

Real Life Wonder Women

By Norman Hill

When writing about women in history, it is virtually impossible to name all women who have made a large contribution to Western society. That would take years of research and selection. Instead, what I've done is to note some whom I believe have made a substantial impact and what I call real life wonder women.

Julia Child

A great American chef, born in 1912, was the first female to graduate from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris. After Child and her husband returned to the U.S., she wrote recipes for American cooks to show how French cooking was possible and practical in American homes. In collaboration with two other French women, she wrote "Mastering the Art of French Cooking," a two volume book that was the first to explain French cooking in a step-by-step manner.

After appearing on TV to promote her book, the PBS station set her up as a host for the first television cooking show, "French Cooking."

When subsequently appearing on more TV shows and writing more books, Julia Child became the first

woman to be inducted into the Culinary Institute Hall of Fame. In 2002, the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History installed the kitchen where Child had filmed three of her popular cooking shows.

After her death in 2004, the life of Julia Child was celebrated in an excellent movie. It showed how she had brought both fun and fresh food into the American kitchen.

Marie Curie

She is considered the greatest female scientist, whose achievements included discovery of radium. Born in Poland in 1867, she continued her education at the Sorbonne Institute in Paris. While choosing her doctoral dissertation subject, she focused on invisible radiation from uranium salts.

After she married her husband, Pierre Curie, in 1895, they continued this study and made numerous experiments together. By 1898, they were able to isolate two new radioactive substances, polonium and radium. Despite considerable skepticism from other scientists, by 1902, they were able to isolate this radium completely. As a result, she

and her husband received the 1903 Nobel Prize.

Curie began teaching in Paris in 1900. She became the first female full professor of physics at the renowned Sorbonne in Paris. She succeeded to her late husband's Chair, after his untimely death in 1906.

Marie Curie continued work with intricate scientific experiments. After isolating pure metallic radium in 1910, she received a second Nobel Prize, this time in chemistry. She continued to travel extensively and, in the U.S. received numerous acclaim and monetary awards.

By the time of her death in 1934, Marie Curie had received 8 prizes, 16 medals and decorations, and 104 honorary titles and degrees.

Marilyn Monroe

This beloved American actress conveyed a sense of joyous life, innocence and yet, sexuality on the screen. Her qualities were widely popular despite critical skepticism and dismissal about her acting (and singing) ability and her own tragic life.

History

Born Norma Jean Miller in 1926, Marilyn achieved some notoriety for posing nude in an early *Playboy* issue. Partly from this publicity, she later starred in roles such as "Niagara", "River of No Return", and then "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" with Jane Russell.

The film, "Some Like it Hot", is probably her best known role, where she played Sugar Kowalczyk, the beautiful, but alcoholic 1920s singer in a girl's band. As Marilyn developed a reputation for being difficult to work with and for perennial tardiness to shoots, her final starring role was with Clark Gable in "The Misfits."

In her private life, it seemed that Marilyn Monroe was searching for a father figure. Her 1954 marriage to Joe DiMaggio, twelve years her senior, lasted only a short time. He may have wanted her to give up or curtail her career, to coincide with the decline of his own. In any event, she seemed to have feelings for DiMaggio that continued after their divorce. There were even rumors that they would reconcile.

Her next marriage, to playwright Arthur Miller, seems to have stemmed from her attraction to his intellect. But after their divorce, Marilyn appeared more disturbed than ever and, possibly, drug-dependent.

In the early 1960s, Monroe seems to have carried on some sort of affair with President Kennedy and, later, with his younger brother, Robert. Her 1961 rendition of "Happy birthday, Mr. President," is still remembered, but not positively.

The unexpected 1962 death of Marilyn Monroe has never been completely explained. Joe DiMaggio showed special grief over the death of his ex-wife and





regularly sent flowers to her grave.

Today, it's difficult to imagine Marilyn Monroe growing old. She'll always be remembered for her beauty and a wonder of what she would have been like—or whether she would have found happiness-- as an older woman.

