

If a woman can do this...



WOMAN DRIVER. Commander Eileen Collins is at the controls of Discovery more than 200 miles above the Earth. *Photos: NASA*

Something punched another hole in that ridiculous glass ceiling last week. Currently it passes above us every 90 minutes at a speed of more than 17,000 miles per hour. It is the most complex machine ever built and guess who's driving?

Worldview by Guy P. Harrison guy@cfp.ky

Eileen Collins is currently serving as commander in one of NASA's most crucial missions ever. This is the first shuttle mission since the Columbia disaster in 2003 and NASA leaders know this crew must come home safely.

If this trip doesn't have a happy ending it likely will mean big budget cuts, plummeting public support and purges throughout NASA management. So what does it tell you that NASA tapped Collins to command this vital voyage? Was this an affirmative action selection? Maybe NASA felt it was a good time to score some PR points with equal rights advocates. No, NASA could not afford to give away anything on behalf of social engineering. Collins is in the hot seat 250 miles

high right now because she is a top-notch astronaut with accomplishments that earned her the confidence of NASA decision makers. If there was any doubt about her ability to perform under pressure, lead others and gently land Discovery next month, she would not have been chosen.

While it is nice to know that women are doing well in space these days, it's a different story down here on Earth. Despite the example of the high-flying Collins, we still have individuals, nations and cultures loyal to the prehistoric notion that women are mentally and emotionally inferior to men.

We live in a bizarre age. We see women perform exceedingly well as astronauts, government ministers, scientists, and more, yet, believe it or not, millions of women in our world today will be jailed if they dare drive a car in some societies. Mrs. Collins is driving a space shuttle right now and it's illegal for millions of women to drive a car?! This could be the most glaring example of just how uneven human progress is. Remember Danica Patrick? She finished fourth in her first Indianapolis 500 this year, almost winning it. How many millions of girls can

never grow up to be tomorrow's Collins or Patrick?

It does not matter if the excuse for treating girls and women unfairly is religion, culture or tradition, it is wrong.

Discrimination in education is perhaps the worst of all crimes against women because it not only hurts them, it hurts the world. Right now, hundreds of millions of girls are not allowed a chance to pursue a basic education. They will never see the inside of a classroom. That's a routine sentence for many who are convicted of being born female on planet Earth in the 21st century.

As girls go, so goes the world. This is not a female problem. It's a human problem. A UNICEF report declares that discrimination against girls not only condemns the girls to a life of poverty and unfulfilled potential, it also slows overall progress for nations.

According to former UNICEF director Carol Bellamy, there is no chance of substantially reducing poverty, child mortality, HIV/AIDS and other diseases if girls are not allowed to go to school. Girls grow up to be women and women have so much influence upon their children that they directly

shape tomorrow.

Cayman is fortunate to be relatively progressive regarding women. Women run for political office here and win. Women serve in high posts within our government. There are women managers and partners throughout the private sector. While the percentages of women with power might not be ideal, Caymanian women clearly have a foothold and are climbing.

I am less concerned about the glass ceiling in Cayman as I am about the efforts being made down in the trenches. Are women and men doing enough to teach all young girls that they need not trim their dreams to fit the framework of ancient prejudices? Do we try hard enough to make sure they all believe in themselves and understand that they have more to offer the world than aspiring to be gyrating scenery in a music video? Do we tell them that they are fully human and not a lesser version of man? Within their sight, do we condemn all prejudice against females, regardless of the source? Do we teach them that women define humankind every bit as much as men?

Do we tell them the truth and behave as if we believe it?