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## A redesign of the National Women's History Project site

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A Redesign Website of the National Women's History Project Site

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2006

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College of Arts & Sciences

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Honors Project Reflection  
National Women's History Project Website Redesign

I originally approached Molly Murphy McGregor, the owner and co-founder of the National Women's History Project about redesigning and developing a new website for her. Coincidentally, she was looking to hire a web designer and was very excited about my proposal.

The state of the current website was very disorganized, un-unified, and messy. It was made in 1997 by a group of community college web design students. Considering that modern companies change their website "look" a few times a year, this was a very outdated website. The front page (see Figure 1) consisted of a column of text with internal banner ads on the sides, promoting a very flashy look that confused the user. The problem with so many flashy graphics was that the website was essentially competing with itself for what the user should click on. My approach differed in that I wanted the content to be organized in a straight-forward way, and for the user to be able to find a logical path to it. While providing fun graphics is very important to me as a graphic designer, I wanted to chose subtle, more elegant, and less distracting images and designs.



Figure 1: Old NWHP website homepage

I started out by reorganizing the website sections and hierarchy from:

- About NWHP
- Women's History Month
- News & Events
- The Learning Place

- FAQ
- Catalog
- Sitemap

to:

- About the NWHP
- Women's History Month
- News and Events
- Resource Center
- Information

This was a challenge because certain pages didn't really fit into certain categories. Molly and I worked on renaming, combining and moving certain web pages to different parts of the website until everything had its home.

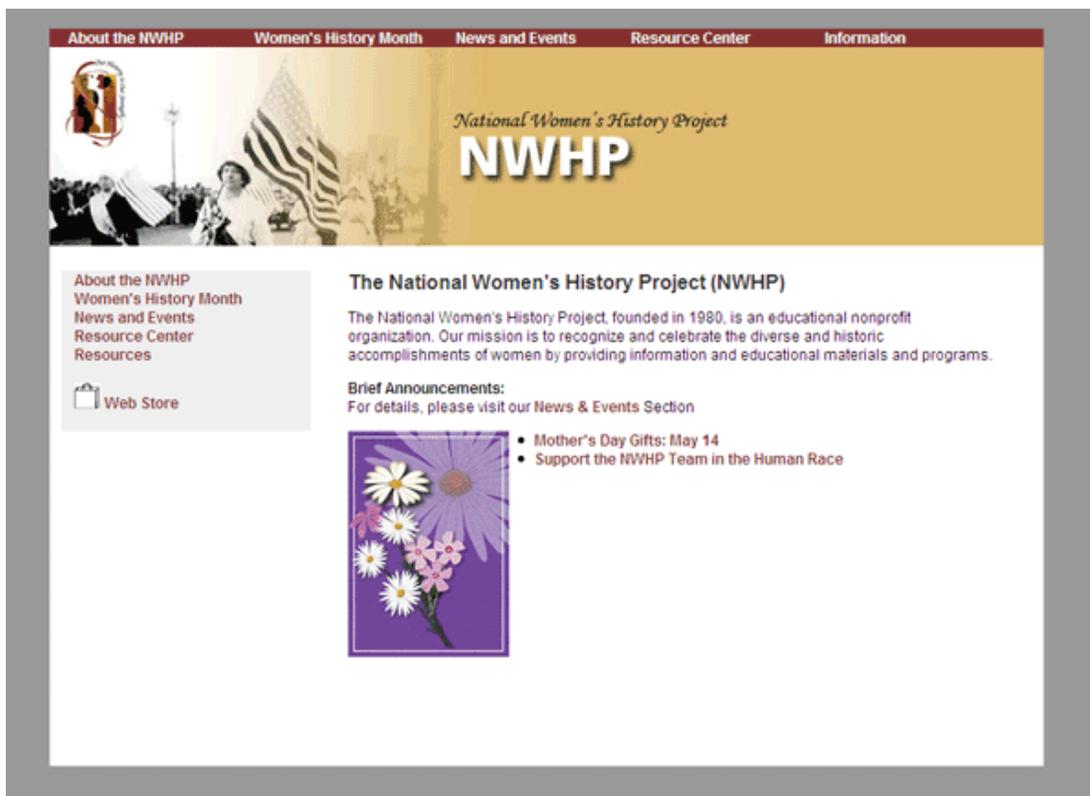


Figure 2: New NWHP redesigned homepage

One major challenge for me was making the website “look cool”. It was difficult to do that without being able to change the logo and the logo colors, which were set in stone as red and yellow. I was able to make font decisions however, and that was a wonderful creative freedom.

I initially presented Molly with a few color and organizational variation (see Appendix), including blue and green. The red and yellow were the most favored, both by my advisor Jay Laird and by Molly herself. I gave Molly navigational variations as well, including an option with no left side sash (allowing for more content space). She wanted the left sash as well as the drop-down menus, which I decided were important for the final version. The website I presented for my department critique with my professors had a right side sash, which they all decided would be better on the left (which I modified on the final product, based on their advice).

