

FEBRUARY NEWSLETTER OF THE MSU WOMEN'S CENTER

Please join us for a special book presentation and lecture with Dr. Cynthia Bejarano!

By Betsy Danforth

Join us in April for special lecture featuring an extraordinary scholar, author, activist and professor of Criminal Justice at NMSU. The lecture and reception are free and open to the public.

Frontera Madre(hood): Brown Mothers Challenging Oppression and Transborder Violence

Tuesday, April 8th, 2025 6:00 p.m.

Inspiration Hall, Norm Asbjornson Hall, MSU



Cynthia Bejarano, a native of southern New Mexico, is a Regents Professor in Gender and Sexuality Studies and the College of Arts and Sciences Stan Fulton Endowed Chair at New Mexico State University. Since joining the faculty of NMSU in 2001, her research has focused on embodied border experiences with violence, immigration and migration, and gender-based violence and feminicidios at the U.S.-Mexico border. Dr. Bejarano co-edited *Terrorizing Women: Feminicide in the Américas* with Rosa-Linda Fregoso in 2010, and she has written extensively on feminicides and other forms of violence in El Paso, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, and southern New Mexico. She is also the author of *Que Onda: Urban Youth Culture and Border Identity (2005)*, and most recently co-edited with Cristina Morales, *Frontera Madre(hood): Brown Mothers Challenging Oppression and Transborder Violence at the U.S.-Mexico Border (2024)*.

In 2014, Dr. Bejarano served as a tribunal judge for the Tribunal Permanente de los Pueblos, “Feminicidio y Violencias contra la Mujer” in Chihuahua City, Chihuahua, México, and co-founded Amigos de las Mujeres de Juarez (2001-2010) an organization that worked with Mexican feminist and human rights groups including families of disappeared and murdered women to end the violence. She co-created and serves as co-principal investigator with Dr. Sylvia Fernandez of Fuerza Feminista: Intimate Recovery and Memory Archives, a digital humanities project that documents and contextualizes the feminist movements in the El Paso/Juarez border region by using transborder feminist approaches (2020-present).

Since 2002, Cynthia has also served as the founding principal investigator for the federally and state funded College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) at NMSU, which provides postsecondary educational outreach, access, recruitment and retention of students from farm working backgrounds. For twenty-three years, she and her CAMP colleagues have served 650 students and have worked for transformational change and social mobility for numerous farm working families across New Mexico and west Texas.

For her dedication in and outside of the classroom, she received the Donald C. Roush Excellence in Teaching Award, the Governor’s Award for Outstanding New Mexico Women, the Critical Educators in Social Justice (CESJ) Special Interest Group’s Community Advocacy Award, and the Excellence in Teaching Award from the National Society of Leadership and Success. In 2024, Dr Bejarano received the Bellas Artes y Culturas Hispanic Heritage Unsung Hero Award.

Please be sure to join us for a **book presentation and lecture by Dr. Bejarano on April 8th at 6:00 PM**. This event is sponsored by the Office of the President, Women’s Center, the HEART Initiative, Access and Success and the Office of the Dean of Students.

THE 'HERSTORY' OF WOMEN INVENTORS: THE UNSUNG INNOVATORS

By Apryl Little

Happy Women's History Month from the Montana State University Women's Center! Women's History Month is a great time to pay tribute to the extraordinary women whose efforts have changed our everyday lives. While famous figures like Marie Curie and Rosa Parks are easily identifiable, there are many other women whose contributions have gone 'unpaid'. For this newsletter, we are highlighting some of the women inventors who are not as well-known but have made a significant impact in our world.

Pioneers of Innovation

For centuries, women have been behind some of the most transformative inventions and yet they frequently faced legal and societal barriers that prevented them from receiving credit. Some of their work was ignored or stolen by others but through their persistence and the sharing of their stories, these innovations will not be forgotten!

Mary Kies (1752–1837) – The First Woman to Obtain a U.S. Patent

In 1809, Mary Kies was the first woman in the United States to obtain a patent for designing a new method of weaving straw with silk and creating new and better hats. At a time when American industries were struggling, her innovation played a huge role in strengthening the economy. She may have not gained financial success but her patent was the first for women inventors and set a precedent that would help countless women patent their ideas.

Margaret E. Knight (1838–1914) – The 'Female Edison'

Margaret E. Knight was an extremely inventive woman who had more than 25 patents to her name. She is most famous for designing a machine that created the flat-bottomed paper bags which are still very popular today. When a man tried to steal her idea, saying that a woman could not have created such a complicated device, Knight took him to court and won. This was a win for women's place in innovation and the ownership of their ideas.

