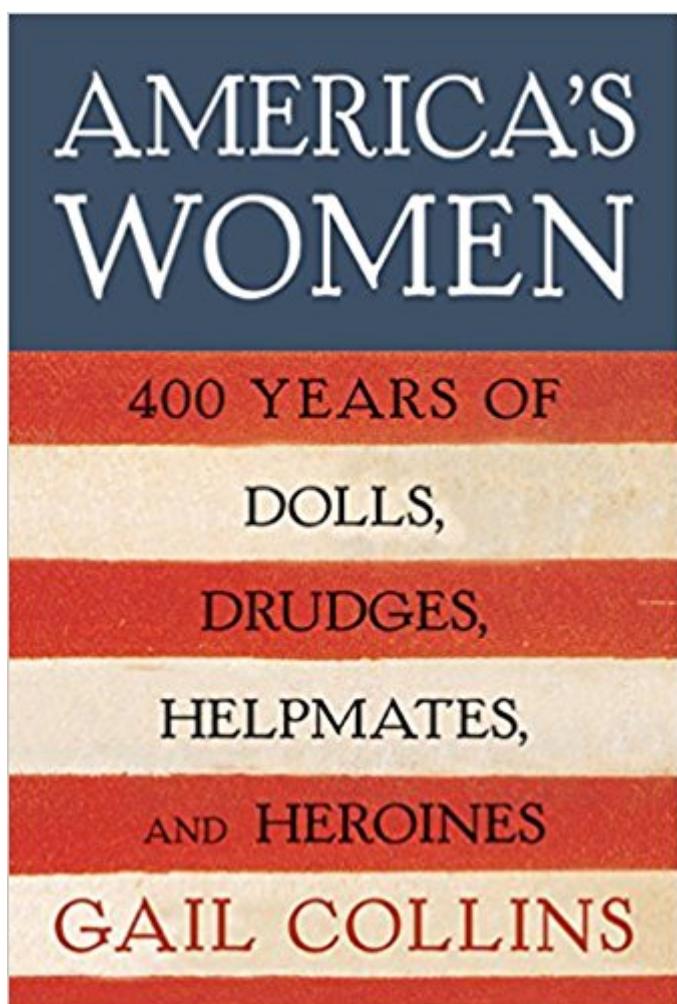


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# America's Women: Four Hundred Years Of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, And Heroines



## 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

Well researched and well written, *America's Women: 400 Years of Dolls, Drudges, Helpmates, and Heroines* is a powerful and important book. Starting with Pocahontas and Eleanor Dare (the first female colonist), this lively and fascinating history records the changes in American women's lives and the transformations in American society from the 1580s through the 2000s. A history of the oft-marginalized sex must often draw from diaries and journals, which were disproportionately written by whites; as a result, African-American and Native American women are not as well represented as white in the earlier chapters of *America's Women*. However, Gail Collins writes about women of many races and ethnicities, and in fact provides more information about Native Americans, African-Americans, and Chinese, Jewish, and Italian immigrants than some general U.S. history books. She writes about rich and poor, young and old, urban and rural, slave and slave-owner, athlete and aviatrix, president's wife and presidential candidate--and, of course, men and women. And some of these women--from the justly famous, like Clara Barton and Harriet Tubman, to the undeservedly obscure, like Elizabeth Eckford and Senator Margaret Chase Smith--will not only make any woman proud to be a woman, they will make any American proud to be American. An editor at the New York Times, Gail Collins has also written *Scorpion Tongues: Gossip, Celebrity, and American Politics* and, with Dan Collins, *The Millennium Book*. --Cynthia Ward

The basis of the struggle of American women, postulates Collins (*Scorpion Tongues*), "is the tension between the yearning to create a home and the urge to get out of it." Today's issues--should women be in the fields, on the factory lines and in offices, or should they be at home, tending to hearth and family?--are centuries old, and Collins, editor of the New York Times's editorial page, not only expertly chronicles what women have done since arriving in the New World, but how they did it and why. Creating a compelling social history, Collins discovers "it's less a war against oppressive men than a struggle to straighten out the perpetually mixed message about women's role that was accepted by almost everybody of both genders." These confusing messages are repeated over 400 years and are typified in the 1847 lecture of one doctor who stated that women's heads are "almost too small for intellect and just big enough for love" (ironically, around this time Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to graduate from an American medical school). The narratives are rich with direct quotes from both celebrated and common women, creating a clear picture of life in the 16th through 20th centuries, covering everyday (menstruation, birth control, cooking, cleanliness) and

