Remarks for Women's Hall of Fame Induction
October 5, 2002

Induction into the Women's Hall of Fame is an honor I treasure. On a Saturday before the first Monday in October, I seldom stray from my desk in D.C. But the invitation to Seneca Falls was impossible to resist. My appreciation to all planners and supporters of this event. Cheers for keeping vibrantly alive the spirit of the women who gathered in this town in 1848 and bravely demanded recognition of women's full stature as members of the human race and citizens of the
U.S.A.

I thought it fitting, in the next few minutes, to convey to you the response I generally give when asked about the changes I have seen in my lifetime in women’s work. I had the good fortune to be alive and a lawyer in the late 1960s when, for the first time in the history of the United States, it became possible to urge before courts, successfully, that society would benefit enormously if women were regarded as persons equal in stature to men.

In my college years, 1950-1954, it was widely thought that women were not suited for many of life's occupations —
lawyering and bartending, banking and brokering, military service, foreign service, piloting planes, jury service, tenured positions at universities, even professional chefs, to take just a few of many examples that now seem ancient. So much has changed for the good since then. But sadly, many people still regard feminism with a certain suspicion or discomfort.

Properly understood, feminism is hardly a cause to distrust. It simply means (as Marlo Thomas put it in a song from the 70s) freeing people, men as well as women, to be you and me, allowing each individual to pursue the God-given talents and qualities he or she has without artificial restraints.
Susan B. Anthony, who tirelessly worked to achieve the vote for women in the United States, offered a prediction at the dawn of the twentieth century. She forecast a time when woman would be the peer of man. In education, in art, in science, in literature; in the home, the church, the state; everywhere she will be acknowledged equal, though not identical with him. That forecast is ours to grasp today.

Some seasons past, my grand colleague and 1995 Hall of Fame inductee Sandra Day O'Connor, first and for twelve years sole woman on the United States Supreme Court, made a surprise appearance one night in the D.C. Shakespeare
Theatre’s production of Henry V. Playing the role that evening of Isabel, Queen of France, she spoke the famous line from the Treaty scene: "Haply a woman’s voice may do some good."

Indeed it may, as women like Rosalynn Carter, Katharine Graham, and all current and past Hall of Fame inductees have shown.

A few years ago, at an event marking the reopening of the renovated Library of Congress Jefferson Building, a college student came up to my table and asked if I could help with an assignment. She had one question and hoped to compose her paper by collecting responses from people attending the
Library's celebration. What, she asked, did I think was the largest problem as we enter the twenty-first century. My mind raced past terrorist threats, privacy concerns in the electronic age, assisted suicide, deadly weapons, outer space. I thought of the vision of Thurgood Marshall, for many years the NAACP's leading counsel, later in life, Federal Court of Appeals Judge, Solicitor General, then Supreme Court Justice.

Justice Marshall praised the evolution, over two centuries of our nation's sometimes turbulent history, of the constitutional concept, "We, the People." Originally confined to white, property-owning men, "We, the People," in time, came to
include once excluded, ignored, or undervalued people —
humans once held in bondage, Native Americans, immigrants seeking freedom from fear and want, and women, at last made voters, nationwide, in 1920.

I thought ultimately of the U.S.A.'s motto and grand ambition: E Pluribus Unum, of many, one. The challenge is to make or keep our communities places where we can understand, accommodate, even celebrate, our differences, while pulling together for the common good. "Of many, one" is the main aspiration, I believe. It is my hope for our nation and world.