



LESSON PLAN: IT'S YOUR WAR, TOO

High School (9-12)

OVERVIEW

The scope and scale of World War II required unprecedented numbers of personnel on the battlefield, in warfighting industries, and in support capacities. The need to “free a man to fight” opened many opportunities for women to serve in the U.S. military and laid the groundwork for women to have a permanent place in the armed forces. In this lesson, students will learn about these expanded roles and then examine the relationship between women’s opportunities in the military and their place in the general workforce.

Estimated time: 1-2 class periods

STANDARDS

National Council for the Social Studies

- NCSS.D2.His.1.9-12: Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.2.9-12: Analyze change and continuity in historical eras.
- NCSS.D2.His.14.9-12: Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will identify ways in which World War II expanded roles for women in the military.
- Students will examine the relationship between expanded opportunities for women in the military and their place in the general workforce.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- PowerPoint presentation
- Student worksheet (1 per student)
- Timeline worksheet (1 per student)
- 1 copy Women’s Roles and Rights Timeline

LESSON ACTIVITIES

Introduction: 5 minutes

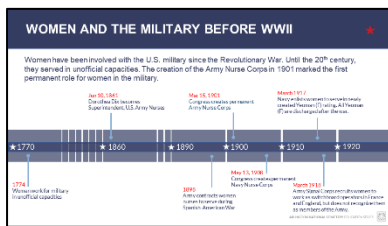
- Pass out the student worksheet and instruct students to complete it using what they know about women’s rights and their place in society around World War II.
 1. Do you think women were allowed to serve in the military before World War II?



2. Do you think women were allowed to serve in the military during World War II?
 3. Which service branches do you think allowed women to serve? – the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard?
 4. Do you think women of color were allowed to serve in the military?
 5. What kind of jobs do you think women were allowed to have in the military?
 6. Do you think it was hard to find women who wanted to serve in the military?
 7. How many women do you think served in the military during WWII?
 8. Do you think women were allowed to keep serving in the military after the war ended?
- After the students have completed the worksheet, instruct them to use it as a note-taking guide during the rest of the lesson. They should use a different colored pen or pencil to correct their answers.

PowerPoint Presentation and Discussion: 45 minutes

Slide 2:



American women have been involved in the U.S. military since the Revolutionary War. Until the 20th century, they mostly worked as nurses, seamstresses, cooks, laundresses, and in other functions related to domestic tasks. Women were not allowed to serve in combat, but some disguised themselves as men in order to serve on the frontlines.

During the Civil War, Dorothea Dix was appointed as Superintendent of Women Nurses for the U.S. (Union) Army. She recruited and organized about 6,000 women to serve. However, these nurses were not considered part of the Army.

The Army contracted, or hired for a short period, about 1,500 women nurses to serve as civilians during the Spanish-American War (1898). Their service was so effective that Congress passed a bill creating a permanent female Army Nurse Corps in 1901. The Navy Nurse Corps was established in 1908. Although both the Army and Navy Nurse Corps were permanent parts of the military, the women who served in them did not have full military status and did not receive the same pay or benefits as male members of the military.

During World War I, the Navy recruited women to serve in order to allow more men to serve in combat. These women were given the rating of Yeoman (F), with the “F” designating female (“yeoman” is pronounced like “yo-min”). In the Navy, yeomen did administrative and clerical work. The female yeomen of World War I were popularly known as “Yeomanettes,” though they themselves did not like this nickname, as it seemed diminutive.



The Yeoman (F) served as enlisted members of the Navy, just as men were allowed to do. However, the Navy ended the Yeoman (F) rating after the war, and all the women were discharged by 1921.

During World War I, the Army Signal Corps recruited women to work as switchboard operators in France and England. These women, popularly known as “Hello Girls,” were required to follow Army orders and wear Army uniforms. However, at the end of the war, the Army determined that they had never been members of the Army and were therefore not entitled to veterans’ benefits. Other women hired by the Army were in similar positions, such as physical and occupational therapists and dieticians.

