What You’re Saying

While I appreciate your coverage, I am disappointed that it focused only on sex trafficking (“Combatting Human Trafficking: The Need for Advocacy,” winter 2017). Sex trafficking is a very important component of human trafficking, but it is not the only one.

Labor trafficking, in which laborers are housed in great privation and paid no wages, and further, threatened if they try to leave these circumstances, is an important part of human trafficking that rarely is either investigated or reported upon.

When writing about sex trafficking, please use this term rather than human trafficking. It will clarify the topic.

DIANA PAGE, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

I am writing to express my opinion on your “A Lesson on School Vouchers” article (winter 2017). As a resident of New Jersey, I have observed more than 30 years of pouring public money into failing inner-city school districts without a significant improvement in student success. I think that education professionals need to begin to consider other approaches.

Parents who might receive a voucher still pay taxes to support their local public school. Personally I believe our public schools have already failed the most vulnerable of the student population, and we need to try a different approach.

BARBARA BAILEY, MOUNTAIN LAKES, NEW JERSEY

Your statement that vouchers would divert money to unaccountable schools when referring to private schools is disingenuous. I think most people would recognize that sending your child to a private school is generally considered to be an improvement over the local public school choice. Because they are allowed to innovate, design their own programs, and are not constrained by teachers’ union requirements, they most often do a superior (albeit pricey) job of education.

BARBARA BAILEY, MOUNTAIN LAKES, NEW JERSEY

And this is a day that will change us forever because we are together. Each of us individually and collectively will never be the same again.

GLORIA STEINEM AT THE WOMEN’S MARCH ON WASHINGTON

All I want to do is be a normal child and use the restroom in peace, and I have had no problems from students to do that only from adults.

GAVIN GRIMM, A TRANSGENDER BOY WHO IS FIGHTING FOR RESTROOM ACCESS AT HIS GLOUCESTER, VIRGINIA HIGH SCHOOL, DURING A 2014 SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
Why We Marched
BY AMY BECKER
AAUW members from all over the country marched for women’s rights on January 21.

The Power of Education
BY BETH PEARSSALL
Her world was transformed by education, and now Tererai Trent, Ph.D., is bringing that right to girls in Zimbabwe.

Title IX at 45
BY AMY BECKER
This 37-word law has made a world of difference for women and girls, but Title IX needs protection now more than ever before.

2017 AAUW National Election Voter Guide
Everything you need to know to vote in the upcoming AAUW National Election is right here in Outlook.
I work with a team of machine-learning scientists, and now I can speak their language more fluently. I would not be as successful in this role without what I’ve learned at Northwestern.”

— Tina Lakinger, MS in Predictive Analytics, Technical Product/Program Manager

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Professional Studies
An Evolving AAUW

In the 1880s, when AAUW was founded, our publications were typeset by hand, women couldn’t vote, and dues were $1 per year. We’ve seen and made so much change since then.

There’s more change on the horizon for us at AAUW. Of course we and the larger feminist community are adjusting to a new political climate, but as a uniquely positioned and powerful group of advocates, AAUW has also been paving the way for change as an organization.

One of those changes is to Outlook itself. Starting with the summer issue, we will be going digital. You’ll still get the same trenchant insight about the issues that affect women and girls the most but you’ll be getting more content, because with a digital version comes complementary features like videos, slideshows, and polls. The format is also attractive and easy to use: You can flip through the pages just like you would with a hard copy, zoom in if you have a hard time reading small print, and go directly to websites that are mentioned in the stories.

You’ll be able to request to opt in to receive a printed Outlook, but unfortunately the cost of printing and mailing the magazine to all members have made it unsustainable. We’re excited about the opportunity to make Outlook more robust and easier to share. Make sure your e-mail address is on file (e-mail connect@aauw.org) to keep receiving your magazine.

Of course the biggest changes are coming this summer, when members will vote in a new AAUW Board of Directors and decide on fundamental changes to our membership requirement, amendments to our Public Policy Program, and more. And the AAUW National Election isn’t the only noteworthy event happening soon: The introduction of AAUW’s new chief executive officer is planned for this summer, and the board is considering a dues increase of $10.

Advancing equity for women and girls means changing with the times, focusing on our impact, making sure our work is sustainable, and working together to make change. It’s what we’ve done since 1881, and it’ll be what we’re doing 136 years from now.
What do you do when your rights are under attack? Stand up, fight back! 🙌💥🌈👊

@AAUWPolicy: We stand with immigrants and refugees as they face unprecedented attacks. #BuildBridgesNotWalls

@AAUWFellowships: During WWII @AAUW offered scholarships that helped women Jewish scholars escape Europe.

Herta Leng was an Austrian-born physicist who received aid from the AAUW War Relief Fund.


 Calling all #RogueOne fans! Teach young girls how to channel the Force with our advocacy and programs. AAUW Tech Trek camps inspire middle school girls to pursue the science, technology, engineering, and math skills that might finally explain the Force.

DON'T MISS A BEAT — OR A TWEET! Follow AAUW on social media.

/AAUW.National /AAUW @aaunational
From the AAUW Blog: Five Ways to Stand Up to Sexism

BY HANNAH GOLDEN

Most people agree that gender discrimination is unacceptable. Yet it still persists and assumes many forms, from the seemingly harmless workplace comments to the denial of equal pay for equal work. So what can you do?

First, challenge your own unconscious biases. The truth is that even the most dedicated of activists can harbor unconscious biases around issues like gender and race. Fortunately, we can all take action to combat our preconceived ideas. Change begins within each of us, and identifying our own biases paves the way for dismantling bias when we see it happen externally.

READ THE FULL POST ONLINE AT WWW.AAUW.ORG/BLOG.
Why We Marched

BY AMY BECKER
Among the millions who gathered in Washington, D.C., and beyond on January 21 to assert that women’s rights are human rights were many AAUW members. These are the stories of where they marched and why.
On a clear day on March 3, 1913, 5,000 women marched down Pennsylvania Avenue from the U.S. Capitol to the front of the White House. On the eve of President Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration these brave women descended on Washington to fight for the vote in the first suffragist parade in Washington, D.C. Seven years after they made history with their march, Congress passed the 19th Amendment, extending enfranchisement to women nationwide, though women of color would have to wait for more than 40 more years before they finally gained equal access to the ballot box through the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

More than 100 years later, another historic gathering of women would descend on our nation’s capitol and in cities across the country. What started as a few simple Facebook posts sparked a gathering of 3.3 million Americans for marches across the United States on January 21, the day following President Donald Trump’s inauguration. In Washington, D.C., alone, crowd estimates were around half a million. Attendees marched for women’s rights, for immigration rights, for minority rights, for LGBTQ rights, for reproductive rights, and more. They came together to remind elected officials at every level of government that women’s rights are human rights and that injustice and discrimination against one group affects everyone. And that would not be tolerated.

