

First Woman Shuttle
3/5/98

FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON

REMARKS FOR ANNOUNCEMENT OF FIRST WOMAN COMMANDER

THE ROOSEVELT ROOM

MARCH 5, 1998

Welcome to the White House and the Roosevelt Room. The President and I are honored to be joined today by so many people who have made this historic announcement possible. I especially want to recognize NASA Administrator Dan Goldin; Sally Ride; Jennifer Harris, who at age 28 was the flight operations director of Mars Pathfinder; and our guest of honor, Colonel Eileen Collins, who is here with her husband Pat Youngs.

In December, 1998, when the Shuttle Columbia takes off, Colonel Eileen Collins will take one big step forward for women -- and one giant leap for humanity. She will become the first woman ever to command a space shuttle. Her mission will launch the most advanced x-ray telescope ever flown so we can examine some of the most distant and powerful objects in our universe. I can think of no better way to celebrate Women's History Month.

Tonight, we will be previewing an HBO series which looks back at our journey to the Moon and shows how our exploration of space has always inspired us as individuals and united us as a nation.

When I was 14, I dreamed of becoming an astronaut. I even wrote NASA to find out what I needed to do to see the stars up close. Unfortunately, I got one of those really thin envelopes back -- which is never a good sign. NASA thanked me for my interest, but said that women weren't being considered for the job. Well, times have certainly changed. The dreams that many of us had as girls have now orbited the universe with women from Sally Ride to Eileen Collins.

I first met Eileen three years ago at another Women's History Month event. She had just become the first woman pilot of a space shuttle -- and she gave me a red shirt she'd worn on that mission. What I saw in that shirt was not only her remarkable accomplishment, but also the courageous road she'd traveled to reach her every goal. As a small child, Colonel Collins would go to the airport with her father and her siblings, sit on the hood of the car and watch the planes take off. She would look up at the sky and imagine traveling into space. And now she is doing just that -- for many of the same reasons that women have always made history.

She made history because of her skill and determination -- to be **not** the best woman for the job -- but simply the best. She's made it because of parents who always told her she could do anything she put her mind to. She made it because she ignored those who said it wasn't cool or feminine to study math or science -- and demanded a first-class education in both. She made it because of the doors of opportunity that NASA has increasingly opened to women and minorities.

And she made history because of the countless other women upon whose shoulders all of us stand. I think of Amelia Earhart, disguising herself to reach her dream. I think of Mae Jemison, the first African American woman to fly in space. I think of Shannon Lucid, who just last year, broke the record for the longest time spent in space by an American. And I think back to 1978, when Shannon Lucid, Sally Ride, Rhea Seddon, Kathryn Sullivan, Judy Resnick and Anna Fisher became the first women to join the astronaut corps.

That was the same year Eileen Collins graduated from college and entered Air Force Pilot Training. Her first week there, the six women astronauts came to do a parachute training. She looked at them and thought, "Wow, this is what I'm going to do." This afternoon, when Astronaut Collins and I go to Dunbar Senior High School to talk about the importance of studying math and science, students will be able to look at her and say the same thing, "This is what I'm going to do." And when her mission launches next December, the next generation of girls -- and boys -- will be able to look to the heavens and think, "There's nothing I can't do."

Children have always gazed at the sky with wonder. And so has our nation. Especially in the aftermath of Sputnik, we have looked to space as the next frontier in our never-ending journey of discovery...and our advancements there have brought us closer together as a country...and, more and more, as a world. In the last year alone, we were riveted by the Mars Pathfinder landing. We received stunning photographs and information from other planets courtesy of the Hubble Space Telescope. And, as Stephen Hawking will point out in his lecture tomorrow night, we can look forward to new scientific discoveries and greater human understanding in the Millennium.

None of these achievements would have been possible without our continuing investments in science, space, and technology. And none of it would have been possible without the leadership of our next speaker.

NASA Administrator Dan Goldin is truly bringing our space program into the next century. By making it "faster, better, and cheaper." And by ensuring that NASA's workforce looks like America and its work reaches all of America. It is my great honor to introduce Administrator Dan Goldin.