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Women in History

Rosie the Riveter

The woman we now know as Rosie the Riveter — a dark-haired beauty that symbolizes how women roared into the workforce in the 1940s — didn't have a name when she was first published.

Keep reading to learn more about how this World War II heroine came to life.

WE CAN DO IT!

Rosie was created by the American artist J. Howard Miller in 1942. The poster was called "We Can Do It!" and is believed to be a part of the Westinghouse Electric Corp.'s wartime production campaign to recruit workers. The poster showed a woman in a red bandanna with her bent arm flexed, rolling up her shirtsleeve.

It's believed that Miller based his picture on a United Press International photograph of a young female war worker, later possibly identified as Naomi Parker at Alameda Naval Air Station in California.

"SHE'S MAKING HISTORY, WORKING FOR VICTORY"

Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb released "Rosie the Riveter" in 1943. The lyrics, in part, go:

"All day long,
Whether rain or shine,
She's a part of the assembly line.
She's making history,
Working for victory,
Rosie the Riveter.

Keeps a sharp lookout for sabotage,

Sitting up there on the fuselage.

That little girl will do more than a male will do."

And Then Came Norman Rockwell

On May 29, 1943, Norman Rockwell's cover of the Saturday Evening Post featured an assembly line worker against an American flag. She's brawnier than Miller's riveter, and is holding a lunchbox that has ROSIE on it. The magazine went to about 4 million homes. After his cover, a woman named Rose Hickey — an actual riveter in Tarrytown, New York — shot to fame, as did Rose Monroe, a riveter in Michigan.

Copyright restrictions kept Rockwell's image from being as widely circulated as Miller's image, the Library of Congress said, so it became the dominant image of Rosie the Riveter.

Rosie became emblematic of all women war workers during World War II and, since, has become a symbol of American feminism. In the wake of World War II, documentaries, books and even a park in Richmond, California, memorialize Rosie and all the women like her. There's even a Rosie the Riveter Day, observed on March 21.



Marilyn Monroe

Norma Jean Mortenson was born June 1, 1926, in Los Angeles.

She was baptized Norma Jean Baker, but spent most of her young life in foster care and in an orphanage. Her mother, Gladys, developed psychiatric problems and her father — rumored to be Clark Gable, though there's no evidence of that — was never in the picture.

She saw a way out through marriage and married Jimmy Dougherty in 1942, when she was just 16. She dreamed of being an actress and was discovered by a photographer while working in a munitions factory in Van Nuys, California. By 1946, she signed her first movie contract.

She signed it Marilyn Monroe.

Her breathy voice and hourglass figure made Monroe one of the most recognizable actors of her era. Monroe's star power was undeniable and she became an international star despite chronic insecurity and anxiety. Her movies, including "All About Eve," "Niagara," "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," "There's No Business Like Show Business," "The Seven Year Itch" and more, grossed more than \$200 million.

Monroe was married three times. Her marriage to

Dougherty ended in 1946, the same year she signed her contract, and she was also married to baseball star Joe DiMaggio and Arthur Miller. She was also romantically involved with other stars such as Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra and Elia Kazan. It's also been rumored that the blonde bombshell was involved with President John F. Kennedy, famously singing him "Happy Birthday" in 1962.

Despite being idolized and rubbing elbows with the rich and famous, Monroe couldn't dodge her demons. She was treated for depression and became a recluse in the last months of her life. She was found dead Aug. 5, 1962, with an empty bottle of sleeping pills found next to her. Speculation has run rampant that she was murdered, but the actor's death was officially ruled a drug overdose. She was buried in an Emilio Pucci dress and DiMaggio had red roses delivered to her crypt for the next 20 years.

Monroe's style formed the foundation for generations of Hollywood starlets, including Madonna, Lady Gaga and Gwen Stefani.



Gloria Steinem

Gloria Steinem grew from a childhood Ohio to become a journalist, feminist and a leader of the women’s rights movement.

She started her career writing freelance pieces in New York, mainly lifestyles or fashion pieces assigned in newsrooms run by men. But she pushed on, seeking more substantial assignments and, eventually, she got on. Show magazine hired her in 1963 to go undercover and report on working conditions at the Playboy Club. The resulting piece, “I Was A Playboy Bunny” showed the seedy, sexist life of the bunnies, but Steinem still struggled to be taken seriously.

By 1968, she helped found New York magazine, where she was a political columnist. The next year, she gave a speech that would change the trajectory of her life. She spoke at an event to legalize abortion in New York, sharing the story of an overseas abortion she had at 22. This speech sparked her feminism and engagement with the women’s rights movement, spurring her attend protests and demonstrations.

Eventually, she founded Ms. Magazine, which became an independent magazine in 1972. She stayed on staff for the magazine for 15 years and still serves in an emeritus capacity.