The second semester I worked with Jay Laird's TA to implement the actual website and add the content to it. This was the most time-consuming task of the project: actually creating the website and making sure all of the current content made it in. Additionally, I had just learned CSS (Cascading Style Sheets), implementing which was a bit of a technical challenge for me.

CSS is the better new way to design websites. The old way was to combine form and content by creating tables and putting content into table cells. CSS allows for a more flexible approach to design (separating content and form/design), where all of the "styles" including the different content containers (called div tags), fonts, and colors, can be styles in a separate external ".css" file. This allows making one change to one file which then directs, for instance, all of the <header 1> tags to be bold instead of italic. This creates an easy way to modify the style of the web page, and leaves the content of the webpage separate from its style. Doug, Jay's TA, took it one step further and showed me how to set up ".php" files which dynamically loaded the dropdown menu for each page. Since each page has the dropdown menu on the top, and the details for that had not been finalized yet, it was really important for me to be able to go into one file and edit the links (as opposed to doing the same change in hundreds of files). This saved me a lot of time and energy, especially in such a vast website.

One CSS problem we ran into was browser compatibility and CSS, which was a technical issue. This project was wonderful because I was able to be the project manager/account executive, the designer, and the web developer. Everything had to go through me and whether it was technical issue, or an organizational content issue, I had to resolve it.

In January, Molly approached me about being NWHP's freelance web designer, as the current designer was leaving. I gladly accepted and began working on website updates and the monthly newsletter. These were a challenge because Molly expected a quick turnover for the web pages she requested, and I was swamped with schoolwork. This, however, gave me an opportunity to really understand the way the website works. I realized that there were hundreds of "old outdated" pages that were still floating around and taking up server space, but were no longer used or needed. Once the link to them was removed from the index page, it became "lost" because people didn't know how to get to it. However, those pages still lived on the server and were taking up space and cluttering the website. Refreshing the website and reorganizing it solved this problem and essentially performed a "spring cleaning" on it.

Other issues included the fact that the index page lived in 3 different places: an “index.htm” file, an “index.html” file, and the front page of the “news & events” section. This meant that every time I had to update the homepage, I’d have to make identical changes to 3 different pages. Another really large issue was adding a national performer to the listings. The national performers were all listed on a “national” page, but were additionally listed on every single state page as well. Although this sort of set up generally makes sense, it is inefficient because the designer has to add this listing to 51 total files, which takes an hour as opposed to 10 seconds. All these issues were noted and resolved in the redesign, allowing for a better organization and much easier update and understanding of the website hierarchy.

Our editing process consisted of mainly Molly looking through the “redesigned” website (which was housed in a “development folder” on their server”) and giving me corrections and renaming and re- categorizing certain pages. Molly has been exceptionally patient and easy to work with during this entire process. Most of her design feedback has been minimally critical and encouraging of my skills and knowledge. She has mostly given me her option and then said: “You know best. I trust your judgment.”

One major frustration was push-back from the board of directors. One active member felt the website did not have enough images and that the web store was not as prominent as it should be. His solution to the web store problem was making the web store link much bigger and flashier and putting little ads for it on certain pages. I felt this was very frustrating feedback to work with, as that is precisely the kind of thing the current website utilizes. It’s difficult to explain to people how something they are so used to is ineffective, tacky, and not user-friendly. Fortunately, I tactfully explained to Molly that it would be best to stay away from flashy graphics and confusing ways to get to the web store, and instead creating an elegant icon for the web store that would be displayed on each page consistently.

One of the challenges of this project was working with the images that the NWHP had available. Most of them are historical black-and white scans of old newspaper photos. Although they are fascinating and very informative, they also give the website an “old” look. I attempted designing a front page with a “modern woman” image on the front. Unfortunately, that gave it a very “pharmaceutical commercial” look, and my advisor and I both decided to steer away from that and work with the historical imagery. It would have been fantastic to be able to go to the different NWHP events and photograph them for the website. I think that’s still a possible option for the future, as I have stayed on as NWHP’s freelance web designer after the completion of this project.

Overall, I have very much enjoyed working on this project, learned a lot of technical knowledge, as well as project management and practical content organizational knowledge. Just organizing your files and making sure you haven’t missed transferring anything from the old website to the new one was a challenge and a learning experience.

## **Appendix**



# NWHP

*National Women's History Project*

Search

 Site map

[About NWHP](#)
[National Women's History Month](#)
[News and Events](#)
[The Learning Place](#)
[Catalog](#)
[FAQ](#)

**About NWHP**

- [Mission & History](#)
- [Director's Letter](#)
- [Why the NWHP's Work is Important](#)
- [Future Plans](#)
- [Staff/Board](#)
- [Join Us](#)
- [Contact](#)



## NWHP: Mission & Vision

The National Women's History Project is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to promote a multicultural women's history perspective by honoring women of diverse cultural, ethnic, occupational, racial, class, and regional backgrounds. We provide information and educational resources on the History of Women's History.

### From a Grassroots Organization to 25 YEARS of Writing Women's History

#### How it All Started

In 1980, we were a group of women who were absent from our texts. No one was devoted to women. Girls had few role models. Many adults assumed women did nothing. We needed to be addressed.

