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Revolutionary Mothers: Women In The Struggle For America's Independence



Synopsis

The American Revolution was a home-front war that brought scarcity, bloodshed, and danger into the life of every American. In this groundbreaking history, Carol Berkin shows us how women played a vital role throughout the conflict. The women of the Revolution were most active at home, organizing boycotts of British goods, raising funds for the fledgling nation, and managing the family business while struggling to maintain a modicum of normalcy as husbands, brothers and fathers died. Yet Berkin also reveals that it was not just the men who fought on the front lines, as in the story of Margaret Corbin, who was crippled for life when she took her husband's place beside a cannon at Fort Monmouth. This incisive and comprehensive history illuminates a fascinating and unknown side of the struggle for American independence.

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Customer Reviews

Confronting "the gender amnesia that surrounds the American Revolution," historian Berkin (*A Brilliant Solution: Inventing the American Constitution*) offers a lively account of women's various roles in the long, bloody conflict. Early forms of resistance included boycotting British cloth--and thus dusting off retired spinning wheels--and tea as women used "their purchasing power as a political weapon." As the conflict became a war in city streets and the neighboring countryside, houses became war zones; ordinary women often served as spies, saboteurs and couriers. Camp followers (often soldiers' wives) provided logistical support (cooking, washing, sewing, nursing, finding supplies) and occasionally even fought; prostitutes kept up soldiers' sexual (and social) morale. Generals' wives, "admired while the ordinary camp followers were often scorned," accompanied

their husbands in different style; they boosted morale with dinner parties and dancing. Berkin reaches beyond white "American" women to chart the experiences of Loyalist women ("targets of Revolutionary governments eager to confiscate the property of... traitors"), Native American women (for whom "an American victory would have... tragic consequences") and African-American women (whose "loyalties were to their own future, not to Congress or to king"). First-person accounts lend immediacy and freshness to a lucidly written, well-researched account that is neither a romantic version of "a quaint and harmless war" nor "an effort to stand traditional history on its head." Agent, Dan Green. (Feb.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Historian Berkin begins with the premise that American women's participation in the struggle for independence was not restricted to such celebrated figures as Abigail Adams, Martha Washington, Betsy Ross, and the apocryphal Molly Pitcher. Although conventional histories have traditionally been limited to chronicling the heroic exploits of a handful of women as opposed to masses of men, in truth the creation of a new nation required the active involvement of countless numbers of females. The author has subdivided these many stories into chapters recounting the experiences of women who protested against English policy, women who toiled on the homefront, women who followed the army, generals' wives, Loyalist women, Native American women, and African American women. What eventually emerges is a splendid overview of the remarkable contributions made by a cultural cross section of women during the course of the American Revolution. Margaret Flanagan Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a really enjoyable book, one that even non-History buffs will enjoy; such as students. At first it looks kind of dull, but Berkin does a really good job of describing aspects of the Revolutionary War that are not often touched upon; these include camp wives (destitute and poor women who followed the soldiers around) and areas of rape that women may have faced and how it was portrayed in the newspapers against either side. One nice aspect is comparing British Camps to American camps, different treatments and philosophies. It is a pretty powerful narrative into a side of the war that is never thought about or discussed, but done with a large number of primary source documents that help to eliminate the element of Berkin "making up" a narrative about the events; rather, from the perspective of the women who lived it and their own journals, letters, and notes.

Revolutionary Mothers is an overview of the role women played in the revolutionary war. Since it was a home front war, American women were very close with the events. Among other roles, some acted as spies or messengers, organized funds for the troops, took care of homes and businesses while the men were away, or were actively involved in battles. Revolutionary Mothers is a short, fairly general overview of the topic at hand. I think it is most suitable as supplemental material for a history course or as an introduction to the topic. I would have appreciated more depth to some sections, but perhaps the material was too scarce for this to be possible. Because of this, the book does not have much of a narrative structure and I found it hard to retain interest while reading. That being said, Berkin's prose is easy to grasp. She never ventures into the territory of academic jargon. Of all the chapters, I found the one on Native American women to be the most enthralling. The material Berkin presents was entirely new to me, and I had never seen it covered in any of the numerous United States history courses I've taken over the years. I would recommend Revolutionary Mothers for people looking to learn about women's role in the Revolutionary war and how the war impacted women.

I love this book. It covers women's contributions leading up to and throughout the American revolution. From the wealthiest ladies to the poorest and enslaved women and their everyday strength and endurance during war. Myths are dispelled, and true heroes are revealed. Wonderful!

This is the second book I've read by Carol Berkin ("Brilliant Solution"), and the pattern that emerges in those two is that she isn't unnecessarily long-winded and her writing is very easy to follow. "Revolutionary Mothers" isn't a 5-star book because it's a brief survey of the topic that breaks no new ground. But it's a book that can be read in a couple of days, and because of how well it's organized, you'll have a strong understanding of the various roles women played during the American Revolution. Berkin provides nice background to gender roles and expectations prior to the conflict with Britain, and then she discusses the stories of women living in the colonies during the war -- housewives, loyalists, spies, African-Americans, native Americans, etc. It's clear from the length of the book and the amount of context she provides that primary-source materials from women of that era are not readily available. In fact, the chapter on African-American women is almost entirely context, but then, slave women in the 1770s weren't keeping diaries or writing letters. This book included some stuff I knew and plenty that I didn't know about women during the Revolutionary period and put all of it in one easy-to-read place, compiled by a respected historian. It would appeal to almost anyone with any interest in history. Highly recommended.

This book wonderfully explained what exactly women were doing before, just after, and during the revolutionary war. It's engaging, not only enlightening the reader as to the roles and expectations of women during the period, but also including stories of individual women to support these summaries. It does a great job of telling the tales of both patriot and loyalist women, women at home left to defend themselves and their houses, camp followers, women who fought, women who spied, and black and native american women banking on being on the right side of the war. A very refreshing perspective on the time period. In case it may be triggering for anyone, I should mention rape is discussed in a small section of the book.

Wonderful collection of back stories about the supporting role played by contemporary women from all walks of life in aid of the Crown, loyalists, and patriots. The author deftly used primary source material (i.e contemporary correspondence) to tell heretofore unknown stories of ordinary people stepping out of their gender roles in response to the extraordinary circumstances brought upon by the American Revolution. Also, an excellent analysis of why the American Revolution, although a transformative event vis a vis colonial times, did not result in a significant improvement in women's economic or political status despite their extraordinary contributions to the cause of "liberty".

As I've been gathering and reading books on Women in the American Revolution, Berkin's work (this book and others) consistently show up in the bibliographies. I had to read it. I'm very glad I did. Berkin clearly knows her history and how to impart the information. Each chapter centers on a different group of women - including First Nations and African-American. Berkin gives an excellent overview of the many different roles women played in this war - some good, some bad, some for Britain, so for the USA. I highly recommend this work as a starting point for more in depth research or reading about Women in the Revolution. I'm also eager to get my hands on more books by Berkin. She has several I mostly eagerly want to read.

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