Steinem also founded the Women’s Action Alliance, Voters for Choice, the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Women’s Media Center, Choice USA/URGE, the Ms. Foundation for Women and Take Our Daughters to Work Day.

Steinem has been honored for her work advancing the cause of women, including the Penney-Missouri Journalism Award, the Front Page and Clarion Awards, an Emmy Citation for excellence in television writing, the



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Women’s Sports Journalism Award, the Lifetime Achievement in Journalism Award from the Society of Professional Journalists, the Society of Writers Award from the United Nations, the James Weldon Johnson Medal for Journalism, the Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Steinem has written several books, including a biography of Marilyn Monroe and a memoir, “My Life on the Road.” She’s also been the subject of at least three documentaries and



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Rutgers University created an endowed chair in media, culture and feminist studies in her honor.

Now, the 87-year-old lives in New

York and remains active as an organizer and lecturer, frequently called on to speak about issues of equality in the media.

Helen Reddy

Helen Reddy was a 5-foot, 3-inch soprano born in Australia who, in 1972, belted out a hit with “I Am Woman.”

The song eventually became the feminist anthem of the decade, reaching No. 1 on the Billboard chart despite backlash.

“That simply underlined the many things women needed liberating from. Nobody called Sinatra a menace when he sang ‘My Way,’ a no less straightforward hymn to self-determination,” Dennis Harvey said in *Variety*.

Reddy was born to vaudeville parents and won a 1966 talent contest with a record company audition and a trip to New York. She didn’t win the audition, but was eventually signed by Capitol records in 1970. Her first hit was a 1971 cover of “I Don’t Know How to Love Him” from “Jesus Christ Superstar,” followed the next year by “I Am Woman.”

The lyrics to “I Am Woman” scream power in a time when women were searching for it.

“I am woman, hear me roar,” Reddy sings. “In numbers too big to ignore. And I know too much to go back and pretend, ‘cause I’ve heard it all before, and I’ve been down there on the floor. No one’s every gonna keep me down again.”

The song propelled Reddy to stardom on the variety show circuit. She appeared on shows like “The Carol Burnett Show,” “The Merv Griffin Show” and “The Glen Campbell



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Goodtime Hour.” She even had her own eight-episode show on NBC, “The Helen Reddy Show.”

Reddy also played a guitar-playing nun in “Airport 1975” and a skeptical lighthouse keeper in “Pete’s Dragon.” She also played in Las Vegas and in musicals, starring in productions of

“Anything Goes,” “Call Me Madam” and “Shirley Valentine.” Her last American hit was “I Can’t Say Goodbye to You” in 1981.

Reddy retired in 2002 and became a therapist and motivational speaker. In 2012, she made several concert appearances, but soon retired again.

Reddy died in 2020 at age 78. She was the subject of a biography film, “I Am Woman,” where she was played by Tilda Cobham-Hervey. Reddy has two children, Traci Wald Donat and Jordan Sommers. Her half-sister, Toni Lammond, is an Australian singer and actress.

Florence Griffith Joyner

Florence Griffith Joyner flew to fame in the 1980s as a sprinter who set world record times in the 100 meters (10.49 seconds) and 200 meters (21.34 seconds).

She was born in 1959 in Los Angeles and started running at age 7, chasing jackrabbits to help improve her speed. She trained with coach Bob Kersee at the University of California and took silver at the 1984 Olympics in Los Angeles.

While she was blazing fast and now adorned with medals, it was Griffith's fashion sense that grabbed the spotlight. She wore six-inch decorated fingernails, long hair and also sported eye-catching racing suits. In 1987, she married Al Joyner, winner of the 1984 gold medal in the triple jump and brother of heptathlon champion Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

The next year, in 1988, the changes in her starting technique and weight training paid off. She set a world record in the 100-meter sprint in the 1988 Olympic trials, blasting the old mark by more than a quarter of a second. At that year's Olympics in Seoul, she won three gold medals — in the 100 meters, 200 meters and the 4x100 meter relay) and a silver in the 4x400 meter relay. She was given the



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Sullivan Award as America's top amateur performer.

Griffith Joyner retired in 1989. She established a foundation for underprivileged children and served as the co-chair for the President's Council on Physical Fitness. She was inducted into the

Track and Field Hall of Fame in 1995, and began working on a comeback for the Olympics, but was hindered by an Achilles injury.

Despite rumors, FloJo never tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs. She passed 11 drug tests in

1988 alone.

"We performed all possible and imaginable analyses on her," IOC medical commission chairman Alexandre de Merode said. "We never found anything. There should not be the slightest suspicion."

In 1989, she even designed

the uniforms for the NBA's Indiana Pacers

Griffith Joyner died of an epileptic seizure in 1998. She was only 38. She is survived by her husband and their daughter, Mary Joyner, who is a singer-songwriter, dancer, musician and performer.

