage often regards Presidents' Day as a day to honor all former presidents of the US), Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Columbus Day, Veterans' Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas. Inauguration Day is celebrated every fourth year on January 20th following the swearing-in of the President but is only observed by federal employees who work in Washington, D.C. and its environs. Each holiday was designed to emphasize a particular aspect of American heritage or to celebrate an event in American history, according to the Congressional Research Service.

However, U.S. law provides for the declaration of selected *public observances* by the President of the United States as designated by Congress or by the discretion of the President. Many special days in the form of proclamations or resolutions have been recognized and observed with appropriate ceremonies and activities. These events are typically to honor or commemorate a public issue or social cause, ethnic group, historic event or noted individual. However, (with several exceptions) there is no requirement that government or business close on these days. Holidays proclaimed in this way may be considered a U.S. "national observance", but it is improper to refer to them as a federal holiday.

For many years, Congress played an active role in declaring special observances for people, events or other activities deemed worthy of national recognition. However, since passing these resolutions occupied a significant amount of time and effort, Congress decided to discontinue this process in January 1995. Federal observances (Title 36 of the United States Code) can be days, weeks, months, or other periods of time. Examples include Child Health Day and National Day of Prayer; National Suicide Prevention Week and National Poison Prevention Week; and Black History and Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Some state legislatures and governors, as well as city officials, still proclaim special days for their regions. Other holidays have been acknowledged by registering them with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce or professional organizations. Of course, many religious, ethnic, cultural, and other traditional holidays populate the calendar, but they are rarely observed by businesses as holidays. Special interests have created a number of holidays not universally observed. Longshoremen, for instance, take off Harry Bridges' birthday to honor the popular labor leader. In the south, Robert E. Lee's birthday has long been observed by various states on the third Monday of January.

In recent years, many individuals and organizations have found that declaring a holiday by naming a day, week or month and promoting it to the public has become an effective way to draw attention to their causes, even without the "official" holiday status.

Then there are the "Hallmark Holidays" that exist primarily for commercial purposes, rather than to commemorate a traditionally or historically significant event. They include Grandparents Day, Sweetest Day, Boss's Day, Secretary's Day, Valentine's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day.

Other non-holiday notable days that might be observed include: Super Bowl Sunday, Super Tuesday, Opening Day of the Major League Baseball season, Oktoberfest, Black Friday, Small Business Saturday, Cyber Monday, Spring Break, and Summer Vacation.

## IT'S ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO GET A PUBLIC HOLIDAY NAMED AFTER AN INDIVIDUAL

I found it is really hard to get a federal holiday named after a person. The only four individuals to have national holidays are Martin Luther King, Jr., Christopher Columbus, Jesus Christ, and George Washington. Martin Luther King Day, celebrating the birth of the civil rights leader, is the most recent (mid 1980s) federal holiday. In fact, it took 15 years to create this federal holiday since a number of states resisted celebrating it.

Why? Money, for one thing, if we are talking about paid holidays. There's generally resistance at some level to funding paid days off, whether in a state legislature or in Congress. Even giving private employees a day off can cost money that a business must justify in its budget. In most businesses, the practice is to give employees a few personal days off that they can schedule at any time of the year. It is estimated that every holiday costs the federal government \$450 million in employee pay and lost productivity.<sup>5</sup>

Other opponents suggest that a holiday to honor a private citizen would be contrary to longstanding tradition. Still others opine that we should get away from holidays celebrating people and instead celebrate important events, a particular aspect of American heritage, or an entire movement rather than one individual, however instrumental.

### *Proposed federal holidays*

But none of these aforementioned reasons keeps lawmakers from proposing them.

According to one source, over the years, more than 1,100 different proposals for federal holidays have been floated.<sup>6</sup>

Besides the proposal for the establishment of a Susan B. Anthony Day as a federal holiday, other more common ones have come up over time. Remarks are included about why they are not observed at the federal level today. Some of these holidays are celebrated at the state level.

