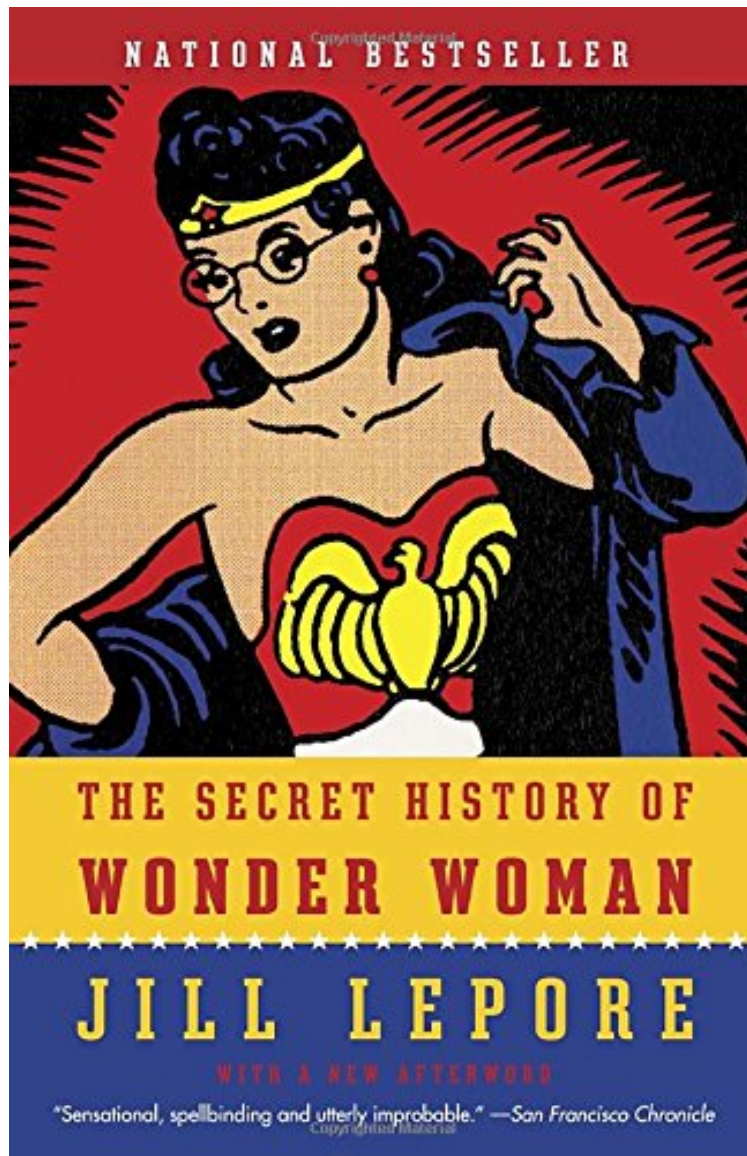


The Secret History of Wonder Woman

Jill Lepore

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Jill Lepore : The Secret History of Wonder Woman before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Secret History of Wonder Woman:

197 of 210 people found the following review helpful. Prepare to be surprised, amazed, and alarmed by the people who created and shaped this comic icon.By Peter J. WardHere 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, Holloway, could fulfill her ambition to maintain a full-time job, while his mistress, Olive Byrne, 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. The author, Jill Lepore, deserves a round of applause for finding this amazing story and bringing it to the public in such an engaging way. This book integrates the history of feminism, comic books, psychology, social shifts in both sexuality and gender, and in the process gives us a nuanced look at some truly interesting people. Marston was a competent but spotlight-loving academic who couldn't resist sabotaging his own successes (in that way he is similar to his predecessor, The wizard from Vienna: Franz Anton Mesmer). Holloway, the wife and rock of the relationship(s) who wanted to give life her best as a working woman but still be able to raise a family. Byrne, the (seduced) graduate student who worked on much of WMM's projects anonymously and raised the Marston family to compensate for her own lonely childhood. And there are many others. Suffice to say - this is an engaging read for anyone interested in the history of feminism, comics, and (naturally) Wonder Woman herself. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Amazing! By Lauren Roland I did a project on Wonder Woman for a comic book class this past semester, and this book was a TREMENDOUS help. It's majorly a biography of Marston, but his life is incredibly intriguing by itself. It's not until close to the end that the book starts talking about Wonder Woman and her beginnings. But the history behind it -- the feminism, Marston's life, Marston's wife and lover... it's all incredible. If you've got at least a passing interest in Wonder Woman, then you need to check this book out. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Excellent, fun history -- with a few issues. By C. A. Dees This is a wonderful hidden history that you don't need to know -- but it's a lot more fun to know. This book also offers an important insight to the early feminists, their radicalism, their blind spots, and their surprisingly current understanding of the issues that women still face. This is quite different than the received wisdom about this era in that first wave feminism didn't neatly end with suffrage, nor did these women feel at all satisfied that their demands had been met by society. I have given 4 stars instead of 5 because of the following: (1) For all the wonderful, granular detail provided about the real characters involved and their world, as well as how their lives were reflected in the pages of Wonder Woman comics, there is strangely little information about the actual Wonder Woman story. Just a chapter or so telling summarizing Wonder Woman's own origin story and a timeline of events in her fictional life would have made a huge difference in my understanding. (2) While Jill Lepore is a talented writer, clearly reveling in the fun of her histories, her prose can sometimes be maddeningly convoluted and ambiguous -- as if she is moving a bit too quickly. Her research and excellent writer's voice deserve a better editing job. Otherwise, there are passages that often feel like first drafts, and the story loses out as a result.

A riveting work of historical detection revealing that the origin of Wonder Woman, one of the world's most iconic superheroes, hides within it a fascinating family story and a crucial history of twentieth-century feminism. 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 twentieth 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. This edition includes a new afterword with fresh revelations based on never before seen letters and photographs from the Marston family's papers. With 161 illustrations and 16 pages in full color.

