

# Important people every geographer should know

## Bruno Latour (1947-2022)

Latour was a French sociologist and anthropologist whose work on science and technology in society heavily influenced geography. In questioning the divide between nature and culture, Latour championed Actor Network Theory. This emerged in the late 1990s and asserted that nonhuman things have agency like humans. Latour passed away in October 2022 – you can read his obituary [here](#).

## Michel Foucault (1926-1984)

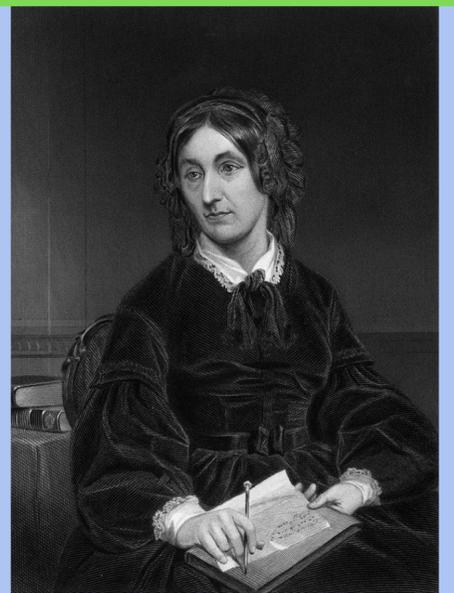
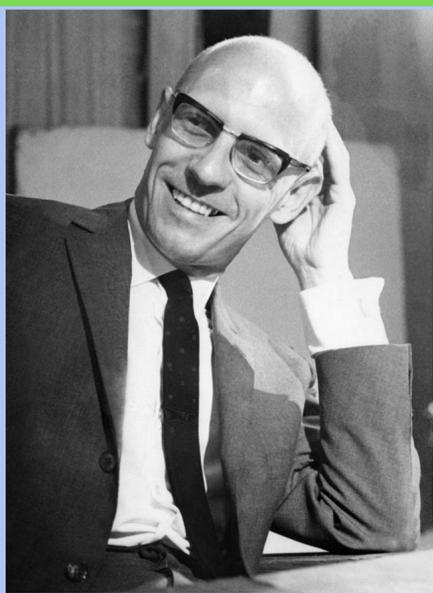
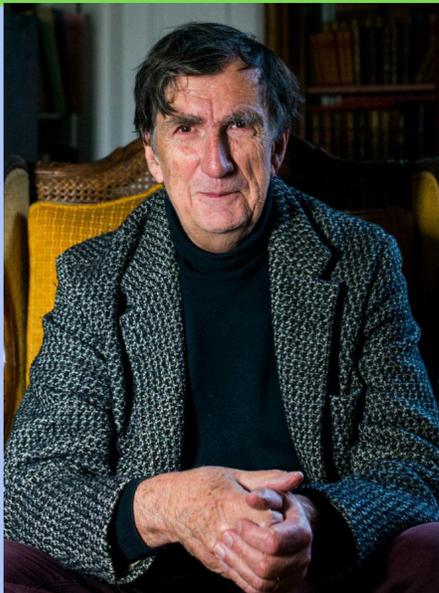
Foucault's most influential philosophical work centred around the relationship between power and knowledge and how both combine to exert social control. His theory of 'biopower' describes how governments control their populations – it has been applied to concepts ranging from migration to reproductive justice by geographers. You can see a dictionary of some of Foucault's key concepts [here](#).

## Judith Butler (1956-)

Butler is an American gender theorist and philosopher, whose ideas about gender as a social construct heavily influenced early feminist geographies and queer theory. Butler has critiqued the terms 'gender' and 'sex', reflected on the experiences of intersex people and argued that we must resist the violence imposed by gender norms. You can read an interview with them [here](#).

## Mary Somerville (1780-1872)

Somerville had a strange upbringing – she was taught to read by her mother but couldn't write so mainly educated herself through her family library. Her textbook *Physical Geography* was published in 1848, the first of its kind in English. Nevertheless, her contribution to geography – and many other disciplines – is often ignored in favour of her contemporaries (Alexander von Humboldt and Charles Lyell, for example).