Slide 3:

WOMEN AND THE MILITARY DURING WWII			
The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard recruited women to serve in non-combat roles, freeing up men to serve in combat.			
Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Coast Guard
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Army Nurse Corps Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), later the Women's Army Corps (WAC) (established on July 1, 1943) Women's Medical Center (WMC) Women's Central Postal Directory (WCPD) Women's Army Central (WAC) (established on July 1, 1945) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Navy Nurse Corps Navy Women's Reserve (established on July 1, 1945) Women's Central Postal Directory (WCPD) Women's Army Central (WAC) (established on July 1, 1945) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marine Corps Women's Reserve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coast Guard Women's Reserve (established on July 1, 1945) Women's Central Postal Directory (WCPD) Women's Army Central (WAC) (established on July 1, 1945)

The scope and scale of World War II required unprecedented numbers of personnel on the battlefield, in warfighting industries, and in support capacities. Each service branch – the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard (the Air Force and Space Force did not yet exist) – recruited women to serve in various non-combat roles, freeing up men to serve in combat.

In the Army, women were allowed to serve in the:

- U. S. Army Nurse Corps
- The Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC), later the Women’s Army Corps (WAC). At first, women served in the WAAC in an auxiliary position, meaning they did not receive all of the same benefits as men who served in the Army. On July 1, 1943, the WAAC became the WAC, and Army women finally received the same rank, privileges, and benefits as male soldiers.
- The Army Air Corps used the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) to deliver and test aircraft, as well as to train male pilots, but they were considered civilians and not officially part of the military. Like the Hello Girls, they were not granted veteran status until the 1970s.

In the Navy, women were allowed to serve in the:

- U.S. Navy Nurse Corps
- Navy Women’s Reserve, also known as WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service)

In the Marine Corps, women were allowed to serve in the Marine Corps Women’s Reserve.

In the Coast Guard, women were allowed to serve in the Coast Guard Women’s Reserve, also known as SPARS (for *Semper Paratus*, “Always Ready” – the Coast Guard motto).



Slide 4:



Look at these photos of women doing a variety of jobs in the military. Discuss: What types of jobs do you see? Do any surprise you?

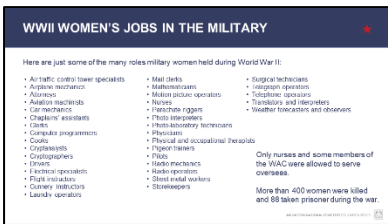
Jobs in pictures:

Top row, L-R: Sorting mail, instructing a sailor on how to operate a machine gun, operating switchboards, cooking, taking inventory

Middle row, L-R: Pilot, inspecting an engine, air traffic control specialists, typists, nurse

Bottom row, L-R: Laboratory technician, mechanic, motor pool drivers, aviation machinists, pigeon trainer

Slide 5:



Here are just some of the many roles military women held during World War II:

- Air traffic control tower specialists
- Airplane mechanics
- Airplane mechanics
- Attorneys
- Aviation machinists
- Car mechanics
- Chaplains' assistants
- Clerks
- Computer programmers
- Cooks
- Cryptanalysts
- Cryptographers
- Drivers
- Electrical specialists
- Flight instructors
- Gunnery instructors
- Laundry operators
- Mail clerks
- Mathematicians
- Motion picture operators
- Nurses
- Parachute riggers
- Photo interpreters
- Photo-laboratory technicians
- Physicians
- Physical and occupational therapists
- Pigeon trainers
- Pilots
- Radio mechanics
- Radio operators
- Sheet metal workers
- Storekeepers
- Surgical technicians
- Telegraph operators
- Telephone operators
- Translators and interpreters
- Weather forecasters and observers

Initially, only a few military jobs were open to women. But as women kept proving they could do these jobs well, and as more men were needed for fighting, military job opportunities for women expanded.