Sandra Day O'Connor

She was the first female U.S. Supreme Court justice. Born in 1930 on a ranch outside El Paso, Texas, Sandra Day O'Connor grew up knowing the land and its people. Her early childhood may not have been poor, but was certainly not luxurious.

After graduating from Stanford in 1950, she became an attorney at a time when there were few female members of the bar. She then moved to Arizona, and served in the state senate from 1969 to 1974, including the position of majority leader. O'Connor then became a judge, including a spot with the Arizona Court of Appeals.

In 1981, President Reagan appointed her to the U.S. Supreme Court, the first female to hold that position. In her opinions, she was considered a moderate conservative on economic issues, but more liberal on social issues, such as abortion rights.

O'Connor retired from the Court in 2006, to care for her ailing husband. Her well-written legal opinions and integrity in the U.S. judicial system will be long remembered.

Ayn Rand

Russian born U.S. author, who developed the first complete philosophical system, Objectivism, since Aristotle, Plato, and Kant. This was necessary to validate the individualistic philosophy enunciated in her fictional novels, *Atlas Shrugged*, *Fountainhead*, *Anthem* and

We The Living.

Born in 1905, Rand and her family suffered under the Bolshevik regime that followed the 1917 Russian revolution. Partly due to the vagaries of a vicious totalitarian regime, she was able to obtain a 6 months student traveling visa in 1925. By leaving the Soviet Union and reaching the U.S. (her real destination) through Europe, she vowed to expose the Communist regime. Rand adopted her name, "Ayn Rand", to protect her family in Russia against retaliation.

After marrying actor Frank O'Connor in 1929, Rand struggled during the 30s as a screenwriter, playwright, and then as an author, trying to have *We The Living* (her Soviet expose) published, despite critical hostility.

In the early 1940s, *The Fountainhead* described a young architect of unbending integrity, who succeeds despite incredible obstacles from his profession and society. After numerous publishers had rejected it, MacMillan decided to publish it. Despite critics' negative reviews, the novel wound up a best seller. This led to *The Fountainhead* being made into a movie, with Gary Cooper and Patricia Neal.

Later, while working as a screenwriter in Hollywood, Rand was inspired to write *Atlas Shrugged*. This project arose from her contemplating what would happen if men of ability decided to strike against a collectivist society that claimed the right to control their talents and minds. It was then that she saw the necessity for completely articulating her philosophy, simultaneously with writing the novel that depicted it. *Atlas Shrugged* was published in 1957 and remains a favorite on the New York Times Best Seller List, being outsold only by the Bible.



Harriet Tubman

Along the way, “We the Living” was re-introduced and became recognized as a classic denunciation of all forms of totalitarianism.

After writing her novels, Rand spent most of her time writing philosophical articles and speaking. She was a frequent speaker at the Ford Hall Forum in Boston. From her writings and talks, she always drew large crowds and volumes of written comments. Some were filled with admiration, others expressed almost hysterical opposition. Her last public appearance was at a Sound Money conference in New Orleans in November, 1981. At that point, her health started to fail and she died in March, 1982.

Ayn Rand’s influence on our culture today is evident in many areas and seems to be quietly growing.

Margaret Sanger

She advocated and popularized birth control and women’s control over their own bodies and destinies. For her views, she was denounced and harassed by authorities and even imprisoned briefly.

Unfortunately, Sanger epitomizes the concept of mixed premises, found in so many people, both famous and obscure. She possessed many admirable principles, but at the same time, advocated some that make one recoil.

Sanger later wrote that she was struck by an episode when she was a young woman. A male immigrant whom she knew came to her, frantic with desperation. He and his wife already had several children. Her physician had warned them that giving birth to any more children would surely kill the wife. The man deeply loved his spouse and now had apparently impregnated her again.

