

Interpreting the Past through the History of Women

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Recently historian Sara Evans, Regents Professor, University of Minnesota, wrote a [resource guide](#) for the National Park Service: *Exploring a Common Past: Interpreting Women's History in the National Park Service*. In the guide Professor Evans suggests ways that women's history scholarship can be utilized to more fully and accurately describe and interpret American historical sites. She identifies seven themes that "reveal the dynamics of gender as a fundamental historical force, shaping the lives of women and men alike and opening much of the traditional historical narrative to reinterpretation."

The intended audiences for the guide are The National Park Service and other museum professionals. Although her examples are from American history, the seven themes she identifies are useful in illuminating the history of women in world cultures as well. Following Professor Evans' guide, examples are suggested for each of the seven themes from global women's history. Some of these examples are taken from longer lessons developed by Marjorie Wall Bingham and Susan Hill Gross that will be posted on the website as it is developed.

Exploring a Common Past

Interpreting Women's History in the National Park Service

Sara M. Evans

The scholarship on the history of American women has been one of the richest and most prolific fields of inquiry in recent decades. Its findings offer the National Park Service an opportunity to develop a sweeping—and far more accurate—interpretive approach that will dramatically enrich and enliven the interpretation of historic sites as well as provide new ways to identify future sites. The key themes of this scholarship bring into focus the dynamic relationships between public and private actions, between the formal realms of government, business, or military, which American culture traditionally defined as male domains, and the infrastructures of daily life. With its emphasis on daily life and the issues of class and race, women's history joined other emerging fields of social history in pioneering an enlarged definition of history itself. For public historians, this transformation has opened the possibility of interpreting an American past that includes every American, regardless of gender, race, class, religion, region, or ethnic or immigrant status. The resources found at historic sites—the cultural landscapes, historic structures, archeological sites, museum objects—can make women's past especially vivid. Cradles and cribs found at Herbert Hoover NHS and John F. Kennedy NHS attest to their mothers' lives. A woman's sewing machine found on a nineteenth century ship at San Francisco Maritime NHP hints of a different history than so often proclaimed. Civil War battles were fought on people's fields with families huddling against the shelling or having their dining room tables appropriated for surgery. Historic sites can present women's history to the public in ways texts seldom can. The history of women, in and of itself, brings all of these issues into play as women are half the population in virtually every socially and culturally defined group. Women's complex struggles for civic inclusion force us to think in new ways about citizenship, democracy, and freedom. They also highlight the emergence of voluntary associations at the intersections of public and private life that have been critical to the expansion of democracy and the definition of active citizenship.

To clarify these implications, this section of the resource guide points to seven of the key themes in women's history scholarship with examples that illustrate their application to NPS sites. This is just the barest introduction, however, as the examples for each theme could be multiplied many times over.

Principal Themes in Women's History

An Applied Approach

The following themes, highlighted in recent scholarship in women's history, have moved rapidly into the mainstream of historical interpretation. They reveal the dynamics of gender as a fundamental historical force, shaping the lives of women and men alike and opening much of the traditional historical narrative to reinterpretation. There is no field of historical inquiry that has not been reshaped by the questions these themes provoke, and no historical site that would not provide an enriched and more accurate interpretation by taking them into account.

Theme 1. Family and Kinship

Cultural definitions of womanhood and of appropriate female roles have in the United States historically centered on familial relationships—wife, mother, and daughter. As a result, the changing definition and structure of the family, both nuclear and extended, have been central concerns for historians of women. Questions of interest include household structure for example, household size and composition fertility rates, and marriage age, but these issues take on meaning in the context of an analysis of the relationship of families to society, such as looking at the family as a center of production or of consumption. Whereas past histories focused on notable individuals and their families, historians now emphasize these individuals' relationships to other social groups in the household.

Scholars of the colonial family were among the first to pose such questions. Their work challenged static definitions of family, pointing out its variable meanings over time and noting the important analytic distinction between family and household. Historians of women like Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, professor of history at Harvard University then looked at the ways in which motherhood in New England colonial families was extensive rather than intensive and woven into the social and economic life of local communities in ways that cast new light on the whole. The family, of course, always exists in dynamic relationship to the rest of society. Motherhood raises questions about fatherhood, childhood socialization, education, and how society reproduces itself from generation to generation. Historian Jeanne Boydston, for example, focused on the early 19th century household as a center of production and consumption previously ignored by economic historians. Historians expanded these themes into the 19th and 20th centuries in studies of immigrant families, middle-class urban families, and the slave family. The latter, for example, is critical to understanding the creation of African-American culture, which developed in spite of the constraints and cruelty of slavery.