extraordinary (life during war, the abolition movement, fighting for the right to vote) topics. Beginning with Eleanor Dare and her 1587 sail to the colonies and ending with the 1970s, Collins's work is a fully accessible, and thoroughly enjoyable, primer of how American women have not only survived but thrived. Photos not seen by PW. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Decent overview of significant women in American history up to the 1960's. One drawback is that it covers so many women it ends up being rather superficial. It is witty though and covers many interesting incidents in a highly readable fashion. It did not cover some women I think we're significant like Helen Keller and Florence Kelley.

Gail Collins has created this amazing, engaging history of women in America, collecting records from the first women who came to the New World, and continuing her exploration up to the book's 2003 publishing date. It seems like everything is here in her book: the experiences of natives and immigrants, stories of the influential and the powerless, lives from the viewpoint of slaves and plantation owners' wives, daily realities of urban and rural wives. There are fascinating tidbits about the women who changed history and stories about women we should have heard about (their stories are just as inspiring). We learn every-day realities women faced, expanding our understanding of what our grandmothers and our great-great-grandmothers must have endured. Gail does a great job of showing the strength of women despite the way society dictates a woman's "proper" position. She even shows the world forces that shift local attitudes. We see periods where women gain some elements of social independence only to have history shift in new directions, taking back some of the hard-fought gains. It is not uncommon for women to be caught in this struggle, deemed by society to be the more dependent, less interested, capable, or "inclined" of the two sexes. Women were expected to step in and take over men's work when the need arose, and then fade back into the background when men reappeared. It was (is) not uncommon for those women remaining in the front lines to work two or three times harder just to be accepted as an "equal." Gail is masterful in her writing and this book was a total joy to read. As a woman, this explained the society I grew up in, as well as defining much of my own struggle, my own frustrations with the role and treatment of women in today's society. This is a book every woman should read, both to appreciate the strength and courage of women who have come before us, and to appreciate our own position. I'd love to see men read this book, because there should be ongoing discussions of women's role in society. My only disappointment with this book is that it ended at the turn of the century. I would love to have seen what Gail thought of the more recent movements by male

politicians, making far-reaching decisions about women's issues without any input from women colleagues.

America's Women gives you a very readable survey of American History from the female half of the population. Almost conversational in style, very little academic jargon but lots of less known information.

An entertaining and instructive account of life as an American woman throughout the centuries. Although none of the material was new to me, the cumulative effect of this half anecdotal, half documentary approach was to make me feel more and more incensed by the way women have been treated: the double standard, the horrific treatment of minorities and the long fight to get the vote and equality. Women in the rest of the world have suffered in exactly the same way and, of course, many are still far behind. The writing seemed particularly heartfelt and vivid in the description of Rosa Parks' insurrection in the 1950s.

If you have not read this book, I suggest you read it, especially if you are female. :) This is a great opportunity to see where you came from...I think it will shock you! I already have and read the book, but I just came upon this on sale for \$1.99, and I could not pass it up. I am always wanting to show friends items from this book, and now I will always have a copy on my IPad. There are already reviews explaining the context, so I will not rewrite it. It is one very smart book, and a very easy read. Gail Collins is terrific, and I think you would find any of her books a joy to read.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading about the struggles, tragedies, and triumphs of the ordinary, work-a-day women through out our history. This book does discuss some of the more notable women in American history, but for the most part it focuses on the "unsung heroines" who have worked to make this country what it is today. I'm sure many, if not most, women today take for granted the freedoms we enjoy as women everyday. Younger women especially have no idea what women of the past have had to endure, just to live. Indeed, the book makes it abundantly clear, that the past one hundred years or so are the first time, ever, that it has actually been desirable to be a female at all.

Great book. I enjoyed reading about women in America from the beginning. There are some true facts I found amusing. For example they didn't take baths very often. Here they are pictured in

lovely clothing and smelling. I could hardly read about the witch trials in Salem. The description really brought it all to life. I haven't read it through but I highly recommend it. You will realize you never had it so good. I am thankful to all who suffered so that I could enjoy my life,

I took a star off because of the last third of the book. The author did not tell the full story of margaret sanger. The rest if the book was worth 5 stars.

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