



Visionary Women: How Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs, Jane Goodall, and Alice Waters Changed Our World

Andrea Barnet

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Longlisted for the PEN/Bograd Weld Prize for Biography

Four influential women we thought we knew well—Jane Jacobs, Rachel Carson, Jane Goodall, and Alice Waters—and how they spearheaded the modern progressive movement

This is the story of four visionaries who profoundly shaped the world we live in today. Together, these women—linked not by friendship or field, but by their choice to break with convention—showed what one person speaking truth to power can do. Jane Jacobs fought for livable cities and strong communities; Rachel Carson warned us about poisoning the environment; Jane Goodall demonstrated the indelible kinship between humans and animals; and Alice Waters urged us to reconsider what and how we eat.

With a keen eye for historical detail, Andrea Barnet traces the arc of each woman's career and explores how their work collectively changed the course of history. While they hailed from different generations, Carson, Jacobs, Goodall, and Waters found their voices in the early sixties. At a time of enormous upheaval, all four stood as bulwarks against 1950s corporate culture and its war on nature. Consummate outsiders, each prevailed against powerful and mostly male adversaries while also anticipating the disaffections of the emerging counterculture.

All told, their efforts ignited a transformative progressive movement while offering people a new way to think about the world and a more positive way of living in it.

Visionary Women: How Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs, Jane Goodall, and Alice Waters Changed Our World Details

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From Reader Review Visionary Women: How Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs, Jane Goodall, and Alice Waters Changed Our World for online ebook

Maddie says

This read like a college thesis, to be honest. Though I found some of the research and the overall stories somewhat compelling, the writing was repetitive and irritating. I also felt that the addition of Alice Waters to the trio of other women felt a little forced, like Barnet needed someone to round out the group and felt that since Waters had done some good work in Berkeley that she was someone worthy of sharing this book with pioneering Carson, Jacobs, and Goodall. All three of those women contributed in a huge way to their respective fields and awakened the world to the plight of the delicate web that connects us all from the smallest being to the largest.

Though Alice Waters did have a hand in awakening the Slow Food movement here in California, I don't feel that she has made a real or lasting impact on the environment or the world the way the other three women have. Though she has created the Edible Schoolyard and done a lot for her community and while the story of her restaurant is very interesting, I don't know that any of the other programs that have been created around the country have come about because of her influence so much as they have been a result of the greater shift that's occurring away from what is bad back to what is good. I feel that Julia Child would have been a much better candidate for the food section of this book than Alice Waters. She was publishing around the same time as the other women (Mastering the Art came out in 1961) and would have been a more natural fit. Overall, I did learn a lot, especially because I was unfamiliar with the work of Rachel Carson and Jane Goodall and I suppose I did enjoy it, but the book really got in its own way quite a bit.

Scottsdale Public Library says

Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs, Jane Goodall, and Alice Waters came from different generations. They worked in different fields. Yet they all made significant contributions in the early sixties (going up against powerful and entrenched interests at the time). Carson spoke up about DDT poisoning the environment, and subsequently helped create the EPA and Endangered Species Act in 1973; Jacobs advocated for livable cities and strong communities, laying a groundwork for current principles in community planning; Goodall's work impacted animal studies. Her push to have chimpanzees recognized as engendered led the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to recommend chimps in captivity be granted the same protections as those in the wild; Waters' ongoing advocacy has helped pave the way for sustainable food and farm-to-table movements. Each identified the moral crisis of modernity and out of their arguments came social movements that would change the world. I highly recommend this book; people should know of the work they did and be inspired to think how they can help their own communities (even on a global level)! -Sara Z.

KC says

This outstanding narrative covers four revolutionary women all striving and executing historical and monumental achievements surrounding the eco-movement during the 20th Century. Rachel Carson brought to our attention the dangers of DDTs, Jane Jacobs who fought for the stability of New York City's urban

communities, parks, and neighborhoods, Jane Goodall who made humans aware of the similarities between man and primate, and Alice Waters who brought to light the importance of organic foods, farming, and the innovative path to healthier eating and living. With the soothing and exceptionally ethereal expression of Cassandra Campbell, this audiobook will be listed as one of my top picks of the year.

Bill S. says

Visionary Women by Andrea Barnet

Should be a part of a course on the 1960's.

The four women are linked as they challenged the "cultural push to bend nature and natural systems to serve mankind's ends." They, and the 60's were a response to the "misguided values and priorities of the 1950's. Together, they changed how we live. They indicted technologies that didn't consider 'feedbacks' such as pollution, or degraded quality of experience, but only the 'narrow purposes' for which their innovations were designed."

