

The Radium Girls: The Dark Story of America's Shinning Women

By: Kate Moore

About the book: *The Radium Girls: The Dark Story of America's Shinning Women* by Kate Moore is a bestselling nonfiction book that tells the true story of young women in the 1920s and 30s who painted watch dials with luminous radium paint, only to suffer horrific illnesses and death from radiation poisoning. The book details their fight for justice against the companies that denied responsibility, exposing corporate negligence and leading to crucial workplace safety regulations. It's a harrowing, yet inspiring, account of their courage, resilience, and the first major class-action lawsuit by women workers.

About the Author: Kate Moore is the *New York Times* and *USA Today* bestselling author of *The Radium Girls*, which won the 2017 Goodreads Choice Award for Best History, was voted U.S. librarians' favourite nonfiction book of 2017, and was named a Notable Nonfiction Book of 2018 by the American Library Association. A British writer based near Cambridge, UK, Kate writes across a variety of genres and has had multiple titles on the *Sunday Times* bestseller list. Her latest book is the *USA Today* bestseller *The Woman They Could Not Silence*, which, among other accolades, was named runner-up for Best History in the 2021 Goodreads Choice Awards and a 2021 *Booklist* Editor's Choice.

People:

- **Grace Fryer:** A leading figure who fought for years to hold the company accountable, despite being dismissed by many.
- **Katherine Schaub:** A young, aspiring writer who painted dials and subsequently faced severe health issues.
- **Mollie Maggia:** The first to die in 1922; her tragic, early death and misdiagnosed syphilis (instead of radiation poisoning) initiated the investigation.
- **Quinta McDonald & Albina Maggia:** Sisters of Mollie who also worked at the factory and suffered severe health repercussions.
- **Edna Hussman:** Another worker who joined the legal fight.
- **Ella Eckert:** A popular worker who suffered from the effects of the radium.
- **Arthur Roeder:** President of the U.S. Radium Corporation who consistently denied responsibility and claimed the women were not poisoned by their work.
- **Dr. Sabin Von Sochocky:** Founder of the USRC and inventor of the "Undark" paint who later died from his own creation.
- **Dr. Harrison Martland:** The county physician who identified the true cause of the women's illnesses, proving the connection to radium.

- **Marie Curie:** While not a direct participant, her famous discovery of radium drove the "radium mania" of the era.
- **Raymond Berry:** A lawyer who eventually took the case for the dying women.

Discussion Questions:

1. What were your overall reactions to *The Radium Girls*?
2. Which part of the book affected you the most emotionally, and why?
3. Were you familiar with this historical event before reading the book? How did the book change your understanding of it?
4. How did the author's writing style impact your experience of the story?
5. Did any particular woman's story stand out to you more than the others?
6. Which of the radium girls did you connect with the most, and why?
6. How did Moore portray the personalities and lives of the women beyond their illness?
7. What role did family and friendship play in helping the women endure their struggles?
8. How did the women show courage and resilience throughout the book?
9. In what ways did the women redefine what it meant to be "strong" or "brave"?
10. Do you think the companies knew how dangerous radium was? At what point did ignorance become negligence?
11. How did the companies prioritize profit over people?
12. Were there moments when the tragedy could have been prevented?
13. How did the behavior of the corporations compare to modern workplace safety issues?
14. Who do you feel was most responsible for what happened to the radium girls?
15. How was radium perceived by society at the time, and why was it considered "miraculous"?
16. Why do you think it took so long for doctors and scientists to acknowledge the truth about radium poisoning?
17. How did misinformation and lack of regulation contribute to the tragedy?
18. What does this story reveal about the dangers of blindly trusting scientific "advancements"?
19. How has medical ethics changed since the era described in the book?
20. How did being young working-class women affect the way the radium girls were treated?
21. In what ways were their voices dismissed because of their gender?
22. How might this story have unfolded differently if the workers had been men?
23. What does the book reveal about women's labor rights in the early 20th century?
24. How did societal expectations of women at the time influence their decisions to keep working?
25. How did the radium girls help shape modern labor laws and workplace safety standards?
26. What obstacles did the women face in their fight for justice?
27. How important was their legal battle for future generations?
28. Were you surprised by how long the court cases dragged on?
29. Do you think true justice was achieved by the end of the story?
30. Why do you think Kate Moore chose to focus so deeply on individual stories rather than just facts and dates?
31. How did the alternating stories between the New Jersey and Illinois women affect the narrative?

32. Did the level of detail help you connect more deeply, or did it ever feel overwhelming?
33. How did the inclusion of photographs and real documents influence your reading experience?
34. What parallels can you draw between this story and modern workplace safety concerns?
35. Are there industries today where workers might still be facing similar dangers?
36. How does this book change the way you think about consumer products and corporate accountability?
37. What lessons should society take from the experiences of the radium girls?
38. Why is it important that stories like this continue to be told?
39. If you could speak to one of the radium girls after finishing the book, what would you want to say to her?
40. What do you think is the most important takeaway from this book?
41. Would you recommend this book to others? Why or why not?

Read Alike:

- The great stewardess rebellion: how women launched a workplace revolution at 30,000 feet
By: McShane Wulfhart, Nell
- The girls of Atomic City: the untold story of the women who helped win World War II
By: Kiernan, Denise
- Glow By: Bryant, Megan E.
- Radium girls By: Cy