



## American Legends: The Life of Helen Keller

*Charles River Editors*

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\*Includes pictures of Helen Keller and important people in her life. \*Includes Helen's quotes on politics, religion, inspiration, and more.

\*Includes a Bibliography for further reading.

"Most people measure their happiness in terms of physical pleasure and material possession. Could they win some visible goal which they have set on the horizon, how happy they could be! Lacking this gift or that circumstance, they would be miserable. If happiness is to be so measured, I who cannot hear or see have every reason to sit in a corner with folded hands and weep. If I am happy in spite of my deprivations, if my happiness is so deep that it is a faith, so thoughtful that it becomes a philosophy of life, — if, in short, I am an optimist, my testimony to the creed of optimism is worth hearing.." – Helen Keller

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

To say Helen Keller is one of the most unique figures in American history would be an understatement. As a young child, Helen lost both her vision and hearing, leaving her deafblind, an almost hopelessly debilitating condition that left her literally trapped, unable to communicate with anyone. As she would later write, "My life was without past or future; death, the pessimist would say, 'a consummation devoutly to be wished.'" Nobody would have blamed her for being hopelessly frustrated and imprisoned by her disabilities; in fact, that was to be expected. When her famous teacher, Anne Sullivan, brought Helen a doll and tried to teach her a few words by spelling them into her hand, the child became so frustrated that she broke the doll.

As every American now knows, Helen eventually overcame the frustration and used unimaginable perseverance to overcome her disability. With Sullivan's help and the sense of touch, Helen eventually broke through and learned to communicate. Helen later recalled that after Sullivan put one of her hands in water and spelled water on the other hand, "I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten — a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me."

Helen's story would have been remarkable enough if it had ended simply with her ability to communicate with the outside world, but "I had now the key to all language, and I was eager to learn to use it." With unbridled ambition, Helen became the first deafblind individual to earn a bachelor's degree from a college, published her own autobiography when she was just 22, and in the early 20th century became famous across the world as both an author and speaker.

Naturally, Helen was a walking embodiment and advocate for people with disabilities, both the blind and deaf, but she was just as interested in other social and political causes, eventually becoming one of the most outspoken figures of her time. Those who were inspired by her story were surprised that she was willing to voice what they believed were radical beliefs on behalf of causes like women's suffrage, pacifism, and socialism. Helen also added actions to her words, founding both the Helen Keller International organization for research in vision, health and nutrition, and helping found the American Civil Liberties Union.

American Legends: The Life of Helen Keller chronicles the amazing life and work of one of America's most famous women, explaining how she suffered and overcame her disabilities. Along with pictures of important people, places, and events in her life, you will learn about Helen Keller like you never have before, in no time at all.

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