

CPCS Honors National Women's History Month - Women as Storytellers

This year, the theme for Women's History Month is designed to "honor women storytellers in every community who have devoted their lives and talents to producing art, pursuing truth, and reflecting the human condition decade after decade."

Sexism manifests itself in many insidious ways, including denial of the reality, weight, and importance of women's experiences and stories. It is an unyielding struggle for women to have their stories openly welcomed and relied upon to help us grow as a society, yet thankfully they persevere and succeed in building awareness, contributing to change, and lifting us through thought and expression.

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.
----- *Still I Rise*, poem by Maya Angelou

In our public defense work, the critical importance of storytelling is manifest.

We tell our clients' stories where they cannot speak for themselves, which requires that we honor not only their words but the pain and trauma behind their human experience, to inspire the most positive feelings about our client's circumstances.

The obligation of storytelling also requires knowledge of the broader cultural history in our clients' lives. The storyteller must show how those patterns impacted client conduct, against the risk that our clients' backgrounds and pain can also be manipulated by opposing counsel to strike fear. Telling a good story also requires embracing the creative – bringing emotion, commitment, and passion to the moments when we seek justice. As we celebrate women as storytellers, we remind ourselves that we all carry the responsibility of honoring our clients' stories responsibly and with integrity.

Our colleague, Rebecca Jacobstein, in talking about crafting narratives notes: "A chronology is not a story, nor is it compelling when we really want or need our clients' perspectives to be heard." As the Director of our Strategic Litigation Unit, Rebecca recognizes the critical importance of telling the story of the systemic harm experienced by our clients, from prosecution through loss of liberty and confinement. This necessitates taking a range of client perspectives and reflecting them in affidavits and pleadings, in ways that don't just provide a chronology of events.

Helen Fremont, the former YAD Trial Panel Oversight Attorney with CPCS, is a nationally recognized author who has written impactful nonfiction novels on themes of discovery,

reconciling with the past, and facing backlash for sharing the truth. Raised as a Catholic in the Midwest, Helen did not know her family's Jewish faith or the secret pain and horror they suffered during the Holocaust until she and her sister pieced together the full history. On her journey, Helen came out to her family as a lesbian, and she ultimately suffered their rejection for sharing these truths. Helen Fremont demonstrates in a compelling voice, the need to know and project the truth, and to find and live with peace despite the consequences.

Being a good storyteller is a personal journey, with no single way to become proficient, and it is certain that there are many wonderful and effective storytellers within our agency. There is no end to the great potential that we have within CPCS to challenge systemic racism, disdain for the poor, and the lack of justice visited on the people we represent. Part of that strength is in learning how to project the dignity and right to respect for our clients, even in those moments when they must face responsibility for their actions.

On this National Women's Month, CPCS, let us praise and lift up the women who tell their stories and the stories of our clients, for the sake of understanding and liberation.

We have included some links to area events and further information that might be of interest, with thanks to the EID Working Group Events Committee and Executive Assistant Francis Evans – enjoy!

March Events – Women's History Month Statewide and National

[National Women's History Month](#)

<https://allevents.in/cambridge/womens-history-month-trivia-night/200024169184145>

Boston

<https://www.boston.gov/departments/womens-advancement/womens-history-month>

<https://www.mos.org/public-events/womens-history-month-2023>

<https://bostonuncovered.com/womens-history-month-in-boston/>

UMass Amherst

<https://www.umass.edu/diversity/march-womens-history-month>

Brockton

<https://brockton.ma.us/event/womans-history-month-market/2023-03-24/>

Newton

<https://patch.com/massachusetts/newton/ev--celebrate-national-womens-history-month-9831249e>

Northampton

<https://news.northampton.edu/today-announcements/2023/03/womens-history-month-with-the-womens-caucus/>

Lowell

UMass Lowell

<https://www.uml.edu/student-services/multicultural/heritage/womens.aspx>

Springfield

<https://www.wwlp.com/massappeal/international-womens-day-celebration-in-springfield/>

For Further Reading and viewing:

hat and why we celebrate Women's History month

<https://www.womenshistory.org/womens-history/womens-history-month>

A Proclamation on Women's History Month – 2023

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/02/28/a-proclamation-on-womens-history-month-2023/>

Trial Work Related Links on Storytelling

The Power of Storytelling for Lawyers

<https://www.trialguides.com/blogs/news/the-power-of-storytelling-for-lawyers>

Gideon's Promise Podcast - Episode 21 – Let the Griots Tell It

<https://www.gideonspromise.org/episode-21-let-the-griots-tell-it/>

Helen Fremont Related Links

"The Escape Artist" Book Talk with Author Helen Fremont

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YeHQxHsXug>

Helen Fremont Website

<https://www.helenfremont.com/>