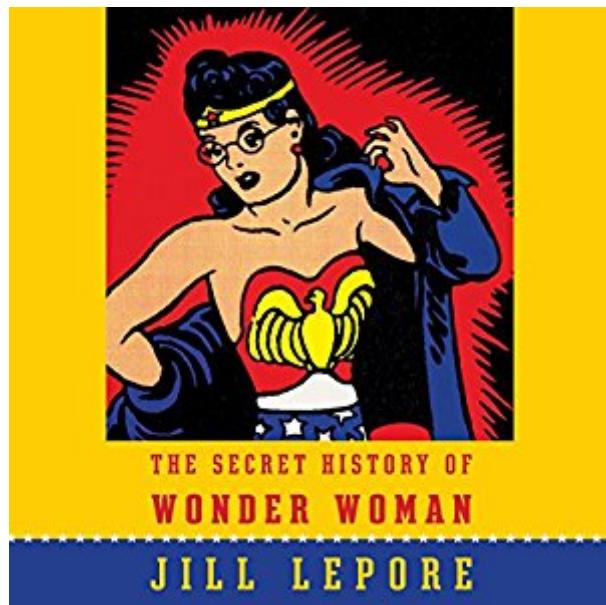


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# The Secret History Of Wonder Woman



## Synopsis

A riveting work of historical detection revealing that the origins of one of the world's most iconic superheroes hides within it a fascinating family story - and a crucial history of 20th-century feminism. Wonder Woman, created in 1941, is the most popular female superhero of all time. Aside from Superman and Batman, no superhero has lasted as long or commanded so vast and wildly passionate a following. Like every other superhero, Wonder Woman has a secret identity. Unlike every other superhero, she has also has a secret history. Harvard historian and *New Yorker* staff writer Jill Lepore has uncovered an astonishing trove of documents, including the never-before-seen private papers of William Moulton Marston, Wonder Woman's creator. Beginning in his undergraduate years at Harvard, Marston was influenced by early suffragists and feminists, starting with Emmeline Pankhurst, who was banned from speaking on campus in 1911, when Marston was a freshman. In the 1920s, Marston and his wife, Sadie Elizabeth Holloway, brought into their home Olive Byrne, the niece of Margaret Sanger, one of the most influential feminists of the 20th century. The Marston family story is a tale of drama, intrigue, and irony. In the 1930s, Marston and Byrne wrote a regular column for *Family Circle* celebrating conventional family life, even as they themselves pursued lives of extraordinary nonconformity. Marston, internationally known as an expert on truth - he invented the lie detector test - lived a life of secrets, only to spill them on the pages of Wonder Woman. The *Secret History of Wonder Woman* is a tour de force of intellectual and cultural history. Wonder Woman, Lepore argues, is the missing link in the history of the struggle for women's rights - a chain of events that begins with the women's suffrage campaigns of the early 1900s and ends with the troubled place of feminism a century later.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Here is the internal dialog I had going at one point while reading this book. Me: "So the inventor of Wonder Woman was a psychology PhD who also invented the first lie detector." Also me: "Neat." Me: "Get this, he was also a pretty hardcore first-wave feminist and based a lot of Wonder Woman's stories and characteristics on Margaret Sanger, the birth-control pioneer." Also me: "That's pretty cool." Me: "He also lived with three women, had children with two of them, and balanced this unusual lifestyle fairly gracefully in way that his wife, Halloway, could fulfill her ambition to maintain a full-time job, while his mistress, Olive Bynre, could do what she wanted and raise the kids, while the third woman, Hurston, could come and go as she pleased. I should mention that Byrne wore thick silver bracelets, while Hurston and he were really into bondage." Also me: "That's pretty crazy, I mean especially for the early twentieth century..." Me: "You're still not getting it: kick-ass first-wave feminist sensibilities, thick silver bracelets, bondage, and making people tell the truth." Also me: "Oh God, that's Wonder Woman's whole gig, truth-telling lasso and all. Wow." So if after that little exchange you find yourself intrigued instead of bored, check this book out. It really is more of a biography of William Moulton Marston (WW's creator) than of the character, but it really is pretty interesting and naturally puts Wonder Woman's development into a more complete context. And the detailed research that went into digging this story out of DECADES of deliberate obfuscation is simply amazing.

With "The Secret History of Wonder Woman" Jill Lepore has greatly strengthened the oft ignored legacy of comic books as an important agent of cultural change in the 20th century. Since their inception in the early 1930's as collections of comic strips through the billion dollar mega-films of today, comic books have been beloved and loathed like no other media. At their peak in the 1940s a comic book might have sold 2 million or more copies. Each single comic was estimated to be read by as many as 6 people. At any one time there were thought to be 100,000,000 comic being read. These were numbers delightful to publishers and fans but terrifying to educators, politicians, scientists and parents. The concern from the "authorities" is somewhat justified. Kids were devouring comics and with the astronomic readership numbers it was hard to imagine how generations of young minds were being shaped by the illustrated insanity in their pages. William Moulton Marston was a man made for this exploding cacophony of four color madness. His creation

of Wonder Woman became the perfect storm for so many cultural, scientific and political upheavals that a reasonable argument can be made had the man Princess never been born America would be a different place. Marston dumped his bohemian and erratic life experience as a scientist (the creator of the lie detector), a psychologist, a bigamist (sort of), a fetishist and an ardent feminist into the development of Wonder Woman with the clear intention of influencing the direction of popular culture. Lepore's excellently researched and fully supported premise is he succeeded in doing just that.

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