

WILEY BLACKWELL COMPANIONS
TO AMERICAN HISTORY



A COMPANION TO
AMERICAN
WOMEN'S HISTORY

Second Edition

EDITED BY
NANCY A. HEWITT AND ANNE M. VALK

WILEY Blackwell

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A COMPANION TO AMERICAN WOMEN'S HISTORY

SECOND EDITION

Edited by

Nancy A. Hewitt & Anne M. Valk

WILEY Blackwell

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To the memory of Susan Porter Benson, Marli Weiner, Lynn Gordon, Rosalyn Baxandall, and Jan Lewis, contributors to the first edition of A Companion to American Women's History, and of Leslie Brown. Your scholarship, mentorship, and friendship will always be with us.

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Introduction

Nancy A. Hewitt and Anne M. Valk

Wiley's invitation to edit a new edition of *A Companion to American Women's History* provided a welcome opportunity to assess the state of this vibrant field. Even before we received essays from the book's contributors, we knew that this volume would be very different from the first edition, published in 2002. In introducing that version, Nancy Hewitt noted that the scope and definition of American women's history was undergoing immense change. The field was incorporating a growing body of research on race, class, ethnicity, and region that deepened understandings of the very subject of the field, just as postmodernist perspectives pointed to new ways of conceptualizing differences, including the meaning of gender. At the same time, American historians also showed rising interest in conservatism, transnationalism, colonialism, and imperialism, broadening the canvas on which scholars worked. Hewitt pointed out that these interests were shifting who and what constituted American women's history, as well as expanding the geographical boundaries and opening the exploration of additional sources that illuminated those pasts.

If anything, the pace of change in this field has accelerated in the past two decades. The place of American women's history within the historical discipline and within the broader academy has changed as well. This collection charts an exponential growth in the amount of work and the centrality of race, class, region, and sexuality as categories for analyzing women's experiences. Women's history is now inextricable from the history of gender and sexuality. The growth of the field is apparent, for example,

in one alteration made from the first edition. In 2002, it made sense to include a comprehensive bibliography in the back of the *Companion*, even if it came in at an unwieldy fifty pages. In 2020, however, it seems both impossible and unhelpful to compile a similar list, given the vast numbers of monographs and articles available and the range of complementary areas of scholarship that are influencing the field.

As we conceptualized what to include in this update, we wanted to capture these and other significant changes. Sadly, several original authors are now deceased: the deaths of Susan Porter Benson (2005), Marli F. Weiner (2009), Lynn Gordon (2012), Rosalyn Baxandall (2015), and Jan E. Lewis (2018) represent profound personal losses to family, friends, colleagues, and students, as well as to the intellectual life of the profession. Other scholars have moved on to new fields, assumed new positions, or retired. As a result, this volume features only a handful of returning authors. Revised chapters by Jennifer Morgan (with co-author Ebony Jones), Lisbeth Haas, Nancy Hewitt, Annelise Orleck, Nan Enstad (with co-author Tracey Deutsch) and Steven Lawson (with co-author Rebecca Tuuri) engage new literature on slavery and the slave trade, nineteenth-century women's activism, the American West, urban life, civil rights, and working women. They also chart substantial changes in the ways some of these topics have been conceptualized – so, Orleck now addresses histories of welfare as well as work, and Enstad highlights histories of capitalism.

Most essays in this volume were written by scholars who represent the second and third generation of women's historians trained since the 1970s. Several were written collaboratively, and in some cases the co-authors formerly had relationships as students and teachers. These transitions are part of a larger process of intellectual

maturity and the practice of mentorship, as one generation helps to guide the next as teachers, colleagues, and, sometimes, antagonists or provocateurs. When appropriate, we have indicated where readers of this volume might benefit from reading an essay in the 2002 edition, which provides earlier understandings and conceptualizations of and debates within the topics treated here. There is significant cross-fertilization in these volumes, but there are also places where current essays diverge sharply from the ways questions and issues were framed just two and three decades ago.

This generational shift also represents other differences: young faculty and recent PhDs are adding both demographic and disciplinary diversity to the field. While the numbers of scholars from traditionally underrepresented populations who receive PhDs remain far too low, they have steadily increased over the past two decades, according to research by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences ([2016](#)). These figures coincide with a continued reconfiguration in the subfields in which historians are specializing. Data collected by the American Historical Association (AHA) for a recent report on the historical profession show that between 1975 and 2015, the percentage of historians who identified their specialization as women's and gender history rose by nearly 800 percent (Townsend [2015](#)). The history of sexuality, which was virtually nonexistent as a subfield in 1975, showed the fastest rise, and specialists in that area were among the youngest in the profession, with nearly 70 percent having received their PhDs since 1994.