Ideals of the nineteenth-century middle class family can be studied at the Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield, Illinois, where the household ornaments reflect the fashions of the day plus a concern for maintaining contemporary standards of good taste while on a limited budget. The Boott Mill at Lowell National Historical Park illustrates a nontraditional living situation in which young girls lived in a boarding house run by the mill. Herbert Hoover National Historic Site, with its Quaker Meeting house, birthplace “cottage,” and one room school may reveal more about nineteenth century Iowa farm families than about the man who left the area at age six. The Kingsley Plantation, part of Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve, interprets the lives of those who lived in the “big house” as well as those enslaved peoples who lived in the quarters. Cane River Creole NHP and Melrose at Natchez NHP do the same. Sites related to American Indian cultures enlarge the notion of family to a broader set of gendered social connections in which kinship is imbedded in the very fabric of the community itself.

Theme 2. Life Cycle

Women's history, in conjunction with recent scholarship on the history of the family, has also highlighted the importance of life cycle. Such a focus unearths a plethora of themes that illuminate otherwise static interpretations: childhood, adolescence, courtship and marriage, childbirth, motherhood, old age, death, or the bodily experiences of puberty and adolescence, menopause, and “women's” diseases. Interpretive themes might include the tasks and games of

childhood, the communal experience of childbirth (or the more isolated one on the frontier or later in hospitals), courtship patterns, schooling, and childhood labor.

Many sites offer opportunities to develop life cycle themes. The nineteenth century farmhouses in Cuyahoga Valley National Recreation Area, for example, provided the setting for nearly every major event, ritual, and celebration of their residents' lives. At the Todd House, part of Independence National Historical Park, Dolley Todd adapted to life as a young wife and mother, then as a widow who began the ritual of courting again. A number of sites exhibit wedding presents, yet the interpretation often focuses on a description of the item and not the rituals of the wedding celebration. Pipe Spring National Monument, which commemorates the Mormon settlement of the southwest territories, was also a favorite Mormon honeymoon spot. Most historic houses offer an array of possibilities for interpreting diverse customs regarding birthing, childcare, adolescence, and courtship, as well as aging and death.

Theme 3. Gender Ideology

Many of the path-breaking studies in women's history have explored societal definitions of "true womanhood" or being a "good wife." Such ideas are manifested in the wordings found on gravestones, in sermons, in nineteenth and twentieth century popular magazines, in fiction, poems, and letters, and in the designs of fashionable clothing. More recently scholars have explored the relationship between societal ideals of femininity and masculinity and the ways that gender has shaped national, regional, and racial identities. The images and metaphors of gender, for example, infuse public discourse on all manner of issues, revealing important new dimensions of popular conceptions of power as well as ideals such as liberty. In the late 19th century, for example, "Liberty" was frequently depicted as a female. Yet the idea of the "citizen" was highly masculine (citizen soldier/ citizen worker), and leaders like President Theodore Roosevelt advocated a strenuous ideal of manliness. Political rhetoric has always been filled with gendered metaphors. Thus, even at historic places where few women were present, there are many untapped opportunities for exploring societal expectations and changing definitions of masculinity and femininity in American history. In such male-oriented settings such as courthouses, legislatures, saloons, and battlefields gendered language and behavior can be interpreted, adding depth as well as historical accuracy.

Ideals tend to be articulated by those with the greatest access to authoritative means of publication—sermons, advice books, magazines—and in positions of considerable social and economic power. On the one hand, such ideals often coexist with different lived realities even in dominant groups like the urban middle classes, but at the same time they have a powerful impact on those explicitly excluded from the ideal (racial and ethnic minorities, working class, etc.). For example, the ideal of "separate spheres" for men and women in the nineteenth century shaped architecture, furnishings, fashions, and reform activities among middle class women. Society did not simply impose separate spheres on women; educated women of the middle class helped create the idea of this distinct space. At the same time, they seized the notion of women as uniquely pious and moral to justify organized forays into a wide array of reform activities from temperance, to peace, to abolition. The Settlement House is an example of the "woman's sphere" transformed into a public space, an implicit challenge to the very idea of separating public (male) from private (female).

