



empowering women since 1881

Ithaca Insights

January/February 2026

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Ithaca Insights is the monthly publication of the Ithaca, New York, Branch of AAUW

AAUW Mission

The American Association of University Women (AAUW) advances gender equity for women and girls through research, education, and advocacy.

In principle and practice, AAUW values and seeks a diverse membership. There shall be no barriers to full participation in this organization based on age, ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, geographical location, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status.

Winter Programs

Monday, February 9 • 7:00 p.m. via Zoom

Huckleberry Finn for Our Time

Our February Program has been planned by the Book Group to commemorate Black History Month. We invite all members to read *James* by Percival Everett and then join in a discussion of this retelling of Mark Twain's famous novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Margaret Nichols will lead our discussion.

James won the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the National Book Award. *James* is as bitingly funny, and faster paced, than Twain's masterpiece. We have a lot to learn about life from a slave's point of view. To begin with Jim was the adult in Huck's story and prefers an adult name, James. And then there is the matter of language and dialect. How did James and his family speak? For more information, see the Book Group news on p. 3.

Thursday, February 12 • 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

A National Perspective: AAUW's Priorities, Issues and Projects

by Meghan Kissell, AAUW Senior Director of Policy and Member Advocacy. She will speak to the Poughkeepsie Branch. To attend, register prior to the program at: <https://shorturl.at/GK3yR>.

Wednesday, February 25 • 7:30 p.m. via Zoom

Financial Literacy for Women

Presented by AAUW-NYS. See p. 4 for details and to register.

Monday March 16, 2026 • 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

Beyond Land Acknowledgments: Creating Allyship Through Action

Mary-Carol Lindbloom, Ithaca Branch Diversity Chair, will lead us in an examination of land acknowledgments through the lens of allyship. Using the AAUW Plug & Play *Creating Allyship* framework, she will discuss what allyship is, what land acknowledgments are, and how allies can move beyond symbolic, performative recognition, e.g., noting Indigenous presence prior to European settlement—to accountability, responsibility, and action.

President's Letter

A Century of Black History Month

The formal recognition of Black history in the United States traces its origins to the inspirational efforts of historian Carter G. Woodson. In 1915 he traveled from his home in Washington, D.C., to Chicago to attend the national celebration of the 50th anniversary of emancipation. Witnessing the thousands of Black Americans gathered at the Coliseum, with exhibits showcasing African American accomplishments since the abolition of slavery, Woodson was deeply inspired to create a more sustained way to celebrate Black history and heritage.



Before leaving Chicago, Woodson co-founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH). A highly educated scholar, he had already earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Chicago and, three years prior to founding the ASNLH, he became only the second African American, after W.E.B. DuBois, to earn a doctorate from Harvard. Like DuBois, Woodson strongly believed that African American youth in the early 20th century were not being adequately taught about their own heritage and the significant achievements of their ancestors.

To address this, Woodson sent out a press release in February 1926 announcing the first Negro History Week. He intentionally selected February for the observance, as the month already contained the widely celebrated birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and Frederick Douglass (February 14). Woodson's vision was to transform these annual commemorations into a long-term, powerful effort aimed at changing how Black people viewed themselves and how the broader world perceived them. Year after year, he worked tirelessly, building Negro History Week into a cultural institution by setting themes and providing educational materials to illustrate the contributions of people of African descent to modern culture and the movement of history.

As the Civil Rights and Black Power movements gained momentum in the 1960s, a new generation of African

Americans on college campuses became increasingly aware of the role history played in their lives. Younger members of the ASNLH—which eventually became the Association for the Study of African American History—advocated for the celebration to be expanded. Consequently, in 1976, on the 50th anniversary of the first Negro History Week, the organization officially made the shift to Black History Month.

This change gained national recognition when President Gerald R. Ford issued the first presidential message recognizing Black History Month that same year. A decade later, in 1986, Congress passed Public Law 99-244, formally designating February as Black History Month nationwide. This sustained effort ensures that Black history finds its way not only into schools but also into museums, archives, libraries, parks, workplaces, houses of worship, and homes across the land. The 2026 national theme, "A Century of Black History Commemorations," marks the 100th anniversary of Woodson's inaugural effort, celebrating the growth, impact, and future of Black history's presence in American life.