Date	Official Name	Remarks
Last Monday of March	<a href="#">Cesar Chavez Day</a>	The holiday was proposed by California Democrat Joe Baca in H.R. 76 and is an official state holiday in states of California and Texas and was further endorsed by President Barack Obama. On March 28, 2014, President Obama used his authority to proclaim March 31st as the National Cesar Chavez Day.

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://theweek.com/article/index/249395/why-isnt-911-a-national-holiday>

<sup>6</sup> <http://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2012/01/16/good-question-what-does-it-take-for-a-federal-holiday/>

Third Monday in May	<a href="#">Malcolm X Day</a>	The holiday was proposed in H.R. 323 in 1993 and 1994 by Congressman Charles Rangel. It was referred to the Committee on Post Office and Civil Service where it died.
June 14	<a href="#">Flag Day</a>	Though proposed several times, it only became a national observance when President Harry Truman issued a proclamation in 1949.
Third Monday of September	<a href="#">Native Americans' Day</a>	The holiday was petitioned for multiple times and was introduced into Congress multiple times, but was unsuccessful. The proclamation exists today as the "Native American Awareness Week."
First Tuesday after November 1	<a href="#">Election Day</a>	There have been multiple movements for this holiday to be official, and legislation has been introduced several times. In December 2011 a joint resolution was referred to the House Judiciary Committee, and no further action has been taken.  The Weekend Voting Act has also been introduced in past Congresses, to little effect — in part because lawmakers have little incentive to change the system. <sup>7</sup>

The subject of who might receive the next national holiday was seriously discussed on a blog that I found interesting.<sup>8</sup> Here are some of the comments:

*- Someone Latino sounds about right, since there is a growing number of Latino voters.*

*- How about a day named after a generic old person?*

*- Based solely on my desire to have more three-day weekends in nice parts of the year, it should be someone with a birthday in either August or late April.*

---

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_holidays\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_States#Proposed\\_federal\\_holidays](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_holidays_in_the_United_States#Proposed_federal_holidays)

<sup>8</sup> <http://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2011/08/who-will-receive-the-next-national-holiday.html#sthash.JynEgdPO.dpuf>

- 9/11 is the most likely candidate presently. But it's too close to Labor Day and more likely would go the way of December 7<sup>th</sup>.

- National holidays to honor something/someone that is almost universally revered. A single symbolic leader in whom we could vest all of our good will for civil rights.

- I would rather ask which we can revoke. The outsized number of holidays for government employees is yet another perk taxpayers can't afford.

. The next federal holiday, if there is one, will probably be Black Friday, the Day After Thanksgiving.

- We might make our way to a gay rights activist.

- You just need to pick a movement and say "who will we decide, 50 years later, was the saintly leader who was in charge?"

- I've had the idea that we could create a "Heroes Day" wherein each year the holiday would celebrate a different historical figure.

- If we're talking about holidays named for specific people, surely 'Women' rank ahead of 'Latinos' on the waiting list. Unfortunately, most of the more obvious candidates were born in holiday-rich parts of the year.

- The obvious multicultural libertarian utilitarian equalitarian solution is to have NO holidays in honor of anybody.

- A federal holiday commemorating science and innovation.

- Make opening of baseball season a national holiday.<sup>9</sup>

- What's the consolation prize for not getting a national holiday named after you? A post office, federal building, airport, highway, dumpsite, local sewage plant, park bench?<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2014/03/opening-day-a-national-holiday-white-house-isnt-playing-ball/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://marginalrevolution.com/marginalrevolution/2011/08/who-will-receive-the-next-national-holiday.html>; <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/02/17/which-holidays-should-government-recognize>

## PETITIONS

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”*

Margaret Mead

Undeterred, I decided to proceed down another path. I would get a petition started to ask the Federal Government to create a new national holiday to honor women.

Actually anyone can petition the Federal Government's administration's policy experts to bring his or her issues directly to political leaders as a way to ensure that their voices are heard. However, attempts to do so may prove futile. Beginning on September 22, 2011, “We the People”, a section of the whitehouse.gov website, was launched to give Americans a new way to petition their government around issues they care about. Since then, more than 15 million users have participated, collecting more than 22 million signatures on more than 360,000 petitions.