The ideal of separate spheres also justified additional denigration of and discrimination against women who, because of racial, religious, class, or ethnic status, did not conform to its tenets. Black women, slave or free, and women factory workers who were paid extremely low wages were considered sexually suspect; and most poor women were judged by middle class standards to be inadequate mothers. Historians also examine the ways in which working-class women shaped the public and private spaces where they lived, worked, and played. Finally separate spheres ideology functioned as a distorting lens through which Euro-Americans perceived American Indians, and it shaped their efforts to compel Indian conformity to western norms from colonial era missionary teachings to late 19th and early 20th century boarding schools.

In the twentieth century, images in popular magazines, television, and film are reflected in national parks. For example, at Eisenhower National Historic Site in Pennsylvania, Mamie Eisenhower's bedroom was ornately decorated in pink, gold, and khaki—in direct contrast with Dwight Eisenhower's bedroom with its severe furniture and red Oriental rug. San Antonio Missions National Historical Park reflects Roman Catholic ideas about women, while Natchez National Historical Park in Mississippi interprets southern womanhood, both slave and free. The emerging new scholarship on conceptions of masculinity (a notable example being Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*) can also allow park interpreters in many traditional sites, for example military sites and western sites having to do with cowboys or miners, to point out the dynamics of gender and to avoid representing the “masculine” as an unmarked norm. At Theodore Roosevelt National Park in Medora North Dakota-- where the future president (and historian!) fled after his wife & mother died nearly simultaneously--Theodore Roosevelt lived out his ideas of masculinity as a “cowboy.” The real cowboys thought him strange because he had books and a toothbrush in his very small cabin there.

Theme 4. Dynamics of Difference

The differences in women's experiences—rooted in race, class, ethnicity, region, religion, and so forth—are primary themes in the scholarship on women's history for any given period. On the one hand, such factors sharply shaped women's experiences, making it impossible to present any single narrative as “women's history.” At the same time, women's historians have shown that with each of these categories—and the histories they evoke such as slavery, immigration, and religious conversion—women's experiences differed, often sharply, from those of men in the same group. Because women constitute a subset of virtually every other social group, their history is as complex as the histories of the American people.

In telling the story of any group we can ask the simple questions: where were the women? What did they do? What ideas or ideals about women affected their lives? In telling the stories of women at a particular place or time we can ask how those stories were different from each other and whether we have noted and interpreted the lives of ALL the women who were there at the time.

Differences in African American women's experiences are evident when one compares Boston's African American National Historic Site, where women were active in the abolitionist movement, with Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site in Virginia, which reflects the life of a business-oriented progressive woman. Walker engaged in numerous enterprises to further both her race and sex, including a newspaper, insurance company, bank and department store. She

transformed The Independent Order of St. Luke, an African American fraternal organization and insurance society, into a 50,000 member organization—during the Jim Crow period. In the grand houses within the National Park Service, the upstairs/downstairs themes reveal the divergent lives of the women of different classes who lived and worked there. The dynamics of difference are also reflected in the experiences of Native American women at Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site in Arizona, where Navajo and Anglo women interacted, and Pecos National Historical Park in New Mexico, where Pueblo Indians encountered (male only) Spanish missionaries.

Theme 5. Work

To understand women’s daily lives, historians set aside narrow definitions of work as paid labor, generally outside the home, and looked closely at the full range of women’s productive activities both inside and outside the home. This expanded definition of work has led to major reevaluations of the divisions of labor—between women and men, adults and children, master or mistress and servants or slaves—of changing definitions and technologies of housework, of informal economies based on barter and trade, and of the gendered expectations imbedded in the emergence of industrialism and urbanization.

Since very few women have been “ladies of leisure,” almost all the historic parks offer opportunities for interpreting women’s work experiences. Whether it is an industrial setting such as women’s work in the textile mills of Lowell, or hotels at Yosemite National Park where women had major responsibilities, or a fort where women ran the kitchen and laundries, or homes in which wives, immigrant servant girls, or slave women performed the daily household tasks, the national parks have diverse opportunities for interpreting women’s work experiences.

Many sites have unrealized potential for examining women’s work and related themes such as the technology of housework and the changing role of the family. The conditions varied considerably, as did the technology available—from open fires to gigantic stoves, from springhouses to Bess Truman’s “modern” red and green kitchen at the Harry S. Truman National Historic Site. The National Park system also has various general stores—at Appomattox Courthouse National Historical Park, at Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site, and at Salem maritime National Historic Site, among others—where women bought supplies.