—Lin Tollefson, President (ltollefson11@gmail.com)

Branch Invites College Women to Apply for a National Conference Grant

The Ithaca Branch is inviting Ithaca area college women, undergraduate or graduate students, to apply for an award to attend the 2026 National Conference for College Women Student Leaders (NCCWSL). This year's conference is May 27-30 at the University of Maryland, College Park, MD. For more information on this unique and inspiring conference for young leaders, please visit: naspa.org.

The Ithaca Branch Award will cover registration fees and up to \$300 in travel and incidental expenses associated with conference attendance. The deadline to apply is **Sunday, February 15, 2026**.

To apply for the conference and travel grant award, please answer the following questions in writing:

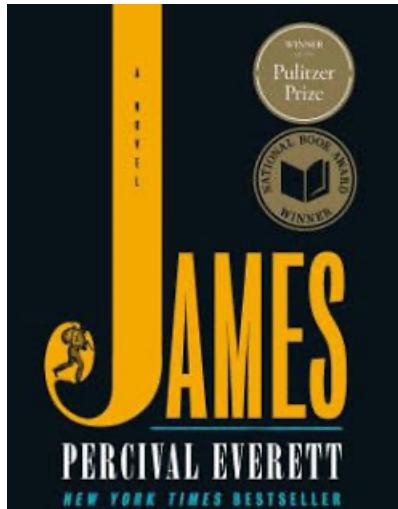
1. Provide your name, mailing address, email address, and phone number.
2. Provide your academic institution, major/minor, and briefly state your academic/career goals.
3. Briefly state what you would like to achieve from attending the **2026 NCCWSL Conference**.

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Book Group

Critics & Readers Love *James*

Join all branch members, via Zoom, on Monday evening, February 9, at 7:00 p.m. to discuss *James* by Percival Everett. If you have ever read *The Adventures of*



Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain, this story will be familiar, but what a change to hear it from the runaway slave's point of view. And his name is James, not Jim.

When *James* was published in 2024, the critics had a lot to say about it in words rarely used for other books:

"A masterpiece that will help redefine one of the classics of American literature, while also being a major achievement on its own."

"Funny and horrifying, brilliant and riveting. Who should read this book? Every single person in the country."

"A work of astonishing ambition—even audacity . . . This is writing that demands to be read."

"Pure brilliance. Funny, wise, gracious."

You have already encountered the author's ironic humor if you saw *American Fiction*. This hit 2023 movie was based on Everett's novel, *Erasure*. After reading *James*, you may want to read *Huckleberry Finn* again to see what you and Twain may have missed.

We look forward to seeing you on February 9. We begin at 7:00 p.m. with tea (yours) and conversation. Margaret Nichols will lead our discussion, which begins at 7:30. Guests are always welcome.

NCCWSL Grant Application (continued from p. 2)

4. Can you present your experiences at an Ithaca Branch of AAUW program or through a branch newsletter article?

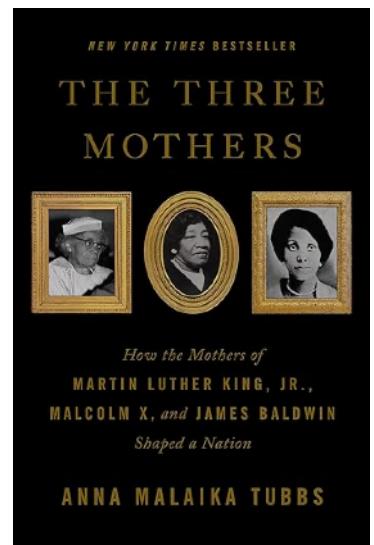
5. Can you commit to attend the **2026 NCCWSL Conference** and after provide copies of your travel and incidental expenses to the Ithaca Branch Treasurer?

To submit your grant award nomination information and/or for questions or other information, please contact: **IthacaBranchAAUW@gmail.com**. Apply by **Sunday, February 15, 2026**.

For Women's History Month

In March we will celebrate Women's History Month by reading *The Three Mothers: How the Mothers of Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and James Baldwin Shaped a Nation* by Anna Malaika Tubbs. This unusual biography focuses on Alberta King, Louise Little and Berdis Baldwin. *The New Yorker* called Tubbs's book "a dynamic blend of biography and manifesto" and said it "stands against the women's erasure, a monument to their historical importance."

—Lin Tollefson (ltollefson11@gmail.com)
& Jeanette Knapp (jkdk454@gmail.com),
Book Group Co-Chairs



AAUW Funds

Thank You !

Our annual Fall Fundraiser re-affirmed our members' generosity and support for women and girls. Your gifts will further their education and career goals, support equity and employment rights, and advocate for the rights of all women.

