

Women's History Month Theme: Builders of Communities and Dreams

The National Women's History Project petitioned Congress to expand the celebration from one week to the entire month of March in 1987. Since then, the National Women's History Month Resolution has been approved with bipartisan support in the House and Senate. Each year programs in schools, workplaces, and communities have grown and become involved with efforts to promote multicultural women's history.

This year's theme, **Women: Builders of Communities and Dreams**, honors the spirit of possibility and hope set in motion by generations of women in their creation of communities and their encouragement of dreams. One of the 2006 Honorees is Winona LaDuke, an author and environmentalist living in northern Minnesota. She uses her strong leadership skills and writing talents to build a self-sustaining community for her people but her work is not limited to American Indian issues. Winona LaDuke's vision is of a world community where all cultures are valued and where her children, and all children, will be empowered to follow their dreams. Visit this website www.nwhp.org to find out about all the honorees and get ideas for projects.

This month is an ideal time to reflect on the legacy of Coretta Scott King, another dreamer. This inspiring American leader just passed away in January. Throughout 40 years following the assassination of her husband, civil rights activist Martin Luther King Jr., Coretta Scott King was an outspoken opponent of injustices ranging from capital punishment to apartheid in South Africa and a vocal advocate of women's rights, gay and lesbian rights, and HIV/AIDS prevention. In 2003, she spoke out against the war in Iraq. She believed that peace and justice should belong to all people everywhere, all the time. Here are some thoughts that poet and friend Maya Angelou, shared at Coretta's funeral. "She cherished her race. She cherished women. We owe something from this minute on so that this gathering is not just another footnote on the pages of history. I pledge to you, my sister, I will never cease. I want to see a better world. I want to see some peace somewhere. I want to see some honesty, some fair play. I want to see kindness and justice. This is what I want to see. I want to see it through my eyes and through your eyes, Coretta Scott King." Former President Clinton asked this important question. "What are we going to do with the rest of our lives? You want to treat our friend Coretta like a role model? Then model her behavior." Sen. Hillary Clinton said, "She has passed, but we must take up her burden. We'll have to split it up, because it was a heavy burden to bear. Together, we can carry it. We can carry on the struggle against racism and discrimination." Pastor of her church, Bishop Eddie Long, said that because of Coretta Scott King, "We are all in a better place, doing better things. Doors have been opened."

It is certainly true that brave, bold women have opened many doors. On March 11th, Michelle Bachelet became Chile's first woman President. This single mother of three was once held as a political prisoner under former Chilean leader, Augusto Pinochet. It will be fascinating to watch the progress of this courageous leader. We must be also aware that there are many more doors to unlock and stride through. When my daughter was a little girl, one of the books that I read to her often was, "Girls Can Be Anything". I just became aware of another book called "Girls Hold Up the World". All of us, women and men, girls and boys, can choose to make a difference as we work together for more equality, more justice, more respect for human rights. It may begin as simply as planting seeds of empowerment and positive self-esteem by reading books and talking about them with young children. March is not over yet, so take action, do something, learn something, tell others about a woman who has been a role model for you. What are challenges where you live? What progress can we make in one year by doing something specific each

month for the cause of women's rights? Get creative. Write it down and make it happen. What if we set a goal to hold more community-wide celebrations during Women's History Month in March 2007? I close with one of my favorite quotes by Margaret Mead, another remarkable woman. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."