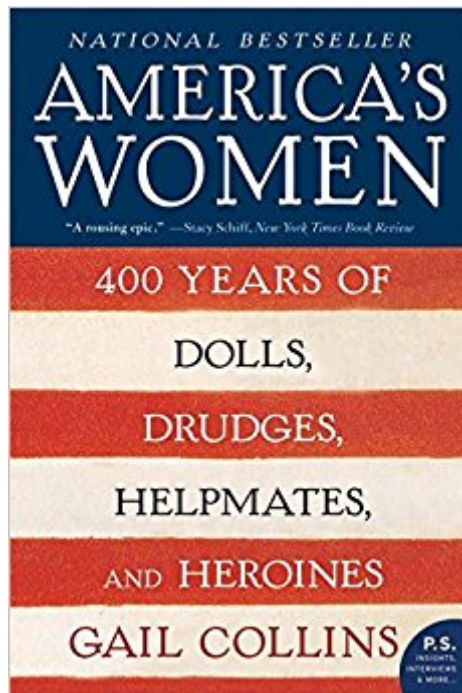




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America's Women: 400 Years Of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, And Heroines (P.S.)



Synopsis

America's Women tells the story of more than four centuries of history. It features a stunning array of personalities, from the women peering worriedly over the side of the Mayflower to feminists having a grand old time protesting beauty pageants and bridal fairs. Courageous, silly, funny, and heartbreaking, these women shaped the nation and our vision of what it means to be female in America. By culling the most fascinating characters -- the average as well as the celebrated -- Gail Collins, the editorial page editor at the New York Times, charts a journey that shows how women lived, what they cared about, and how they felt about marriage, sex, and work. She begins with the lost colony of Roanoke and the early southern "tobacco brides" who came looking for a husband and sometimes -- thanks to the stupendously high mortality rate -- wound up marrying their way through three or four. Spanning wars, the pioneering days, the fight for suffrage, the Depression, the era of Rosie the Riveter, the civil rights movement, and the feminist rebellion of the 1970s, America's Women describes the way women's lives were altered by dress fashions, medical advances, rules of hygiene, social theories about sex and courtship, and the ever-changing attitudes toward education, work, and politics. While keeping her eye on the big picture, Collins still notes that corsets and uncomfortable shoes mattered a lot, too. "The history of American women is about the fight for freedom," Collins writes in her introduction, "but it's less a war against oppressive men than a struggle to straighten out the perpetually mixed message about women's roles that was accepted by almost everybody of both genders." Told chronologically through the compelling stories of individual lives that, linked together, provide a complete picture of the American woman's experience, America's Women is both a great read and a landmark work of history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Last September in Fast Company magazine, there was a brief commentary on this book which caught my eye. It cited a number of historical facts of which I had previously been unaware. For example:1. In 1637 in Virginia, Ann Fowler was sentenced to 20 lashes after she suggested that Adam Thorowgood (a county justice) could "Kiss my arse." The state's General Assembly then ruled that husbands would no longer be liable for damages caused by their outspoken wives.2. During the 18th century in Pennsylvania's Brandywine Valley, impoverished single women with children were required to wear a P (for pauper) when appearing in public.3. In the 19th century during Civil War era, about 80% of the reading public was female.4. "In World War II, 1,000 women pilots flew 60 million miles -- mostly in experimental jets and planes grounded for safety reasons --and often towed targets past lines of inexperienced gunners. Then [they] would get arrested for leaving base wearing slacks after dark."As Collins examines four centuries of historical material, much (most?) of it is probably unfamiliar to most readers. In process, she focuses on various "dolls, drudges, helpmates, and heroines" and their diverse contributions -- both positive and negative -- to the evolution of American history. Although Collins is renowned for her work as a journalist (editorial page editor of the New York Times), she displays in this volume all of the skills of an accomplished historian as well as those of a cultural anthropologist. Also, she's a terrific storyteller.I wholly agree with Ellen Chesler (who reviewed this book in The New York Times) that "vast scholarship on women has dramatically reshaped academic thinking about American history....

Forget Hillary Clinton, Madonna, Queen Latifah, and Diane Sawyer. Today's media magnets are nothing compared to the forthright ladies and rustic women who helped create the United States of America. The names we should know are Eleanor Dare, Temperance Flowerdew, the Brent sisters, Mary Johnson, Susan Blunt, Eliza Lucas, Phillis Wheatley, Deborah Sampson Gannett, Sarah Hale, Katy Ferguson, Maria Chapman, Mary Ann Bickerdyke, and Jane Addams, to name just a few of the thousand women Gail Collins has put on display in the seductive and sprawling historical romp AMERICA'S WOMEN. From the Victorian age to the Age of Aquarius, this ambitious volume brings to life the brave, selfless and patriotic ladies who stood in front of, on top of, in spite of and sometimes even behind the men America still stubbornly celebrates as the sole defenders of freedom. So richly filled with newly uncovered historical fact and biographical detail, the book is a

fantastic time machine, beginning in braless 1587 and ending in the bra-burning era of 1960-1970. Collins's effort is unique because it is not just another encyclopedic listing of famous women of the ages that choke our library shelves. With a diary quote opening each section, AMERICA'S WOMEN relies on the original sources to tell the tales, interspersed with spicy and informative editorialization from Collins. "One of the tricks to being a great historical figure is to leave behind as much information as possible," the author explains, revealing that primary source material was drawn from the New Englanders' "winning habit of keeping diaries."

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