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## Mary Kingsley (1862-1900)

Kingsley was a complex woman, who played many roles in her short lifetime, from the dutiful daughter to the intrepid, self-proclaimed 'voyager'. As a single, childless woman in patriarchal Victorian Britain, her exploration – which became *Travels in West Africa* (1897) – appeared incredibly courageous. However, Kingsley held racist views about the African people she encountered and advocated against women being admitted to the Royal Geographical Society. Felix Driver and Dea Birkett have written extensively on geographical exploration and Mary Kingsley – check out their work if you'd like to find out more.



## Doreen Massey (1944-2016)

You may already be familiar with Massey's *A Global Sense of Place* (1991), where she argued that places are dynamic and imbued with multiple meanings and identities. Massey has been influenced by economic, feminist and Marxist geographers and has drawn attention to the differentiated effects of globalisation based on gender, class and race.

## Gillian Rose (1962-)

Rose is a cultural geographer who used to be the Head of the School of Geography and the Environment in Oxford. Her first book – *Feminism and Geography: The Limits to Geographical Knowledge* (1993) – was a seminal text in feminist geographies. Now, she looks at digital technologies, urban spaces and contemporary visual methodologies. As part of this, she has explored everyday places, such as shopping malls as well as smart cities.





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## Ingrid Pollard (1953-)

Pollard is a British artist and photographer, who was born in Guyana. Her 1988 photo series Pastoral Interludes conveyed how people of colour feel out of place and intimidated in the British countryside. By becoming the photographer, and photographing herself in the landscape of the Lake District, Pollard challenged the assumption that Black people only exist in urban spaces. In 2018, she became the photographer for the Colonial Countryside: Reinterpreting English Country Houses project and was nominated for the Turner Prize in 2022.

## Corinne Fowler

Fowler is Professor of Colonialism and Heritage at the University of Leicester and is perhaps best known for her 2020 book Green Unpleasant Land: Creative Responses to Rural England’s Colonial Connections. Her work with the National Trust has drawn criticism and anger from some politicians, journalists and right-wing historians, who have accused her of ‘wokery’ for highlighting the connections between colonialism and our landscape. Nevertheless, Fowler is set to publish a new book – The Countryside: Ten Walks Through Colonial Britain – in 2023 and continues to give talks across the country.

## Hans Rosling (1948-2017)

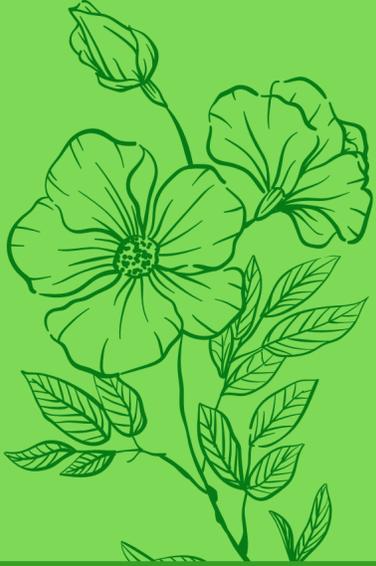
Hans Rosling was a Swedish academic whose bestseller Factfulness (2018) aimed to change pessimistic conceptions of the world by showing how life is getting better for the poorest. His clever manipulation of data and data visualisation, as part of the Gapminder Foundation, made Rosling a popular public speaker, with his talks garnering millions of views on YouTube (our fave is [here](#)). Despite this, Rosling started his life as a doctor, and promoted a public health approach to poverty.

## Katherine McKittrick (1970-)

McKittrick is a Canadian professor of Gender Studies who has long championed the importance of intersectionality in feminist geographies. McKittrick has challenged traditional geographic research techniques by utilising poetry, music and other creative media to re-centre Blackness in academia. Her 2006 book Demonic Grounds explored Black women’s sense of place, as it relates to the ongoing violence of slavery and oppression.



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## Tim Cresswell (1965-)

Cresswell is a human geographer and poet whose work centres around differentiated mobilities and the interconnection between mobility, place and power. He defines mobility through 3 aspects: physical movement, representations of movement and the experienced and embodied practice of movement (2010). Cresswell has also explored the so-called 'mobilities turn' of the 1990s, arguing that we too often focus on high-tech, large-scale forms of mobility (2011). *Geographic Thought* (2013) explores the history of Geography as a discipline.