AAUW has never been an organization to sit out history, and an official AAUW delegation was there at the Washington march and at marches across the country with signs and megaphones (and in one instance, a seven-foot-tall puppet of Lady Liberty). Following in the footsteps of AAUW members who attended the original Women’s March in 1913, including founding member of the NAACP Mary Church Terrell, child welfare advocate Julia Lathrop, suffragist Anna Kelton Wiley, and social work pioneer Jane Addams, in January AAUW members gathered not just in our nation’s capital but across the country in their communities, their statehouses, and their town squares. As a nonpartisan organization, AAUW marched to remind elected officials that women are watching and will make their voices heard on any action (or inaction) on women’s issues.

AAUW Board Chair Patricia Fae Ho was one of the Women’s March on Washington attendees who walked with the AAUW delegation. Upon seeing the excited and determined faces of attendees she noted the importance of AAUW and its presence in that historic moment: AAUW’s strength of purpose was exemplified in the powerful advocacy of our members and friends throughout all the marches across the country. We stand firm on our issues in advancing women’s equity and enforcement of civil rights for all.

Thousands of AAUW members participated in either the Washington march or what the organizers called Sister Marches nationwide; AAUW branches were represented in 49 states as well as Washington, D.C. We spoke with a handful of members who participated to get a sense of what brought them to the marches and what’s next in the fight for equality.
Susan Wheatley made the journey from Indiana, Pennsylvania, where she is a branch president and board secretary, to join her daughter and AAUW member Melinda Martin-Beltran for their second women’s march. We marched for women’s reproductive rights in 1989, when I was 41 and she was 14. And now this year she is 41! It was an incredible mother-daughter moment for both of us, said Wheatley.

She added that the reasons behind the 2017 Women’s March aren’t much different from the one she attended almost 30 years ago. We have made enormous strides since Mindy and I made our first march in 1989. But we still know women in our country who have been discouraged in the political realm, in the academic realm, said Wheatley. So the main thing that we must do to continue the momentum from the Women’s March is to talk openly in all of our communities across the nation.

Affiliate AAUW member and Saint Louis University student Taylor Jackson piled into a van with four friends and made the 13-hour drive to Washington to be part of history. Jackson said she decided to travel to D.C. to join the community of thousands of individuals who are passionate about making change and moving forward. Jackson said that women everywhere should continue the momentum by showing up for other issues and all threats against inequity, adding, I have to ask myself, as a white woman who experiences privilege based on various identities, why I was willing to drive to D.C. for this march, but I have not always been willing to attend Black Lives Matter protests within my own city. Feminists have to show up to protest injustices, regardless of whether or not they affect you personally. If your feminism isn’t intersectional, it isn’t feminism.

Members of the Younger Women’s Task Force (YWTF) also made a strong showing at the march. YWTF of Greater Lafayette Chapter Director Melissa Gruver from Indiana did not walk with the AAUW delegation but instead with what she calls the satellite AAUW delegation (they didn’t get to meet up with the official AAUW group among the crowds) made up of herself and two other AAUW members. She also noted that Greater Lafayette YWTF members marched in four other Sister Marches across the country. Gruver chose to march because she said she believes in the power of women of color to lead in past, current, and future social movements. In terms of the future of the March and how

Clockwise from top left: a member of the AAUW delegation in D.C.; members in Vermont; members in Naples, Florida; AAUW Thousand Oaks Branch members in California; a member from Vermont at the D.C. march
Feminists have to show up to protest injustices, regardless of whether or not they affect you personally. If your feminism isn’t intersectional, it isn’t feminism.

STUDENT TAYLOR JACKSON

AAUW can continue beyond the one-time event, Gruver says, We have to remember that our own liberation is bound up in each other’s liberation. AAUW members and supporters can continue the momentum by seeking out opportunities to follow the lead of women of color and to listen to marginalized women when they share their stories and experiences and do what they ask us to do.

Another YWTF member, Laura Groth of the D.C. chapter, also attended the march and said of her experience, I marched because I wanted the world to know that Americans still believe in human rights, and we are willing to keep talking and fighting for equality for all regardless of what they might read on Twitter!

With the large swells of people spilling out onto the U.S. Capitol grounds, onto the National Mall, and onto the steps of almost every Smithsonian museum, it was profoundly moving to know that this same passion was also being exhibited in cities and towns across the country. AAUW has branches in all 50 states—more than 1,000 branches and 170,000 members and supporters. Those who couldn’t make it to D.C. or wanted to participate in their own communities were adamant in making sure that elected officials heard them roar, no matter how many miles stood between them and Capitol Hill.

Members of AAUW of Idaho braved the elements and marched through the falling snow, alongside a seven-foot-tall Lady Liberty who obviously was an AAUW member (she was carrying an AAUW I March for Equality sign). Why did they brave the snow? Because of the women who marched before us, women now have the right to vote and make their own health care choices. We marched to demonstrate that we will fight to keep those hard-earned rights for future generations of girls and young women, said Kathy Scott, AAUW of Idaho copresident. The AAUW Boise Area Branch has put a major focus on state advocacy to push AAUW policy priorities, such as access to health care. Scott had advice for other AAUW branches on how to do the same.

If AAUW branches, especially in the capital city of each state, do not have a statehouse lobby corps, they should investigate forming one. ... We are now in our third year and are getting stronger and more involved each year. Our presence at the statehouse is becoming more recognized by legislators every session.

A far cry from the snowy mountains of Boise, AAUW Honolulu Branch members collaborated in organizing the Hawaii Women’s March. Bev Munson, a member...
of the Honolulu branch, brought along her husband, and together they participated in their very first march. I felt it was important to help send a message to Congress and the president that equality is important. Because equality is so important, I am willing to make a public statement by participating in the march, said Munson.

Peg Carlson-Bowen, the vice president of programs for the AAUW San Jose Branch in California, helped work an AAUW information table at the Women’s March San Jose. She felt it was especially important for AAUW to have a strong presence at every single women’s march that took place that day. AAUW has been here since 1881. We aren’t going away, and our infrastructure and community can welcome someone who needs a new home for their enthusiasm and energy, said Carlson-Bowen. Hundreds of thousands of women have fought before us, and we are standing on their shoulders.