Jane Jacobs wrote *The Death and Life of American Cities* - 1961 - one year before *Silent Spring*. Challenged the conventional wisdom which was urban renewal - tearing down old neighborhoods and rebuild with cold, modern housing projects, reserving streets for cars only, sectioning off the city like a suburb with separate places for living, working, entertainment, and retail. Without a college degree (she dropped out rather than take prerequisites) she actually observed cities and talked to people. Realized that what seemed to be chaotic and congested, was what made cities vibrant places. Complex mixture of old and new, living, working, and retail. Places where people congregated and watched out for one another - a community, not a dormitory. People were safer because people were always in the street for a variety of purposes, so there were eyes everywhere. Organic and changing. Saved Washington Park from being turned into a street to ease traffic. Jacobs was right that closing traffic from the park actually eased traffic. People decide to walk or use public transport when they know the city is difficult to drive in. When you build more streets or widen them, it encourages people to drive and they fill them up. Then saved her own neighborhood in Greenwich Village, the key being when she uncovered that the developer who stood to profit had most likely drawn up the plans before the community was slated for renewal and had created the "citizens" group pushing for renewal by making outlandish promises to the people who got on board.

Stopped the Lower Manhattan Expressway from destroying 400 buildings and 800 small businesses in Greenwich Village and Little Italy. Would turn NY into LA she stated. Grassroots beat the top-down dogma of the day. She was a master at getting press attention and organizing the neighborhood. Moved to Canada so her boys would not have to go to Vietnam. When she died in 2006 a bouquet of flowers was found at her former home in the Village with an unsigned note: "From this house, in 1961, a housewife changed the world"

Jane Goodall - Brit. Louis Leaky, the scientist who established that man's origins were in Africa, turned to Jane to do a study of chimpanzees in the wild of what is now Tanzania. She had no credentials at all, but he rightly reasoned that she would have the stamina and patience to do it as well as having a woman would help since they would seem less threatening to the shy creatures. Leaky felt that since humans and apes had a common ancestor that learning about ape behavior would give us insight into the behavior of early man - what did we share with our cousins? Nobody had successfully studied apes in nature before. Unlike others she approached in the open, alone, acted bored and non-threatening. It took a year before the chimps came to Jane's camp. Eventually, she set out bananas and they came everyday.

1960 - first to see them eat meat and FIRST TO OBSERVE THE USE OF TOOLS. Used twigs or grass to

fish termites out of their nests. To this point we assumed that the use of tools was what made us human. This moment moved Leaky to say "We must redefine what a "tool" is, redefine man, or accept chimpanzees as humans." She further insisted that they were emotional creatures who were self-aware and self-directed which directly challenged the prevailing view that sex and violence was the simple fixed pattern of behavior. She was sent to Cambridge to get a PHD lest her work be doubted, but she caught plenty of flak. Scorned for using anecdotes rather than data and writing for a popular audience. And of course, it did not help that she was a beautiful woman. Her article in national Geographic in 1963 caused a sensation. Set up a research facility and starting in the 1980's turned to travelling the world urging us to live sustainable lives. She realized that the only way to save the chimps was for the people in the area to get out of poverty. Most effective tool was educating girls and then family size went down.

"How is it possible that the most intelligent creature to ever walk the planet is destroying his own home...There seems to be a disconnect between the clever brain and the human heart." - Goodall

Alice Waters - A radical from Berkley who spent a semester abroad in France where she fell in love with the food, the perfection of preparation and presentation, and saw how food was connected to community. When she attempted to bring it back home she realized that the key was ingredients. French cooks went to market to see what was fresh and then improvised based on what they found. But, we did not have many of the ingredients. Saw eating as a political act. A revolution against corporate America's fast and convenient and processed food. A war against agribusiness. She started using local ingredients in her restaurant, Chez Panisse (named after a character in a movie) in Berkley CA, opened in 1972. One dish per night and it changed every night for a low price at first (Now it is 75 on Monday nights, 100 or 125 the rest of the week. She never really made much money at it as she treated her workers very well and did not want to make a chain. Early convert to organic food as those who took care of the soil produces the best quality and best tasting produce. Started farm to table and then began Edible Schoolyards. To her, "We are what we eat" meant that "When you eat fast food, you're digesting the values of a culture that says there are no seasons, that everything should be available 24/7, that food isn't important, that advertising confers value, that waste is fine. Cooking and farming, don't bother with those. Someone else will take care of that...Sitting at the table, that doesn't matter either. You can eat in your car. Time is money. More is better. Everything should be fast, cheap, and easy. That's what fast food culture is telling us, and we are eating these values."