New dimensions of the past come into focus when the productive life of a household is examined. For example, at Martin Van Buren National Historic site, where Van Buren spent his retirement years, the interpretive program discusses the Irish immigrant women whose work made life in the formal parlor possible. The staff does not interpret Van Buren in isolation from other social groups but rather stresses the theme of interdependence among those who shared that household space. Clara Barton National Historic Site interprets her story of a self-educated, self-appointed nurse and the story of nursing being developed as a profession. A proudly displayed photograph here shows an elderly Barton sitting proudly in front of a class of nurses. The Red Cross offices there with typewriters hint at the technological changes that occurred during her lifetime. Other sites also illustrate changing technologies that affected women’s lives: Edison National Historic Site has both early phonographs and a wooden-handled electric curling iron. Golden Spike NHS in Utah celebrates completion of the transcontinental railroad which provided

an alternative to wagon trains, allowed produce and meat to travel great distances improving diets, and changed immigration patterns.

Theme 6. Education

Until the late twentieth century, society considered formal education less important for women than for men, and in many instances women were formally denied access to educational institutions. Yet women have always been providers of education. In the colonial era, when literacy and vocational training were familial responsibilities, women taught their children and other young people in their households. Young girls learned basic household skills—food preparation, needlework, spinning, gardening, etc.—by taking on these tasks at an early age. In the revolutionary era, the debate about “woman’s place” in the new republic and the need for an educated citizenry led to a new emphasis on formal education for women in the middle and upper classes. To be “Republican mothers” capable of raising virtuous citizens, women claimed the importance of education for themselves.

Through the nineteenth century, women’s struggle for education took on many dramatic dimensions, ranging from the secret, and often illegal, education of some slave women to the growth of female academies and colleges and the gradual feminization of the teaching profession. The rise of public education created an enormous demand for teachers that was increasingly filled by drawing on the skills of women, thus enlarging their “sphere” and opening opportunities for travel and independence outside of marriage. For most groups of women, education has had a very powerful and subversive impact by raising expectations, offering new skills and broader horizons.

Opportunities to interpret women’s contributions in the field of education are present at many parks. Homestead National Monument of America includes Freeman School, a one-room school, which both illustrates the expansion of education and the feminization of the teaching profession. The Oaks, the home of Booker T. and Margaret Murray Washington, at Tuskegee Institute National Historic Site in Alabama, focuses on coeducational intellectual and vocational training reflecting women’s leadership role. The influence of individual teachers can be seen at Jimmy Carter National Historic site, which includes Plains High School where Miss Julia L. Coleman taught Carter. Her influence on the future president was so significant that Carter referred to her in his inaugural address. Two schools especially significant in the civil rights movement, the Topeka School featured in *Brown v. Board of Education* in Kansas and the Little Rock High School in Arkansas are also NPS sites.

Theme 7. Public Life and Voluntary Associations

American political institutions were initially founded on the assumption that women—like children, slaves, and the insane—were not “fitted” for participation in public life. Women’s close association with domesticity, however, has meant only that they followed different paths into public life, not that women were absent from the public domain. Indeed, by exploring the interactions of public and private spheres, the study of women’s history demands a more capacious definition of politics and illumines in new ways what we thought we knew.

Beginning in the revolutionary era, women pioneered the formation of voluntary associations, laying the basis for that layer of “civil society” that is critical to the maintenance of an active

democratic citizenry. Nineteenth century American politics proceeded along two different, and highly gendered, lines: 1. electoral politics, not only exclusively male but also infused with images and rhetoric about manhood as the source of political allegiances that crossed class lines; and 2. the politics of “influence,” primarily female and located in voluntary associations that became the seedbed for the social justice dimensions of progressive reform. The crucial role of religion is notable here, as women often first acquired public skills in religious settings such as missionary societies and they put those skills to political use in the name of moral imperatives that had religious roots.

The movements for women’s rights are part of the larger drama of American democracy in which numerous groups have broadened the definition of citizen and redefined the terrain of politics. Women’s participation in politics, however, has also taken many other forms. Through voluntary associations women have reshaped civic life, creating benevolent associations, missionary societies, reform and social service institutions—hospitals, orphanages, settlement houses—inventing professions such as social work, and feminizing others such as teaching. The community infrastructures that resulted broadened the arenas of civic action and civic education considerably and over time they expanded accepted views of societal responsibility and the role of government.

