

In Praise of Difficult Women: Life Lessons From 29 Heroines Who Dared to Break the Rules

Karen Karbo

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Karen Karbo's *In Praise of Difficult Women* collects twenty-nine biographical profiles of women who have pushed back, broken the mold, or simply lived on their own terms. The women chosen are eclectic, while the narrative is researched and informed yet conversationally welcoming.

Among Karbo's distinctive roster are icons like Coco Chanel, Frida Kahlo, and Josephine Baker, and political forces Eva Perón, Angela Merkel, and Hillary Clinton. Aviation pioneer Amelia Earhart is included, as well as writer Martha Gellhorn, whose perilous work as a war correspondent was preferable to her than her combative marriage to Ernest Hemingway.

Karbo's fondness for rule breakers and benders is clear, and she defends them through character quirks and missteps—real women lead real and flawed lives. Certain profiles have extra verve, such as that of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who at eighty-five still works out in the Supreme Court gym, wears stylish collars to accessorize her formal black robe, and is brilliant yet accessible enough to merit the nickname Notorious RBG.

Karbo's Janis Joplin is feisty and poignant—not a “dulcet” 1960s folk songstress, but more of a “monster truck with a broken muffler hauling ass down a ... Southern road.” Carrie Fisher is also featured, her wit, vulnerability, and excess far more intriguing than her eternally hyped Princess Leia of *Star Wars* role.

Though the list is diverse, a common trait among Karbo's forthright females is being true to one's soul—for better or worse, but generally better. *In Praise of Difficult Women* offers many words of wisdom, including sage advice from fashion titan Diana Vreeland, who noted that the only right life to live is “the one you know you want, and you make it for yourself.”

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