And let's not forget that Feminine Mystique, Harrington's The Other America came out at the same time, Unsafe at any Speed 1965. All challenged the existing order and changed how we think and how we live.

Andréa says

Note: I accessed a digital review copy of this book through Edelweiss.

Heather Kerley says

Essential reading for anyone who wants to "be the change" they want to see in the world. The four women Barnet discusses had a huge impact on our society in ways we take for granted now. In a world of top-down policy-making, stovepiping, and scientific specialization - not to mention technological arrogance - these visionaries approached their areas holistically rather than in isolation. They identified and explored problems with a view toward the interconnection of nature and societies. In so doing, they were able to take a long view of issues, in opposition to the prevailing trend of pursuing short term gain (which is still a big problem

for our species).

When I picked up this book, I was most interested in Rachel Carson and Jane Goodall, who are both personal heroes. The chapter on Rachel Carson was my favorite part of the book. I was familiar with her role in getting DDT banned. However, I did not know how instrumental she was in changing the human view of nature from one of dominion and specificity, to the larger ecological view we have now. Her personal story is also very intriguing and inspiring. Her adversaries often threw the term "childless spinster" at her, as if her single status were somehow relevant to the arguments she was making. I was intrigued to learn that Carson's family was very important to her and were ever present in her life, including two nieces she helped take care of, and a nephew she adopted to raise as her own.

In fact, aside from the similarities of their approaches, all four women in Barnet's book had very supportive families. In the case of Carson and Goodall, it was an educated and passionate mother who supported her daughter's work, in both cases quite literally. Carson's mother helped type up her manuscripts and kept house and cooked for her while Carson split her time between her full-time job and writing her books. Jane Goodall's mother spent time in Gombe, running a makeshift clinic for villagers to foster local goodwill while Goodall went into the forest to study her chimps.

The other thing that struck me about Carson and Goodall was their physical endurance. Carson was a tireless worker who wrote all day in her federal job and came home at night to continue writing. When she went into the field, she would stay out all day observing nature. When she went to the coast she would stand in cold tidal pools observing sea life until she could no longer feel her feet. Goodall was even more remarkable. Initially she was sent into the forest with local "minders" but the men would often fall behind. Her pace was tireless and she could stay out in the woods, hiking and climbing at a stiff pace, often eating very little. While Carson continued to give appearances and interviews while dying of cancer, Goodall, now in her eighties, continues to travel the world as an advocate and activist at a pace that would exhaust a person a third her age.

Of the four women in the book, I was unfamiliar with Jane Jacobs and Alice Waters. However, I found myself fairly riveted by Jacobs, less so by Alice Waters. Of these women, Waters came to her activist work much later in the game, long after she had been running the first "farm-to-table" restaurant operation, mostly because she wanted to recreate in America the eating experience she loved so much in Europe. Many other people had been studying and advocating for sustainable agriculture before she really gave herself over to the issue. Perhaps I am minimizing her role, but she doesn't seem to me to be quite the visionary that these other women were. She strikes me as being someone who was building on the ground that had been broken by many others, especially by Carson. This is obviously not a bad thing, but I'm just not so sure she belongs in the same class with the other three. That said, the discussion of sustainable food, does bring the whole discussion full circle.

I was excited to read this book, mainly for the inspiration, and I was not disappointed. It's tempting to look at the world and see nothing but bad news these days, but it makes me feel more positive to think of these women, who encountered far more obstacles and derision in their male-dominated fields than I can imagine. And yet they persevered and just did their work, confident they were doing something necessary. And all of human society has received the benefit. Ultimately, Barnet has done her subject a huge service as well. She has applied the same holistic view to the careers and biographies of these women that they themselves pioneered, highlighting connections between them we would otherwise miss.

Courtney Judy says

Wow. Just wow, what a great read about four incredibly strong and important women. My hands-down favorite section was the chapters covering Jane Goodall, but I attribute that to at least knowing who she was before sitting down to read this. This gem sent me down so many wonderful rabbit holes it was hard to come back sometimes.

A well written history-nonfiction-women are awesome-read. It has a great format that makes it easy to read in spurts. I myself would take breaks between sections to learn more about each of the women discussed in the section. It helped make the history easier to read. I'm glad I picked this up, and I will happily recommend to pretty much anyone.

Sarah Boon says

I know Rachel Carson's story quite well, and have read Jane Jacobs' books. But I didn't know much about Jacobs' life and knew nothing about Goodall and Waters. This is a great book to whet your appetite to read more about and by these amazing women, and it really works well to show how these women shared a worldview and perception of society despite never having my.