Members in the Midwest also didn’t let cold temperatures prevent them from pounding the pavement for issues affecting women. AAUW Public Policy Committee Chair and Ballwin-Chesterfield Branch, Missouri, member Karen Francis was overwhelmed with seeing the strong outpouring of participants in St. Louis. To place a different spin on a quote from one of my favorites, Eleanor Roosevelt, Today, well-behaved women made history. Or as others have said, One woman can make a difference; together we can rock the world. In another Missouri metropolis, past AAUW of Missouri President Linda Beebe marched in Kansas City to be sure that the voices of all Americans were heard and to show support for advancing women’s and other social justice issues. Representing the AAUW Columbia Branch, Diane Suhler described the makeup of the Columbia, Missouri, crowd: What was so heartening and impressive about the March in Columbia was the diversity of the participants. There were men and women, young and old, people of all colors and ethnic backgrounds, lots of babies and children. The mood was very uplifting.

But the fight for equality did not end once the megaphones were packed away. AAUW members have been on the front lines of social change throughout our history. We don’t intend to stop now, said Elizabeth Holden, the grassroots advocacy manager for AAUW.

There are many ways you can keep the March momentum going 365 days a year. Become a Two-Minute Activist. Get an insider’s view on the legislative process by signing up for the newsletters Washington Update and AAUW in the Statehouse to get resources to make you a more effective advocate in your own community.

The success of these women’s marches depends on what we do going forward, and it shows that organizations like AAUW are needed now more than ever. March participants were dynamic in amplifying AAUW’s voice on so many issues that affect women and families. We were all so proud to be marching together, said AAUW Board Chair Ho. Going forward, AAUW knows we will not be marching alone. We still have the megaphones; now all we need is your voice. Together, we will make a difference.

Amy Becker is AAUW’s political media manager.
AAUW celebrated Title IX's 41st anniversary with D.C Public School students, the Washington Mystics, and the filmmakers behind Granny's Got Game by hosting a basketball event at the Rayburn Senate Office Building in 2013.
Title IX at 45

BY AMY BECKER

Forty-five years ago AAUW member Rep. Patsy Mink (D-HI) led the charge in Congress to pass Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. With the bill’s passage on June 23, 1972, the nation moved forward in striving to ensure equal opportunity in education for all students regardless of sex. Although Title IX faces challenges as the Trump administration sets its agenda, AAUW continues to advocate full enforcement, implementation, and funding of this comprehensive federal law.
Title IX prohibits sex discrimination in education, providing guidelines, procedures, and resources to help schools prevent and address inequities that can deter students’ ability to succeed. The law assists girls and women who want to achieve their maximum potential in education without obstacles based on their sex, and also benefits boys and men who want equal access to an equitable education. By prohibiting hostile, threatening, and discriminatory behavior, Title IX protects the rights of all students to learn. These advantages not only benefit students but the nation as a whole, which stands to gain a well-prepared workforce.

Girls and women have made great strides in education since the passage of Title IX. As noted in the National Council for Women and Girls in Education (NCWGE) report Title IX at 40, girls make up a growing proportion of students in many math, science, and technology-related fields, particularly in the life sciences. Girls now have earlier and greater opportunities to participate in sports, and they are taking advantage in record numbers. They have also achieved gains in career and technical education in fields that have historically been nontraditional to pursue. Time and again, girls and women have proven that they have the drive and proclivity to succeed in areas once considered off limits.

Despite tremendous progress, challenges to equality in education still exist. Women are vastly underrepresented in certain science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields engineering and computer science, for example. Pregnant and parenting students are frequently subjected to discriminatory policies that present real obstacles to completing their education. AAUW’s 2011 research report Crossing the Line: Sexual Harassment at School found that nearly half of all middle and high school students report being sexually harassed in school. These and other challenges affect the ability of all students—male and female—to get the most from their education.

There are steps that can be taken to address these shortcomings. When it comes to increasing the number of women in STEM fields, one major step is to raise awareness of just how Title IX opens doors to all educational programs in all fields. Title IX has helped narrow the achievement gap for women in STEM, but there’s more to be done: As of 2013 women still made up only 26 percent of employees in computing fields and only 12 percent in engineering. There is a role for Congress and federal agencies that provide education and grant funding to establish and support outreach and retention programs at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels to engage girls and women in STEM activities, courses, and career development. Title IX also aims to address implicit gender biases, which refer to attitudes or stereotypes that can cloud people’s judgment about others and affect students’ performance. Other efforts must include teacher training to help educators recognize bias and avoid reinforcing stereotypes. In order to meet the needs of a competitive global economy, we must also increase girls’ interest in STEM and encourage more women to pursue STEM careers, including those in computing and engineering, which make up 80 percent of the STEM job market. Title IX remains an excellent tool to help us meet these goals.

Title IX also protects pregnant and parenting students from discrimination. That means it is against the law for schools to exclude pregnant students from school or specific classes. Pregnant students cannot be forced to attend alternative schools or programs. But many students don’t know their rights. When it comes to pregnant and parenting students, outreach and awareness are key as well. Such measures as tracking student outcomes and training school officials to understand the rights and needs of pregnant and parenting students can help ensure equal access to education. Stronger enforcement is needed at the federal, state,
Stronger enforcement is needed at the federal, state, and institutional levels. and institutional levels to protect students from discrimination. Greater support for pregnant and parenting students, including flexible leave options and funding for such services as child care and tutoring, can help ensure that these students have the opportunity to succeed in school.

In recent years the nation has been engaged in a long overdue conversation about campus sexual assault, in large part thanks to student and survivor activism. A 2007 campus sexual assault study by the U.S. Department of Justice found that around 1 in 5 women are targets of attempted or completed sexual assault while they are college students, and about 1 in 16 college men also experience such violence. An AAUW survey of a sampling of K-12 students found that both male and female students report being sexually harassed with girls more likely than boys to experience sexual harassment (56 percent versus 40 percent). This results in consequences that can undermine academic success. Students will alter class schedules, walk home a different way, miss class, or simply drop out altogether. Students can’t learn if they don’t feel safe.

By focusing on Title IX implementation and enforcement, schools and college campuses can appropriately respond to, combat, and prevent sexual assault and violence. When sexual harassment occurs, Title IX requires that schools take immediate, effective action to eliminate the hostile environment, prevent its recurrence, and remedy the effects on the survivor. These steps are essential for creating an environment in which all students can succeed. Understanding schools obligations under Title IX is essential for combatting sexual assault. This includes accurately tracking and reporting allegations as well as establishing equitable procedures for investigating and addressing harassment.

