Eleanor Holmes, my ABSOLUTE fave!! MM

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TO THE CONTRARY  
Women and Black History Month  

Women Executives...Good for the Bottom Line: A new study shows companies with women in the higher ranks of leadership earn a higher return on equity and higher shareholder profits.

The Flap over Women and the Olympics: Some countries that participate in the Olympics have not sent women athletes in the past. A new group "Atlanta, Sydney, Athens, Plus" says countries that don't have women athletes should be banned from the games.

Dr. Dorothy Height on Black History Month: Dorothy Height, the former President of the National Council of Negro Women, talks about being a woman in the predominantly male dominated civil rights movement.

HOST: Bonnie Erbe

PANELISTS:

Del. Eleanor Holmes (D-DC)
Kellyanne Conway, Republican Pollster
Michelle Conlin, BusinessWeek
Dana White, The Heritage Foundation
PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY"

HOST:
BONNIE ERBE

GUESTS:
ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
DANA WHITE
MICHELLE CONLIN
KELLYANNE CONWAY

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2004

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MS. ERBE: A new study finds Fortune 500 companies with more women in high levels of management have higher profits. Will this finding prompt the shattering of the glass ceiling once and for all?

DELEGATE NORTON: It may just be that what the glass ceiling needs is not a sledgehammer, but the sound of a very high note from the inside.

MS. WHITE: Success is always the best method to overcome any obstacle.

MS. CONLIN: We know that women can deliver superior profits, superior performance. The question is, do they want to be crashing through the glass ceiling as it stands now in corporate America?

MS. CONWAY: Some women crash the glass ceiling, some women hang out a shingle, but all women are now more empowered to earn more and be more.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to To The Contrary, a discussion of news and social trends from a variety of women's perspectives.

This week, new research finds higher profits for companies with more women in management. Then, European feminists challenge the International Olympic Committee, the governing body for the Olympics, to ban national delegations with no female athletes. Behind the headlines, in honor of Black History Month, an interview with civil rights legend Dr. Dorothy Height.

Up first, the Fortune 500's feminine edge. Companies with more women in senior management out-perform competitors, this according to a new study by Catalyst, a nonprofit group dedicated to advancing women in business. Researchers divided Fortune 500 companies into four groups based on percentage of female senior managers, then compared the return on equity and shareholder profits among the four groups. Companies with more women managers performed better in both areas. Those with the highest representation of women in leadership had an average 35 percent higher return on equity, and 34 percent higher shareholder profits than companies with lower proportions of female senior managers. This disparity is especially pronounced in companies producing consumer goods, and in financial services.

Researchers stress they found a link, but no proof of causation. Women executives are not necessarily the reason for their company's financial success. Fortune 500 companies with the most women in senior management include Hewlett-Packard, Coca-Cola, Southwest Airlines, and Verizon. Some of the less gender diverse companies include Bank of America, Compaq, Exxon Mobile, and Whirlpool.
So, Michelle Conlin of Business Week, why? If they find a link but no causation, what's your theory about why it is the more women you put in higher positions of management the better return on shareholder equity?

MS. CONLIN: You know, there's this question of is there a macho jinx? We know that women get higher returns in the stock market as investors. We know from recent research that women outscore men on most of the scales in the global information economy, or the new economy that are needed. And, moreover, as you look at women are graduating from college more than men, they're getting more graduate degrees, they're getting more Ph.D.s, they're closing the earnings gap, and they're the consumers. And so that's who companies have to go after.

But here's what's interesting, the companies need these women because that's the market they're going to have to cater to. But women often don't want to be in the top ranks of corporate America because it's still sort of patterned after the ideal worker, which is a man who takes no break for child-rearing, he doesn't down shift. That's why so many women -- there's a continuing exodus from corporate America, because there's no flexibility.

DELEGATE NORTON: I wouldn't emphasize that, because these figures show that they're coming in. Of course, there's an exodus. The real question is, why these companies do better? We speculate on --

MS. ERBE: Let me ask you this, let's pretend for a moment that you're males, probably white, probably male, CEO, and you see that your company, which doesn't have as many women at the top as one of these companies, Hewlett-Packard, that does, are you going to promote yourself out of a job, or hire more women right underneath you to try to improve profitability?