Lepore's brilliance lies in knowing what to do with the material she has. In her hands, the Wonder Woman story unpacks not only a new cultural history of feminism, but a theory of history as well. *Carla Kaplan, New York Times*

Book Ms. Lepores lively, surprising and occasionally salacious history is far more than the story of a comic strip. The author, a professor of history at Harvard, places Wonder Woman squarely in the story of womens rights in Americaa cycle of rights won, lost and endlessly fought for again. Like many illuminating histories, this one shows how issues we debate today were under contention just as vigorously decades ago, including birth control, sex education, the ways in which women can combine work and family, and the effects of violent entertainment on children. The tragedy of feminism in the twentieth century is the way its history seemed to be forever disappearing, Ms. Lepore writes. Her superb narrative brings that history vividly into the present, weaving individual lives into the sweeping changes of the century. Carol Tavis, *The Wall Street Journal* After years of sifting through unpublished letters and diaries, Lepore has written the authoritative work on William Moulton Marston, a Harvard-educated psychologist best known for two things: inventing the lie detector test and creating the worlds most famous superheroine. Lepores careful detective work reveals a man of fascinating contradictions. . . . The Secret History of Wonder Woman is the fullest and most fascinating portrait ever created about the complicated, unconventional family that inspired one of the most enduring feminist icons in pop culture. . . . In [Lepores] hands, The Secret History of Wonder Woman is its own magic lasso, one that compels history to finally tell the truth about Wonder Woman and compels the rest of us to behold it. Laura Hudson, *Los Angeles Times* The Secret History of Wonder Woman relates a tale so improbable, so juicy, itll have you saying, Merciful Minerva! . . . an astonishingly thorough investigation of the man behind the worlds most popular female superhero. . . . Lepore has assembled a vast trove of images and deploys them cunningly. Besides a hefty full-color section of Wonder Woman art in the middle, there are dozens of black-and-white pictures scattered throughout the text. Many of these are panels from Marstons comics that mirror events in his own life. Combined with Lepores zippy prose, it all makes for a supremely engaging reading experience. Etelka Lehoczky, NPR If it makes your head spin to imagine a skimpily clad pop culture icon as (spoiler alert!) a close relation of feminist birth control advocate Margaret Sanger, then prepare to be dazzled by the truths revealed in historian Jill Lepores *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*. The story behind Wonder Woman is sensational, spellbinding and utterly improbable. Her origins lie in the feminism of the early 1900s, and the intertwined dramas that surrounded her creation are the stuff of pulp fiction and tabloid scandal. . . . It took a super-sleuth to uncover the mysteries of this intricate history, hidden from view for more than half a century. With acrobatic research prowess, muscular narrative chops and disarming flashes of humor, Lepore rises to the challenge, bringing to light previously unknown details and deliberately obfuscated connections. Audrey Bilger, *San Francisco Chronicle* On the one hand, the story [The Secret History of Wonder Woman] relates has more uplift than Wonder Womans invisible airplane or her eagle-encrusted red bustier. Its a ye-saying tale about how this comic book character, created in 1941, remade American feminism and had her roots in the ideas and activism of Margaret Sanger, the founder of Planned Parenthood. On the other hand, *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* is fundamentally a biography of Wonder Womans larger-than-life and vaguely creepy male creator, William Moulton Marston. . . . [Lepore] fully tells Marstons history for the first time, as well as the complete history of how so many crisp feminist ideas made their way into