

# Women's History Month

MARCH 2024

# Women's History Month

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Each year, the Department of Defense honors the women who have shaped U.S. history, and through their contributions paved the way forward for future female pioneers.

In 1987, Congress passed Public Law 100-9 authorizing the President to proclaim the month of March as Women's History Month each year. Before this, the event was known as "Women's History Week," which originated in 1981.

# Theme

This year's theme, "***Women Who Have Made Great Achievements***," celebrates the women who have left an impact on the United States through their sacrifices, public service, and inspirational work.

This presentation features just a few of the female pioneers who have achieved great things: **Claudette Colvin, Sonia Sotomayor, Mabel Lee, and Annie Dodge Wauneka.**

# Claudette Colvin (1 of 3)

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Nine months before Rosa Parks made her famous stand for civil rights, there was Claudette Colvin, a 15-year-old Black girl who challenged segregationist bus policies.

Born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1939, Colvin was keenly aware of the racism, inequity, and abuse that surrounded her. Inspired by her school's month-long Black history celebration, she decided to resist the oppression in her town.



# Claudette Colvin (2 of 3)

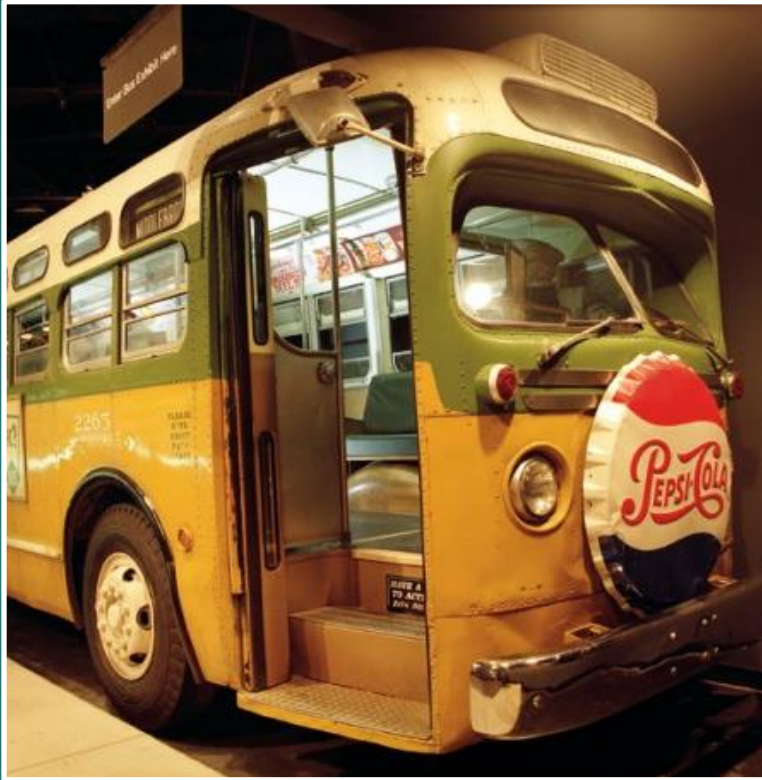
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In 1955, Colvin refused to give up her seat for a White woman after the “Whites only” section was full. When asked why she would not give her seat up for the woman, she replied, “because it is my constitutional right.”

The bus driver alerted the police, who forced her off and jailed her. She was the first person arrested for challenging Montgomery’s bus segregation laws. After being mistreated by the officers, she was charged with disobeying segregation laws, resisting arrest, and assaulting an officer. These offenses stayed on her record into adulthood.

# Claudette Colvin (3 of 3)

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Despite breaking this segregation barrier, she did not go on to lead the Civil Rights Movement as Rosa Parks did. Instead, she moved to New York City where she started a family. Colvin only returned to testify in court to challenge segregation on Montgomery buses.

In 2021, Colvin, then 82 years old, finally had her record expunged of the criminal charges.



# Sonia Sotomayor (1 of 3)

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Sonia Sotomayor is the first Latina and the third woman appointed to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Born in New York City in 1954, Sotomayor grew up in a Bronx housing project in a large ethnically mixed, working-class community. As valedictorian of her school, she received a full scholarship to Princeton University, where she pursued a career in law.



