

Let Us Now—At Last—Praise Famous Women

by Zabelle Stodola

On March 8, 2018, Amisha Padnani published a column in *The New York Times* titled “How an Obits Project on Overlooked Women Was Born.”

In it, she describes how she established Overlooked, “a history project recalling the lives of those who, for whatever reason, were left out of *The Times’s* obit pages.”

As you might suspect, many of the forgotten were women, people of color, or other minorities who either achieved fame in their day or who waited for posterity to recognize them. Take Nella Larsen, the Harlem Renaissance prodigy in the 1920s and 1930s whose novel *Passing* was much lauded. Sadly, she quickly fell into obscurity during her lifetime and died alone in 1964. Or consider one of the major twentieth-century poets, Sylvia Plath, who committed suicide in 1963. Or the great twentieth-century photographer, Diane Arbus, who also took her own life, in 1971. Or Marsha P. Johnson, a transgender pioneer, who died in 1992. Or Henrietta Lacks, who died of cervical cancer in 1951, but whose cells have been used in cutting-edge medical research.

The mission statement of Overlooked states, “Since 1851, obituaries in the New York Times have been dominated by white men. Now, we’re adding the stories of other remarkable people,” including those mentioned above. It’s a late attempt to correct the fact that “who gets remembered—and how—inherently involves judgment.” This commitment to publish late obituaries of those who were Overlooked at the time they died is a regular feature in the *New York Times’s* Obituaries section. It makes fascinating reading.

You can read it for yourself here:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/08/insider/overlooked-obituary.html>