

city's women Blazed

the trail

How these ten remarkable people earned their place in the history books

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Highlight: Among the many women from New York who have made the world a better place are (from far left) Gertrude Ederle, the first to swim the English Channel, Latina activist Julia de Burgos, and ballerina Maria Tallchief. Below, is Anna Arnold Hedgeman with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Below, from left are director Penny Marshall, early civil rights fighter, Elizabeth Jennings Graham, Columbia Prof. Chien Shiung Wu and Emily Warren Roebling, who oversaw the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge.AP

Body

They were soldiers, advocates, educators, scientists and women. So much is said about the nation's Founding Fathers, but there is no shortage of ladies responsible for immeasurable contributions to the country.

Here are some of the remarkable women who added to the city's rich diverse tapestry:

Margaret Corbin

Margaret Corbin fought alongside the Continental Army at the present day Fort Tryon Park during the 1776 battle against the British - making her the first woman to fight in the Revolutionary War. Corbin's husband John died during the clash, so she took control of his cannon and fired it against 4,000 Hessian mercenaries hired by England. The Continental Congress recognized her as a member of the army and granted her half of a soldier's pension in 1779. In 1926 - 126 years after her death - when Corbin's remains were transferred to West Point, she became the first woman buried at the military cemetery. Fort Tryon Park's drive and entrance are named after her.

Elizabeth Jennings Graham

One hundred and one years before Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, Elizabeth Jennings Graham refused to get off a horse-drawn streetcar that only serviced white commuters. Graham, a 24-

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year-old black schoolteacher, would not budge in July 1854 when a conductor of a Third Avenue Railroad Company horsecar in lower Manhattan told her to get off. Graham wound up suing the driver, the conductor and the Third Avenue Railway. Graham - who was represented by Chester Arthur, the future 21st president of the United States - won her suit in 1855. She's credited with helping to desegregate New York City's public transit system.

Emily Warren Roebling

Emily Warren Roebling oversaw the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge and was the first person to cross the New York City landmark. Roebling's father-in-law and civil engineer John Roebling had initially spearheaded the project - but his untimely death in 1869 meant that Roebling's husband, Washington Roebling, had to take over. When her husband contracted a bad case of "the bends" in 1872, someone had to fill the role of engineer - and Roebling became the obvious choice. She served as a key liaison between her husband and the construction team, and was lauded for her work before the bridge officially opened in 1883.

Anna Arnold Hedgeman

Political activist Anna Arnold Hedgeman was the first African American woman in a mayoral cabinet position in the city. Hedgeman served under Mayor Robert Wagner from 1957 to 1958. Prior to her tenure, the well-respected educator worked on the 1948 Harry Truman presidential campaign and was a columnist and editor for the "New York Age." She also served as the Assistant Dean of Women at Howard University.

Gertrude Ederle

Gertrude Ederle, the first woman to swim across the English Channel was from Manhattan. The world record holder and gold-medal Olympian swam from Cap Gris Nez in France to Kent, England, in 14 hours and 39 minutes on Aug. 6, 1926 - a feat that earned her the moniker "America's Best Girl" coined by President Calvin Coolidge. Ederle - the daughter of German immigrants and raised on the Upper West Side - also became the first woman to have a ticker-tape parade in her honor and later performed at the 1939 World's Fair.

Angela Bambace

Shirtwaist factory worker and Harlem native Angela Bambace founded the first women's local of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) in 1936, leading the charge on women's labor rights. The Italian-American advocate had previously organized the 1932 Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union strike in New Jersey and the 1933 walkout of about 75,000 dressmakers in New York City. She was later elected to be the ILGWU vice president - the first woman to hold a leadership position within the union.

Maria Tallchief

When prima ballerina Maria Tallchief joined the New York City Ballet in 1942, it allowed her to become the first American to perform at the Bolshoi Theater in Moscow and the Paris Opera Ballet in France. The dancer refused to drop her Native American last name, and was repeatedly denied roles because of her ancestral roots - but she got her big break when a lead ballerina from the New York City Ballet stepped down. Tallchief was given a Kennedy Center Honor lifetime achievement awarded in 1996 and was later inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.

Chien-Shiung Wu

Chinese-American physicist Chien-Shiung Wu joined the Manhattan Project in 1944 at Columbia University and was the only person from China to be a part of the enterprise. Shiung Wu, grew up outside of Shanghai, earned her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley and helped develop the process for separating uranium metal into U-235 and U-238 isotopes by gaseous diffusion. She also became the first woman president of the American Physical Society, and was awarded the National Medal of Science, the Comstock Prize and the Wolf Prize in Physics.

Julia de Burgos

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Poet, journalist and Latina activist Julia de Burgos was the art and culture editor for the New York-based newspaper *Pueblos Hispanos*. De Burgos grew up in Puerto Rico, and her poetry collections like "Poemas exactos a mi misma" in 1937, "Canción de la verdad sencilla" two years later and "El mar y tú: otros poemas" in 1954 centered around social justice and feminism decades before the Nuyorican poetry movement. The Julia de Burgos Latino Cultural Center and its performing arts center in East Harlem carry on her legacy.

Penny Marshall

Actress, writer and director Penny Marshall played the beloved character Laverne DeFazio in the hit sitcom "Laverne and Shirley" - paving the way for other women in television. Marshall, who grew up in the Bronx, starred in the show alongside Cindy Williams as Shirley from 1976 until its final episode in 1983. Marshall has continued success behind the camera directing a number of films including the '90s classic "A League of Our Own" starring Madonna and Whoopi Goldberg, as well as "Big," "Awakenings" and "Riding in Cars With Boys."

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