DELEGATE NORTON: Let me tell you the change I've seen, when I chaired the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, you had to get at companies on affirmative action programs. Then, when affirmative action came under fire, the first to step up for these programs have been business. It seems to me they learned something that these figures are beginning to show, these are the companies that are most flexible. These are the risk takers. These are the growth companies. And these are the companies that say, we also value our reputation. We value the reputation as being companies that want to have diverse workforces, and it's paying out.

MS. CONWAY: Women tend to create a very positive work environment, if not a more compelling work product. And rather than generalize, we can observe that just in the corporate scandals of the last couple of years, the whistleblowers are women. The men who are being accused, not quite quickly enough, frankly, and indicted, have all been men. And that's not to say one is bad and one is good, but there is something about that ability to negotiate, to be reasonable, to not want to cut corners. But I think in the long-term, literally, it yields a dividend, and in the short-term, day-by-day, yields some type of almost psychic profitability to the workers.
MS. WHITE: Also, just going back to your fictitious white male as a CEO --

MS. ERBE: And I only say that because history has proven that most of them are.

MS. WHITE: But, it's stock market forces, it's about the bottom line. And even as a white male CEO, you know what, if she knows the marketplace better, we are in more colleges, we are getting more MBAs than men now, but if she knows how to make my bottom line better, she's the one for the job. And I think, again, it's about success. If you can produce the results that the market called for, then you have the job and you can break the glass ceiling.

MS. CONWAY: All you have to do is look at advertising right now to sort of get a sort of psychic picture of where corporate America is at, which is all the financial advertising, or most of it, single woman in front of a desk, maybe she's even pregnant. There's no husband in the picture, and it's interesting that you're seeing more and more catering --

MS. ERBE: I don't know where you're getting "most of," I think you're starting to see that. But even last weekend at the Super Bowl there was talk that something like 40 percent of the Super Bowl audience was women, but 99 percent of the ads were aimed at men, even though they're only slightly more than half the audience.

MS. CONWAY: Women are still in the kitchen getting more guacamole.

DELEGATE NORTON: The reason that you're seeing more women than you used to see before, if you look at the growth market, not at the market you already have, you already have your investment, you've got the men, you've got more and more single women, you've got more and more educated women, if you're going to grow, that's where you've got to go.

MS. CONLIN: It's one of the things driving the housing boom.

(Crosstalk.)

MS. CONWAY: There are 29 million in America now, a vast majority of them are women, who are single and living alone, and that's mostly by choice not from circumstances. They aren't elderly widows or 18 year olds who just haven't gotten married in the next year or two. But I do think that it's a huge leap to go from that all the way to say, well, then that's going to produce X number of millions of female corporate executives. Women make 81 percent of the household decisions. We even make some of the gadget decisions now, like the cars, and computers, and the cell phones. And in our company, Woman Trend, the people are just banging down our door to find out how to reach the woman consumer. Nobody is banging down our door to find out how to cultivate more women managers.
MS. ERBE: So, does some of this data lead us to believe that what's really holding women back at this point is women? That women are smart enough to know or on some level figure out that you can't be a CEO and be a full-time mom at the same time, and one has to give, at least for a while?

MS. WHITE: I think that's exactly it. I think women put our own pressure on ourselves to say, it's this or that. I can't become a CEO if I also want to be married by 35. That's not going to happen. And you also have to deal with a cultural perception that you're not going to be as attractive a suitor if you're the CEO, who are you going to date, other CEOs are mostly already married. That's also a serious problem in terms of cultural perceptions.

MS. CONLIN: If you're a woman and you have children or you want to have children, you're going to come to this impasse where you're going to face, do I want to have to give it up all for this 24/7 schedule, or do I want to have to down shift in some way? The reality is, in corporate America it's often an either/or proposition.

DELEGATE NORTON: And it shouldn't be.

MS. CONLIN: Unless you have a house-husband.