Some of the examples of national parks that interpret the theme of women’s public contributions are Women’s Rights National Historical Park, site of the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention, and Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site in Washington, D.C., which was the home of the National Council of Negro Women. Still many other sites offer opportunities to discuss women’s public roles. For example, Clara Barton identified and marked 12,000 union graves at what is now Andersonville National Historic site in Georgia, provided relief after the Johnstown Flood (now a NHS) and established the American Red Cross. At Ellis Island, the Daughters of the American Revolution provided supplies for immigrants detained on their island, and the National Council of Jewish Women found homes for unaccompanied women and girls. Women who lived in many of the houses located in national parks worked at settlement houses, participated in temperance organizations, were members of suffrage organizations or the League of Women Voters, and provided leadership to reform and philanthropic organizations. Women participated in social reform, especially abolition, at the Boston African American Meetinghouse. They were active in religion as missionaries with Narcissa Whitman at Whitman Mission NHS and Eliza Spaulding at Nez Perce and as leaders at the Quaker meetinghouse at Herbert Hoover NHS in Iowa with its roll-down doors for men's and women's meetings.

Seven Themes of Women’s History Scholarship

Examples from World History

Theme 1. Family and Kinship

As in the United States, cultural definitions of proper female roles in most world cultures have centered on the family. Study of changing family configurations and varying expectations for women are crucial to women’s history scholarship. Family configurations vary widely depending

on time, place and class, as do expectations of women's roles within the family. In North American and European countries the norm is a nuclear family while in many Islamic countries polygamy for men is allowed usually with a limit of four wives. In the history of Tibet the practice of polyandry allowed a woman to marry several brothers. In much of Latin American history lower-class women frequently did not formally marry, as the requirements for marriage were too financially burdensome. Among upper class Latin American women cross-cousin marriage was encouraged while in other cultures cousin marriage is disapproved of as too close in kinship. Each of these configurations creates different roles and expectations for ideal behavior of women.

The example of 20th century Japan illustrates how marriage and family expectations for women can shift over time. In the early years of the 20th century Japan had an active feminist movement that advocated more freedom and rights for women within the family. By the 1930s birth control clinics were opened and many Japanese women took paying jobs and wore Western dress. When Japan turned to a military-style government during the 1930s, leading to participation as an Axis power in World War II, government propaganda stressed roles for women as wives and mothers. In the early 1940s the ministry of education issued the following instructions to Japanese women:

“We must admonish Japanese women to reject individualistic ideas and encourage them to cultivate and improve such virtues inherently belonging to them as submissiveness, gentleness, chasteness, perseverance, and service.”

Women were encouraged to return to traditional Japanese-style dress and give up work outside their homes. By the early 1940s, Tōjō Katsuko, wife of the Japanese prime minister, was quoted as saying “having babies is fun!” Birth control was made illegal and the Japanese government promised subsidies to couples with large families. With World War II, however, the Japanese military found that it needed women factory workers to replace men drafted for the war. The government then abandoned ideology that discouraged women from working and encouraged large families. The new propaganda emphasized the patriotism that women showed by working in munitions factories.

Theme 2. Life Cycle

Worldwide the valuing of women and their authority may change dramatically depending on their stage of life. Preference for boys at birth is a feature of many cultures but has been extreme in some areas. In parts of India, for example, a strong preference for boys is a central factor that leads to an unbalanced sex ratio with boys outnumbering girls by a wide margin. However, within India there are areas, such as in the state of Kerala in the south, where this boy preference is much less pervasive and the sex ratio is evenly divided. For historians this raises many interesting questions. Why is the sex ratio so unbalanced in some areas and not in others? What leads to this preference for boys in many cultures? What are the results for girls in gaining access to an education and healthcare? How does this effect boys and men in these cultures? Why does this preference for boys vary over time or even switch from a preference for one sex over the other? An example of this is contemporary Japan where a growing preference for girl babies seems to be replacing a preference for boys. Japanese women particularly have long life expectancies and daughters are thought to take better care of elderly parents than sons.

