



CALIFORNIA
National Organization for Women

Working to advance the women & girls of California



March 21, 2011

Visitors per month: 8,150

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Women Explorers



During Women's History Month, we'll be featuring a post each week from America Comes Alive! on little-known American women's history.

Bessie Coleman (1893-1926) was the first African-American woman to get an international pilot's license. Her older brothers had fought in World War I and came home and told her stories about flying and noted that in Paris, "even a

woman could fly." Because of segregation, she could not learn to fly in the U.S. so she determined she would go to France, and she began to save the money she earned from her job in a beauty parlor.

By 1921, Coleman saved enough money for the trip; she was the only woman in her aviation class. Her return to the U.S. was a front page story, but if Coleman had not taken matters into her own hands, that would have been the end of it. The only regular job in the U.S. that required pilots was flying mail planes, and the post office only hired white men.

Coleman realized she could continue to fly and make money doing it by barnstorming. Coleman embarked on a lecture circuit and combined it with demonstration flights for the public. Her goal was to set up a school where African-Americans could learn to fly. Coleman was testing a newly purchased but older plane in 1926; it crashed and she did not survive.

*In celebration of March and Women's History Month, **America Comes Alive!** will feature "30 Under 30"— women who have made contributions to the society we live in. Check back here every Monday to see this week's theme and featured woman, and visit AmericaComesAlive.com daily in March to see each day's featured woman.*

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