According to the website, “petitions that meet a certain threshold of signatures will be reviewed by officials in the Administration, and an official response will be issued.” That threshold, however, is high: a petition must reach 150 signatures within 30 days to be publicly available on the WhiteHouse.gov website and then reach 100,000 signatures within 30 days in order to be considered. Petitions that do not reach the threshold for official response are removed from the site. And furthermore there is no guarantee the government will actually respond to petitions that acquire 100,000 signatures.” *However, depending on the topic and the overall volume of petitions from We the People, responses may be delayed* (indefinitely?), acknowledges the We The People website.<sup>11</sup>

Even more disheartening is that petitions to establish a National Holiday In Honor of American Women have already been created – with little or no attention garnered.

1. In January 2001, Kenneth Baldwin, Sr. of Sunrise FL started a petition on Change.org. It had 56 supporters.<sup>12</sup>
2. Tom Bulger of Canandaigua NY petitioned Congress, via Change.Org, to declare August 18th a national holiday in honor of Susan B Anthony. He reached 5 signatures.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/how-why/introduction>; <http://www.mediaite.com/online/new-white-house-petition-demands-the-white-house-actually-answer-white-house-petitions/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.change.org/petitions/national-holiday-in-honor-of-american-women>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.change.org/petitions/congress-declare-august-18th-a-national-holiday-susan-b-anthony-day-2>

3. Another petition to declare Susan B. Anthony a National Legal Holiday was started in February 2014 by Alexandra Hrachovsky on MoveOn.org. Discouragingly, only 45 people signed it.<sup>14</sup>

4. Again through Change.Org, the Women's Studies Department at the University of Central Florida teamed up with feminist organizations in their area with the goal of creating America's first national holiday for women. They wanted to honor suffragist Alice Paul. Only 118 supporters signed this petition.<sup>15</sup>

5. A petition was started (author unknown) on petitiononline.com to bring about a Federal Holiday honoring women. This holiday would pay tribute to the suffragettes whose unflagging, lifelong dedication was for the sole purpose of enacting the 19th Amendment. The petition suggests the date of August 26th, the anniversary of the passage of the 19th Amendment. It received 86 signatures.<sup>16</sup>

6. A petition was started (2014) through the website change.org to make March 8th an annual national holiday. Forty-five people signed it.<sup>17</sup>

## HAVE WE GIVEN UP?

So what's going on here?

1. Maybe those from a younger generation think that all the battles have been won for women or that women have gained true equality. Maybe today's students do not understand the long and winding road the leaders of the women's right movement had to travel throughout the past century. Maybe they can't appreciate what it took for women in the United States to gain the right to vote, join men in the workplace, and close the educational gender gap.

*Most of us know that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men.*

2. Maybe by limiting and even undermining the representation of women and their roles throughout history and certainly in textbooks, young male and female students are given the impression that women

---

<sup>14</sup> <http://petitions.moveon.org/sign/declare-susan-b-anthony>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.change.org/petitions/alice-paul-national-holiday>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.petitiononline.com/August26/petition.html>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.change.org/p/united-states-congress-make-march-8th-an-annual-national-holiday-women-s-equality-day>

have played a very minimal role in history and, when they were present, functioned only in very female-oriented fields, such as seamstress (Betsy Ross) or nurse (Clara Barton).

*Students who don't learn the facts can develop the wrong idea about what women have accomplished. If women's contributions and accomplishments are not mentioned, the omission is not even noticed, but a subtle lesson is learned just as certainly. We rarely portray women working in fields or performing tasks that are very masculine (with the exception of Rosie the Riveter).*

3. Maybe most people aren't even aware that women are not fully equal citizens in this country or believe the Equal Rights Act (ERA) was ratified. The reality is that the legal rights women currently enjoy are not rooted in the Constitution, but in a series of statutes like the Pregnancy Discrimination Act, executive orders like affirmative action, and various rules interpreting laws such as Title IX, guaranteeing equal educational opportunity.