Most women were stationed in the United States. Only nurses and some members of the WAC were allowed to serve overseas. Though




	<p>they were not allowed to fill combat roles, more than 400 American women were killed and 88 taken prisoner during the war.</p>
<p>Slide 6:</p>  <p>Ruby Bradley</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of the Army Nurse Corps during WWII, assigned to serve in the Philippines in 1940. Assigned to the Philippines by the War Relocation Authority (WRRA) in 1941. While a prisoner of war, she provided medical care to other prisoners. Assigned to U.S. Army in February 1945. Assigned as a chief nurse in Korea during Korean War. Promoted to the rank of colonel in 1958, the first woman in the Army to hold that rank. <p>Joy Bright Hancock</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Served during WWI as a Yeoman (F), and later as a Chief Yeoman at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Cape May, NJ. After WWI, she worked as a civilian employee for the Navy, eventually as Bureau of Aeronautics' civilian head of Editorial and Research section. Received her pilot's license. Joined the WAVES during WWII, and she encouraged the Navy to recruit women for aviation jobs. During and after the war, Hancock served in various leadership roles and advocated for expanding women's roles in the military. Involved in preparing the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, which created a permanent place for women in the military. After the act was passed, Hancock was sworn in as one of the first eight women to join the regular Navy. 	<p><i>All of the women on these two slides are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. You can find their burial locations in the Planning at Visit to Arlington National Cemetery? section at the end of this lesson plan.</i></p> <p>Let's learn a bit about some of the women who served:</p> <p>Ruby Bradley was a member of the Army Nurse Corps before WWII. She was assigned to serve in the Philippines in 1940. Soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), the Japanese invaded the Philippines and Bradley was taken prisoner. While a prisoner of war, she established a hospital and provided medical care to other civilian prisoners. Despite the many hardships and lack of supplies, Bradley performed 230 operations and delivered 13 babies while a prisoner. Bradley was liberated by American forces in February 1945. During the Korean War, Bradley served as the chief Army nurse in Korea. She was promoted to the rank of colonel in 1958, the third woman in the Army to achieve that rank.</p> <p>Joy Bright Hancock served during WWI as a Yeoman (F). She rose through the ranks to become Chief Yeoman at the U.S. Naval Air Station in Cape May, NJ. After WWI, she worked as a civilian employee for the Navy, eventually as Bureau of Aeronautics' civilian head of Editorial and Research section. She also received her pilot's license. Hancock joined the WAVES during WWII, and she encouraged the Navy to recruit women for aviation jobs. During and after the war, Hancock served in various leadership roles and advocated for expanding women's roles in the military. She was involved in preparing the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948, which created a permanent place for women in the military. After the act was passed, Hancock was sworn in as one of the first eight women to join the regular Navy.</p>
<p>Slide 7:</p>	<p>Elaine Danforth Harmon earned her pilot's license while in college. She joined the WASP in 1944 after her husband was deployed overseas. Harmon flew training aircraft – the PT-17, BT-13, and AT-6 Texan – and co-piloted the B-17 Flying Fortress bomber. She also trained male pilots in instrument flying, which is navigating by using instruments like</p>




Elsie Danforth Harmon


- Formed the 6888 Central Postal Directory (CPOD) in 1945.
- Served in Europe, Africa, and the Pacific during WWII.
- Awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2022.



Mary Crawford Ragland

- Served in the 6888 Central Postal Directory (CPOD) in 1945.
- Served in Europe, Africa, and the Pacific during WWII.
- Awarded the Congressional Gold Medal in 2022.






the compass and altimeter instead of by sight. After the war, Harmon advocated for WASPs to be recognized as veterans. She was present when President Barack Obama signed the bill awarding WASP pilots the Congressional Gold Medal.