## Frantz Fanon (1925-1961)

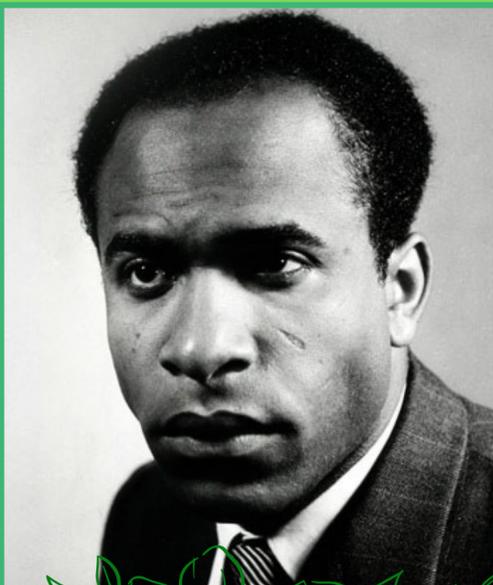
Fanon was a psychiatrist born in the French colony of Martinique in 1925. After witnessing the mental illnesses triggered by the Algerian war of independence, he devised a theory about decolonisation. This became *The Wretched of the Earth* (1965?), which went on to inspire liberation struggles across the Global South, from South Africa to the US. Aimé Césaire – a leader of the Negritude movement and prominent Marxist intellectual – taught Fanon when he was young. We found [this summary](#) of *The Wretched of the Earth* to be very helpful and clear.

## Yi-Fu Tuan (1930-2022)

Tuan was perhaps the most significant humanistic geographer, with his 1977 work *Space and Place* encouraging us to consider the relationship between people and the world through "the perspective of experience". Therefore, Tuan advocated for the use of qualitative methods (e.g., observation, interviews and oral histories) in Geography, to better understand people's emotions and affective connections or responses to their environments. He also argued for a perspective of landscapes as a 'way of seeing'.

## Ellen Churchill Semple (1863-1932)

Semple was the first female president of the Association of American Geographers and strongly influenced by Friedrich Ratzel. Although most known for her interest in environmental determinism, which replicates the idea of racial determination through 'nature', her commitment to teaching and travel was astounding. Furthermore, Semple's first book *American History and Its Geographic Condition* shaped how American history was taught until the 1950s, whilst her ideas continue to influence Geographers today.



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## David Harvey (1935-)

Harvey is a Marxist economic geographer and was prominent in the rise of radical geographies in the 1970s-1990s and later urban geography too. He has explored the idea of the right to the city and how capitalism intersects with and dictates the production of space, emphasising inequality and poverty. His work is heavily critiqued, and Harvey remains one of the few geographers to strongly adopt Marxist thinking. Harvey was one of the first contributors to the journal *Antipode*.

## Patricia Daley

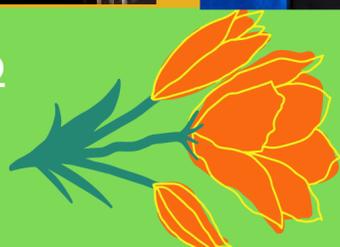
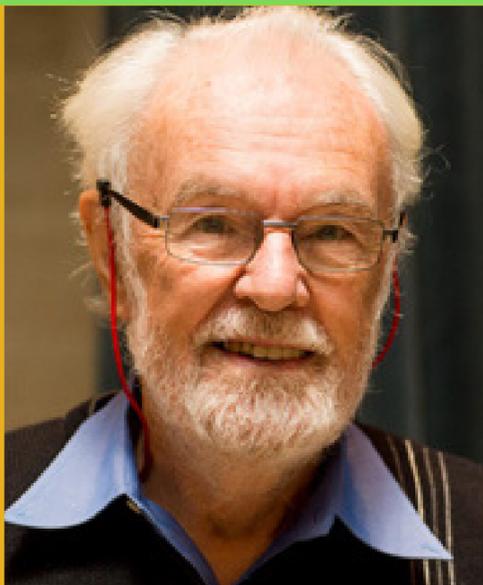
When Prof Daley moved to the University of Oxford in 1996, she became the first black woman to be appointed a lecturer at Oxford. Since then, her work has focused around migration, citizenship, feminist geopolitics, political ecology and racial violence. We found her chapter in *Rhodes Must Fall* (2018) and her book *Gender and Genocide in Burundi* (2008) to be particularly interesting and relevant to undergraduate geographers. Watch a short speech she gave [here](#).