The fight to end campus sexual assault is very much a student-led fight and will continue no matter who occupies 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The voices of these activists were heard by the Obama White House, which made Title IX enforcement, especially regarding campus sexual assault, a key issue in the administration. Former Vice President Joe Biden took on the issue as his own personal campaign. A special White House task force to protect students from sexual assault was created along with a support site, NotAlone.gov (which can now be found at ChangingOurCampus.org), and a public campaign to support bystander action, It’s On Us, was launched to raise awareness across the country.

The leadership in the White House and continued pressure from students, schools, and communities spurred the U.S. Department of Education into action as well. Its Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has worked tirelessly over the past eight years to reiterate the requirements of Title IX. Through guidance documents in 2011 the office made it clear to colleges and universities that Title IX requires them to act when sexual harassment and violence occurs. In 2013, the OCR provided
additional information about the rights of pregnant and parenting students. In 2015, it outlined the long-standing requirement that every school employ a Title IX coordinator or point person to implement the law. Title IX coordinators oversee all aspects of Title IX in their schools, including fielding complaints and identifying and addressing any patterns or systemic problems. The OCR has found that some of the most egregious and harmful Title IX violations occur when schools fail to employ a Title IX coordinator or when a Title IX coordinator lacks the training or authority to oversee compliance with the law.

In 2016, the OCR released guidance to further explain to schools how Title IX protects transgender students. The Obama administration guidance also covered a host of other issues, such as the importance of addressing transgender students by their preferred names and pronouns and schools’ responsibility to prevent harassment and bullying of transgender children. This guidance was in response to queries from school districts across the nation about how to accommodate transgender students in gender-segregated restrooms as well as the national outcry that arose over North Carolina’s bathroom bill, HB2. North Carolina was the first and thus far only state in the nation to pass a law requiring transgender people to use public bathrooms that correspond with the gender on their birth certificates. Within the first month of his presidency and among a flurry of executive orders, President Trump decided to rescind the federal guidance related to transgender students’ civil rights protections under Title IX. This decision does not immediately change the rights transgender students have under the law; however, it does leave them more vulnerable and raises questions for schools as to how to best comply with Title IX. Schools still have an obligation to ensure that all students, including transgender students, receive an education free of sex discrimination.

The U.S. Department of Education announced in 2013 that schools must collect and disclose more information about students’ civil rights. Access to data is something that AAUW has advocated because of its importance in Title IX enforcement. Crucial questions were added to the department’s Civil Rights Data Collection survey, a long-standing data collection that includes such critical information as how many reported incidents of sexual harassment occur annually. In recent years schools have been required to report whether they have Title IX coordinators and how many students were bullied because of their sexual orientation.

AAUW has put this vital information in action. Because AAUW had combined the resources the department released in 2015 for Title IX coordinators with the names of these officials at schools AAUW branches and members were able to deliver vital resources and guidance to their local Title IX coordinators. These tools are designed to help the coordinators understand the full scope of Title IX, their own responsibilities, and the application of Title IX to various issues. These deliveries were a way to introduce AAUW to school officials, talk about what’s at stake with respect to Title IX, and ensure that Title IX coordinators receive these important new resources to help them do their job. As of February 2017, members have made more than 700 deliveries to schools in 29 states.

The OCR also plays a critical role in promoting and ensuring equity and fairness in educational settings, as well as addressing violations of students’ civil rights that can seriously undermine their access to an education. In December 2016

For additional information be sure to read the National Coalition for Women and Girls in Education’s upcoming report, Title IX at 45, to be published in June. AAUW chairs the group. The report examines the effect that Title IX has had on women and girls in several areas of education and calls on policymakers to direct more resources and attention to strengthening Title IX.
the OCR released its report *Securing Equal Educational Opportunity*, spotlighting its eight years of accomplishments during the Obama administration and the positive effect it’s had in implementing Title IX. The report notes that in 2016 alone the number of Title IX complaints skyrocketed to 16,720, an all-time high. The OCR resolved more than 66,000 civil rights cases during Obama’s presidency. It also resolved 1,346 Title IX complaints that ranged from schools handling of athletics to sexual harassment and more.

This generation of women, girls, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, students of color, and survivors of campus sexual violence will reap the benefit of greater understanding, application, and enforcement of Title IX, which has positively affected academic results and resulted in safer environments for all students, said Lisa Maatz, AAUW’s vice president of government relations and advocacy, in an AAUW statement responding to the OCR report. Students demanded this change, schools asked for additional clarity, and the OCR answered the call by ensuring that schools and colleges implemented many of these changes. It’s a new day, and we will never go back.

With the election of a new president and Congress, many are concerned about the future of Title IX. The U.S. Department of Education has a lot of leeway to change its approach to the important guidance and technical assistance of the past eight years. And while it would take an act of Congress to set aside Title IX, there are other ways in which the law can be implemented less robustly and ultimately provide fewer protections for students. I don’t need to remind the president that on this particular issue he has a bit of a credibility gap.

AAUW has always held that personnel is policy, especially for agency heads who wield significant influence over the daily lives of women and families. Because of that AAUW had keen interest in Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. AAUW opposed her nomination following her uninspiring performance during her confirmation hearing especially her silence on the enforcement of Title IX and efforts to combat campus sexual assault. Secretary DeVos now has the opportunity to do the right thing. It is the role of the Department of Education to issue guidance, be a backstop, and provide the technical assistance that is crucial to moving the needle forward on safe access to education for all our country’s students.

Although we will see changes at the Department of Education, the student movement will continue, no matter who is president or who is in control of Congress. AAUW expects the Department of Education and the OCR’s robust Title IX enforcement activities to continue because every student deserves an equal opportunity to learn because every student deserves an equal opportunity to learn. That must remain a national priority regardless of who occupies the White House, says Maatz.

Amy Becker is AAUW’s political media manager.
The world was transformed for this year’s Alumnae Recognition Awardee by an AAUW International Fellowship, and now as one of today’s most internationally recognized voices for quality education she is determined to bring education to other girls to empower them as well.

The Power of Education
Tererai Trent, Ph.D., was bound to follow the path that so many women had travelled before her: early marriage, abuse, illiteracy, poverty. Born in a small rural village in what is now Zimbabwe, she saw her community prioritize the education of boys. Girls remained at home to cook and clean until they were married off at a very young age, and Trent was headed down that path until an American aid worker told her that her dreams were, in fact, achievable.