Well-written and engaging.

Leslie Goddard says

Wow. What a fantastic book. Barnet does an exceptional job providing thoroughly researched but succinctly told biographies of these four women. All four profiles are fascinating, but what really stands out is the overarching narrative about how these women tapped into the power of grassroots action. They acted from a place of personal passion to embark on journeys that changed how we think about the world. She does an excellent job showing how paradigm shifts can happen when one committed person refuses to be dissuaded.

More than that, Barnet's writing is crisp and lively, never falling into the Wikipedia-article style of listing facts. I finished this book much faster than I'd intended because it was so engaging to read.

These four women, and the empowering narrative they share, will stay with me, and inspire me, for a long time.

Linda Brunner says

Amazing women, all. Who's mission found them.

Rachel Carson, my super hero:

"Carson's critique was at once simple and complex: pesticides, she argued, posed a threat to the "shared biology of all living things." Mankind, she insisted, was not the overlord of nature, but simply one of its citizens. As such, humans were deluded in believing they could control nature through chemistry, allegedly

in the name of progress. Technological meddling, she reflected, could "easily and irrevocably" disrupt the entire web of life. Nature was a fabric on the one hand "delicate and destructible," on the other "capable of striking back in unexpected ways." To ignore this would be at humankind's own peril."

And here we are, some almost 50 years after she wrote *Silent Spring* STILL in the hands of the political/business collusion that is destroying the web of life. RESIST!

Melinda says

Very well-written and well-researched account of four extraordinary women and how they influenced events and issues of post World War II America. Barnet has a way of putting you into their lives, and she includes much in the way of important events of the times. Even though these women did not know each other and were not contemporaries, their contributions to our world have common themes. Barnet ties them together well.

Julie Barnard says

This was a great book - interesting, well written and definitely worth reading. All four women - Rachel Carson, Jane Jacobs, Jane Goodell and Alice Waters - did much to change the world and the way we look at it.

Chris Demer says

This is a wonderful and inspiring book about four women who changed the way we think about our environment, ourselves and our place in the animal kingdom, and our food and how it is related to our health.

The author writes about the early lives of these women, and later about their public lives. Although none of them sought the limelight, they were all forced into the public sphere because of the breadth and depth of their understandings of the world around us.

Rachel Carson had a difficult early life. Her mother was her sole guide, as her father was mostly absent. Although she never married or had children, she became the guardian of her grand nephew when her niece died at a young age. She herself died from cancer when she was barely middle aged. However, her impact on the world has been profound. She is considered the founder of the concept of ecology. She was a brilliant writer and a meticulous scientist. She wrote about the communities of organisms in the sea and was clear about the connections of all species.

Somewhat later she became aware of the onslaught of chemicals in the fight against insects, particularly DDT in the efforts to eliminate mosquitoes. She pursued clues, studied the impact of these chemicals on other species, and realized that a single minded approach to wiping out any species would affect many others. Her whole approach from her scientific studies showed the interconnectedness of living organisms. Her book, *Silent Spring*, was a polemic against this approach, and to any control of the larger environment. It was a blockbuster. But there was a huge amount of push-back from chemical companies of course. She was derided in public, criticized as a dilettante (which she most definitely was not!) and described as a hysterical

spinster!

She was a careful scientist and understood the web of life in a way that most did not. Her legacy has been to impress upon the world that science is not infallible, and that attempts to control nature are not progress. Conservation is critical to maintain the world as we know it.

Jane Jacobs was a pioneer in another sense—that of the importance of community to human beings. She and her husband settled in the West Village in New York rather than suburbia, that was the "thing" at the time. As they settled in and became part of the community they came to love—with its diversity of people, buildings, architecture, street life—she became aware that there was a redevelopment plan afoot. Robert Moses had decided to re-structure that part of the city. First by building a 4-lane road through Washington Park, and later by bulldozing the West Village (after having it declared a slum) and re-building it as luxury high rises. She became a political activist par excellence. Fighting City Hall and the powers that be, with a large cadre of like-minded inhabitants, they were able to prevent that catastrophe. She eventually wrote "The Death and Life of American Cities" a book which is now the bible of city planners. Her approach was not dissimilar to that of Rachel Carson, in as much as she saw the fabric of communities in its people. She saw that the interactions of neighbors, vendors, shop owners, small manufacturing businesses, were not messy, but were intertwined in a functional whole. Thanks to Jane Jacobs, it is now understood that communities have the power to renew themselves for their own benefit and large scale destruction—with its usual lack of green space, mixed use buildings, street life, is not advantageous to anyone who has to live there. (Recall the building of "housing projects" which were such a disaster, that most have long since been demolished.) Thanks to Jacobs, cities are (mostly) more thoughtful in managing development, building mixed use buildings, insuring green areas, and preserving architectural gems.