DELEGATE NORTON: Until women change corporate America -- that false choice is going to be there until women are in there in critical enough mass to change corporate America.

MS. CONWAY: That's why there are so many small business women now, though, and it's not because it's a consolation prize for all these women who otherwise would want to be the CEO of Whirlpool or Hewlett-Packard, it's because they're saying that really gives me the most empowerment. The numbers are off the charts that women are in businesses, continuing to grow at a very heartening clip, even in the face of the white collar recession, even in the face of a downturn in the economy, women are hanging up a shingle, just setting up a Web page.

DELEGATE NORTON: And that takes more time, so that's where I really part company with your notion that this is all about women exiting. That takes a whole lot more time, a whole lot more dedication. Before we write off women as CEOs, and I haven't done that yet, I still think they're plowing ahead.

MS. ERBE: All right. We're out of time.

From business competition to athletic competition. Prominent European feminists are challenging the International Olympic Committee to stand up for female athletes worldwide. The group called Atlanta, Sydney, Athens Plus, or ASAP, wants the IOC to bar countries with no female athletes among their 2004 Olympic delegations. For countries with no female Olympic caliber athletes, ASAP suggests including women in the opening ceremonies in Athens. The group cites historical precedent, South Africa
was banned from Olympic competition for 28 years during Apartheid. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait are among the 10 countries that sent no women to the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympics. ASAP also says the International Olympic Committee itself sets a bad example, only 11 members of the 149-member committee are women, 43 percent of the U.S. delegation to the 2000 Sydney Summer Games was female, an all-time high for this country.

So, Kellyanne Conway, good idea, bad idea, what?

MS. CONWAY: We just all agree that maybe the one last safe place in this world where political correctness and gender equity may not be artificially thrust upon is with the Olympics. I mean, can this not be the last merit-based institution? It's the Olympics, for God's sake, it's not -- to spare your feelings or make you feel better that I, too, can do the shot-put the way a man can, I can't.

DELEGATE NORTON: Kellyanne, just a moment. They would not be competing in men's sports, they would be competing one against another woman. Now, you can I may find some agreement here --

MS. ERBE: Oh, my God, history in the making.

DELEGATE NORTON: First of all, let's start at the top, don't let the guys preside over saying you must have women. Secondly, it is an important point to make, although I must say if I wanted to get to the world's women, I don't think I would begin with the Olympics. You've got to take what you've got. I certainly wouldn't start out by banning people with no notice. They need a kind of, forgive the word, affirmative action program. They need to be put on notice. You're dealing with cultural patterns here, not my patterns, but patterns I think you must breakthrough because I don't think if the women can even speak up, some of those are religious patterns.

MS. ERBE: That's what some groups might come back and say, this is really mainly a slam on Islam, and what do you say to that?

DELEGATE NORTON: It's not a slam because, of course, we have Islamic countries that are participating. But we've got to start moving, we can't leave the Olympics the way it is. Start at the top, try to get various ways to encourage women's competition within countries so that we can bring it internationally.

MS. CONLIN: I don't think that boycotting is the answer.

MS. ERBE: Wait a minute, why was boycotting the answer to help end Apartheid, and it's not the answer --

MS. CONWAY: It's entirely different.

MS. ERBE: Okay, tell me how.
MS. CONWAY: It's entirely different. That's Apartheid. I mean, that is just institutional racist policy that can do no good. You're biased against people because of their skin color versus you're trying to say let's have women compete against women for judo, and the luge, when none of them want to do it.

MS. WHITE: Also, Apartheid was very costly on many levels. It was financially costly for South Africa, and larger scale internationally it was a costly thing. So, it could follow that they could be banned from the Olympics. But you are dealing with a lot of Middle East countries, you are dealing with very ingrained and cultural issues in letting women in.

MS. CONLIN: And that's why I think it's so important that we lead by example, and for it to be about inclusion and not sort of get off the table.

MS. ERBE: Play devil's advocate here. When you think about successful social change in this country, Title IX ranks right up there. Virtually nothing has been as successful getting women ahead in society as involving them in sport, which is their natural proclivity in many cases anyway, they just needed to end the social barriers that prevented women from doing that. So, why not try to do it with countries that -- you know, America is one if not the most progressive country in the world on women's issues and women's rights.