Because we don't have an ERA, depending on their origin, all of these can be revoked in the dead of night by any simple majority of Congress, bureaucrats in a hostile administration, or the president himself. Here we are, 92 years later, and women still have not achieved equal constitutional status. First introduced in Congress in 1923, the ERA was introduced into every session of Congress until 1971. In 1972 the ERA was passed by a two-thirds vote in the Senate and the House of Representatives and was sent to the states on March 22 with a seven year deadline for ratification. From 1971-1977 it was approved by 35 state legislatures, with only three more state ratifications needed to put it into the Constitution. It was stopped short by millions of corporate dollars backing Phyllis Schlafly's anti-woman storm troopers, who feared unisex toilets more than they valued freedom from discrimination. Even though the deadline was extended in 1978, organized political, economic, social, and religious anti-equality efforts prevented any more state ratifications before the new deadline. And from 1982 to the present, the ERA has been introduced into every session of Congress; ERA ratification bills have seen legislative activity in 8 of the 15 unratified states as of October 2014.<sup>18</sup>

4. Maybe the impact of women's history might seem abstract to some, less pressing than the immediate struggles of working women today.

For more than two decades, the demands and hours of work have been intensifying. Yet progress in adopting family-friendly work practices and social policies has proceeded at a glacial pace. If employers instead instituted workplace flexibility in terms of hours and locations, the gender gap in pay would be considerably reduced and might vanish altogether. Women are still mostly the caretakers for their families, so they are disproportionately affected by the lack of guaranteed sick days and the lack of paid family leave.

5. Maybe there aren't federal/state holidays for women because holidays are voted into law mostly by the male-dominated Congress. They don't like giving holidays out willy-nilly, so the few that are approved go to men.

---

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.equalrightsamendment.org/>

6. Maybe in today's fast-paced world people are too busy, preoccupied, cynical, or afraid to sign petitions that might result in change. The triple role of worker, parent and caregiver for elderly or disabled family members is wearing women down and making them less able to be advocates for their own rights.

*...Or maybe the majority of women consider campaigning for the establishment of a Federal Holiday to honor women simply trivial, silly, or irrelevant when compared to the enormity of the problems confronting the world. ...Or maybe they are focusing on other women-related issues that seem more important to them. I understand.*

---

Consider some recent basic statistics:<sup>19</sup>

**Women outnumber men in the U.S.** There were 161 million females in the U.S. as of December 2013, compared to 156.1 males, according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau data. Women outnumbered men 2 to 1 at age 85 and older.<sup>20</sup>

**Women are almost half of the workforce.** They are the equal, if not main, breadwinner in four out of ten families. They receive more college and graduate degrees than men.<sup>21</sup>

**Yet, on average, women continue to earn considerably less than men.** Women in the U.S. earned 78 cents\* for every dollar than men earned in 2013. The median annual earnings of women 15 or older working fulltime was \$39,157, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The median annual earnings for men was \$50,033.<sup>22</sup>

\* The amount that female year-round, full-time workers earned in 2013 for every dollar their male counterparts earned

**Women held a record number of chief executive positions in the fourth quarter of 2014.** In September, 25 of the "Fortune 500" company CEOs were female, the highest level ever reached, according to the

---

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.com/womens-history-month-march-2015-facts-figures-about-us-women-21st-century-1831444>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/facts-for-features/2015/cb15-ff05.html>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/pay-equity-and-discrimination#sthash.1bWimmx9.dpuf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2014/demo/p60-249.pdf>;  
<http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/pay-equity-and-discrimination>

research organization Catalyst. At 5% of all chief executives, that achievement was small compared to women's 47 percent share of the overall workforce, based on data from the last full U.S. Census count.<sup>23</sup>

**Women hold more positions of elected office in the federal government than ever before.** Women currently hold 104 of the 535 seats in the 114th Congress, according to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University in New Jersey. That breaks down to 20 of 100 seats in the Senate and 84 of 435 seats in the House of Representatives.<sup>24</sup>

**Women were less than a third of workers creating the programming for broadcast TV networks.** Over the last two years, women made up 27 percent of all show creators, directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors and directors of photography, according to a 2013-2014 study by the Center for the Study of Women in Television & Film at San Diego State University in California. That represented a 1 percent drop from the previous study, but a 6 percent increase since 1998.<sup>25</sup>

## PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE

Granted, women all over the world can celebrate the tremendous progress that has been made over the past century with a long list of female eminences in all fields of life. We have, in some respects, “come a long way, baby” – the popular saying of the 1970s era which originated on cigarette advertisements meant to acknowledge the giant strides of the women's movement.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the peak of the 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of feminism, our society has undergone massive change. More and more women have taken on new responsibilities outside the home by joining the paid workforce. While women made up only about one-third of the workforce in 1969, today they make up almost half of all workers in the United States. Women are now found in large numbers in professional schools and in the professions, and, to a much lesser extent, in executive suites and legislatures. They work at a host of technical and blue-collar jobs previously closed to them. The percent of women in the military has increased considerably. More than 900 women's/gender/feminist studies programs, departments, and research centers exist around the world. The effects of Title VII have spilled over to every area of our society. Laws have changed women's rights with regard to abortion, divorce, child custody and support, rape, jury service, appointments as administrators and executors of estates, sentencing for crimes, and admission to places of public accommodations, such as clubs, restaurants, and bars.

---

<sup>23</sup> <http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2014/09/22/3570450/women-ceo-highest-share/>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast\\_facts/levels\\_of\\_office/documents/cong.pdf](http://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/fast_facts/levels_of_office/documents/cong.pdf)

<sup>25</sup> [http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2013-14\\_Boxed\\_In\\_Report.pdf](http://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/files/2013-14_Boxed_In_Report.pdf)

## BUT SO MUCH MORE WORK REMAINS TO BE DONE

Even with a string of laws and legal wins that have advanced women's positions in the workplace, so much work remains to be done before women achieve equity and justice in our society. Women today are still victims of inequality, violence, discrimination and even the threat of death in some countries simply because they are women.

In a recent (May 2014) study, *The Shriver Report*, a nonpartisan initiative for studies on the status of women in America, cited some of the challenges today's women face. I have chosen to highlight the first (Gender Wage Gap) and second (Violence Against Women), though the rest are certainly significant and deserve further examination. I have augmented this list of challenges with some of my personal observations.

### 1. The Continuing Gender Wage Gap.

Americans regard basic norms of fairness and equality – specifically in terms of pay and opportunities to advance – as the greatest issues facing working women today, according to a recent (September 2014) Gallup Poll. Nearly 4 in 10 Americans say equal pay is the top issue facing working women in the United States today, a sentiment shared by roughly the same proportions of men, women, and working women.<sup>26</sup>

The Equal Pay Act of 1963, which turns 50 this year, was intended to prohibit sex-based wage discrimination. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, in 2013, female full-time workers made only 78 cents for every dollar earned by men, a gender wage gap of 22%. They reported that women, on average, earn less than men in virtually every single occupation for which there is sufficient earnings data for both men and women to calculate an earnings ratio. The earnings ratios are for full-time workers only; if part-time and part-year workers were included, the ratios of women's to men's earnings would be even lower, as women are more likely than men to work reduced schedules, often in order to manage childrearing and other care giving work.<sup>27</sup>

The United States Department of Labor releases its "*Annual Survey of Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-time Wage and Salary Workers By Occupation and Sex, Annual Averages*". It corroborates that in 2014 a significant wage disparity exists between men and women in the labor force.<sup>28</sup> Data are available for about 400 occupations; there are few occupations in which women have higher median weekly earnings than men.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.gallup.com/poll/178373/americans-say-equal-pay-top-issue-working-women.aspx>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.iwpr.org/initiatives/pay-equity-and-discrimination#sthash.1bWlmmx9.AGHlMLGE.dpuf>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/wkyeng.t08.htm>

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.iwpr.org/publications/pubs/the-gender-wage-gap-by-occupation-and-by-race-and-ethnicity-2013#sthash.t03d79mz.dpuf> and <http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat39.htm>

The situation is no different in the White House. In February 2014, the American Enterprise Institute published a comparison of salaries of men and women who work there. It turns out that while approximately equal numbers of men and women are employed at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the wage gap is 12%.<sup>30</sup>