# Sonia Sotomayor (2 of 3)

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At Princeton, Sotomayor advocated for greater representation after realizing she was often the only woman—and Hispanic person—throughout her schooling. After graduating Princeton in 1976 and Yale Law School in 1979, she became an assistant district attorney.

Over the next decade, Sotomayor proved her skills as a lawyer. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush nominated her to become the first Latina woman to join the U.S. Federal Southern Court District.



# Sonia Sotomayor (3 of 3)

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After years in the subordinate Federal courts, Sotomayor made history again when President Obama nominated her for the Supreme Court in 2009.

Since then, she's served on the bench, delivering many progressive decisions on important issues, such as criminal justice reform.



# Mabel Lee (1 of 3)

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Mabel Ping-Hau Lee was a feminist activist who fought for voting rights in the United States and China. She was also the first Chinese woman to earn a doctoral degree in the United States.

Born in 1896 in Canton, China, Lee moved to New York City with her family, who worked for the Baptist Church, at a time when anti-Chinese immigration laws were the norm.



# Mabel Lee (2 of 3)

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Lee and her family were supporters of the women's suffrage movement, hoping to change negative perceptions of the Chinese people. As a teenager, Lee was invited to ride with the honor guard leading a huge suffrage parade in New York, cementing her passion for advocacy.

She'd go on to give speeches about women's equality in China and the United States, promoting education and civic engagement.



# Mabel Lee (3 of 3)

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In 1921, Lee went to Columbia University where she earned a Ph.D. in economics. But she found fewer opportunities for Asian women in the United States compared to China. Still, she stayed to support her local Chinese community.



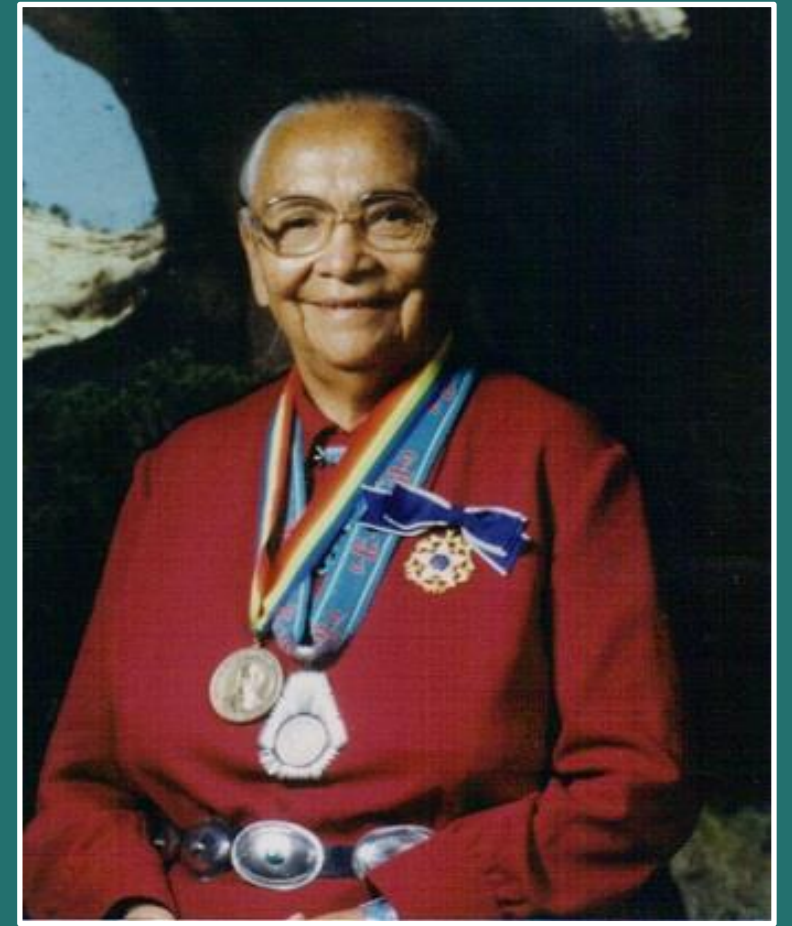
Her contributions to the suffrage movement are often overlooked but serve as an inspiration to intersectional, global feminism and equality.