This thought inspired Trent to relentlessly pursue seemingly impossible goals throughout her life goals that took her from an abused, uneducated young wife and mother in rural Africa to a university student in the United States to a global leader in the fight for universal access to quality education for all children. Today Trent is a symbol of hope and living proof that anything is possible, which is why she will be speaking at the 2017 AAUW National Convention as the Alumnae Recognition Awardee.

Trent’s remarkable story begins in a small home back in her village, its roof thatched with grass and its walls made of mud. Each day she would tend to the family’s cattle and fetch water and firewood from miles away.

As a little girl Trent was desperate to learn. She would often see the older boys on their way to school and long to join them. But for most girls in her village an education was an impossible dream. Boys were seen as the future breadwinners, so families sent only their sons to school to improve their chances of getting a job in the gold mines or urban factories.

I n my village, girls have no hope, explains Trent. T he way women are treated is rough. They are married young, before they have defined their dreams, and most of the time to older men. As a cattle-herding tomboy I was bound to follow in the footsteps of generations of women before me.

But Trent was determined to learn and formed a pact with her brother Tinashe: He would secretly help her learn how to read and write, and in return, she would complete his homework. Trent pored over her brother’s schoolbooks and learned quickly. Books showed me another world, a magical place where malnutrition and violence were not a part of daily reality. I wanted that life a life where I had access to an education, plenty to eat, and peace, she says.

Tinashe’s teacher eventually discovered the siblings secret the brother’s homework outshined his performance at school and begged Trent’s father to let her attend school. Her father consented, and Trent’s dream of attending school became a reality.

But after just two terms in school, Trent was married. Her father accepted a cow in exchange for his daughter. She was just 11 years old. By the age of 18 Trent was the mother of three children and the wife of an abusive husband. When my husband realized that I wanted to have an education, he would beat me, she explains. I have nightmares of that time in my life.

But in 1991, Trent met a woman who would profoundly change Trent’s outlook: Jo Luck, who was then the director of international programs for Heifer International (she later served as its president and chief executive officer). Heifer International is a nonprofit working to eradicate world hunger and poverty. Luck visited the village and asked a group of women, including Trent, about their dreams. It was the first time anyone had asked Trent such a question.

I don’t even know where I got the courage to share my dreams, she recalls. But I did. I told her that I wanted to go to America and get my undergraduate degree, my master’s degree, and my Ph.D. and Jo Luck told me, I f you believe in your dreams, they are achievable.

Trent ran home to tell her mother, who told her daughter to write down her dreams and bury them. Mother Earth will feed them and help them grow, her mother said, adding,
Your dreams will have greater meaning when they are tied to the betterment of your community; that’s what makes life meaningful. Trent wrote down her four dreams on a piece of paper: going to America, earning her undergraduate degree, and earning her master’s degree and Ph.D. She then added a fifth dream to give education back to her village sealed them in a tin can and buried them under a rock.

Over the next eight years Trent worked to complete her GED. She describes it as eight years of punishing work: eight years of struggling to get the tuition for the next class. But eight years of never giving up.

After working for years as a community organizer and taking correspondence courses, in 1998 Trent moved to Oklahoma. She insisted on bringing her five children with her, and her husband came as well. Three years later Trent earned her bachelor’s degree in agricultural education from Oklahoma State University. In 2003, she received her master’s degree in plant pathology from Oklahoma State University. That same year her husband was deported for domestic abuse. After working for Heifer in Arkansas and then returning to her village in Zimbabwe, Trent began pursuing her doctorate at Western Michigan University; in December 2009 Trent earned her Ph.D.

Each time Trent accomplished one of those goals that she had buried long ago she returned home to Zimbabwe, dug up her tin can, and checked it off.

Trent’s path to achieving her educational dreams was certainly fraught with difficulty. She recalls one critical point in her journey when she was close to packing her bags and heading back to Zimbabwe: In 2001, Trent was pursuing her master’s at Oklahoma State University. She had not received any scholarships and was working three jobs, caring for her children, and completing her coursework would be impossible all the while enduring regular abuse from her husband. With no other options, she was ready to give up.

That’s when a then-vice president of the university, Ron Beer, Ph.D, suggested that Trent apply for an AAUW International Fellowship and wrote her a letter of recommendation. At the time, I had no hope, Trent recalls. So when the vice president called me to say that I got the fellowship, it was unbelievable. If I did not get the fellowship for my graduate [degree], I believe I would just be going home and that would have defeated my own journey.

Trent adds, I do not think I would be where I am today without the fellowship. I would be rotting in my village right now or probably I don’t think that I would be alive. That was the time when HIV was so high in my country. Her husband eventually passed away as a result of HIV. Trent later remarried fellow plant pathologist Mark Trent.

[AAUW] coming in was, in many ways, a miracle because there is no [other] way I could have done it, Trent explains. The scholarship allowed me not to work many jobs but to concentrate on my studies and ensure that I was going to be successful. I became successful because of that scholarship.

Trent now works tirelessly to fulfill her fifth dream: bringing her success back home. After earning her doctorate Trent designed her own T-shirts bearing her favorite motto: Tinogona (it is achievable). Her plan was to sell the shirts, make millions, and use the money to change the lives of women in her village. Unfortunately, she sold only 20 shirts, mostly to friends. Trent was devastated.

Then she received the most memorable phone call of her life from Oprah Winfrey, who had read about Trent’s experiences in New York Times writer Nicholas Kristof’s book Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009). Trent appeared on the
Oprah Winfrey Show in 2009 and again in 2011, when Winfrey named Trent her favorite guest of all time. It’s my favorite story, because it speaks to the power of what an individual can do. Winfrey said on her show in 2011. It doesn’t matter where you come from. It doesn’t matter what your mother did or didn’t do. ... It speaks to the power of being able to manifest your dreams.

Winfrey donated $1.5 million to help rebuild Trent’s childhood elementary school. Through strategic partnerships with Winfrey and Save the Children, the construction of Matau Primary School was completed in 2014. Girls now attend the school in numbers that would have been inconceivable when Trent was a child.

What gives me joy is when I see old men in the village holding their girls and taking them to school, says Trent. One day, an old man came to me holding his eight-year-old daughter. With tears streaming down his cheeks he asked, Tererai, can she be just like you? In that moment, I realized not only are we improving education, but we are also transforming communities to start believing in women.