When Mary Crawford Ragland was 17 years old, her mother came home one day and showed her a newspaper ad calling for Black women to serve in the military. Her mother said, “if I were young again, I would do this.” This inspired Ragland to enlist, and she served in the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion (part of the WAC). The “Six-Triple-Eight” was the only unit of Black women who served in Europe during WWII. They were sent overseas to process an enormous backlog of mail in Great Britain and France. The work was expected to take six months, but the women of the 6888th completed it in three. Ragland worked as a clerk and served in a group that provided entertainment for troops. Though the 6888th had served admirably, they did not receive much fanfare upon their return home, and Ragland was discharged at the end of the war. In 2009, the Army honored the 6888th in a ceremony at the Military Women’s Memorial (adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery), and in 2022 the unit received the Congressional Gold Medal.

Slide 8:

RECRUITING WOMEN

- When the WAAC first began, 35,000 women applied for 1,000 available positions.
- By the end of the war, approximately 350,000 women had served in the military.
- Each branch had different requirements for who could serve, but all barred pregnant women and women with children under the age of 18.
- Black women were allowed in the WAACs starting in 1942, but not allowed in the WAVES or SPARS until 1944. They were not allowed in the Marine Corps Reserve.
- Japanese American women were allowed to serve in the Army, but not until 1943.



When the Women’s Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) first began, 35,000 women applied for 1,000 available positions. Lots of women wanted to serve in the military, and lots of women did serve – approximately 350,000 by the end of the war.

Each branch had slightly different requirements for who was allowed to serve. Enlisted WAVES could be between ages 18 and 36, and officers between 20 and 50. The WAAC initially required women to be between the ages of 21 and 45. Women with children under the age of 18 generally were not allowed to join the military. If a woman became pregnant, she would be immediately discharged.

There were 40 Black women in the first group of WAACs in 1942, but the WAVES and SPARS did not begin recruiting Black women until 1944. Black women were not allowed to serve in the Marine Corps at all. Japanese American women were allowed to serve in the Army, but not until 1943.

Slide 9:

These posters were made during WWII to recruit women into the military, Cadet Nurse Corps, and wartime industries. Discuss:

- What types of women are featured?



- Are the messages directed to “women” or “girls?” Do you think there is a difference between the meaning of these words in this context?
- What reasons are offered to motivate women to join these various services?

Slide 10:



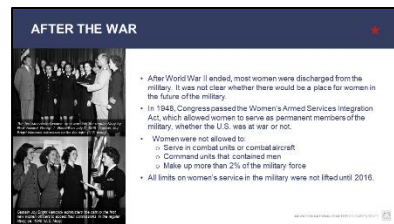
Watch “It’s Your War, Too,” 00:45-4:40
<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/35837>

This video was created by the WAC to recruit women to serve, especially by fighting negative stereotypes of the WAC.

After watching the video, discuss:

- Which myths about the WACs and women in the military did this video address?
- Which strategies did it use to appeal to women?
- How do the strategies in the video and posters reflect gender stereotypes at the time?

Slide 11:



Once WWII ended, women were no longer needed to “free a man to fight.” Most women were discharged, and it was not clear whether there would be a place for women in the future of the military.

In 1948, Congress passed the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act. This allowed women to serve as permanent members of the American military, whether the U.S. was at war or not. However, women were still not allowed to serve in combat units or in combat aircraft, and they could not command units that contained men, among many other restrictions. Women could not make up more than 2% of the military force.

All limits on women’s service in the military were not lifted until 2016.

Timeline Activity and Discussion: 30 minutes

- Let’s take a bigger picture look at the expansion of women’s roles in the military, as well as the expansion of women’s roles and rights in American society.
- Hand out the Timeline Worksheet and display the timeline cards for the following events:
 - April 17, 1775-October 19, 1781: Revolutionary War
 - June 18, 1812-February 18, 1815: War of 1812
 - April 25, 1846-February 2, 1848: Mexican-American War
 - April 12, 1861-April 9, 1865: Civil War
 - June 10, 1861: Dorothea Dix appointed Superintendent of Women Nurses for the U.S. (Union) Army
 - April 21, 1898-December 10, 1898: Spanish-American War