## Pat Noxolo

Noxolo is currently a senior lecturer in Human Geography at the University of Birmingham. Her research interests include development geography and postcolonial theory, and she was the first Black editor of *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* – an esteemed journal. Noxolo describes herself as an African-Caribbean Brummie and she has used discursive and literary approaches in her work. You can hear more about it [here](#).

## Halford Mackinder (1861-1947)

Mackinder is regarded as the founding father of geopolitics and he established the School of Geography at the University of Oxford. Mackinder is well known for his 'Heartland Theory', in which he divides up the world and argues that control of Eastern Europe was vital to control of the world. In an effort to prove his masculinity and credentials, Mackinder scaled Mount Kenya in 1899, murdering his African porters in the process. Mackinderian thinking continues to influence Putin and his cronies, with its overt environmental determinism and colonial logics.





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## Edward Said (1935-2003)

You cannot escape Said's seminal text *Orientalism* (1978) at Oxford! Whilst a difficult text to grasp – we recommend using a study guide as you go along – *Orientalism* was the trigger for decades of postcolonial scholarship. Its main idea surrounds a divide between “East” (which is portrayed as exotic and barbaric) and “West” (which is supposedly the home of civilisation and scientific knowledge). This became relevant particularly after 9/11, as the USA constructed the Middle East as a security threat. Said was born in Palestine.

## Homi K. Bhabha (1949-)

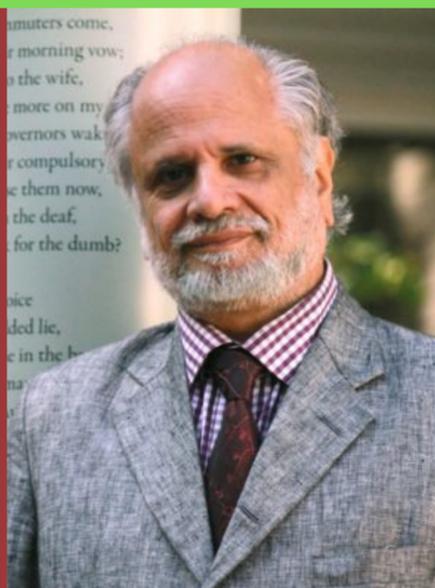
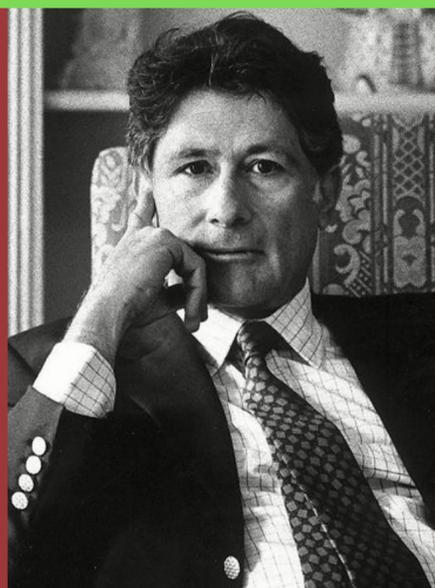
Bhabha is an Indian-British scholar and one of the most important figures in contemporary postcolonial studies and poststructuralism. His theory of hybridity describes the mixing of two separate things/cultures to make a new, third thing during colonial rule. Hybridisation takes many forms, creating an ambiguous ‘thirdspace’ which challenges the idea of culture as homogenous and unifying.

## Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1942-)

Spivak is best known for her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) which argues that it's difficult for the marginalised to find their voices without adopting western ways of thinking or becoming homogenous. The marginalised subaltern subject is always defined via his or her difference from the elites. By arguing against a singular Eurocentric subject, Spivak was hailed as a co-founder of postcolonial theory. However, her work has been criticised as too difficult to understand, so for a summary look [here](#).