The new Matau Primary School is only the beginning, Trent founded Tererai Trent International, which seeks to provide universal access to quality education while empowering rural communities. Tererai Trent International hopes to rebuild 10 more dilapidated schools in rural Zimbabwe over the next 10 years, in partnership with local and international organizations. The organization is also working to improve learning conditions through teachers training programs, communitywide literacy programs, and early childhood development programs, to name a few.

Critical to this effort, says Trent, is emphasizing female role models: Growing up, all of the role models were men. Now communities are seeing me as a role model, and I see a shift in respect for women. Women are being inspired. We need to emphasize how women are intelligent and committed and how they can improve the community. We need to hear their stories and the challenges they have overcome.

When I go to these communities, I am not saying you can also get a Ph.D., she explains. I am saying look at me. What is it that you can take from me that you can apply in your own life? They can take the inspiration to say, I want to be just like you so I can also stand and be proud and have dignity. Because education brings dignity to women.

Trent continues to bring her powerful message to people all over the world. And with each speech she hopes to bury a dream deep within each audience member’s heart—a sacred dream to educate all girls in our communities.

If we give women and girls an opportunity for an education, it will be the best investment any country could make, says Trent, who is currently an adjunct professor for an online program at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She splits her time between Zimbabwe and the United States. Education is the pathway out of poverty. We are giving the children and grandkids of poor rural women a chance to break this generational cycle of poverty. Trent’s own family is an inspiring example of how education can reverberate across generations: She is taken aback at what her children have accomplished, including a daughter pursuing a biomedical engineering degree and a son pursuing biology and music.

Education is everything, she adds. Education empowers. Education gives us dignity. Education liberates the girl child.

Beth Pearsall is a freelance writer in San Diego, California.
Ready to Vote? Save This Outlook!
Beginning in April members may cast ballots for national board candidates and decide on proposed changes to the Public Policy Program and AAUW Bylaws. This year’s ballot includes candidates for chair, vice chair, and the 10 elected directors on the AAUW national board. It also features a variety of other critical ballot issues, including AAUW’s membership degree requirement.

Voting will take place online from April 17 through June 15, and you will need your member number and your voter PIN which are printed in the yellow box on the back cover of this Outlook to log in to the voter site and cast your ballot. For instructions and information about the candidates, ballot issues, and deadlines, see the voter guide on page E1.

Voting online is fast, simple, and convenient and it saves AAUW money! Between April 3 and May 4, however, members may request to have a paper ballot mailed to them by e-mailing connect@aauw.org or calling 800.326.2289. If used, paper ballots must be postmarked by May 29.

Storm the Capitol With AAUW
Have you made your plans yet for the 2017 AAUW National Convention in Washington, D.C., June 14–17? Don’t miss the chance to lobby on Capitol Hill with hundreds of AAUW members, network with fellow advocates, get the latest leadership tips, and hear speakers such as journalist Judy Woodruff and global education advocate Tererai Trent, Ph.D. (see page 18). Learn more at convention.aauw.org.

Protecting Religious Freedom for All
AAUW recently joined more than 100 religious and civil rights organizations urging passage of the Protect American Families Act (S. 54), which would uphold religious freedom and the inalienable rights of all people. This legislation prohibits the creation of a federally funded registry that is discriminatory and that targets individuals on the basis of race, age, gender, national origin, nationality, citizenship, religion, and/or ethnicity. AAUW believes that all communities and persons of all faiths should be able to live free of oppressive government policies. AAUW believes that congressional support of the Protect American Families Act is a part of our elected officials’ duty to protect the religious freedom that is guaranteed under the Constitution and to defend the human rights of all.

Notice of Annual Meeting
The AAUW annual meeting will be held June 16, 2017, in Washington, D.C., in conjunction with the 2017 AAUW National Convention.

61st U.N. Commission on the Status Of Women
On March 14 in New York City, AAUW participated in the 61st U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and hosted a parallel event,
Women and Work: Expanding Leadership, Pay Equity, and Economic Power. This year’s Commission on the Status of Women priority theme was women’s economic empowerment in the changing world of work. AAUW has special consultative status with the U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

**Forming Global Connections with Women’s Organizations**

From January 20 to February 4, AAUW Vice President of Fellowships, Grants, and Global Programs Gloria Blackwell visited Morocco and Tunisia as an exchange participant in the Professional Fellows Program. The program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State, began with AAUW hosting Souad Kadi, a fellow from Morocco, last fall. Blackwell visited women’s organizations working to foster economic, political, social, and cultural empowerment in both countries. Blackwell also collaborated with other U.S. participants to provide technical assistance and support concerning grant and proposal writing and evaluation.

**New Research on Student Debt Coming in May**

More than half of U.S. college students are financing some or all of their education with student loans, and increasingly students are leaving college with debt that they will have difficulty repaying. College degrees have been a pathway to greater economic and personal independence for decades especially for women and remain so. However, acquiring those degrees results in more debt and is not without risk. And though women with college degrees are paid much better than women without them, they are still paid about 25 percent less than men with college degrees. The gender pay gap for college graduates is one major factor that contributes to a substantial loan repayment gap between men and women following graduation. AAUW’s latest research report *Deeper in Debt: Women and the Student Loan System* will be published on May 24.

**Join the #StandUptoSexism Movement**

Speaking up can be revolutionary. That’s why AAUW has launched #StandUptoSexism, a new campaign that aims to start a much-needed conversation about the pervasiveness of sexism in our society.

Sexist comments add up and hurt women’s confidence, says Paige Robnett, AAUW college and university relations manager. They are part of why women are less likely to run for office or to ask for the raises they deserve. Especially given the current political climate, it’s important that we raise awareness about this issue on college campuses and beyond.

A central part of the campaign is a video that shows women grappling with sexist microaggressions causing them to doubt their ability to succeed and be leaders.

Women, girls, boys, men, and allies of all identities can join the #StandUptoSexism movement. Share the video, and visit www.aauw.org/stand-up-to-sexism to download a printable flyer. Fill out the flyer with your reasons for fighting sexism in your life, and share it with the hashtag #StandUptoSexism.

*AAUW’s #StandUptoSexism video*
Wisconsin Branch Hosts Delegation from Kosovo

In November 2016, the La Crosse Branch in Wisconsin welcomed a special set of guests: a delegation of five visitors and a facilitator/translator from Kosovo who were there to exchange ideas about how to address domestic violence in the courts and in community services.