- April 28, 1898: U.S. Army contracts civilian women nurses
- March 15, 1901: Army Nurse Corps created
- May 13, 1908: Navy Nurse Corps created
- July 28, 1914-November 11, 1918: World War I
- March 21, 1917: Loretta Perfectus Walsh becomes the first woman to enlist in the U.S. military when she joins the U.S. Navy as a Yeoman (F).
- September 1, 1939-September 2, 1945: World War II
- 1942: Creation of the WAAC, WAVES, Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, and SPAR.
- June 25, 1950-July 27, 1953: Korean War
- March 15, 1962-March 29, 1973: formal U.S. participation in the Vietnam War
- August 2, 1990-February 28, 1991: Gulf War
- September 14, 2001-August 30, 2021: Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq

Slide 12:

WOMEN'S ROLES AND RIGHTS TIMELINE

- 1776: First women in military roles.
- 1789: Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, granting women the right to vote.
- 1861: Confederate soldiers are recruited, allowing women to serve in the military.
- 1862: Department of Defense directs that women are allowed to serve in any role or occupation in the military.
- 1868: Department of Defense issues a ban on military women from serving in combat.
- 1875: Equal Pay Act becomes law, prohibiting pay discrimination based on sex.
- 1898: Equal Rights Amendment, which would guarantee equal legal rights regardless of sex, fails to be ratified by a majority of U.S. states.
- 1901: First woman Supreme Court justice.
- 1908: First woman to command a vessel.
- 1917: First woman vice president of the United States.
- 1918: First woman to give a speech on the floor of Congress.
- 1920: Newspaper columnist calls prohibition "the greatest wrong done to women."
- 1924: Prohibition ends because of low revenue, prohibition penalties, discrimination due to pregnancy, childbirth, or marital conditions.
- 1924: A federal law, prohibiting sex discrimination in education activities that receive federal funding.
- 1942: 18 of 48 states and 10 territories are approving employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, or sex.
- 1948: Women allowed to enter all military service branches.
- 1948: Women's Armed Services Integration Act passed, making a permanent place for women in the military.
- 1950: Women's Veterans program was allowed to continue in the military.
- 1953: Wyoming becomes first state to grant women the right to vote.

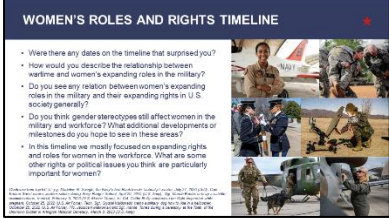
Take a look at the collection of events on the PowerPoint slide – where do you think they fit on the timeline?
Guide students to make guesses. As they guess, tape up the timeline cards in the correct order.

- April 17, 1775-October 19, 1781: Revolutionary War
- June 18, 1812-February 18, 1815: War of 1812
- April 25, 1846-February 2, 1848: Mexican-American War
- July 19–20, 1848: First women’s rights convention held in Seneca Falls, NY.
- April 12, 1861-April 9, 1865: Civil War
- June 10, 1861: Dorothea Dix appointed Superintendent of Women Nurses for the U.S. (Union) Army.
- December 10, 1869: Wyoming becomes first state to grant women the right to vote.
- April 21, 1898-December 10, 1898: Spanish-American War
- April 28, 1898: U.S. Army contracts women nurses.
- March 15, 1901: Army Nurse Corps created.
- May 13, 1908: Navy Nurse Corps created.
- July 28, 1914-November 11, 1918: World War I
- March 21, 1917: Loretta Perfectus Walsh becomes the first woman to enlist in the U.S. military.
- August 24, 1920: 19th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, granting women nationwide the right to vote.
- January 12, 1932: Hattie Wyatt Caraway becomes first woman elected to U.S. Senate.
- September 1, 1939-September 2, 1945: World War II
- 1942: Creation of the WAAC, WAVES, Marine Corps Women’s Reserve, and SPAR.
- June 12, 1948: Women’s Armed Services Integration Act makes a permanent place for women in the military, although they are still treated differently than men.



