

Greetings!

This article is part of a series of activities and resources to promote the Center for Youth Citizenship's good citizenship traits of Justice, Fairness, & Equity in schools and communities in 2007-2008. ~ Joseph P. Maloney, Ph. D., Executive Director, Center for Youth Citizenship



An Under-Represented Group of "The Greatest Generation"




In the 1980's, the month of March was declared, by U.S. Congressional Resolution, as Women's History Month! Congress wanted all citizens to promote our fundamental principles of equal treatment and opportunity, regardless of such things as gender, and to recognize the status and accomplishments of women. Women have made significant contributions to the greatness of our country. It would seem logical to have this type of acknowledgment be continuous and happen in classrooms throughout the year! Today's schools, undoubtedly, spend time on the contributions of individual women in history

from Betsy Ross (1776) to Nancy Pelosi (2007), the first woman to become Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Schools can and do, with some research, easily include the accomplishments of women of all ethnic and cultural groups that reflect our diverse backgrounds and communities. The contributions of women are related to all subject matters. However, an additional activity for students, teachers and families would be to expand reflection and study to include the gains individual women have made to include those collectively

accomplished by groups of women. The rationale for this extension would be, that in today's and tomorrow's communities, continual progress will undoubtedly be made by some outstanding individuals, but it is more likely that significant improvements – real change – will be accomplished by small groups skilled in collaboration and teamwork. The spirit of individual initiative must include proactive strategies to address mega-urban sprawl, stressed institutions and infrastructures, and rapidly changing technologies.

For the last 60 plus years, Americans have been expressing their appreciation for the men that served their country during World War II. The John Wayne rugged individual types have been in numerous books and movies and have served as our male role models and heroes. Some women were recognized, to a more limited degree, for their individual contributions. The role of many other women, however, has been trivialized in past films and books. The renewed interest about our "greatest generation" and their sacrifices to help win the war and preserve the peace has provided a long awaited opportunity to thank an under-represented group from our past.



For sure, “his story” has not always been “her story”! Also, balanced coverage in textbooks and classrooms was not always a given and continues, to some degree, to be a matter needing correction. Few would argue that men and women, as groups and from a traditional public policy perspective, were not always treated the same! A recently released book makes this point and identifies a group of women that deserves to be included in a revisit of our history.

The book, *Yankee Doodle Gals: Women Pilots of World War II* is the story of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP). A great read and highlight of an under-told part of our history, this story is a good example of inequities in treatment and policies in our armed services. For the record, these women who enlisted to become pilots had to pay their own way to training and, after they were abruptly released in 1944, had to find their own means home. Approximately 25,000 women applied as WASP. Some 1,830 were accepted for training, while around 1,100 graduated and became pilots. Noteworthy is the fact that thirty-eight WASP graduates or trainees lost their lives in service to our country. These women casualties received no honors, official ceremonies, or survival benefits. Their many valourous contributions included duties from ferrying planes, training male pilots, and test piloting new aircraft being brought on line for the war effort.

The WASP were forgotten for over thirty years. The WASP program, during this time period, was not an official part of the history of WW

II; military records were sealed and were not available to historians until years later. In November of 1977, Public Law 95-202 was passed by Congress to provide veteran status to the WASP. Finally, our nation declared that WASP service during WWII would be designated as “active military service.” Starting in 1979, WASP members received their long deserved honorable discharge letters from the United States Air Force. No retroactive provisions were included in this legislation.

The WASP truly provided a foundation for other women’s efforts in aviation, space and military service. This book also reflects and points out the contribution of civilian women to the war effort outside of military service. In shipyards, air craft factories and other support services, women across the United States were essential to our victory. “Rosie the Riveter” and her group of the under recognized must also be appreciated and included as a part of the “greatest generation.”

Reviewing past oversights and historical blind spots may be painful, but is healthy and fair. As part of this review, one might surmise that as a nation we have come a long way, but still have some ways to go! Our collective interests will be reached when women, along with men, work to ensure (regardless of gender, race, creed etc.) those beliefs and statements that are fundamental to our historical documents. Our collective pursuit of the **fairness, justice and equity** in treatment and our efforts to expand **respect** and appreciation of differences and individuality are essential for

improving today’s and tomorrow’s communities.

Let’s begin by making this type of reading and history available in school libraries for those youth who dream of becoming the leaders of the next generation. If we can’t, for whatever reason, envision a hopeful future with equal and fair opportunities for all, we may fail to achieve a place fitting the commitment and sacrifices of our past generations or the ability to provide the motivation and environment necessary to guide and prepare tomorrow’s citizens and their efforts to improve the human condition.

For information on the Women Airforce Service Pilots, visit:

<http://www.iwasm.org>

<http://www.loc.gov/index.html>

<http://www.free.ed.gov>

Joseph P. Maloney is the Executive Director of the Center for Youth Citizenship (CYC). CYC believes that it is our duty to prepare and inspire our children to be responsible citizens committed to acting with character. Through Character-Based Citizenship® partnerships, CYC helps schools and communities teach youth the fundamental behaviors, habits, skills and actions that prepare them for academic and community success and full participation in our democracy. Contact Dr. Maloney or CYC at cyc@scoe.net or (916) 228-2322, or visit www.youthcitizenship.org.