The delegation was part of the World Services and Open World Leadership Center, which is an international exchange that aims to promote understanding among the United States and former Soviet Union countries. When La Crosse branch leaders Betty Kruck and Carlene Roberts learned that a delegation would be visiting, they applied to be the host organization and were selected among applicants from all over the country. The branch members decided to make it into a branch program and volunteered to take on many hosting and transportation duties.

AAUW La Crosse branch members developed the schedule for the delegation, found host families, hosted dinners at their homes, and served as van drivers for the delegation.

Programming included a speaker from Kosovo before the delegation’s arrival, a presentation from the delegation members, and a community reception. The events were covered on local television and attracted U.S. congressional staff, local public officials, and even Kosovo’s Consul General Xhavit Gashi from Des Moines, Iowa.

Branch member Erica Koonmen says that many in the La Crosse community benefited from hearing the delegation’s insight on antidomestic-violence work, and it made them reexamine their local processes. “We learned more about the strengths of the La Crosse area’s coordinated services, and were reminded of an area of weakness,” says Koonmen. Branch member Roberts even plans to visit Kosovo informally this summer to gain even more insight.

Cheers to 10 Years

In January the Weston Branch celebrated 10 years of accomplishments at a Cocktails and Convos event that featured live music and public officials for the southeastern Florida city. The branch was launched by Kamala Anandam, Ed.D., in 2007.

In its 10 years the branch has accomplished much, holding an annual leadership conference for high school girls, organizing events that address human trafficking and more, holding a science and math workshop for elementary school students, and working on gun violence issues. The branch’s momentum is going strong, says Anandam, who serves as the program director for
the branch: Members are sponsoring two students to attend AAUW’s National Conference for College Women Student Leaders this year. We are looking forward to many more years of advancing equity for women and girls, says Anandam.

Campus Leaders Demand Accountability in #DearBetsy Campaign

Newly appointed U.S. Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos was the focus of the #DearBetsy campaign early this year, which compelled activists to share tweets and videos explaining the importance of Title IX. The gender equity law could be endangered under DeVos at her confirmation hearings, she was unable to say whether she would uphold Title IX as it relates to campus sexual assault.

As a young woman who has utilized Title IX to my benefit after being assaulted, I feel deeply compelled to fight with my every ounce of activism to keep protective measures like this within our education system, says Brooke Lopez, an AAUW National Student Advisory Council (SAC) member and a senior public affairs major at the University of Texas, Dallas. Title IX gave me freedom from fear, freedom from my attacker, and freedom to continue learning in an environment dedicated to higher education without worry. DeVos has threatened to remove that freedom by not standing firmly in support of Title IX.

For students, the campaign was a chance to amplify their voices by getting others involved in the conversation.

I love the social media aspect of the campaign. I was extremely interested in sharing this message and creating a long-term effect, said Sanah Jivani, an AAUW SAC member and a sophomore sociology and communication major at the University of Texas, San Antonio. I sent my photo to everyone in my network and encouraged them to take and post their own photos. It’s crazy how much of a difference you can make by personally reaching out to your network and inspiring them to make change.

Others seized the opportunity to address the multitude of education-related issues that are important to them.

I am passionate about increasing women and minority involvement in STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math], therefore I feel like students deserve educations free of discrimination, said Linh Anh Cat, an AAUW SAC member and a third-year Ph.D. candidate studying ecology at the University of California, Irvine. DeVos could influence an entire generation of Americans through the quality of their education. We may see reduced diversity in STEM and a poorer understanding of global issues that affect us.
Some of Us Are Brave: A Pioneer of Black Women’s Studies

Nationally renowned academic Patricia Bell-Scott, Ph.D., has dedicated the majority of her professional life to advancing the women’s studies field, concentrating in particular on women of color. The 1984–85 AAUW American Fellow is a professor emerita at the University of Georgia, a cofounder of the National Women’s Studies Association, and a coeditor of the first comprehensive collection of black feminist scholarship, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women’s Studies* (the Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1982).

Bell-Scott’s interest in black women’s studies initially stemmed from the charged social and political climate of the American South during the 1940s–60s. She refers to herself as part of the breakthrough generation—the generation that sought to give voice to silenced stories, mostly of the black experience. Limited research existed on black women’s lives when Bell-Scott was starting out, and what research did exist was fraught with biases, inaccuracies, and negative stereotypes. Out of this research gap grew Bell-Scott’s career and her award-winning biography *The Firebrand and the First Lady*, which tells the largely unknown story of civil rights activist and lawyer Pauli Murray’s life and friendship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Bell-Scott’s illumination of this mutually supportive and life-changing relationship is just one example of how her work creates a place to, as she says, expand research by and about us.

She is part of a generation that sought to give voice to silenced stories of the black experience.
2016–17 Fellow and Grantee Highlights

**Ashley Farmer**
American Fellow Ashley Farmer is a historian of black women’s history and a postdoctoral fellow at Duke University. Her research interests include women’s history, gender history, intellectual history, radical politics, and black feminism. Her current project analyzes how black women’s intellectual production shaped gender constructs and political organizing in the Black Power era.

**Mary Levandowski**
Career Development Grantee Mary Levandowski works with the National Park Service on studying changes in natural resources—specifically water systems such as streams, rivers, and springs. Her goal is to develop analytical methods for monitoring wetlands to study aquatic ecology in the greater Yellowstone ecosystem.

**Marcia McNair**
Community Action Grantee Long Island Girl Talk, run by Marcia McNair, teaches girls how to create, produce, and star in their own public-access television show about women’s and girls’ issues in their communities, explore careers in media, and learn technical skills in traditionally male-dominated fields.

**Elif Ege Tatar**
International Fellow Elif Ege Tatar, a doctoral candidate at the University at Buffalo who is from Turkey, is examining how the Kurdish women’s movement in Turkey adopts, appropriates, and imagines transnational connections through local activism. She focuses on protest images, posters, artwork, and slogans by and about Kurdish women.

**Tolulope Monisola Ola**
International Project Grantee and 2013–14 International Fellows Tolulope Monisola Ola’s work addresses the psychosocial impact of breast and cervical cancer diagnoses among women in Nigeria and how diagnoses affect treatment outcomes. She recently received a certificate of appreciation from the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center for her outstanding and dedicated work against cancer.