Wonder Woman comics. Its complicated material that she capably explores. . . . There are many profitable detours in this book: the history of female cartoonists; the moral panic over comics and juvenile delinquency; a history of the feminist movement. Dwight Garner, *The New York Times* Lepore specializes in excavating old flashpoints forgotten or badly misremembered collisions between politics and cultural debates in Americas past. She lays out for our modern sensibility how some event or social problem was fought over by interest groups, reformers, opportunists, and thought leaders of the day. The result can look both familiar and disturbing, like our eras arguments flipped in a funhouse mirror. . . . Besides archives and comics Lepore relies on journalism, notebooks, letters, and traces of memoir left by the principals, as well as interviews with surviving colleagues, children, and extended family. Her discipline is worthy of a first-class detective. . . . Lepore convinces us that we should know more about early feminists whose work Wonder Woman drew on and carried forward. . . . A key spotter of connections, Lepore retrieves a remarkably recognizable feminist through-line, showing us 1920s debates about work-life balance, for example, that sound like something from *The Atlantic* in the past decade. *New York of Books* Even non-comix nerds (or those too young to remember Lynda Carter) will marvel at Jill Lepores deep dive into the real-world origins of the ian superhero with the golden lasso. The fact that a polyamory enthusiast created her partly as a tribute to the reproductive-rights pioneer Margaret Sanger is, somehow, only the fourth or fifth most interesting thing in Ms. Womans bizarre background. *New York Magazine* With a defiantly unhurried ease, Lepore reconstructs the prevailing cultural mood that birthed the idea of Wonder Woman, carefully delineating the conceptual debt the character owes to early-20th-century feminism in general and the birth control movement in particular. . . . Again and again, she distills the figures she writes about into clean, simple, muscular prose, making unequivocal assertions that carry a faint electric charge . . . [and] attain a transgressive, downright badass swagger. *Slate* Deftly combines biography and cultural history to trace the entwined stories of Marston, Wonder Woman, and 20th-century feminism. . . . Lepore a professor of American history at Harvard, a *New Yorker* writer, and the author of *Book of Ages* is an endlessly energetic and knowledgeable guide to the fascinating backstory of Wonder Woman. Shes particularly skillful at showing the subtle process by which personal details migrate from life into art. *Christian Science Monitor* This captivating, sometimes racy, charming illustrated history is one part biography of

the character and one part biography of her fascinating creator, psychologist and inventor William Moulton Marston an early feminist who believed, way before his time, that the world would be a better place if only women were running it. . . . In the process of bringing her superhero to life in this very carefully researched, witty secret herstory, Lepore herself emerges as a kind of superheroine: a woman on a mission energetic, powerful, brilliant and provocative as her subject. Meredith Maran, *Good Housekeeping* This book is important, readable scholarship, making the connection between popular culture and the deeper history of the American womans fight for equality. . . . Lepore restores Wonder Woman to her rightful and righteous place. Jeffrey Ann Goudie, *The Kansas City Star* Jill Lepores generously illustrated *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* impressively links the iconic superheros 1941 creation by William Moulton Marston (also the inventor of the lie detector) both to the aims of mid-twentieth-century feminism and to the influential Marston familys deep domestic intrigues. ElleAn engaging, well-researched look at the unconventional family behind the character and stories of Wonder Woman. Lepore handles her potentially thorny topic well and manages to avoid being salacious or gossipy. . . . Fans interested in the