Marie Van Brittan Brown (1922–1999): The Mother of Home Security

Before the existence of smart security systems, Marie Van Brittan Brown came up with the first home security system in 1966. She was concerned about safety in her neighborhood which led her to design a closed-circuit television system which allowed people in the neighborhood to see who was at the door before opening it. Her work is the foundation of modern surveillance technology, which is a 2.7 billion dollar business in the US and saves countless lives.

Women Inventors at Montana State University

Innovation continues to thrive right here in Montana. Many great women scientists and inventors who have contributed so much to the world in different fields have graced the halls of Montana State University.

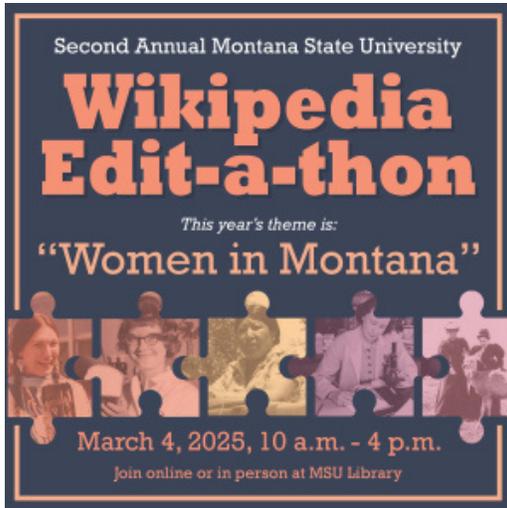
One notable example is **Dr. Christine Foreman**, a professor in the Department of Chemical and Biological Engineering. Dr. Foreman has received the Women in Science Distinguished Professor Award, which honors outstanding faculty women in the sciences who have excelled in their research accomplishments, teaching, mentorship, and contributions to MSU and the state of Montana. Her work has advanced our understanding of microbial life in extreme environments and contributed to fields ranging from astrobiology to environmental science.

Another MSU pioneer, **Dr. Mary Cloninger**, a professor in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry and another recipient of the Women in Science Distinguished Professor Award. Dr. Cloninger's research focuses on developing new methods for detecting and treating diseases, including cancer, through new and innovative biochemical approaches.

Dr. Mary Miles, a professor in the Department of Food Systems, Nutrition, and Kinesiology in the College of Education, Health and Human Development, has been recognized with the Women's Faculty Caucus Distinguished Mentor Award. This award acknowledges extraordinary efforts by a faculty member in mentoring female students, staff, research associates, and faculty. Miles' dedication to mentorship has inspired countless students and created a supportive environment for women pursuing careers in science and health-related fields to continue innovating and creating groundbreaking work.

Women's History Month is a great time to celebrate the women whose inventions have truly shaped the world. As we look ahead, the future of invention will undoubtedly continue to be shaped by women who bring fresh perspectives and new ideas to the table. Celebrating their achievements isn't only about honoring their legacies; it's imperative to inspiring the next generation of women to push boundaries and redefine what's possible.

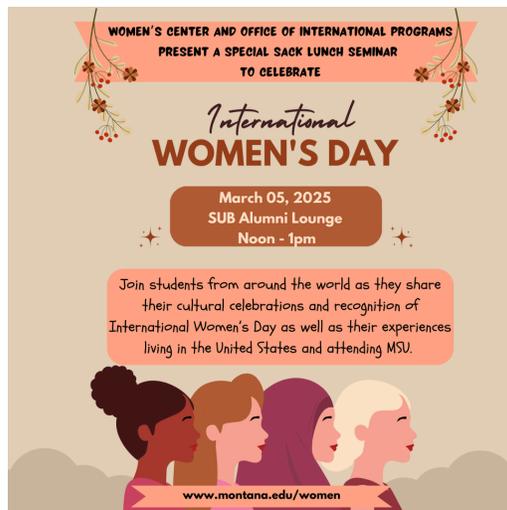
UPCOMING WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH EVENTS:



March 4: *The 2nd Annual Wikipedia Edit-a-thon*

MSU Library and virtually, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The HEART Initiative at MSU invites you to attend a free event featuring a conversation around some of the root causes of human trafficking in our community. Dr. Veronica Shepp, professor of Sociology at MSU will join Shalynn, Anti-trafficking Legal Advocate with Haven, and Shannon Brown, Nurse at Bozeman Health, to discuss root causes of human trafficking and the barriers in offering services and resources to victims.



March 5: *Celebrate International Women's Day!*

SUB Alumni Legacy Lounge, Noon-1 p.m.

