



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



March 2024 Her Story ENewsletter Legacies

In the last few months, we have lost two women who are profiled in *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*: Sandra Day O'Connor and Chita Rivera. Both were significant pioneers in quite different areas of expertise. Sandra Day O'Connor was the first woman appointed to the United States Supreme Court, which occurred despite the extreme discrimination she experienced early in her legal career. Chita Rivera was a pioneering Latina actor who broke many barriers for those who followed her.



In 1981, **Sandra Day O'Connor** became the first female justice appointed to the United States Supreme Court. After growing up in Arizona, O'Connor attended Stanford University, completing her law degree at Stanford in two years, instead of three, and finishing third in her class. Unable to find employment due to her gender, O'Connor instead began her law career working for free, as a legal secretary for San Mateo County in California. She eventually became a deputy county attorney and then paid for her work.

In 1957, after time spent overseas, she and her husband settled in Arizona where she opened a private practice and later served as Assistant Attorney General for Arizona. Her career in Arizona was varied and each position served to grow her legal expertise. In 1981 President Ronald Reagan appointed her to the United States Supreme Court and she was unanimously approved by the U.S. Senate. During her tenure on the court, she was considered one of the strongest and most powerful women of her time. In 2006 she retired from the court to nurse her husband.



A pioneer for Latinas in the arts, actor, singer, and dancer **Chita Rivera** had a five-decade long career on Broadway during which she was nominated for ten Tonys and won two. Rivera was born in Washington, DC and enrolled in a school of ballet when she was a pre-teen. At 15, she auditioned for and was selected to become a student at George Balanchine's School of American Ballet in New York City. Her Broadway debut was as a dancer in the 1950 production of *Guys and Dolls*. Her breakout role, in 1957, was as Anita in the original production of *West Side Story*.

River received her two Tonys for *The Rink* (1984) and *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1993). She continued to perform on Broadway, in movies, and on television through 2021. Her autobiography, *Chita: A Memoir*, was published in 2023. Rivera was the first Latin American to receive the Kennedy Center Honors (2002). Her many other honors included the Presidential Medal of Freedom, awarded by President Obama in 2009, and a Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2018.

Sandra Day O'Connor and Chita Rivera are among the more than 850 women profiled in our book *Her Story: A Timeline of the Women Who Changed America*. Women's accomplishments continue to inspire and encourage us. Continue to help us tell women's stories!

Charlotte Waisman and Jill Tietjen

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