Jane Goodall was fascinated by animals from the time she was a young girl. She always wanted to go to Africa. So when the opportunity came, she headed for Nairobi, where she met Louis Leakey, the famed paleoanthropologist. Although it took some time to reach her destination and her work with the chimpanzees, she had all the personality traits that made her ideal for a study of these animals in their natural habitat. She loved animals and the outdoors. She was fearless. She was fine living with lack of creature comforts, and she had almost unimaginable patience. She lacked academic credentials, however. So as Leakey found funding for her study and realized the value of her work, he arranged for her to go to Cambridge and enroll in a doctoral program—even though she did not have an undergraduate degree.

She was loath to leave the Gombe stream reserve where she was finally making headway in observing the chimps, but went on to study for her doctorate. She found, in researching the literature that practically nothing was available on the behavior of these animals. The few studies that had been done were either done with animals in captivity or by men with rifles and an aggressive approach to the chimps which was totally useless (as they all fled, of course.)

Her studies broke new ground in many ways. She was able to study many individuals—not one or a few and then generalize about those few. She could see that they had different personalities. She observed group behavior, mating behaviors, and mothering styles. She observed chimps making and using simple tools, such as adapting long blades of grass to poke into termite mounds, and eat the termites as they withdrew the tool. She even observed them eating small game—to the shock (and disbelief) of other scientists. She set the stage for studying animals in their natural setting and their relationships with each other, other species and their surroundings. She saw how connected the animals are to the world around them—and that they are not so different from us. She gave life to the concept of the connections between us and nature and the importance of caring for all of it.

Alice Waters, came a bit later, and was enmeshed in the 60's counterculture. Her personal history involves living in Paris for a semester and sampling as many bistro's and cafes as possible. She was amazed at the freshness and taste of foods she thought she knew, but that tasted so much better.

Eventually she returned with the idea of developing a restaurant that attempted to mimic the delicious foods that she had remembered from France.

The earlier details of this development was perhaps somewhat more in depth than was necessary- the only criticism I have of this book.

In any case, through trial and error, over the years, the restaurant (Chez Panisse) was successful, but Alice's main contribution was not the restaurant, although it was necessary to reach her conclusion-which was that mass produced, processed foods from the ever enlarging agribusiness was seriously lacking in taste and freshness, and was being produced with chemicals, antibiotics, hormones, genetic modifications. All these factors were for the purpose of "efficiency"-producing more food and making more money. The methods were not sustainable. The food was bad. The idea of eating on the run, in the car, and any fast food became the norm. No more enjoying a meal with friends and conversation. We were losing all the joy related to the preparation and communing while enjoying a carefully prepared and wholesome meal.

She became political about her ideas. She sourced all her foods from local farmers. She sought only foods that were organically grown and in season. Eventually, the idea of farmer's markets has grown considerable and we can support them to enhance our health. She started healthy gardens at schools, where the children produced and ate the foods they grew. (This organization is still growing and thriving.)

These four women were all nurturers. to quote "Instead of material expansion, each emphasized quality of life, the public good, what was sensible and ethical. ..each was looking for what was sustainable in the long term. " They all sense the interconnectedness of the living world.

They were truly visionaries who changed the way we think of the environment (both natural and man made) and our place in it, as well as our responsibility to it.

I highly recommend this book!!!!

Noreen says

I think that my expectations of how enjoyable and informative this book would be were so under what the true experience has been.

Andrea is a writer with credibility and heart. These women came alive because of her skill for me.

I think it's a must read for all generations of women. The impact it left me, growing up in the 50s and 60's, was profound. But, I also want my daughter and grand daughter to read it with hope, so they will know that now the sky is the limit to what they can achieve if they have will and determination. Look how far these women came with social and cultural road blocks in their way.

It is also a wonderful read for men who appreciate women and are secure with who they are and how much they have been afforded in this society.

I am much looking forward to another book about women of color and LGBTQ people. The world is hungry for writers with Andrea's insight.

Bravo!!!

Well done!

Karen says

Amazing read, the ideas and theories of these women resonate even more today. The authour neatly brings together the intersecting and converging ideas of all four women and their continued impact.

Even though Carson, Jacobs and Goodall were disparaged and dismissed due to their gender they bravely stood their ground and continued fighting for what they knew to be truth. Each woman looked beyond the now to the future and what that meant for our children.

Rachel Carson's work of all four speaks to me the most.
