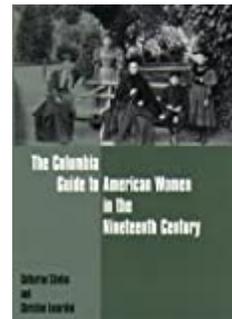




Catherine Clinton, Christine Lunardini. *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century.* Columbia Guides to American History and Cultures. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. 364 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-10920-8.



Reviewed by Heidi Campbell-Shoaf (Curator, Historical Society of Frederick County, Maryland)

Published on H-Women (March, 2001)

A Primer for Nineteenth Century American Women's History

A Primer for Nineteenth Century American Women's History

As a young student of women's history during the era in which the field was growing by leaps and bounds, but had not yet made its full presence felt in all institutions of higher learning, necessity forced me to read extensively beyond my course textbooks. Though I voraciously devoured new and old works on the subject of women's history there was always this nagging bit of uncertainty that I must most assuredly be missing something. Had I read all the germinal texts, the insightful monographs, and the interesting biographies? There was really no certain way to know. Thankfully, Clinton and Lunardini have saved future women's historians of the nineteenth century some of that same apprehension.

The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century provides the tools for constructing a sturdy foundation for students interested in the changing status of women during a pivotal time in our nation's history. The book is divided into four sections, each with its own distinct style and purpose.

Part one begins with an historiographical essay that helps the reader understand the process of women's history. It provides insight on how the discipline developed, how scholars emerged and how they created theories that have become synonymous with nineteenth century women's history. Those who are advanced in their study of women's history will find this to be a thorough review of authors and texts they have already read or perused. Those who are new to the field will find this section enlightening as well as useful in directing future reading. The remainder of the first section is dedicated to a narrative overview of women's history divided into topical and chronological sections from the post-Revolutionary era to the turn of the twentieth century.

The second section of the book is a mini-encyclopedia or glossary of names and terms that are significant to the study of women in the 1800s. To be even more helpful to the reader, the authors highlighted these same terms with bold lettering in the narrative section of the book, thus creating a sort of cross-reference. This helps one put the word or name into context beyond just a short definition.

The third section of the book is a chronology of women's history beginning in 1783 and ending in 1920. Most years have multiple entries addressing the fight for women's rights, notable women's firsts, and milestones in the lives of prominent women of the era.

The fourth and final section of the book may be the most useful to students. Entitled "Resources," it is a lengthy, annotated bibliography of sources for further research. Everything from standard book-length studies arranged topically, to reference books, archival holdings, electronic resources (including CD-ROMs and web pages), and even novels and movies are included in this section. >From this vantagepoint one can appreciate the wide array of work that has already been done and note what areas still need fleshing out.

The book capably meets its goal of providing a readable overview of nineteenth century women's history and its historiography up to the present. Most people who have studied women's history at the graduate level will already be familiar with the information imparted in Clinton and Lunardini's book. Though a quick read will provide even these students with a sense of where they are in their ongoing study of the subject and perhaps remind them of a book or resource they have yet to examine.

By far, however, this book is of greatest use for individuals starting out in women's history and for those of other disciplines who need a background or reference source for nineteenth century women's issues and ac-

complishments. It is written in a way that enables one to pick up the book and easily find an answer without having to read it cover to cover. At the same time the narrative section lends itself well to either continuous reading or the review of a select section. This characteristic makes *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century* a strong candidate for use as a classroom text.

One noticeable omission within the text is that of the experiences of northern women during the Civil War. Though the authors do mention the work of Sanitary and Christian Commission workers and battlefield nurses, women's lives on the northern home front get very little attention. The authors cannot be blamed for this shortcoming as the scholarship has yet to provide us with a similar variety of information about northern women that we now have for southern women.

The other shortcomings of the book can be attributed to the copyeditors and publisher. On several occasions, mostly at the beginning of the book and notably more often in the paragraph-length overview at the start of chapters, typographical errors, omitted words, and non-sequiturs are too obvious to miss notice. This was somewhat of a surprise in a work published by such an established and respected institution. Hopefully, these errors will be corrected in future editions.

Finally, as this work is of most use for students starting out in the field of women's history, a less expensive paperback version of the book would be of utmost utility.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-women>

Citation: Heidi Campbell-Shoaf. Review of Clinton, Catherine; Lunardini, Christine, *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century*. H-Women, H-Net Reviews. March, 2001.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=5051>

Copyright © 2001 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.