DELEGATE NORTON: I believe in universal standards of human rights, and that includes women as well as people of color. But I do think one has to take people from where they are. We're dealing with severe cultural and religious standards that I think are wrong. You've got to empower women in those countries to come forward, and you don't do it by starting out with a ban. You do it by sitting around a table and trying to figure out how to do it, and off the top of my head I can't tell you how to get into Saudi Arabia, but I will say this because I think it's very important to say, I do not think you can leave Saudi Arabia on the basis of religion, culture, or anything else, where they are. I think we have got to find a way.

MS. WHITE: Well, we're in Iraq and Afghanistan, and we're making changes there.

MS. CONWAY: I think that Title IX for the world is getting to be like imperialism, and what happened in this country with Title IX, even its biggest advocates have to concede, that it did hurt some men's sports. But I think that would be the unintended consequence of doing a Title IX type of credo for the International Olympics.

MS. ERBE: Let me get back to one thing before we're out of time, one of their ideas was -- one of these European -- and remember this is an idea that started in Europe, not the United States, but one of the European women's ideas was, okay, you can't create, as you've pointed out, a Saudi Arabian women's sledding team, but you can put a woman
in the opening ceremonies delegation. How much would that cost? I mean, how bad is that?

MS. CONWAY: There's nothing wrong with that. And those two are very different prospects for a country to invest its resources in training women to be Olympians, which is a full-time job as I understand it. It's a very different investment, I think it's a very different cultural and financial investment as well. And really the issue here is that there's human rights and international civil rights on which we should all agree and be anti-Apartheid, for example, in the situation with South Africa's participation in the Olympics. I'm not so sure that women competing in the same sports tomorrow is really a civil rights or human rights issue.

MS. ERBE: All right, behind the headlines, February is Black History Month, when Americans celebrate the accomplishments of African-Americans. Today we celebrate the accomplishments of the most famous and honored African-American woman in the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Dorothy Height. She was president of the National Council of Negro Women for more than four decades, and is still active at 91. Her memoir, Open Wide The Freedom Gates, hit the bookstores just recently. I asked her about her experiences as a woman working with predominantly male civil rights leaders.

DR. HEIGHT: I had kind of a peer relationship with those men, because what we were looking at was, the issue was about civil rights, it was about justice, it was about equality. And to be able to join hands and work with men of the great strength of those men on that cause meant that it was not a matter of male and female, it was a matter of seeing a common cause.

MS. ERBE: Dr. Height sees tremendous progress for African-American women during the past 60 years despite what she calls the double handicap of race and gender. She credits civil rights laws, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, as well as the women's movement, which some activists claim hasn't done enough for black women. This progress, she says, proves women of color needn't choose between race and gender.

DR. HEIGHT: When we advanced in the civil rights laws, it didn't help just black people. It helped the whole country. We advanced with them. It just doesn't help women, it advances the whole family. That's why I don't like to put one against the other.

MS. ERBE: But she cautions, laws alone won't eliminate discrimination.

DR. HEIGHT: I know both as an African-American and a woman, that was giving us the foundation for action, but we have to really now have to act more vigorously because you don't have the overt expressions of black signs, and white signs, and white toilets, and black toilets, and men only ads in papers, and those, we don't have those things. In the absence of those things, it is so easy to try to pretend that the problems are gone, but they're still there.
MS. ERBE: Dr. Height believes annual commemorations, such as African American History Month help people understand the persistent nature of discrimination, and help to highlight accomplishments of past generations. She was inspired by African American women who came before her, such as Mary Church Terrell, educator, suffragist, and anti-segregation activist who co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. But her greatest motivation comes from a woman who was also a mentor.

DR. HEIGHT: Mary McLeod Bethune, who founded the National Council of Negro Women, and who I met in 1937, was a great humanitarian, a great leader. On that same day, I met Eleanor Roosevelt at a meeting Mrs. Bethune was heading. And those two women for the rest of their lives were not only friends and mentors, but they made a great impact in my life.