In traditional China a very difficult life stage for women was that of young bride. Upon marriage Chinese women moved to the villages and into homes of their husbands. They were expected to obey and work for their mother-in-law; she was the absolute authority in the home. If abused there was no recourse for the bride. Her husband might come to her aid but he also was expected to give filial devotion to his mother and father. The way for the young Chinese bride to achieve higher status in the family was to become the mother of sons. The pressure on a bride to give birth to boy children could be enormous and a childless woman's life was one of misery and even rejection by her husband's family. When her sons married, however, the wife achieved the highest status for women, that of mother-in-law. Her daughters-in-laws were expected to obey her and do her bidding. She might even interfere with the couple's personal life and take over the training of her sons' children if she chose. Because women in traditional Chinese families went from powerless bride and to powerful mother-in-law the system was difficult to change. Each new generation of women who had suffered as powerless brides desired to have their turn at being the authority in charge.

Theme 3. Gender Ideology

The example of Japan and the changing ideology of proper roles of women, wives and mothers given for Theme 1 could be applied to this theme as well. As discussed earlier, the proper roles for women in particular family configurations or at a particular life stage vary greatly depending on cultural area. In many world areas all women were expected to marry and be sexually pure upon marriage. The poet, Sarojini Naidu, said of Indian women that, "Our girls are born married." The necessity of finding proper husbands for daughters and maintaining their sexual purity before marriage is an on-going theme in women's history as well as world literature. The lesson on the Clio website describing [arrow marriage](#) among a tribal group of Central India illustrates one ingenious way a minority group avoided the cultural norm of marrying daughters at a very young age. Young girls were married to an object such as an arrow or a tree assuring their sexual purity as married women. At an appropriate age they were then married to a man.

Practices of *purdah* and seclusion, such as veiling in public and females occupying a special women's quarter at home, aimed at assuring that daughters would remain eligible brides and faithful wives. Sometimes these practices could backfire. In colonial Peru, Spanish social customs and the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church determined what appropriate behavior for women was. The Church decreed that girls of marriageable age wear a *saya y manto* when going out in public to mass. This costume—worn for church and other public gatherings—was supposedly designed to guarantee a woman's modesty. It covered a woman's head and most of her face, with only one eye exposed so that she could see her way. The loose skirt worn beneath reached to the ground. But according to a Catholic archbishop, this costume actually led to "debaucheries." Women in Lima were so well covered and anonymous in this outfit that they could go anywhere they pleased without being recognized. Church leaders especially feared that wearing the costume and going about unsupervised might lead women to have immoral love affairs. In fact, such may have been the case. Various travelers reported that these women moved about with great freedom. John Byron, father of the English poet Lord Byron, reported that he actually had been pinched by one of these veiled ladies as she hurried by. Despite the protests of churchmen and many sermons, women in Lima, Peru, continued to wear their *saya y mantos*. This custom of near complete veiling did not die out in Lima until the 20th century.

Theme 4. Dynamics of Difference

An analysis of differences such as those of class, individual talents and circumstances contributes to a more complete story of women at any particular time and place. The lesson on an exceptional woman in history, [Halide Edib](#) of Turkey, asks how a woman raised in a traditional home during the Ottoman Empire achieved international stature as an author and lecturer. What was unusual about her, her family, and her time that allowed her break out of the traditional roles for Turkish women? One observation about “exceptional” women of history, women whose accomplishments were in fields usually reserved for men, is that they usually were only daughters with no brothers. Although Edib, for example, had a half brother she was the only child of her father’s first and most beloved wife who died young.

Gender ideology may change depending upon class as well as time and place. Although upper-class Latin American women in the 18th and 19th centuries were secluded at home and chaperoned in public, lower-class women, who had to work to support their children, could not afford the luxury of seclusion. They might be seen as less worthy of male chivalry than women of the upper classes because they acted in the public work place considered to be masculine domain. In North Africa some women wear distinctive costumes that mark them. As Riffian Berbers they can go about without veils, selling goods in the public markets where most women are heavily veiled. Riffian women are known as being very independent and the majority culture seems to accept their deviation from the norm.

Theme 5. Work

Throughout most of human history there has been division of labor by sex but the particular tasks a society thought proper for women and men varied widely. Until recently the term farmer in the United States was a masculine title. In much of the African continent, however, the farmer wears a skirt as rural African women are expected to raise the family food while wearing what is considered to be proper female apparel. They also prepare the food, including pounding grain, and fetch water while caring for children. “Backing” a baby while doing fieldwork is a common sight in rural Africa.

There is also a long history in Africa of women traders, particularly in West Africa. One of the most famous traders, Madame Tinubu, lived in what is now Nigeria in the 19th century. Although she dealt with unsavory Brazilian slave traders for a time, she made her fortune in palm oil that was exported to Europe.

