

EXPLORATIONS IN WORLD HISTORY

*Envisioning Women
in World History*

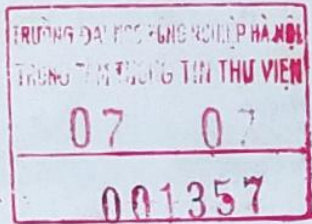
PREHISTORY—1500, VOLUME 1

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ENVISIONING WOMEN IN WORLD HISTORY

PREHISTORY-1500, VOLUME 1



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NOTE FROM THE SERIES EDITORS



World History has come of age. No longer regarded as simply a task for amateurs or philosophers, it has become an integral part of the historical profession and one of its most exciting and innovative fields of study. At the level of scholarship, a growing tide of books, articles, and conferences continues to enlarge our understanding of the many and intersecting journeys of humankind framed in global terms. At the level of teaching, more and more secondary schools as well as colleges and universities now offer, and sometimes require, World History of their students. One of the prominent features of the World History movement has been the unusually close association of its scholarly and its teaching wings. Teachers at all levels have participated with university-based scholars in the development of this new field.

The McGraw-Hill series—Explorations in World History—operates at this intersection of scholarship and teaching. It seeks to convey the results of recent research in World History in a form wholly accessible to beginning students. It also provides a pedagogical alternative to or supplement for the large and inclusive core textbooks that are features of so many World History courses. Each volume in the series focuses briefly on a particular theme, set in a global and comparative context. And each of them is “open-ended,” raising questions and drawing students into the larger issues that animate World History.

Women’s history may be the only field of historical study more vigorous than World History over the last 40 years. Nevertheless, the sheer volume of research and writing, after millennia of neglect, has made it difficult for most scholars in women’s history to reach beyond the established conceptual traditions of national histories. World History has taught us to ask and try to answer larger questions about women than those posed by national histories. What patterns can be discerned from the separate histories of women over the globe? Have women always been subordinate to men, or is patriarchy a particular historical development with a beginning, middle, and perhaps an end? What historical conditions or institutions repress or liberate women? What have women been able to accomplish to shape their own destinies?

The authors of this book are ideally suited to help us answer these questions. Catherine Clay, Chandrika Paul, and Christine Senecal are all specialists in women's history within particular cultures: Eurasia, India, and ancient and medieval Europe, respectively. They are also all passionate, practicing world historians. We are proud to offer the fruits of a collaboration that finally introduces, in engaging prose, the other half of world history.

Robert Strayer
Kevin Reilly



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INTRODUCTION



Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. . . . And she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called "the sex." . . . She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. . . . But it will be asked at once: how did all this begin? . . . How is it that this world has always belonged to men? (de Beauvoir, 1980)¹

Over and over again women heard in voices of tradition . . . that they could desire no greater destiny than to glory in their femininity. Experts told them how to dress, look, and act more feminine. . . . They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. . . . (Friedan, 1963)²

In 1953, the English translation of Simone de Beauvoir's *Le Deuxieme Sexe* (*The Second Sex*) was published in the United States. De Beauvoir offered an explanation of the lower status of women in society. Her book, along with Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), became the seminal works defining the early 1960s women's movement in the United States. As the above quotes demonstrate, de Beauvoir and Friedan are in agreement that from beginning of historical time, women have led a peripheral existence in comparison with men. Their works intensified the intellectual debate on the origins of patriarchy—that is, the institutional domination of men over women. Some scholars disagreed with their analyses, arguing that some societies have existed where women shared a rough parity with men. Largely because of the vast differences in women's experiences in different societies, historians have yet to develop either a simple explanation for the origins of patriarchy or a universal description of its manifestations.

Our book, *Envisioning Women in World History: Prehistory to 1500 CE*, addresses these issues from a global perspective. A comparative approach to Women's History enables us to point out broad patterns in women's experiences while acknowledging change across time and space. Women's roles have been neither universal nor static, but their power within families, their sexual and reproductive rights, and their economic and political influence have waxed and waned. Consequently, the meanings and manifestations of women's agency, or power, have also varied. Women have not always been able to confront their oppression; indeed, the inequality among genders may have even been embraced by the wealthiest women