

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

MARCH



WILMA RUDOLPH

Wilma Rudolph (b. 1940-1994) was born and raised in Tennessee and overcame incredible odds to become a gold medal winning Olympian and "the fastest woman in the world." Born to a family of 22, Wilma Rudolph battled bouts of polio and scarlet fever as a child, leaving her with a brace on her leg. Although doctors told her family that she would never walk again, she was out of her leg brace by the age of 9 thanks to her family's care. Rudolph quickly turned to sports, was nominated as All-American in basketball when she was in high school and then turned her attention to track and field, where she excelled. Wilma went on to compete in the 1956 and 1960 Olympics, where she won one bronze and three gold medals, respectively. Upon returning home from the 1960 games, Rudolph refused to attend her own homecoming parade in Clarksville, TN if it was not integrated. The parade became the first fully integrated event in the town's history.

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Like many heritage months, Women's History Month began as a week long celebration. Women's History Week was first celebrated in 1978 in Santa Rosa, California. The Commission on the Status of Women chose to celebrate during the week of March 8th, corresponding with International Women's Day. Recognition of the week quickly caught on across the country, and by 1980 the National Women's History Project--now known as the National Women's History Alliance--led a consortium lobbying for national recognition. In February of 1980, President Jimmy Carter declared the week of March 8 as National Women's History Week.

The week of March 8 continued to be recognized as Women's History week until 1987, when Congress passed Pub. L. 100-9 which designated the month of March 1987 as "Women's History Month." Ever since, presidents have issued annual proclamations designating the month of March as Women's History Month.

This year, the Margaret Cuninggim Women's Center will celebrate 50 years of Title IX and women in sports. They will host daily events in honor of Women's History Month and will feature guest speakers who will discuss the impact of Title IX.



VANDERBILT
UNIVERSITY

(Excerpt and biographical information from the National Women's History Museum womenshistory.org. Photo from biography.com)

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