



Women Make History: Stories we should have learned in school

Welcome to the first issue of **Women Make History**, a monthly newsletter spotlighting stories of women who opened doors – sometimes just a crack – and blazed a trail for other women. Too often, the ordinary women who spoke up when it mattered or who took risks that initiated change, have been quickly forgotten. Women like Mary Ware Dennett.

Before I discovered Mary, I considered myself well informed and engaged in women's issues. Little did I know I had barely scratched the surface. [TIME magazine](#) included Mary (1872 – 1947) among nine American women everyone should know. Yet beyond academic circles, few know her name. Here's why we should: She was a champion of free speech. An advocate for honesty in sex-education. Founder of the first national birth control organization. A pivotal leader in women's suffrage. Accomplished artist. Mother of two. She held a vision of equality for all women and was steadfast in her belief that women could accomplish anything.



I married her great-grandson and have spent ten years reading the family's collection of her private letters and journals. In researching her life and her early 20th century circumstances, I've discovered other remarkable women whose experiences, tragedies, and triumphs, resonate both courage and wisdom. Yet the life stories and accomplishments of these women are rarely included in our conversations, literature, film, art, or national celebrations. We need a cultural shift. Now.

Each month, the Women Make History newsletter will restore knowledge of female trailblazers and activists by inviting you to make their stories a part of your life. Together, we will write women back into history, culture, politics, and the arts—actively empowering ourselves today and for the future.

Flashback on Feminism

“Women are people. That is perhaps the shortest possible explanation of what feminism stands for...Feminism is not the lining up of women against men. Feminism does not imply that women want things as women. They only want to do things, have things, and feel things as people, as half the human race, on equal terms with the other half.” — Mary Ware Dennett

RBG's Parenting Hack

I've struggled, as most women have, being the primary parent on call while also managing a career. So I admire Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's insight on the sexist assumptions that befall working mothers.

RBG said that when her son was young, his teachers called him hyperactive. She considered him lively. Teachers often called her at work whenever there was an issue at school, interrupting her workday. RBG wondered why the school never called her husband. One morning, after pulling an all-nighter to finish a legal brief, her phone rang. It was her son's school.



“This child has two parents,” RBG said. “Please alternate calls. It’s his father’s turn.” [January 2018 interview with NPR’s Nina Totenberg](#)



Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

My mother would look at me and she'd say, 'Kamala, you may be the first to do many things, but make sure you are not the last.' That's why breaking those barriers is worth it. As much as anything else, it is also to create that path for those who will come after us." Vice President Elect Kamala Harris.

Learn more about the powerful women who have shaped Kamala Harris by reading this [Nov. 7, 2020 article by Rachael Davis, Nia Lawrence in Essence Magazine.](#)

Kamala Harris also says of her mom: (She) "taught us anything was possible, unburdened by what has been."

Ask yourself: Who has taught you that anything was possible?

Ask a friend: What is your personal definition of fearlessness?

Kamala Harris' mother was invested in giving Kamala authentic experiences of her Black and Indian cultures. How do you know what you know about your ethnicity, culture and family history?



[Sharon Spaulding](#) discovered the hidden story of Mary Ware Dennett, suffragist, sex-ed and reproductive rights activist, after Sharon married Dennett's great-grandson. [Time magazine](#) recently included Dennett one of the most important women in American history.

Sharon has spent ten years researching first-wave feminism, the battle for birth control rights, and Mary's life in the context of politics and social mores from 1914–1947. She received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her research and the creation of a manuscript. Her journalism has appeared in BOLD and Utah Stories. She lives near Salt Lake City with her family and her dog gus.

Sharon is available to speak on the forgotten stories of remarkable women as well as the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movement in the early 20th century. Contact her at: Sharon@SharonSpaulding.com.

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