background of the character and readers who appreciate well-written popular history will enjoy this thought-provoking volume. *Library Journal* Relegated to second-class status in her kitschy later years, long overshadowed by her male colleagues in the Justice League, the exiled ian goddess is rescued and recast as the missing link of the feminist movement. She was created by William Moulton Marston: rogue psychologist, inventor of the lie-detector test, and head of a polyamorous household that included the niece of birth-control pioneer Margaret Sanger. In wartime, she was a Rosie the Riveter in actual combat. Its an origin story far deeper, weirder, and kinkier than anything a cartoonist ever invented. *Vulture*, *8 Books You Need to Read This October* The story of William Moulton Marston, the Harvard-trained psychologist, inventor of the first lie-detector test, and creator of Wonder Woman for DC Comics, is at once inspiring and disheartening. His unlikely career shows us (among other things) that the qualities that make it possible to innovateswagger, cleverness, tenacityare the same ones that can render a person hopelessly out of sync with the reigning strictures of the times. *Bookforum* Fascinating . . . often brilliant. . . . Through assiduous research (the endnotes comprise almost a third of the book and are often very interesting reading), Lepore unravels a hidden history, and in so doing links her subjects lives to some of the most important social movements of the era. Its a remarkable, thought-provoking achievement. Alden Mudge, *Bookpage* The Marston familys story is ripe for psychoanalysis. And so is *The Secret History*, since it raises interesting questions about what motivates writers to choose the subjects of their books. Having devoted her last work to Jane Franklin Mecom, Benjamin Franklins sister, Lepore clearly has a passion for intelligent, opinionated women whose legacies have been overshadowed by the men they love. In her own small way, shes helping women get the justice they deserve, not unlike her tiarad counterpart. . . . It has nearly everything you might want in a page-turner: tales of SM, skeletons in the closet, a believe-it-or-not weirdness in its biographical details, and something else that secretly powers even the most serious feminist historyfun. *Entertainment Weekly* Hugely entertaining. . . . Lepore calls Wonder Woman the missing link between the first and second waves of feminism, as theyre knownthat is, between the suffragist era that so inspired Marston and the 1970s womens-liberation movement. . . . Shes right that the imagery of waves and troughs overlooks the complicated ways that movements make advances even when no ones lookingeven as daily lives seem stuck and society seems to be moving backwards. Katha Pollitt, *The Atlantic* Lepore has an astonishing story and tells it extremely well. She acts as a sort of lie detector, but proceeds through elegant narrative rather than binary test. Sentences are poised, adverbs rare. Each chapter is carefully shaped. At a time when few are disposed to see history as a branch of literature, Lepore occupies a prominent place in American letters. Her microhistories weave compelling lives into larger stories. *The Daily Beast* In the spirited, thoroughly reported *The Secret History of Wonder Woman*, Jill Lepore recounts the fascinating details behind the ian princess' origin story. . . . [Lepore]seamlessly shifts from the micro to the macro. . . . A panel depicting this labor unrest is just one of scores that appear throughout Lepore's book, further amplifying the author's vivid prose. *Newsday* A Harvard professor with impeccable scholarly credentials, Lepore treats her subject seriously, as if she is writing the biography of a feminist pioneer like Margaret Sanger, the founder of the birth control movementwhich this book is, to an extent. . . . Through extensive research and a careful reading of the Wonder Woman comic books, she argues convincingly that the story of this character is an indelible chapter in the history of womens rights. *Miami Herald* *The Secret History of Wonder Woman* is as racy, as improbable, as awesomely righteous, and as filled with curious devices as an episode of the comic book itself. In the nexus of feminism and popular culture, Jill Lepore has found a revelatory chapter of American history. I will never look at Wonder Womans bracelets the same way again. Alison Bechdel, author of *Fun Home* Jill Lepores obsessively researched book on Wonder Woman, the four-color embodiment of the womens rights movement, reveals that the life of the characters creator, Dr. William Marstoninventor of the lie detector, charming crank, ardent feminist and secret polygamistwas waaay more colorful than any comic book superhero. *Suffering Sappho!