Biography Center
Women's Rights Movement
Great Speeches
Honored Latinas
Performers
Authors/Presenters
Museums/Organizations
International Women's Day
Links
Teacher's Lounge
Student Center
Parent's Corner
History Quiz

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#### National Women's History Month



We convinced Congress and the White House of the need for our nation to celebrate and recognize women's role in history on an annual basis. As a result of our efforts, the week of March 8th (International Women's Day) was officially designated as National Women's History Week. In 1987, we led the successful campaign to have the entire month of March declared National Women's History Month.

We mobilize and unify the national celebrations of Women's History Month in March each year by choosing an annual theme. We promote a multicultural women's history perspective by honoring women of diverse cultural, ethnic, occupational, racial, class, and regional backgrounds.

Figure 3: Blue design proposal



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**NWHP: Mission & Vision**

The National Women's History Project is a nonprofit organization. Our mission is to promote, preserve, and provide information and education about the History of Women's History.

**From a Grassroots Organization to 25 YEARS of Writing Women's History**

How it All Started

In 1980, we were a group of women who were absent from our texts. No one was devoted to women. Girls had few role models. Many adults assumed women did nothing. We needed to be heard.

- Biography Center
- Women's Rights Movement
- Great Speeches
- Honored Latinas
- Performers
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- Museums/Organizations
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We mobilize and unify the national celebrations of Women's History Month in March each year by choosing an annual theme. We promote a multicultural women's history perspective by honoring women of diverse cultural, ethnic, occupational, racial, class, and regional backgrounds.

Figure 4: Green and Yellow design proposal version, with dropdown menus

## NWHP: Mission & History

The National Women's History Project is an educational nonprofit organization that recognizes and celebrates the diverse and historic accomplishments of women and educational materials and programs.

From a Grassroots Organization into a National Institution  
25 YEARS of Writing Women Back into History

### How it All Started

In 1980, we were a group of women who noticed that women were only 3% of the content was devoted to women. Girls had few role models and assumed women did nothing important. This perception needed to change.

### National Women's History Month



We convinced Congress and the White House of the need for our nation to celebrate and recognize women's role in history on an annual basis. As a result of our efforts, the week of March 8th (International Women's Day) was officially designated as National Women's History Week. In 1987, we led the successful campaign to have the entire month of March declared National Women's History Month.

We mobilize and unify the national celebrations of Women's History Month in March each year by choosing an annual theme. We promote a multicultural women's history perspective by honoring women of diverse cultural, ethnic, occupational, racial, class, and regional backgrounds.

### What We Do

Today our aim is as clear and simple as it was 25 years ago:

**to teach as many people as possible about women's role in history.**

Every year we send out 100,000 catalogs and distribute tens of thousands of women's history posters, celebratory materials, books, videos, and curriculum resources.

Our staff has responded to more than 200,000 requests for information from students, teachers, authors, historians, librarians, corporate and government agency executives.

In 1997 we launched our website to serve as the digital clearinghouse for multicultural women's history information. Today, our award-winning website is the first women's history choice on all website search engines and attracts over 1,000,000 visitors a year. Additionally, we answer over 2,500 e-mails and letters each year from students, teachers, reporters, and other interested individuals requesting information.

We work with schools, colleges, companies, churches, clubs, communities, government offices, unions, publishers, and the media. Our staff has conducted women's history training sessions and women's historic site tours in 42 states. We have trained over 30,000 teachers and federal program managers and have delivered over 2,500 speeches.

We created the national clearinghouse to provide multicultural women's history information, materials, referrals, and strategies. This service also provides easy access to women's history performers, organizations, museums, and historic site.

We have designed, developed, and produced more than 200 multicultural women's history resource materials, such as videos, speeches, posters, celebratory items, guides, program kits, and curriculum units.

### NWHP Campaigns



We established the NWHP Network to strengthen the connections between and among local, state, and national women's history and educational organizations.

In 1995 and 1998, we created and led national campaigns to celebrate and recognize the work of women in expanding and enriching our democracy.

In 1995, we celebrated the 75th anniversary of women in the United States winning the right to vote and in 1998 we celebrated the 150th anniversary of the Women's Rights Movement.

These successful campaigns resulted in tens of thousands of local, state, and national celebrations. In 2005, we will celebrate the 85th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment and the 25th anniversary of the women's history movement.

### Awards and Recognition

We have been honored to work with the President's Commission on the Celebration of Women in American History.

Our Executive Director was appointed by the White House to serve on the Congressional Commission on Women's Historic Landmarks.

Our work has been recognized by a wide-range of educational organizations including the National Educational Association, the National Association for Multicultural Education, the Association for Gender Equity Leadership in Education, and the American Educational Research Association.

- Biography Center
- Women's Rights Movement
- Great Speeches
- Honored Latinas
- Performers
- Authors/Presenters
- Museums/Organizations
- International Women's Day
- Links
- Teacher's Lounge
- Student Center
- Parent's Corner
- History Quiz

Figure 5: Website without side-sash (allowing for more content space, and just top "drop down" navigation).



Figure 6: This was the option that ended up being selected, although the actual design ended up looking a bit different.