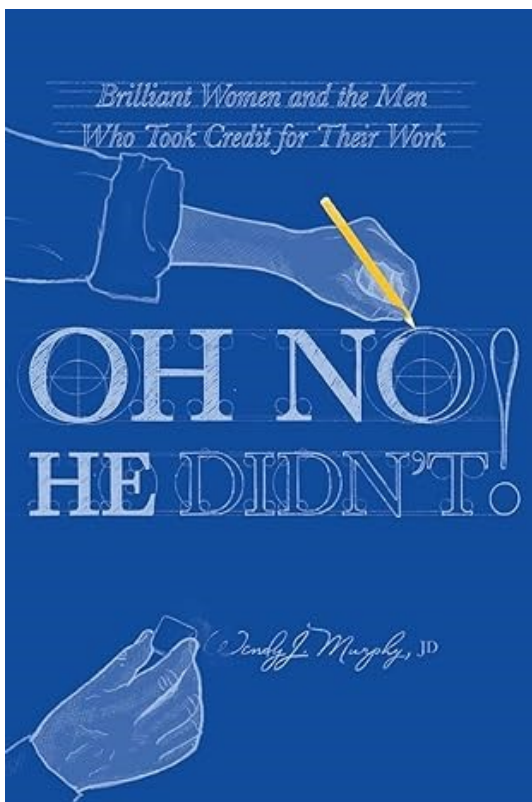


# With new book, attorney credits women ‘robbed’ of discoveries over time by men

Book review by R. Marc Kantrowitz, November 1, 2024

## “Oh No He Didn’t! Brilliant Women and the Men Who Took Credit for Their Work”

by Wendy J. Murphy, Cynren Press; September 2024; \$20; 266 pages



For those of us (lawyerly disclaimer) who know Wendy Murphy, the word “gutsy” comes to mind, which she proves on page 2 of the introduction to her book. There, she names names — of the well-known TV reporter who shamelessly stole her scoop while working as a commentator for NBC (you’ll have to buy the book to find out who), and the attorney who hired her and another (a male) to give a talk on Title IX regulations. She was lied to and stiffed on her small fee, unlike her male counterpart.

I wish she had continued naming the sinners when she wrote about a judge ordering her into court despite the fact that she gave birth two days earlier, or another judge who refused a 15-minute break so that she could breastfeed

her baby, explaining that “we don’t take breaks for that.”

I’d like to think that we’ve come a long way since those regrettable days and bigotries.

“Oh No He Didn’t!” is a relatively short and easy-to-read collection of stories of women through the ages who have been robbed of their discoveries by men taking the credit. Fortunately, over time, recognition in these cases has been properly accorded, though often sadly far too late with death interceding.

Take, for instance, the well-known and popular board game “Monopoly.” Invented as “The Landlord’s Game” by Elizabeth Magie in the late 1800s, she aimed to disavow greed. In 1934, Charles Darrow happened upon it and liked it so much that he stole it, making a few simple changes along the way.

Soon, Parker Brothers came calling and made a deal with Darrow, even helping him secure a patent, despite the fact that Magie already had one.

As a mass-produced entity, it sold an astonishing 35,000 games per week. When Parker Brothers became suspicious about Darrow’s claim that he was the sole inventor, he was questioned about how he arrived at the concept and gave incongruous answers. With a little digging, Magie came to the game company’s attention.

Magie was essentially paid off and, unfortunately, faded into the background as Darrow made millions and remained credited with inventing the game. Magie died in 1948, with few knowing of her creation.

When a college professor created a similar game in the 1970s called “Anti-Monopoly,” Parker Brothers sued, setting the stage for a decade-long legal battle. In the end, the truth came out, with Magie posthumously given her due.

Science has been ripe for rip-offs. While Eunice Foote made great discoveries concerning climate change, John Tyndall took the credit. Foote was a pioneer, the first to attend college on equal footing with men, the first woman to have a scientific paper presented at a prestigious conference, and the first woman to have a research paper published in a peer-reviewed scientific journal.

In 1859, Tyndall, a scientist himself, confirmed Foote’s discovery three years earlier but failed to acknowledge her, claiming full credit for himself. His deception wasn’t discovered until 2010.

While Tyndall received great recognition for his (and her) work, Foote — from the grave — may take solace from a 2023 episode of the game show “Jeopardy,” naming her as the person who discovered the greenhouse effect.

Still in the science realm, Otto Hahn received the Nobel Prize in 1944 for his work on nuclear fission. Lise Meitner, an Austrian physicist, might well have been the rightful recipient or at least a co-winner.

Meitner worked with Hahn for three decades and not only contributed much to their research but well might have been the driving force. Despite the snub, Meitner still received much acclaim for her scientific brilliance. But the big prize, the Nobel, eluded her despite her being nominated an astonishing 49 times.

Some of the stories told are familiar ones such as the “Big Eye” paintings, which were for a time very popular, some selling for as much as \$50,000. While Margaret Keane drew them, her handsome, charismatic and artistically challenged husband, Walter, claimed that he was, in fact, the true artist. She went along with the deception due to threats and coercion.

While she worked throughout the day drawing, Walter spent much of the time carousing. In 1965, she finally divorced him and later set the record straight on a radio show, which enraged Walter.

To settle the dispute, Margaret challenged him to a well-publicized public paint-off that Walter blew off. She sued him and in a scene worthy of a courtroom drama, the judge ordered an in-court demonstration. It took an hour for Margaret to produce her signature painting, while Walter begged off, complaining of shoulder pain. The jury awarded her \$4 million, which Walter never paid.

In 2014, Amy Adams portrayed Margaret in the Tim Burton film “Big Eyes.”

“Oh No He Didn’t!” even includes an “Oh Yes He Did!” example with the case of architects Denise Scott Brown and her supportive husband, Robert Venturi. They designed, taught and wrote together and formed a highly regarded firm, which was rewarded the distinguished Pritzker Prize in 1991.

Only Robert would be recognized, though, despite his request that Denise be included as his equal. An angered Denise refused to attend the ceremony.

In 2013, a Harvard Graduate School of Design group gathered 20,000 signatures asking that the snub be rectified. It wasn't. She did, however, garner other prestigious awards.

From windshield wipers, disposable diapers, hair straighteners and leprosy treatments to signal flares, pulsar stars, circular saws and other discoveries, women saw their contributions either stolen or ignored. Those injustices are addressed and corrected in Murphy's concise and lively "Oh No He Didn't!"

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