While the number of historians who specialize in the study of women, gender, and sexuality has risen, they have not necessarily tracked into positions dedicated to those areas. As the AHA points out in its 2015 report on the profession, scholars in these specialties occupy some of the most

precarious positions in the discipline and are more likely to appear in the ranks of adjunct and non-tenure-track faculty compared to their counterparts in other subfields (Townsend [2015](#)). In addition, when we informally surveyed the contributors to this volume – most of whom hold continuing academic appointments – their responses indicated that they generally do not hold positions as women's historians. Instead, between 2002 and 2020, historians of women, gender, and sexuality expanded their presence less by the creation of more dedicated lines and more by integrating their work across all time periods and into a wide range of specialties, including political, legal, African American, Atlantic, and other areas. In addition, many offer courses and hold appointments (or joint appointments) within Africana, African American, Native American, women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Others teach in newly created programs, such as community and environmental studies and public humanities. To put it another way, rather than being relegated to specifically designated women and gender or sexuality history positions, this subject is now incorporated across many fields. These transformations may result in added precariousness for individual scholars, especially those who are early in their careers. At the same time, they suggest that women and gender history has moved from the margins to the mainstream. Women's historians may no longer be seen as specialists but instead as scholars who can capably teach on diverse topics and whose expertise is critical to understanding broader geographical and chronological studies.

The scholarship included in this book reflects this rich mixture, showing how scholars and teachers are thinking about the state of the field of women, gender, and sexuality history today and where they believe it is heading. The study of sexuality and sexual identities has expanded so

much that it warrants a dedicated chapter on the ways trans sexuality reshapes definitions and concepts of gender and sexuality more broadly. Another chapter focuses on reproductive politics. Essays on the history of capitalism have replaced those devoted to gender and class formations in early America and urban spaces in the twentieth century. These essays emphasize new frameworks that link work, paid and unpaid, in and out of the home, considering how women's roles as consumers, producers, family members, and pleasure seekers help to shape, and are shaped by, gender. And, as already noted, the 2002 chapter on "Wage-earning Women" in the twentieth century here traces the intertwined histories of work and welfare. Notably, a chapter that foregrounds the history of indigenous women in the Americas replaces previous chapters centered on the European American presence in colonial North America. And, in addition to a chapter on slavery and the slave trade to 1800, a new chapter focuses on black women in slavery and freedom. Other new essays address legal history and women and the state. The importance of the state is also visible in the chapter on immigration, which now also addresses refugees and the role of state actors in creating and maintaining these categories. The two essays together illuminate legal definitions of citizenship, which have shifted over time and which carry layers of meaning for those who enforce the differences and those forced to live with their consequences. And every field has broadened to include the diverse and contending voices of women of color as the investigation of race and ethnic identities and communities has become central to scholarship across time and place.

As a result of vital new work in the field, the organization of this volume has shifted significantly from the 2002 edition. Older periodizations have shattered. Indeed, we abandoned

the chronological sections that divided the first edition. Though these current chapters are arranged somewhat chronologically, the overlap is considerable. And many hint at new periodizations or the need to rethink chronologies. The history of woman suffrage, for example, now extends from the start of the nineteenth century well into the second half of the twentieth and is addressed in both a dedicated essay and in chapters on the Revolutionary era, the law, women's pre-Civil War movements, and civil rights and black liberation. Taken together, these chapters reveal the diverse philosophical and political origins of the demand for women's suffrage; the incomplete victory represented by ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920; and the continued activism of the millions of women who remained (and remain) disenfranchised because of their race, immigration status, and place of residence. As this book appears in 2020, during the 100th anniversary of the federal suffrage amendment, many new studies will be published, some of which are noted here. We hope our volume and other path-breaking studies will inspire further investigation of the history and legacy of women's multifaceted campaigns for voting rights and political empowerment.

Finally, just as we know that contemporary events – including commemorations and anniversaries – can inspire a reconsideration of history, contemporary social and political life shapes the scholarly investigations pursued by historians. As the economic, political, and cultural issues that press on Americans shift, so do debates in the field and the questions that drive new scholarship. Issues that we thought were settled, such as reproductive rights, are returning to the forefront. Many historians now dedicate themselves to reaching broader audiences through digital projects, public history efforts, and historic sites. New essays by Brittney Cooper and Jessica Wilkerson showcase