In its Spring 2015 report, *The Simple Truth about the Gender Pay Gap*<sup>31</sup>, the American Association of University Women, using the most current statistics from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau, concluded that:

- **The pay gap has barely budged in a decade.**
- **Women in every state experience the pay gap, but some states are worse than others.**
- **The pay gap is worse for women of color.**
- **Women face a pay gap in nearly every occupation.**
- **The pay gap grows with age.**
- **While more education is an effective tool for increasing earnings, it is not an effective tool against the gender pay gap.**
- **The pay gap also exists among women without children.**

The statistics for the population of women of color and immigrants are even more alarming and do not portend well for the future. The issues most relevant to their lives are often not reflected in our national policy agenda and in our various movements.

Among the central findings of a March 2013 extensive report by the Ms. Foundation for Women, “women are marginalized in the economy, consistently relegated to the lowest-paying sectors, which are further stratified by race”.<sup>32</sup> While there's a gender pay gap for white women measured at about 82.5 cents (median weekly full-time earnings) for every dollar a white man makes in comparison, black women earn 68 cents and Latinas earn 61 cents for that same dollar, according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.<sup>33</sup>

The rate of growth of these marginalized communities in our nation is growing. By 2050, the Census Bureau predicts a U.S. population of 439 million, an increase of 55% since 2000. Nearly all of that growth will be driven by communities of color, particularly Latinos. People of color, now roughly one-third of the

---

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/local/abcarian/la-me-ra-why-are-we-still-fighting-about-whether-women-deserve-equal-pay-20140408-story.html#axzz2z08RNkRJ>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.aauw.org/research/the-simple-truth-about-the-gender-pay-gap/>

<sup>32</sup> <http://forwomen.org/moretodo>

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.iwpr.org/>

U.S. population, are expected to make up 54 % of the population by 2050.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, the proportion of immigrants within the U.S. population will grow. A Pew Research Study estimates that by 2025, the immigrant share of the population will surpass its peak during the last great wave of immigration in the early 20th century. By 2050, almost one in five Americans (19 %) will be an immigrant, up from one in eight (12%) in 2005.<sup>35</sup>

## **2. Violence Against Women.**

Women and girls nationwide experienced about 270,000 rapes or sexual assaults annually – on college campuses, in the military, and in their homes, according to a U.S. Department of Justice report from March 2013.<sup>36</sup> More than 31 percent of women in the United States have been physically abused by an intimate partner at some point in their lives, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in their 2013 study, *National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey*. The survey also captured forms of non-physical abuse, with nearly half of women in the United States having experienced at least one act of psychological aggression by an intimate partner at some point in their lives.<sup>37</sup>

Worldwide, about one in three women is a victim of gender-related violence. According to a World Health Organization 2013 global review of available data, 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. However, some national violence studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime from an intimate partner. On average, 30% of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical or sexual violence by their partner.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to **The Continuing Gender Wage Gap** and **Violence Against Women**, The Shriver Report<sup>39</sup> acknowledged many other challenges women face, and certainly books could be written about each of them.

- 3. Women’s Reproductive Rights are being threatened.**
- 4. Maternal and Infant Health Care is inadequate.**
- 5. The Absence of Laws Mandating Paid Sick and Parental Leave.**

---

<sup>34</sup> <http://forwomen.org/moretodo>

<sup>35</sup> <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/85.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fvsv9410.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6308a1.htm?s\\_cid=ss6308a1\\_e](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6308a1.htm?s_cid=ss6308a1_e)

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs239/en/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://shriverreport.org/top-18-issues-challenging-women-today/>

- 6. Reasonable Accommodations for Pregnant Women**
- 7. The Lack of Affordable and Competent Child Care**
- 8. The Treatment of Women in Prison.**
- 9. Human Trafficking and Sex Slavery.**
- 10. The Severe Continued Under-Representation of Women in Political Life.**
- 11. Under-Representation in the Justice System: As Prosecutors, Judges, and Police Officers.**
- 12. Inadequate Representation Among Those Who Run Our Top Corporations and Serve on Corporate Boards.**
- 13. Inadequate Representation and Unequal Pay for Actors, Writers, Directors, and Producers in the Entertainment Industry.**
- 14. Keeping Women in High-Tech Fields.** A report released in early 2014 by by the Center for Talent Innovation (CTI), a research think tank founded by economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett, found that U.S. women working in these fields are 45% more likely than their male peers to leave the industry within a year—and the reason was gender bias. In addition, the study also found that nearly one-third of senior leaders — both men and women — who work in science, engineering and technology fields reported that a woman would never reach the top position in their companies.<sup>40</sup>
- 15. Lack of Health Insurance**