* Art Spiegelman, author of *Maus* An absolutely unputdownable book. The life history of polymath charlatan and/or genius (I couldnt ever decide) William Moulton Marston, who worked his way through law, movie scenarios, lie detection, mnages a trois, free love, BDSM and polygamy before creating the first feminist super-person had me saying wow practically every other page. And thats not even mentioning the tough-as-nails women he exalted, lifted from and, uh, shared who make up the molten core of this newly-revealed story. Rocketing from the suffragism of the 1910s to the ERA of the 1970s on a

wave of home-spun pop culture righteousness, this story's head-spinning weirdness ultimately makes you question your own accomplishments, aims, and almost like a great modern novel your real motives. Chris Ware, author of *Building Stories* Lepore restores Wonder Woman to her rightful place as an essential women's rights icon in this dynamically researched and interpreted, spectacularly illustrated, downright astounding work of discovery that injects new zest into the history of feminism. Booklist, starred review "It's an irresistible story, and the author tells it with relish and delight." Kirkus s Wonder Woman, feminist hero, was the creation of a husband and wife who led, on the surface, average existences. Behind the mask, however, they had extraordinarily unconventional lives. It takes Harvard professor and New Yorker writer Lepore to dig into the complicated story behind the lasso (of truth), and forgive me for sounding like Upworthy, but it's true: what she uncovers will shock you. Let's just say that Wonder Woman's SM subtext was there for a reason. Flavorwire, 25 Must-Read Books for the Fall About the Author Jill Lepore is the David Woods Kemper 41 Professor of American History at Harvard University and a staff writer at *The New Yorker*. Her *Book of Ages* was a finalist for the National Book Award. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. The Splash Page Wonder Woman is the most popular female comic-book superhero of all time. Aside from Superman and Batman, no other comic-book character has lasted as long. Like every other superhero, Wonder Woman has a secret identity. Unlike every other superhero, she also has a secret history. Superman first bounded over tall buildings in 1938. Batman began lurking in the shadows in 1939. Wonder Woman landed in her invisible plane in 1941. She was an immigrant from an island of women who had lived apart from men since the time of ancient Greece. She came to the United States to fight for peace, justice, and women's rights. She had golden bracelets; she could stop bullets. She had a magic lasso; anyone she roped had to tell the truth. To hide her identity, she disguised herself as a secretary named Diana Prince; she worked for U.S. military intelligence. Her gods were female, and so were her curses. Great Hera! she cried. Suffering Sappho! she swore. She was meant to be the strongest, smartest, bravest woman the world had ever seen. She looked like a pin-up girl. In 1942, she was recruited to the Justice Society of America, joining Superman, Batman, the Flash, and Green Lantern; she was the only woman. She wore a golden tiara, a red bustier, blue underpants, and knee-high, red leather boots. She was a little slinky; she was very kinky. Over seven decades, across continents and oceans, Wonder Woman has never been out of print. Her fans number in the millions. Generations of girls have carried their sandwiches to school in Wonder Woman lunch boxes. But not even Wonder