MS. ERBE: Dr. Height lauds not only historical figures, but African American women making history today.

DR. HEIGHT: I look at a young -- you have to bear in mind that at 91 everyone seems so young, but I look at the work that Marion Wright Edelman is doing with children, I look at women in the wide range of fields, there are so many who have gone beyond simply getting skills, they've made a commitment to improving the quality of life, and they are great.

MS. ERBE: And, by the way, Congresswoman Norton, she mentioned you, too. We just knew we were going to come out and talk to you, so we didn't run that part of the interview. What do you think are the greatest challenges today for African-American women in this African-American History Month?

DELEGATE NORTON: I'm going to give you an answer that you may not expect. African-American women, in no small part because of feminism, because they awoke to feminism, again in no small part because of people like Dorothy Height, have forged ahead and forged way ahead in some areas of African-American men. My great causes today is neither men nor women, but the African-American family. We cannot have a community where women are so far ahead of men, and still have a viable community. So, I think what we most need in our own community today is keep pressing with African-American women, because they're still at the bottom, but they are rising. What we see with African-American men is the opposite, that they are going down.

MS. CONLIN: That's right. We're in such danger of creating this permanent sink group or under-class. When you look at the charts, it's amazing to see African-American women going like this, and men, and that's not good for the men, and it's not good for the women either because, exactly as you say, because of the notion of the African-American family, and a lot of these women they get good jobs, they succeed, and then they look around, and it's just this community of women and the men are missing.

MS. WHITE: Newsweek did an article a couple of months ago --
MS. ERBE: A cover story.

MS. WHITE: -- a cover story about this very topic, and the statistics are astounding that black women are six times more likely to be in college, even more so for graduate school, and you're absolutely right, black women have done a great deal in 60 years. But you can't really evaluate that success without also looking at the men in our lives. That is something that you have to think about. Atlantic Monthly did a great article about a bus here in D.C., that it's filled with black women and their children going into Center City, but there are no black men on this bus. That is where the jobs are, and these black men aren't on that bus. And so, again, you have to think about black women's major problem, the challenge is, what do we do with black men.

DELEGATE NORTON: And mandatory minimums, crack cocaine, the failure to focus on the inner city has resulted in a disproportion that I don't think, in fact I know, perhaps you've seen it in human history, but you've seen it after war, and in this country perhaps you saw it after the Civil War, but it righted itself right away. So, black women can't stop pressing ahead, more and more of the community is depending on them. But they understand entirely that we've got to get our community somehow back into the normal pattern, and that is what the society hasn't quite figured out yet.

MS. CONLIN: We have people in this country who get caught with some pot, they're on death row. And when you think about the insanity of that, and how much money --

MS. ERBE: We have people on --

MS. CONLIN: That's right, there are some states where for a pot conviction it's actually a life sentence.

MS. ERBE: It's got to be like a boatload of marijuana.

MS. CONLIN: Oh, excuse me, not death row, a life sentence.

MS. ERBE: Okay.

MS. CONLIN: When you think about the amount of money that we're committing to them, we could send them to Harvard. It's insane.

MS. CONWAY: On a positive note, we do find many people, even in the suburbs, reawakening to the fact that for an entire to continue to prosper and survive, that we must go back to the urban areas and revitalize them, and strengthen them. And I will tell you, we work in New Jersey with the legislature there, and there are Republicans and Democrats coming together to take this mandatory minimum out of the criminal justice system and putting it into the healthcare system. And it's not a matter of punishment, it's
a matter of treatment. In the State of New Jersey, they spend $28,000 a year per prisoner, and $12,000 a year per public school student. That's crazy.

MS. WHITE: Also, just off the subject of drugs per se, black women as a subgroup in America are the least likely to marry.

MS. ERBE: Hold on to that thought until after we come back from credits. That's it for this edition of To The Contrary. Next week, a new program allows teacher and parents to track their school's performance on standardized tests. Whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time. And we want to hear from you, write to us at ToTheContrary@pbs.org, or visit our PBS Online Web site at PBS.org.

(End of program.)