

WOMEN IN EARLY AMERICA

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



Women in Early America

EDITED BY THOMAS A. FOSTER

FOREWORD BY Carol Berkin • AFTERWORD BY Jennifer L. Morgan

Women in Early America, edited by Thomas A. Foster, tells the fascinating stories of the myriad women who shaped the early modern North American world from the colonial era through the first years of the Republic. This volume goes beyond the familiar stories of Pocahontas or Abigail Adams, recovering the lives and experiences of lesser-known women—both ordinary and elite, enslaved and free, Indigenous and immigrant—who lived and worked in not only British mainland America, but also New Spain, New France, New Netherlands, and the West Indies.

In these essays we learn about the conditions that women faced during the Salem witchcraft panic and the Spanish Inquisition in New Mexico; as indentured servants in early Virginia and Maryland; caught up between warring British and Native Americans; as traders in New Netherlands and Detroit; as slave owners in Jamaica; as Loyalist women during the American Revolution; enslaved in the President's house; and as students and educators inspired by the air of equality in the young nation.

Foster showcases the latest research of junior and senior historians, drawing from recent scholarship informed by women's and gender history—feminist theory, gender theory, new cultural history, social history, and literary criticism. Collectively, these essays address the need for scholarship on women's lives and experiences. *Women in Early America* heeds the call of feminist scholars to not merely reproduce male-centered narratives, "add women, and stir," but to rethink master narratives themselves so that we may better understand how women and men created and developed our historical past.

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Loyalist Women in British New York City, 1776–83

Ruma Chopra

SUMMARY

Loyalist women emerged from diverse backgrounds and at different times during the war. Some had connections to Anglicanism or were related to Loyalist-leaning merchants and politicians, others were widows of Loyalist soldiers, and thousands were slaves. This essay examines Loyalist women's circumstances for choosing sides, their experiences during the military years of the revolution, and their lives in exile after the revolution.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- In what ways did women experience gendered violence during the war?
- How does examining the experiences of Loyalist women change our view of the American Revolution?
- What were conditions like for Loyalists during the American Revolution?
- What sources does the author use to examine this history?
- Why does the author focus on New York City?

“I Knew That if I Went Back to Virginia, I Should Never Get My Liberty”

Ona Judge Staines, the President’s Runaway Slave

Erica Armstrong Dunbar

SUMMARY

On a spring evening in May of 1796, Ona Judge Staines left her master’s house in Philadelphia never to return. Judge Staines was the former slave of Martha Washington who escaped as her masters ate their supper. Judge Staines was one of the hundreds of slaves who labored on the Virginia plantation of George and Martha Washington, yet she was only one of nine slaves who were taken to Philadelphia to serve the president during 1790s. This essay explores the life of Judge Staines during her captivity in Philadelphia through her eventual escape to Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What was Ona Judge Staines position within the Washington household?
- How did she manage to run away?
- How do we know about her experiences?
- What would you like to know about her life?
- How does studying the life and experiences of Ona Judge Staines change how you think about slavery? About George Washington? About women in early America?
- Why did it matter that she was in Philadelphia when she made her escape?

“The Need of Their Genius”

A Women’s Revolution in Early America

Mary C. Kelley

SUMMARY

This chapter examines the post-Revolutionary transformation in women’s education, both formal and informal. It argues that an education that began to approach the learning acquired at the male colleges opened the door to the choices women were able to make throughout the nineteenth century. Employing the benefits of their schooling, women redefined themselves and entered public life as educators, writers, editors, and reformers.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What did women study in schools in colonial America?
- How was women’s education changed after the Revolution and why?
- Did educational opportunities open up for all women?
- What sources does the author use to examine this history?
- How does studying this history change our view of early American women’s history?

Afterword

Jennifer L. Morgan

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- What does the author mean by the argument that one day a book title like women in early America could see “redundant”?
- How does the author see the essays in this volume as contributing to women’s history?
- How does the author see the essays in this volume as contributing to early American history?
- How does the author see the essays in this volume as possibly contributing to the eventual undoing of early American women’s history?