Woman's most ardent followers know the true story of her origins. She's as secret as a heart. In an episode from 1944, a newspaper editor named Brown, desperate to discover Wonder Woman's secret past, assigns a team of reporters to chase her down. She easily escapes them, outrunning their car in her high-heeled boots, leaping like an antelope. Brown, gone half mad, suffers a breakdown and is committed to a hospital. Wonder Woman, taking pity on him, puts on a nurse's uniform and brings him a scroll. This parchment seems to be the history of that girl you call Wonder Woman! she tells him. A strange, veiled woman left it with me. Brown leaps out of bed and, not stopping to change out of his hospital johnny, races back to the city desk, where he cries out, parchment in hand, Stop the presses! I've got the history of Wonder Woman! Brown's nuts; he hasn't really got the history of Wonder Woman. All he's got is her fan legend. This book has got something else. The *Secret History of Wonder Woman* is the result of years of research in dozens of libraries, archives, and collections, including the private papers of Wonder Woman's creator, William Moulton Marston papers that have never been seen by anyone outside of Marston's family. I read the published material first: newspapers and magazines, trade journals and scientific papers, comic strips and comic books. Then I went to the archives. I didn't find anything written on parchment; I found something better: thousands of pages of documents, manuscripts and typescripts, photographs and drawings, letters and postcards, criminal court records, notes scribbled in the margins of books, legal briefs, medical records, unpublished memoirs, story drafts, sketches, student transcripts, birth certificates, adoption papers, military records, family albums, scrapbooks, lecture notes, FBI files, movie scripts, the carefully typed meeting minutes of a sex cult, and tiny diaries written in secret code. Stop the presses. I've got the history of Wonder Woman. Wonder Woman isn't only a fan princess with badass boots. She's the missing link in a chain of events that begins with the woman suffrage campaigns of the 1910s and ends with the troubled place of feminism fully a century later. Feminism made Wonder Woman. And then Wonder Woman remade feminism, which hasn't been altogether good for feminism. Superheroes, who are supposed to be better than everyone else, are excellent at clobbering people; they're lousy at fighting for equality. But Wonder Woman is no ordinary comic-book superhero. The secrets this book reveals and the story it tells place Wonder Woman not only within the history of comic books and superheroes but also at the very center of the histories of science, law, and politics. Superman owes a debt to science fiction, Batman to the hard-boiled detective. Wonder Woman's debt is to the fictional feminist utopia and to the struggle for women's rights. Her origins lie in William Moulton Marston's past, and in the lives of the women he loved; they created Wonder Woman, too. Wonder Woman is no ordinary comic-book character because Marston was no ordinary man and his family was no ordinary family. Marston was a polymath. He was an expert in deception: he invented the lie detector test. He led a secret life: he had four children by two women; they lived together under one roof. They were masters of the art of concealment. Their favorite hiding place was the comics they produced. Marston was a scholar, a professor, and a scientist; Wonder Woman began on a college campus, in a lecture hall, and in a laboratory. Marston was a lawyer and a filmmaker; Wonder Woman began in a courthouse and a movie theater. The

women Marston loved were suffragists, feminists, and birth control advocates. Wonder Woman began in a protest march, a bedroom, and a birth control clinic. The red bustier isn't the half of it. Unknown to the world, Margaret Sanger, one of the most influential feminists of the twentieth century, was part of Marston's family. Wonder Woman has been fighting for women's rights for a very long time, battles hard fought but never won. This is the story of her origins—the stuff of wonders, and of lies.