**Zaida Hernandez**
Selected Professions Fellow and NASA Johnson Space Center Pathways intern Zaida Hernandez is pursuing a master’s in industrial engineering and will work as an aerospace engineer in NASA’s thermal design branch after her May 2017 graduation. Recently she designed and prototyped struts that reduce heat load between the payload and the lander structural frame of lunar landers. She hopes to work on optimizing rapid prototyping for space applications.
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For more details, see page E1 or visit www.aauw.org/resource/national-election.
Trump and Congress Take Aim at Reproductive Rights
On his first full day in office, President Donald Trump got straight to work releasing a flurry of executive orders, including one that would reinstate a ban on giving federal family planning funding to international health groups that provide abortion care, refer patients to abortion providers, or even give women information about abortions. While previous presidents have reinstated the rule, President Trump’s version expands the scope to apply to all global health funding, meaning organizations working on HIV/AIDS, Ebola, or maternal and child health are subject to the rule. The move puts the most vulnerable, especially women living in poverty, at extreme risk.

Two days after the anniversary of Roe v. Wade in January the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 7, the No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act and Abortion Insurance Full Disclosure Act, by a 238-183 vote. AAUW believes strongly in the importance of choice in the determination of one’s reproductive life and increased access to quality, affordable health care and family planning services, per our member-adopted Public Policy Program. AAUW opposes all attempts to limit women’s access to necessary medical care. If adopted, H.R. 7 would make it practically impossible for women to have any public or private insurance coverage for abortion, regardless of their circumstances or need.

More Executive Orders
During his first week in office, President Trump issued a variety of disconcerting executive orders—12 signed in the first five days. Among the orders are a direction to federal agencies to waive or delay implementation of Affordable Care Act provisions, a U.S. withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, advancing the Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines, delaying retirement protections, and building a wall along the United States-Mexico border.

Trump Cabinet Takes Shape

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos faced controversy ahead of her confirmation vote. DeVos’ nomination was met with ardent opposition by education groups, educators, and the American public. Constituents flooded their senators inboxes and gave the capital switchboard its busiest days in history. AAUW announced its opposition to DeVos’ confirmation after a number of concerns were left unaddressed. DeVos has been conspicuously silent on the importance of Title IX...
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and other civil rights laws and has been an outspoken advocate against public education. The Senate voted 50-50 to confirm her; the vice president, Mike Pence, broke the tie, a historic first for confirmations.

The Senate also confirmed (52-47) controversial nominee Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL) to be attorney general. AAUW opposed Sessions confirmation because his record of resistance to policies that would help end discrimination and protect the civil rights of women and girls, as well as his failure to adequately address key issues during his confirmation demonstrate that he is not the right person to lead the U.S. Department of Justice. Debate on the floor took a dramatic turn the night before the vote when Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) attempted to read a letter written 30 years ago by Coretta Scott King opposing the nomination of Sessions for a federal judgeship. Republicans charged that Warren violated Senate rules against impugning another senator, and a party-line vote effectively silenced her. She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted, said Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) after Warren s rebuke. Warren s male colleagues, including Sens. Tom Udall (D-NM), Jeff Merkley (D-OR), and Bernie Sanders (I-VT) were allowed to read the same later without incident.

Trump s first nominee for Secretary of Labor, Andrew Puzder, withdrew his name for consideration in early February. Trump announced his replacement pick, Alexander Acosta, who would also be the first Hispanic member of Trump s cabinet. Acosta served as assistant attorney general for the Civil Rights Division under President George W. Bush and was also a member of the National Labor Relations Board. At press time, confirmation hearings for Acosta were yet to take place.

Meet Your New Supreme Court Nominee
President Donald Trump announced his nomination of Neil Gorsuch to fill the vacancy on the U.S. Supreme Court. The seat, once occupied by the late Justice Antonin Scalia, has been vacant since early 2016. Gorsuch attended Columbia University, Harvard Law School, and Oxford University, and served as a judicial clerk for two Supreme Court justices. Since 2006, he has served on the the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit in Colorado. Gorsuch is known as an originalist who shares a similar interpretation of the Constitution as Justice Scalia. In the high-profile Burwell v. Hobby Lobby case, Gorsuch sided with the defendants, arguing that the Affordable Care Act s contraceptive mandate would force Hobby Lobby s owners to violate their religious beliefs. He also opposed the Chevron deference, which gives more power to regulatory agencies.

Federal judges have demonstrated time and time again the critical role our courts play in our system of checks and balances, and the Supreme Court is the final stop when it comes to many of the most important legal challenges our country faces, says AAUW Vice President of Government Relations and Advocacy Lisa Maatz. AAUW will be watching the confirmation hearing with keen interest and will make our own judgment regarding what his confirmation could mean for women and families positive or negative, says Maatz.
The Women behind the Man on the Moon

BY KATHRYN BIBLER

From World War II’s fighter planes through the golden days of the NASA space program, some of America’s most important technological achievements were possible only because of black women who worked as “human computers” in Hampton, Virginia. Yet such brilliant minds as those of Katherine Johnson, who calculated the trajectory that put Neil Armstrong on the moon, and Mary Jackson, NASA’s first black female engineer, were left off of the reports they authored, ignored by the TV cameras, and rarely recognized for what they were: the brainiest of the brain busters, the thousands of mathematicians and engineers who propelled NASA to greatness.

Hidden Figures traces the storylines of many black women engineers—though NASA’s gendered and racialized hierarchies almost never gave women that title, instead relegating them to the clerical computer. These women trained together, pulled late shifts together, attended church together, raised families together, and raised each other up through promotions and social networks.

Hampton’s Langley Research Center offered new careers for women and people of color, but Margot Lee Shetterly does not gloss over the realities of midcentury America. The book nails that irony quite painfully: As humanity surpassed the limits of our atmosphere, on the ground black mothers watched their children drink from separate water fountains and hoped they would come home safely from school.

The narrative also places acts of resistance within Langley’s walls in a broader context. While students across the country sat in at lunch counters, Johnson unflinchingly used the restroom reserved for her white colleagues. While Cold War threats triggered national fervor to win the space race, Miriam Mann waged a quiet war with the sign that designated where colored computers had to sit at lunch.

Hidden Figures bursts with women like these: brave and fascinating and human, math and science prodigies who could each have headlined her own book. But crowding the spotlight was clearly a narrative choice. Through a dizzying array of examples, Shetterly reminds us that black female talent is not rare. We just have to make sure that history acknowledges it.

Kathryn Bibler is AAUW’s senior editor.
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From the Archives

AAUW members from across the country marched in Washington, D.C., in support of the Equal Rights Amendment on July 9, 1978. The next day they lobbied their congressional representatives. The ERA passed in Congress in 1972 but was ratified by only 35 of the necessary 38 states.