In those days, abortions were strictly criminal and were often administered by unsavory characters with little or no medical or sanitary skills. Because Sanger could offer no help, the couple attempted to undergo one of these abortions and the man’s beloved wife died during the procedure. This motivated Sanger to find solutions for women to avoid unwanted childbirths.

Initially, Sanger started to lecture publicly on the need for birth control. She apparently did not advocate legalizing abortion, but instead, focused on other means of birth control. Sanger founded Planned Parenthood, the organization that continues a primary focus on this control.

Her writings and lectures drew the wrath of Anthony Comstock. This man, a vile maniac, was secretary of a private New York organization, The Society for Suppression of Vice. He used his contacts with the Post Office to seize Sanger’s material as illegal and immoral. At one point, he succeeded in having her imprisoned for indecency. Later, after her release, he realized that Sanger had become sufficiently popular so that his further harassment of her was unwise.

By the time of Sanger’s death in 1966, birth control pills had reached the market. This revolutionized the culture and, for the first time in human history, made family planning feasible. Although legalized abortion followed seven years later, with Roe versus Wade, Sanger’s primary contribution to birth control was already in place.

Her views on eugenics, forced sterilization of undesirables, and similar means of mandatory birth control are unfortunate. But rejecting these should not minimize her above contributions.

Harriet Beecher Stowe

U.S. author, wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin in 1852, depicting the horrors of slavery. Its immense success in the North showed that, even though political practice hadn’t yet caught up, Northern moral sensibilities were starting to see that slavery, somehow, must end.

Stowe was the wife of a seminary teacher and daughter of a prominent New England minister. In her novel, characters such as Tom and, especially, Eliza, were based on actual characters from the Underground Railroad whom Stowe studied.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin brought slavery, the Underground Railroad, and the Abolitionist movement to the forefront of American consciousness. Much more than sermons and religious fervor from Abolitionist leaders, it presented the journeys of escaping slaves along the Underground Railroad as romantic, as well as moral, endeavors. The graphic depiction of Eliza’s escape across the frozen Ohio River, while pursued by slave catchers, made many Northerners seethe with indignation over slavery in a way that previous writings and sermons had not generated.

Naturally, her novel was despised in the slave states. Uncle Tom’s Cabin was banned there and U.S. postmasters in the South were diligent in keeping it

out of delivered mails.

Later, during the Civil War, President Lincoln invited Stowe to the White House. While uncertain, he may have introduced her as “The little lady who wrote the book that made this great war.” She had.

Margaret Thatcher

She has often been called the “Iron Lady” or, by the Soviets against whom she stood up, “Iron Maiden.” As U.K. Prime Minister, 1979-1990, the first female in this position, she brought her country out of dismal status as a European sick man, similar to current Greece. Against strong opposition, even within her own party, Thatcher promoted free market principles. By selling off money-losing state properties and confronting Marxist labor unions, she helped revive the U.K. economy. Thatcher supported Reagan in fighting Soviet ambitions, which ultimately brought Cold War victory. Also, she enhanced U.K. morale by taking a firm stand in the Falkland Islands conflict with Argentina. Although the islands were quite small, their psychological impact was large.

A recent movie, “The Iron Lady,” described Margaret Thatcher’s life.

Harriet Tubman

Born into slavery in 1822, Tubman escaped from a Maryland plantation to freedom in the North. She served as a fearless conductor along the Underground Railroad, not just with finding shelter for escapees in Northern cities, but guiding them along trails in the South. Despite a price on her head, she returned to the South again and again to help slaves use “Railroad” facilities to reach freedom in the North. She successfully freed several members of her own family.

After the Civil War, later in her life, Harriet Tubman founded and raised funds for a home for indigent and aged African-Americans in upstate New York. When she died in 1913, age 91, she had outlived her known contemporaries, white and black, who had served in the Underground Railroad.

Unfortunately, Tubman remained illiterate all her life, and her speech patterns were always crude. Thus, there are no personal memoirs of her life and exploits. But her many friends and colleagues, along with people she rescued from slavery, have assured her of a place in American history.