... and from my own list:

- 16. Underrepresentation of women in the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields.** In 2011, men outnumbered women at a rate of 74 % to 26% in all science, technology, education and math (STEM) sectors of employment. In fact, women’s representation in computer occupations has declined since the 1990s, according to Census Bureau statistics.<sup>41</sup>
- 17. Being unfairly or incorrectly represented in the media,** either sexually objectified or having to fit a ‘standard’ white, thin, young beauty ideal.
- 18. Socialized gender norms** which are harmful to boys and girls.
- 19. Unsafe working conditions for immigrant women.**

---

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.womenintechology.co.uk/news/keeping-women-in-high-tech-fields-is-big-challenge.-report-finds/131/>

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2013pubs/acs-24.pdf>

## A CALL TO ACTION

Designating a Federal Holiday for Women, while a worthy cause, will not resolve all efforts to establish equality, nor is it likely to happen.

**The Administration at this time does not plan to propose legislation that would create a new national holiday.** That's because it places a higher priority on legislative proposals to fuel job creation and other economic measures. According to Tonya Robinson, the Special Assistant to the President for Justice and Regulatory Policy, the Administration "welcomes the continued conversation regarding enhanced civic engagement but apparently is unwilling to consider adding new holidays."<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, wearing purple – the traditional and contemporary color that represents women empowerment on August 26<sup>th</sup>, Women's Equality Day – will do little to effect change.

Call me ignorant or naïve, but the optimist in me believes that **Sisterhood (Still) is Powerful**, that through the collective use of our personal resources we can initiate the dialogue for civil, economic, social and political equal human rights. I posit that a new women's movement is desperately needed – one in which people of all stripes come together in solidarity, as fiercely nonpartisan allies, without compromise or submission to corruption, in an unrelenting and sustained commitment to women's full constitutional equality once and for all.

The need for constitutionally guaranteed equality remains shamefully overdue. Instead leaders propose statutory "women's rights" initiatives, rather than addressing the need for constitutional equality. Without equality first, legislative initiatives are meaningless because they can't be equitably enforced, as a constitutional matter, in the courts.

Patricia Arquette's call for women's equality during her acceptance speech at the 2015 Academy Awards a few weeks ago had me cheering. That people reacted so vigorously is a powerful indicator that she touched on an issue people care deeply about but is not getting the attention it deserves in society.

Meanwhile, I'm pleased to report there is still action to establish a Federal Holiday for Women. In November of 2014 a campaign was launched by Women For Action, a Chicago-based organization, to petition Michele Obama and 6 others to ask Americans to support a petition to elevate August 26<sup>th</sup>, Women's Equality Day, to a federal holiday. A goal of 100,000 signatures is proposed.

**Please support the petition to elevate August 26<sup>th</sup>, Women's Equality Day to a Federal Holiday** by visiting <https://www.change.org/p/michelle-obama-elevate-women-s-equality-day-to-a-federal-holiday>. And tell your friends, family and associates where you stand. Let them know that you support women's equality and efforts being made to acknowledge women's contributions. Take the time to share this petition across your networks.

---

<sup>42</sup> <https://petitions.whitehouse.gov/response/voting-and-federal-elections>

Maybe after we have a female President, things will change and the battle won't be so uphill.

Maybe, just maybe, it's not too late.

---

Carol Olmert is a researcher and writer who lives in Walnut Creek CA. She is author of the book, *Bathrooms Make Me Nervous: A Guidebook for Women with Urination Anxiety (Shy Bladder)*. This report, "Why are there no major national holidays celebrating the achievements of women?", was prepared in March 2015.