## Stuart Hall (1932-2014)

Hall was born in Jamaica but travelled to the UK as part of the Windrush generation to become a Rhodes Scholar in 1951. Hall viewed culture as always a place of interpretive struggle, and embodied experience rather than an abstract concept. His thinking was informed by Marxist perspectives, Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Althusser's view of the media as a means through which an agenda is subtly enforced. You can see a great summary of Hall's work [here](#).



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## Paul Gilroy (1956-)

Gilroy has been described by The Guardian (2021) as 'one of Britain's most influential scholars'. In his book *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, Hall argued that racism was intertwined with nationalism in Britain. But it was his following work, *The Black Atlantic* (1993) which was most influential, arguing that there is a long, complex history of African-diasporic intellectual culture that is specifically transnational. This contests the view of Black cultures as marginalised or derived from white cultures. You can read why Gilroy's work is more important than ever [here](#).

## Naomi Klein (1970-)

Klein is a Canadian activist and author, whose first book on anti-globalisation, *No Logo* (1999), brought her international acclaim. Her parents emigrated from the US to Canada due to their resistance to the Vietnam War, and Klein has continued this legacy of radicalism. *This Changes Everything* (2014) argued that the capitalist world system and countries' emphasis on economic growth will prevent climate change mitigation from being successful.

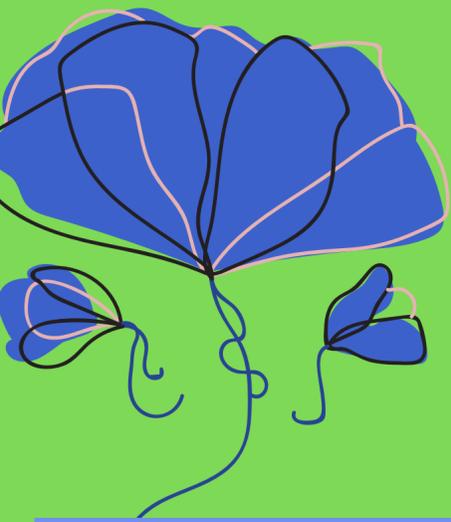
## Dambisa Moyo (1969-)

Moyo is a Zambian-born economist, whose book *Dead Aid* (2009) argued that government-to-government foreign aid has done more harm than good to the people of Africa. This is because it has fostered dependency, encouraged corruption and perpetuated the cycle of poverty. Moyo received a life peerage in October 2022.

## Nicholas Kristof (1959-)

Kristof is an American journalist, progressive and the winner of two Pulitzer Prizes. After being appalled at the lack of media coverage on some of the most common issues of our time – namely sex trafficking, maternal mortality and gender-based violence – Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn co-wrote *Half the Sky* (2009). This was not just a call to arms, but included the testimonies of enslaved women from across the world. Sign up to his free newsletter [here](#).





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## Akala (1983-)

Akala is a rapper and poet by day, but turned his hand to issues of race and class in Britain in his 2018 book *Natives*. Here, he carefully weaves together biography with socialist and Pan-African thought to directly confront British denial towards its colonial legacies. It is vital reading for any geographer.

## Paul Vidal de la Blache (1845-1918)

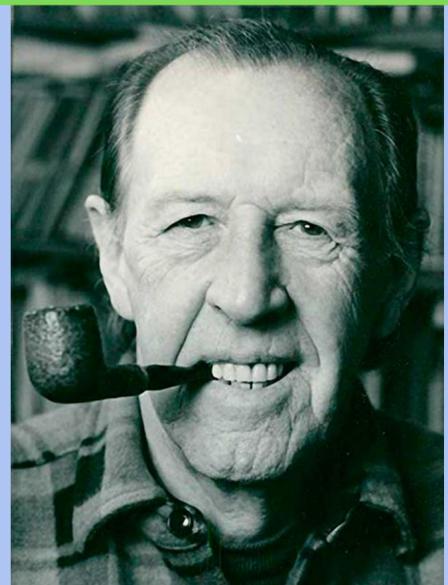
Vidal was a key proponent of French regional geography, which argued that France was divided up into distinctive, unique regions marked by differences in everything from climate to cuisine. Although regional geography fell out of favour quite quickly, Vidal influenced humanistic geographers of the mid-1970s with his *genres de vie* (patterns of living associated with unique cultures).