While Madame Tinubu was exceptionally successful, many other women supported their families by trading. Even in societies that practice strict purdah, where women live secluded in compounds and veil when on the street, some still carry on trade. The Hausa women of Nigeria, for example, go into purdah in their early teens but continued to make cooked food for sale. Their young daughters, who are not yet in purdah, carry head-loads of food that they sell on the public streets. Women say they like trading as an occupation because they can combine it with childcare duties and the work is less strenuous than the manual labor required for farming. Also, in local villages, the market is usually the focal point for social and commercial activity. The women enjoy the chance to socialize as they engage in the business of trading.

In her guide, Sara Evans emphasizes the analysis of tools used by women and men as one way to investigate the division of labor by sex within a particular society. In Tanzania a word for “woman” is also the word for “stove.” Although this may seem to a Westerner as an example of sexism, to Tanzanian women it may indicate a source of power as women are ultimately in charge of preparing food. Another example are the Woyo wives of the Congo River area who send messages to husbands through the carved pot lids that cover hot food. A village carver creates different lids for different complaints. Because the men eat separately with other men, wives can send husbands a public message of discontent without verbally confronting them. In many times and places, including in American history, kitchens and cooking tools have been considered off-limits to men and this restriction can be a source of power for women.

Besides tools, women’s work songs can be another source of power. Women of the Chewa in Malawi use songs, for example, to express their needs and make their complaints public. Pounding songs are sung while women stamp corn into flour using long wooden pestles and a wooden mortar. The rhythm and group participation ease the work of an otherwise tiresome task and the words sung often convey a strong message to village men in a socially acceptable way.

Women are increasingly moving into roles that in some groups were assigned to men. In 2004 Mosadi Seboko became the first woman to become chief of the Baletes tribe in Botswana. Traditionally the new male chief was given gifts befitting a male leader; the gifts given Mosadi Seboko reflect the confusion of dealing with a new work role for a woman. She was given a pickup truck, computer, and printer but also a washing machine and vacuum. The gifts to Chief Seboko hint at the roles for men and women among the Baletes as well as the need to create new traditions with changing roles.

Theme 6. Education

A debate about the proper education for women is a recurring theme in world history. One argument given against educating girls was that they were intellectually inferior and not capable of learning. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle (364-322 BCE) thought that women were an inferior subspecies of humans and, thus, could not learn on the level of men. Unfortunately, the influential medieval philosophy Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274 CE) based his views on Aristotle and also opposed education for women.

By the end of the European Renaissance, however, most of the opposition to educating women had disappeared but what girls and women should learn was still debated. The Renaissance thinker, Juan Luis Vives, wrote a book of advice for the future Queen Mary of England, *Christian Woman*, which stressed the virtuousness of pious learning and submission to a husband’s wishes. Ignoring the fact that he was writing for the future queen who would rule England, Vives wrote, “To the woman nature has given a fearful, a covetous and humble mind to be subject unto man.”

Throughout medieval and Renaissance times there were learned women who found ways to get around prohibitions against women’s education. Many choose the life of a nun, which sometimes offered a chance to pursue a scholarly career. Hroswitha of Gandersheim, a 10th century German nun, wrote plays and poetry. Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1176) founded a

convent, corresponded with scholars and leaders throughout Europe, composed music still listened to today, and carried out scientific experiments.

Educated European women who were not nuns included queens such as Eleanor of Aquitaine. But there were other women who were not nuns or royalty who obtained educations. Christine de Pisan (1365-1431) is sometimes called the first professional woman writer as she received some commissions for her work that helped to support her family.

The debate about whether girls should learn and, if so, what they should learn was held in many parts of the world. From colonial times into the 20th century most Latin American women could not read or write. Many reasons were given for not teaching girls. Fathers in 18th century Peru feared educating their daughters because they might write love letters and read forbidden sinful novels. An 18th century Brazilian ordinance set up regulations for schooling in an orphanage that required “teaching the boys to read, write, and do sums and the girls to sew, wash, and make lace.”

In other world areas there were the same sorts of arguments about women’s education. But women throughout world history have sometimes been able to overcome these obstacles, often in ingenious ways, to become educated. Sometimes they got help from sympathetic family members. In modern China, where boys had more clout in the family than girls, an older brother sometimes helped to convince parents that daughters should be educated as well as sons. Often the family sacrificed to send the oldest boy in the family to the best schools available. Since by the early 20th century these were usually Westernized schools, the young men came home and encouraged their sisters desire for an education. In their autobiographies several Chinese women mention the support of older brothers in their struggle for an education.

