



A TIMELINE OF THE WOMEN
WHO CHANGED AMERICA



March 2026 Her Story ENewsletter Women Who Changed the Course of American Entertainment

Recently *The Wall Street Journal* wrote about people who have changed the course of American entertainment. The women who were highlighted included Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martha Graham. Let's learn more about these women, both of whom have been inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame.



Born into a family who was prominent in reform movements, abolitionist and author **Harriet Beecher Stowe** originally wrote short stories on domestic life, to supplement the family income. In 1850, the South threatened to secede from the Union; at the same time the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act occurred. Stowe began writing a serial published in the *National Era* newspaper on the evils of slavery. Her serials grew to forty chapters and became the bestselling book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published in 1852. The book has been called "one of the most effective pieces of reform literature ever published."

The first major American novel to feature a Black hero, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* sold three hundred thousand copies in its first year. The only book to outsell it in the 19th century was the Bible. The book shocked the country with its frank exposé of the harsh conditions of slavery. It showed readers that slaves were people who were suffering great cruelty. Through the book, Stowe argued that slavery undermined the morals of people who tolerated slavery or profited from it. Stowe wrote additional novels, but none had the same success or impact as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.



Martha Graham's impact on dance is staggering; it is comparable to that of Picasso on painting, Stravinsky on music, and Frank Lloyd Wright on architecture. Graham transformed the art form, revitalizing and expanding dance around the world. She created the Martha Graham Dance Company, one of the oldest dance companies in America. As a teacher, Graham trained and inspired generations of dancers and choreographers.

The Graham technique, now a standard, codified method of training dancers, developed from the movement vocabulary she created for each new work. This includes the centrality of breath, the principles of contraction and release, exhalation and inhalation, compression, and an explosion of energy. Graham introduced the use of moving scenery, used props as symbols, and combined speech with dancing. She was also the first to integrate her group, using African Americans and Asians in her company. Graham replaced the traditional ballet folk dress with either a straight, dark, long shirt or the common leotard. She also pioneered using the stage, the floor, and the props as part of the dance itself. Breaking away from classical ballet, she introduced completely new techniques and new methods; it is not an understatement to say that Graham thrust the art of dance into the modern world.

Harriet Beecher Stowe and Martha Graham 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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