A CONCISE WOMEN’S HISTORY

Mari Jo Buhle
Brown University

Teresa Murphy
George Washington University

Jane Gerhard
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While students today may think it is obvious that women have a history worth studying, it was not always the case. Historians of women, beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, had to win a place for their field by establishing that conventional histories neglected women’s contributions to U.S. society and too often left out the experiences of ordinary people in the United States. Along with scholars of African American and Native American histories, historians of women participated in larger trends in academic life that altered the definition of what counted as “history.”

After nearly a half century of quiescence, the academic study of women across several disciplines took off. In 1969, U.S. colleges and universities offered only seventeen courses on women. A year later, there were more than one hundred women’s studies courses, and by 1973 there were more than two hundred. No single feminist organization directed this growth. The courses cropped up spontaneously all over the country, with some campuses implementing new programs in response to sit-ins and strikes conducted jointly by students and faculty. In other places, faculty women privately pressured their departments to sponsor women’s studies classes. The first women’s studies program was established in 1970 at San Diego State College after a year of intense organizing.

According to the American Historical Association, the concentration in women’s history and gender studies is currently one of the fastest-growing areas of the discipline. Several colleges and universities now offer advanced degrees in women’s history, and courses in the area are now offered at most colleges and universities in the United States.

Since the 1960s, historians have created new frameworks for the writing of U.S. women’s history. Three frameworks have proved most important to the field. The first is a framework that emphasizes that gender is a product of society and culture, not only biology. The second is that the division of social life into public and private realms simplifies what is in fact a far more complex and dynamic field of social relations. Last is the understanding that women have multiple identities that are rooted in race, class, sexuality, and religion, as well as gender.

This book explores the lives of a broad spectrum of women from the era of first cultural contact in the fifteenth century to the new globalism of the twenty-first century. This book pays special attention to the history of social activism with regard to inequality and the intimate relationships in the historical realm of sexuality. It explores both the political economy and the spheres of reproduction to shape a narrative and underscores the significance of the United States as a “nation of immigrants.”
FEATURES

There are many features available in the printed and digital e-book versions of this book to engage students. Offerings in both print and digital versions are highlighted with ✽.

- **Timelines**, which open each chapter integrating major U.S. historical events and special events in women’s history.
- Selected “Overview” tables that provide a quick reference to major topics.
- Selective **photographs** from historical sources.
- **Multimedia** selections to various sources including documents, images, profiles, and more.
- **Critical Thinking Questions** close out the chapter to reinforce main themes.
- **Recommended Readings** in short annotated form for each chapter.
- **Additional Bibliography** of books and articles for each chapter.
- **A Glossary** of key terms and definitions.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MARI JO BUHLE

TERESA MURPHY
Teresa Murphy is Associate Professor of American Studies at George Washington University. Born and raised in California, she received her BA from the University of California, Berkeley and her PhD from Yale University. She is the author of *Ten Hours Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (1992) as well as *Citizenship and the Origins of Women’s History in the United States* (2013). She is the former Associate Editor of *American Quarterly*.

JANE GERHARD