Theme 7. Public Life and Voluntary Associations

In 2003 and 2004 the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to women: Shirin Ebadi of Iran and Wangari Maathai of Kenya. Ebadi is known for her human rights work in Iran and Maathai is founder of the Green Belt Movement to plant trees in deforested areas of Kenya. Wangari Maathai was also a human rights activist who defied the dictatorial government of President Daniel arap Moi. Both women represent a new vision of creating a civil society through empowering citizens, particularly women, at the grassroots level.

In most societies women have had less official authority than men but they have frequently devised strategies to overcome this lack of authority. Some women have banded together to oppose male dominance. The power of Igbo women of Nigeria was based on their solidarity as expressed in their meetings, their market networks, their kinship groups, and their right to use strikes and boycotts to force change. One type of strike was called “sitting on a man” and involved women gathering at a man’s compound, sometimes late at night, dancing and singing scurrilous songs which detailed the women’s grievances against him. Often these grievances involved his mistreatment of his wife or violation of women’s trading and market rules. The women would bang on his hut with pestles used for pounding yams; they might demolish his hut, plaster it with mud, or rough him up a bit. Even the threat of being subjected to “sitting on a man” was often enough to change a man’s behavior. The examples of the Chewa women of

Malawi and Woyo wives of the Congo area described in Theme 5 also illustrate methods of public shaming of men to change their behavior.

Women worldwide have banded together in formal organizations to improve the status of women. Women in India, for example, can look back to a rich history of reform movements aimed at improving women's lives. The anti-purdah movement in the early 20th century was organized to change a custom that limited women's freedom of movement. Purdah, the seclusion and veiling of Hindu and Muslim women, was seen by these reformers as having a major adverse impact on women's status. Two women's organizations, The Women's Indian Association, formed in 1917, and The All-Indian Women's Conference, 1927, sought to advance the status of women through education, social reform, and politics with a major emphasis on eliminating the custom of purdah. Both organizations founded branches throughout India and by the mid-1930s claimed a combined membership of over 10,000 women.

After attending a woman's conference in Italy in 1919, the Egypt feminist, Huda Sharawi, removed her veil on arrival at Cairo railway station. Others followed her example and in 1924 she headed the Egyptian Feminist Union working for Egyptian nationalism and women rights, particularly education for women.

In many parts of Latin America, women joined independence movements during the 19th century aiming at gaining independence from Spain and creating new republics. They took the lead in forming tertullias, usually considered social occasions like an open house, but these tertullias became occasions where revolutionary ideas could be discussed and converts made to the cause of independence. The Colombian Manuela de Gonzales Manrique formed the tertullia, El Buen Gusto, to discuss poetry but the real purpose was to plan for the revolution against Spain. Other Latin American women became spies for the cause of independence. Teresa Heredia of Venezuela was caught and jailed, "tarred and feathered, and made to ride nude on a burro through the city streets." A worse fate befell the Colombian, Policarpa Salavarrieta, who was hunted down and publicly executed.

During the Mexican Revolution (1919-1917) women soldaderas played a prominent part as the rebels' quartermaster corps. These women raided villages for food, ground corn and made tortillas, often carrying rifles and ammunition. Sometimes they also carried babies on their backs.

Women in world history have led armies into battle often as "warrior queens." In Japanese history, for example, the Empress Jingū (200-269 CE) took over her husband's army upon his death and invaded Korea. As she was pregnant, she had to girdle herself to fit into her uniform, perhaps the origin of the obi that is wore over the kimono. In 1588 Queen Elizabeth I of England led her troops at Tilsbury to oppose the invasion of the Spanish and in the 19th century India Lakshmi Bai, Rani of Jhansi, led a rebellion against British rule when the British annexed Jhansi. She was surrounded on the battlefield and shot, dying shortly afterward.

Throughout world history women have organized in informal and formal ways to improve their status and gain civil rights. They worked with men to rebel against colonialism and dictatorships. They have also been powerful leaders as queens, queen mothers, and regents. In recent times

they have lead their countries as prime ministers and held significant posts in many governments. Often they had to overcome social norms that restricted their roles to private ones of wife and motherhood to achieve recognition and success in the public sphere.