Mae Jemison

Mae Carol Jemison came a long way from Alabama.

Jemison, the youngest of the three children of a school-teacher mother and a maintenance supervisor father, grew up watching the Apollo landings on TV, but she was upset that there were no women astronauts.

She would change that. She graduated from Morgan Park High School in Chicago and attended Stanford University, where she was president of the Black Student Union and choreographed a performing arts production about the African American experience. She graduated in 1977 with a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering and a bachelor's degree in African and African-American studies. Jemison then attended Cornell Medical School, earning her doctorate in medicine in 1981.

Fluent in Russian, Japanese and Swahili, Jemison joined the Peace Corps and served as a medical officer in Africa. When she returned, she opened her own practice and started applying to be an astronaut.

She succeeded in 1987, when she became part of NASA Astronaut Group 12, the first bunch of new astronauts selected after the Challenger explosion.

Jemison trained at Kennedy Space Center and at the Shuttle Avionics Integration Laboratory, receiving her first



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mission Sept. 28, 1989. She lifted off as part of the crew of the Endeavor on Sept. 12, 1992, becoming the first Black

woman in space. Jemison and her crew traveled 127 orbits of Earth, returning to Kennedy Space Center Sept. 20.

She left NASA in 1993, starting The Jemison Group, a consulting company, and also taught at Dartmouth College

Jemison lifted off as part of the crew of the Endeavor on Sept. 12, 1992, becoming the first Black woman in space.

and directed the Jemison Institute for Advancing Technology in Developing Countries. Hearing she was a fan of “Star Trek” — Lieutenant Uhura also inspired young Jemison to go to space — actor LeVar Burton asked her to appear on the series. She became the first real astronaut on “Star Trek: The Next Generation” as Lieutenant Palmer.

Jemison also created an international space camp and The Dorothy Jemison Foundation for Excellence. She wrote her book in 2001, “Find Where the Wind Goes,” and is leading the 100-Year Starship Project through the United States Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. She also serves on several boards, including Morehouse College, the Greater Houston Partnership Disaster Planning and Recovery Task Force and as a member of the National Academy of Sciences’ Institute of Medicine.

Britney Spears

Britney Jean Spears was born in 1981 and is credited with the revival of teen pop in the early 2000s.

She's sold more than 100 million records worldwide, rising to stardom after signing with Jive Records at just 15.

A native of Kentwood, Louisiana, Spears grew up singing in the church choir, winning talent shows and state-level competitions in gymnastics. When she was 8, she auditioned for "The Mickey Mouse Club," and was deemed too young. The casting director did refer her to a New York City talent agent and shortly thereafter, appeared in the off-Broadway musical "Ruthless!" and on the television show "Star Search." She returned to "Mickey Mouse" in 1992, where she was cast along with Christina Aguilera, Justin Timberlake, Ryan Gosling and Keri Russell.

She signed with Jive at 15 and became a pop sensation with "... Baby One More Time" in 1999 and "Oops! ... I Did It Again." Her career took off, followed by a Super Bowl half-time show, promotional deals, tours and a self-titled album.

Spears' fourth album, "In the Zone," came out in 2003. She asserted more control with this album, writing and co-producing much of the material. NPR

called it one of the 50 most important recordings of the decade and the track "Toxic" won Spears her first Grammy.

In early 2004, Spears married a childhood friend in Las Vegas, but had the marriage annulled 55 hours later. A petition to the court said she "lacked understanding of her actions." She later married dancer Kevin Federline, launched a reality show and a perfume. She also released a compilation album, "Greatest Hits: My Prerogative" before taking a break to start a family.

Starting in 2006, cracks appeared in Spears' pop-perfect life. She was photographed in her car with her son, Sean, in her lap instead of in a car seat. She went into drug rehab, then publicly shaved her head before going back to rehab. In 2007, she lost custody of her children and was sued by Louis Vuitton. In the midst of the turmoil, her fifth album, "Blackout" debuted.

The next year, Spears was hospitalized after police found her under the influence of a substance and she refused to turn over custody of her sons. She was committed involuntarily and placed under a conservatorship lead by her father,



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Jamie Spears, giving him an attorney Andrew Wallet control of her assets.

Spears continued to work, churning out another album, "Circus," and 2011's "Femme Fatale," as well as another greatest hits album, then

2013's "Britney Jean." She held a two-year residency in Las Vegas, created 2016's "Glory" album, continued to rake in the awards, and tour. In 2019, she went back into a psychiatric facility after her conservator father suffered an illness.

Shortly thereafter, a social media movement, #FreeBritney, began, campaigning to end her father's conservatorship. Allegations of physical altercations and other abuse surfaced. The conservatorship ended in late 2021.