We donated \$1,615 to AAUW Funds in response to my letter. That total includes \$615 given to the Legal Advocacy Fund (LAF) reflecting the Ithaca Branch's long-term commitment to equal pay for equal work back to the 1980s *Cornell II Lawsuit*. At this time, we do not know how much more has been given by members through the AAUW Website. We appreciate your support however and whenever you make your gifts. If the timing was not good this past fall, please remember that AAUW appreciates your support throughout the year.

TC3 Scholarship Grows

Gifts totaling \$815 were also given to the Ithaca Branch of AAUW Scholarship for Non-Traditional Students attending Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3). The Fund continues to grow. We hope that in the future we can provide financial assistance to more students who will form a connection with branch members. Our

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AAUW Funds (continued from p. 3)

members also donated funds for an Ithaca Area College or Graduate Student to attend the **2026 NCCWSL (National Conference for College Women Student Leaders) Conference** at the University of Maryland College Park Campus (naspa.org/events/nccwsl) and the **2026 AAUW Atlantic Regional Conference** being held in Lancaster, PA. The **NCCWSL Conference** provides emerging women leaders opportunities to learn in a supportive environment, network and have lifelong experiences. The **Atlantic Regional Conference** (aauwpa.aauw.net/2026-atlantic-states-regional-conference/) will bring AAUW members from the Atlantic States together to focus on our mission, network with other AAUW members and enjoy plenty of social time.

If you would like to serve on the nominating committee to select the student to attend the 2026 NCCWSL Conference, please contact me.

—Kim Edgar, kimberlysedgar@gmail.com



New Life for Used Shoes

To help the branch cover a portion of the two conference and travel awards, we are coordinating a used shoe drive through **funds2orgs** (<https://funds2orgs.com/fundraising/>). We will collect paired and rubber-banded used shoes at our three in-person programs in the Spring. Saturday, April 11th, we will have a program and lunch with AAUW Fellows; on Saturday, April 18th, we will attend the Elmira-Corning Branch Play; and Saturday, May 9th, is our Annual Meeting. Please contact me for more information or to arrange a shoe pick-up. Feel free to spread the word about the used shoe drive and start collecting used shoes this winter, so that we can raise a lot of funds for our conference and travel grant awards and promote AAUW in our community.

Best wishes for a happy and healthy 2026!

Kim Edgar

Financial Literacy for Women

On February 25 at 7:30 p.m., via Zoom, hear from Barbara Mastellone, retired Vice President and Wealth Management Advisor at Merrill Lynch. Her topics:

Retirement Planning

Wealth Management

Fraud Protection

Health Care Long-Term Care

Social Security

Investing Basics

This presentation will require you to register to attend:

Link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/meeting/register/L00TX6gxT0uGG2h7aHsJnA>

Submit questions to mastelloneb@aauwnys.org prior to the event. This presentation will be recorded and added to the AAUW NYS website, so if you cannot attend on February 25, you will be able to view it at your convenience.

Suzanne Young-Mercer

President, AAUW NYS

The Six Triple Eight

Celebrate both black history month and women's history month by seeing *The Six Triple Eight*. This new movie was written and directed by Tyler Perry and stars Kerry Washington as the real-life commanding officer Charity Adams. Among the thousands of women who joined the new Women's Army Auxiliary Corps in World War II was Charity Adams, 23. On summer vacation from teaching junior high math and science in South Carolina, she applied after receiving a letter that "emphasized career and leadership opportunities." She would go on to lead the the 6888th Battalion and become the first Black woman to serve as an officer.

The unit was created in 1944 to address a three-year backlog of undelivered mail for the 7 million U.S. soldiers stationed in Europe. It was a daunting task, due to frequent soldier movement and common names—with over 7,500 Robert Smiths alone. The 6888th was responsible for all mail that couldn't be delivered on the first attempt due to incorrect or outdated addresses. Veterans recalled processing rooms with mailbags stacked to the ceiling and six airplane hangars full of undelivered Christmas packages.

Predominantly composed of African Americans, along with some women of Hispanic and Caribbean descent, the 855-member regiment faced a battle on three fronts. As veteran member Anna Tarryk put it, "First we had to fight segregation, second was the war, and third were the men." The women faced racism and misogyny, including separate drinking fountains for "colored" soldiers," and crude remarks from male officers. But, they managed to sort more than 17 million pieces of mail, completing their six-month assignment three months ahead of schedule.