Join students from around the world as they share their cultural celebrations and recognition of International Women's Day as well as their experiences living in the United States and attending MSU!



March 12: *Access to Maternal Healthcare: Implications for Rural and Indigenous People*

SUB Alumni Legacy Lounge, Noon - 1 p.m.

In this seminar, Dr Maggie Thorsen, Associate Professor of Sociology, will speak about the limited and unequal access to maternal health care in the United States, particularly for rural and Indigenous people. In this talk she will share insights from her research on Montana and findings from across the US, to highlight the ongoing barriers to and facilitators of accessing care during pregnancy and childbirth, as well as the health implications of limited maternal health care for women and communities.

RIP SISTER CECILE RICHARDS: A TRUE WARRIOR

By Betsy Danforth



January 20th of this year was memorable for several reasons, the celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday and a presidential inauguration were both notable; but for me, the most memorable event on January 20th was the tragic loss of one of women's health's biggest champions, Cecile Richards.

Born in 1957 to socially and politically progressive parents, Cecile grew up with a strong sense of social justice and the importance of activism and citizen engagement. Her mother Ann Richards served as Governor of Texas in the early 1990's, and her father, an attorney, focused on civil rights, freedom of the press and union cases during his career.

After graduating from Brown University, Cecile successfully navigated an early career working for and co-founding several non-profits, foundations and political causes. In 2006, Richards became the president of Planned Parenthood, reinvigorating the organization and growing the base of donors and volunteers for more than a decade. She was able to motivate and engage young women in new ways that propelled women's health issues to the forefront for high school and college women.

Her vast experience with grassroots movements and her passion for women's health and social justice successfully combined to prove her to be extraordinarily inspirational.

Richards stepped down in 2018 and was succeeded by Leana Wen. In 2019, Richards co-founded a new political action group, Supermajority, to help move forward an agenda that related to women's health and well-being such as family paid leave, equal pay, voting rights, affordable healthcare and responsible gun legislation.

In mid-2023 Cecile was diagnosed with glioblastoma, an aggressive form of brain cancer; she died far too young at her home on January 20, 2025. Richards kept up her vital work throughout her life and illness that left a mark on our world. She was recognized with many awards throughout her career-- the most notable being a Medal of Freedom given by President Biden in 2024.

I had the enormous honor of meeting Cecile Richards here in Bozeman when she came to our state in 2012 to visit our campus, the Montana Planned Parenthood and to stump for Senator Jon Tester. It was certainly one of the most memorable moments of my life, Cecile was gracious, kind, and genuinely interested in the work the students at MSU and our Women's Center were doing. The photo taken of the two of us is among my greatest treasures. Cecile Richards was larger than life, yet so accessible, incredibly engaged, interesting, and most certainly, a professional role model for all young women who want to change our world for the better.

MEDIA SECTION:

Book of the Newsletter:

By Apryl Little

The book of the newsletter this time is *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly, a perfect read for Women's History Month, especially when we consider the theme of overlooked women inventors and innovators. The book tells the story of three African-American women: Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson, who played crucial roles at NASA but whose contributions were long overshadowed. Shetterly's research not only uncovers their mathematical and engineering genius but also paints a vivid picture of their determination to push through barriers of race and gender. Much like the women we highlight in this newsletter, their stories are a reminder of the critical impact women have had on science and innovation, even when their work has gone unrecognized. If you haven't seen it already, this story was also made into an excellent film that brings these incredible women's lives into sharper focus. It's a powerful story about resilience, brilliance, and the importance of remembering those whose work has shaped the world in ways we often take for granted. Give it a watch or a read if you haven't already, you won't regret it--this is a great piece of women's history!



Betsy's Media Musings:

The Case of the Missing Second Seasons:

By Betsy Danforth

After watching a great series on Hulu called *The Other Black Girl*, I eagerly checked to see when the second season would be released. It won't, the show has been cancelled. I found the same news years ago when I finished watching the first (and only) season of *High Fidelity*, a terrifically smart, hip and interesting series starring Zoe Kravitz as "Rob" (originally played by John Cusack), and I found the same response when looking for Season 2 of *How to Die Alone*. The most typical reasoning for cancelling a show after one season is reported to be low viewership. But I would argue that these shows were not well promoted by the streaming services themselves.

With massive amounts of content on a wide variety of viewing platforms, consumers need to be intentional about selecting shows that speak to them while representing a variety of cultural experiences. The erasure or stereotyping of entire cultures in our media content can be potentially harmful, and, let's face it, just plain boring!