- June 25, 1950-July 27, 1953: Korean War
- March 15, 1962-March 29, 1973: formal U.S. participation in the Vietnam War
- June 10, 1963: Congress passes the Equal Pay Act, which prohibits pay discrimination based on sex.
- July 2, 1964: Title VII of the Civil Rights Act prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, or sex.
- November 8, 1967: 2% limit on women in military lifted; women allowed to be promoted to the highest ranks.
- 1968: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission prohibits help-wanted ads in newspapers from specifying a gender.
- June 23, 1972: Title IX becomes law, prohibiting sex discrimination in education activities that receive federal funding.
- 1975: Women who become pregnant are allowed to continue serving in the military.
- 1976: Women allowed to enter all military service academies.
- October 31, 1978: Pregnancy Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination in the workplace due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions.
- September 25, 1981: Sandra Day O'Connor becomes the first woman Supreme Court Justice.
- 1982: Equal Rights Amendment, a constitutional amendment which would guarantee equal legal rights regardless of sex, fails to be ratified. This amendment was first proposed in 1923.
- 1989: Captain Linda Bray becomes the first woman to command in combat.
- August 2, 1990-February 28, 1991: Gulf War
- 1994: Department of Defense issues a rule excluding women from serving in direct combat.
- 1994: The Secretary of the Army decrees that women can serve in the Tomb Sentinel Squad for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier.
- 1996: Sgt. Heather Johnson becomes the first woman to guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery.
- September 14, 2001-August 30, 2021: Wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- January 24, 2013: Combat exclusion rule is rescinded, allowing women to serve in combat.
- August 21, 2015: Shaye Lynne Haver and Kristen Griest become the first women to graduate from the U.S. Army Ranger School.
- January 29, 2016: Department of Defense directs that women are allowed to serve in any role or occupation in the military.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> January 20, 2021: Kamala Harris becomes the first woman vice president of the United States.
<p>Slide 13:</p>  <p>WOMEN'S ROLES AND RIGHTS TIMELINE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were there any dates on the timeline that surprised you? How would you describe the relationship between wartime and women's expanding roles in the military? Do you see any relation between women's expanding roles in the military and their expanding rights in U.S. society generally? Do you think gender stereotypes still affect women in the military and workforce? What additional developments or milestones do you hope to see in these areas? In this timeline we mostly focused on expanding rights and roles for women in the workforce. What are some other rights or political issues you think are particularly important for women? 	<p>Lead a discussion about the timeline using the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were there any dates on the timeline that surprised you? How would you describe the relationship between wartime and women's expanding roles in the military? Do you see any relation between women's expanding roles in the military and their expanding rights in U.S. society generally? Do you think gender stereotypes still affect women in the military and workforce? What additional developments or milestones do you hope to see in these areas? In this timeline, we mostly focused on expanding rights and roles for women in the workforce. What are some other rights or political issues you think are particularly important for women?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

- Invite students to add other events in women's history to the timeline. These may be events you have learned about previously in class, or students may need to do additional research.
- Watch additional WWII recruiting videos from the Marine Corps, SPARS, WASP compiled by the National WWII Museum here: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/its-your-war-too-women-world-war-ii>
- Listen to oral history interviews given by:
 - Joy Bright Hancock: <https://www.usni.org/press/oral-histories/waves>
 - Elaine Danforth Harmon: <https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.30070/>
 - Mary Crawford Ragland: <https://guides.loc.gov/6888th-central-postal-directory-battalion/mary-crawford-ragland>

PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?

The individual women highlighted in this lesson are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. You can use the ANC Explorer app to visit their graves and honor their service.

Gravesites:

- Ruby Grace Bradley: Section 21, Grave 318
- Joy Bright Hancock (Ofstie): Section 30, Grave 2138-RH
- Elaine Danforth Harmon: Columbarium Court 9, Section N42, Column 12, Niche 6
- Mary Crawford Ragland: Columbarium Court 7, Section PP, Column 2, Niche 5

You can also use the Military Women or Women's Rights walking tours on the ANC Education website to learn more about individuals who paved the way for women's rights in the United States.



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