# Annie Dodge Wauneka (1 of 3)

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Annie Dodge Wauneka was one of the first women ever elected to the Navajo Tribal Council. Born in Arizona in 1910, Wauneka was just a child when Spanish influenza devastated her community.

She survived the pandemic and went on to dedicate herself to improving the health care and welfare of her people, studying public health at the University of Arizona.



# Annie Dodge Wauneka (2 of 3)

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Wauneka's Tribal Council initiatives included establishing an English-Navajo medical dictionary, educating people on diseases, and improving housing and sanitation conditions.

She also served on advisory boards to the U.S. Surgeon General and U.S. Public Health Service, balancing modern medicine with traditional cultural values.

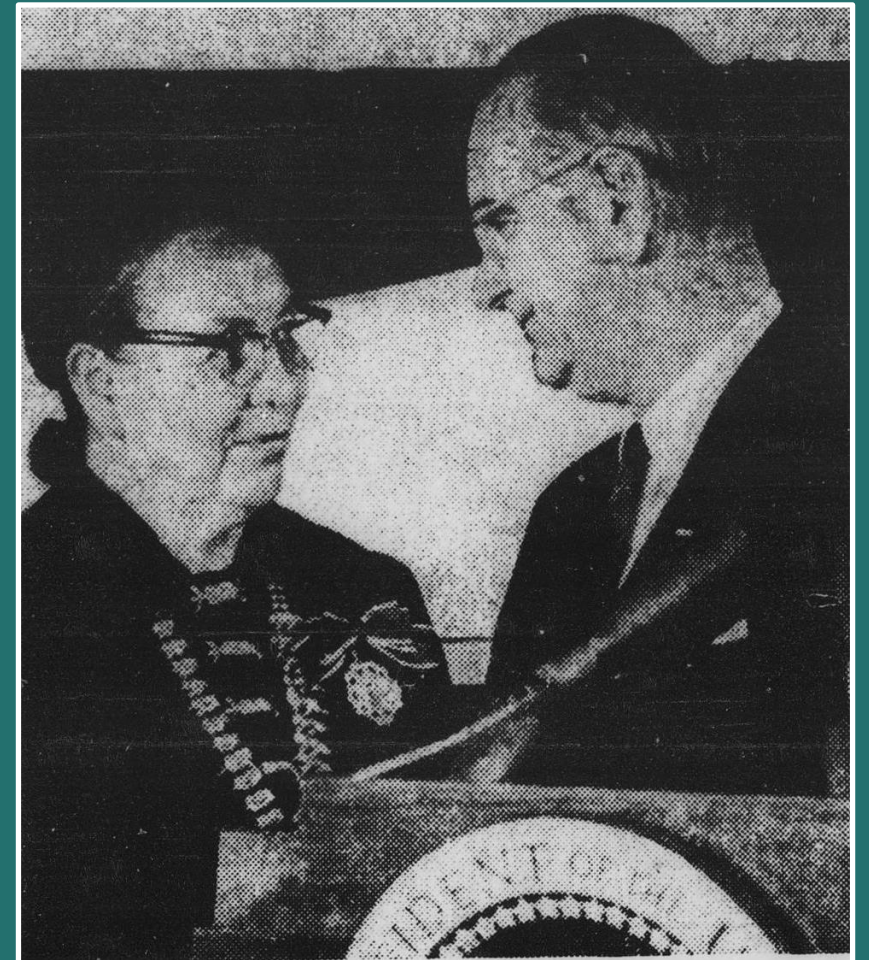


# Annie Dodge Wauneka (3 of 3)

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In 1963, for recognition for her life of service, Wauneka was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, becoming the first American Indian to earn the honor.

Until her death in 1997, she aided her community as the “legendary mother of the Navajo Nation,” making massive improvements to the health and education of all Navajo people.



# Conclusion

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Women have played a crucial role in moving progress forward throughout American history. The contributions of women like Claudette Colvin, Sonia Sotomayor, Mabel Lee, and Annie Dodge Wauneka serve as an inspiration for current and future generations.

The countless achievements women have made, and the barriers they have broken, deserves to be commemorated during Women's History Month and should be honored all year.

Prepared by the  
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