## Arturo Escobar (1952-)

Escobar is a Colombian-American anthropologist whose 1995 book *Encountering Development* criticised development programs as neo-colonial. He cites Harry Truman (1949) as a proponent of the idea of the 'third world' which needs the help of rich countries to develop through capital, science and technology. Escobar also analysed the idea of 'hunger' as an easy, obvious focus of development discourses, which portray African subjects especially as dehumanised.

## Raymond Williams (1921-1988)

Williams was a Welsh socialist writer who disrupted his studies at Cambridge University to enlist in the British Army. His 1977 chapter on *Structures of feeling* argued that culture can be conceived as a web of linkages, or social experiences in solution, which are always vying to emerge at any one time in history. This concept has been significant in reconceptualising modernity and landscape.





# Important people every geographer should know

13 CLIMATE ACTION



## Michael E. Mann (1965-)

Mann is an American climatologist who is best known for the 'hockey stick graph' (1999) which showed how global temperatures rose exponentially in the 20th century. Mann has contributed towards IPCC reports with his work on paleoclimates and climate proxies. We highly recommend his 2021 book *The New Climate War*, as it gives a clear history of the 'culture wars' behind climate change.

## Christina Lamb (1965-)

Lamb is a journalist and chief foreign correspondent for The Sunday Times. She has reported extensively from Afghanistan and Pakistan and became the first female former undergraduate of University College, Oxford to be elected an Honorary Fellow. Although she is perhaps better known for her account of Malala Yousafzai's life, Lamb's *Our Bodies, Their Battlefield* (2020) describes the ubiquity of rape as a weapon of war and devastation.

Read a review of the book here: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/mar/08/our-bodies-their-battlefield-christina-lamb-review-women-war-rape-victims>

## Heather Viles

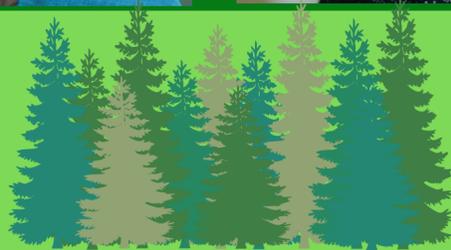
Viles is a professor of Biogeomorphology and Heritage Conservation at the University of Oxford, whose research has centred around the application of science to heritage conservation (e.g., English cathedrals). She currently runs the Oxford Resilient Buildings and Landscapes lab (OxRBL) and remains interested in using new technologies in geomorphology research. Viles was awarded the Founder's Medal by the RGS in 2020.

## Robert J. Whittaker

Described by our committee as the 'OG biogeographer', Prof Whittaker has published over 150 articles and several books on ecology, botany and biodiversity. He has been at Oxford University since 1986 and has become an authority on the ecology of the Krakatau Islands in Indonesia.



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## Amilcar Cabral (1924-1973)

Cabral helped lead Guinea-Bissau to independence, and his Marxism-infused thought made him a leading African intellectual of the 20th century. Starting off by organising workers' strikes, Cabral and fellow members of the PAIGC shifted their fight for independence to the countryside, where they could employ guerrilla-style tactics. Cabral was assassinated shortly before the country achieved independence, and his brother became the first president. His ideas of 're-Africanising' the country through culture as the key to national liberation have been highly influential for subsequent postcolonial scholars.

## Ania Loomba

Loomba is an Indian literary scholar who has contributed significantly to the field of postcolonial thought. She suggests that postcolonialism is not just the moment in time following the demise of colonialism, but the contestation of colonial domination and its enduring legacies (Loomba, 1998). Loomba argues, therefore, that postcoloniality works in different ways in different parts of the world.

## Rachel Carson (1907-1964)

Carson was an American marine biologist who is best known for her book *Silent Spring* (1962). This outlined the detrimental effects of pesticides like DDT on the environment, which helped to launch the environmental movement. Carson heavily criticised the chemical industry for intentionally misleading the public, despite evidence of cancer and other illnesses caused by pesticides. As such, corporations like DuPont tried to prevent the book from being publicised.

