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Teresa A. Meade, Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, eds. *A Companion to Gender History.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006. xii + 676 pp. $43.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4051-4960-0.

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A Blackwell Collection on Gender History

Readers will appreciate this book not just for its global coverage of issues related to gender history, but for its use of textual criticism as an approach to gender studies. There are thirty-two contributing authors. Ten authors offer thematic essays on gender issues in world history (part 1). Twenty-two authors write chronological or geographical essays (part 2). Their work ranges across prehistoric, classical, and post-classical societies (2000 BCE-1400 CE); gender and the development of modern society (1400-1750 CE); gender and the modern world (1750-1920); and gender in the contemporary world (1920-2003). Although definitions, meanings, and constructs of gender have varied internationally over the centuries, scholarly investigations of the roles of gender and women's history have not fully recognized this, only gradually coming to a redefinition of the central issues from an earlier understanding of gender and its practices. Teresa A. Meade's incisive reference to the work of Joan Wallach Scott, who viewed gender not just as "category imposed on sexed body" but as a primary way of signifying power relations, shifts the focus immediately from women as a subject of historical investigation to the critical position of gender in social history. Thus, the vast and related disciplines of women's history and the historical analysis of gender are featured as historically changing, with dynamics specific to period and place. Concerns are raised about the emphasis on the United States and Europe, and it is the attempt to use new research to build a globally inclusive record that makes this book outstanding.

This work contains thematic essays on the concepts of gender as they relate to other historical topics, and the standards of analysis not only complement the earlier contributions to the history of women but stress the role of gender in defining human relationships. It is evident from this medley of analyses that no particular findings or conclusions on gender are universally valid, either globally or temporally. As in other fields of study, the evolution of our knowledge of gender is such that acceptable propositions of decades ago are today subject to questions linked to new research and concepts in contemporary social history. For instance, biological indices such as chromosomes and genitalia no longer serve to partition gender identities and scholars have reasoned that gender is a role-based label. As such, it has been used to change the status of individuals who found themselves in certain roles or who for reasons related to class or race did not fit into existing male-female categories.

In his discourse on sexuality, Robert A. Nye draws on rich collections of cultural heritage from many parts of the world where, contrary to existing beliefs, women ruled over men and some men role-played as women, thus building a solid intellectual base for a more flexible gender-role analysis. Mounting opposition to a dual sex category has led to the invention of third gender models to accommodate a globally perceived diversification of body types, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Nonetheless, the management of procreation has been critical to the sustenance of societal prosperity, and so sex categories as well as the practices that ensured and regulated birth have been held in esteem across all cultures.

Laura Levine Frader, in "Gender and Labor in World History," explores the importance of masculinity and femininity in the history of Western Europe and Asian societies with a view to understanding how the development of industrial capitalism reinforced earlier divisions of labor and the concept of gender. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, in "Structures and Meaning in a Gendered Family History," reasons that the concept of gender stands out as a category of analysis in the history of family. She sees family history as having stressed the roles of race, social class, location, ethnicity, religion, and fertility levels in creating differences in the structures, forms, and mean-

ings of family life and how the family, in turn, shaped these factors. Ursula King, analyzing "Religion and Gender, Embedded Patterns, Interwoven Framework," argues that there exists subtlety in the relationship between the concepts of gender and religion. According to King, religion embodies the creation, legitimization, enforcement, and oppression as well as the transformation and liberation of gender in a complex nexus of interrelationships (p. 71). Susan Kingsley's "Gender Rules, Law and Politics" shows that feminist movements in the Western world have improved the social, political, and economic lives of the women in this domain, but suggests that this may not apply to women elsewhere. She solicits a broader feminist politics that would encompass and address issues of perceived differences in class, sexuality, race, religion, culture, and ethnicity among women across the globe. Deirdre Keenan, while analyzing the various feminist theories of race, gender, and other differences, sums up by affirming Eleanor Smeal's speech that theory can enhance the unity of women by revealing, rather than obscuring, differences and suggests ways for women to form coalitions by breaking cultural barriers. Through the lens of mass compulsory schooling, Paula Miller views complex issues involving gender and other categories such as race and class.

Among the chronological and geographical essays, Marcia-Anne Dobres, in "Gender in the Formation of the Earliest Human Societies," points out, with reference to archeological records, how gender roles, relationships, ideologies, and processes contributed to the form and transformation of the earliest human societies, and suggests methods for modeling ancient gender practices. Guity Nashat in "Women in the Middle East, 8000 BCE to 1700 CE" suggests that women's private roles and men's public roles have been mistakenly attributed to Islamic influence, and argues that they stem instead from pre-Islamic social structures. On the other hand David Schoenbrun, in "Gendered Themes in Early African History," reflects on the versatility of gendered identities and social relations in Africa. He posits that ancient African history "reveals distinctive arrangements and intersections of the categories of gender, age, class and status" (p. 249). In "Gender and the Development of Modern Society (1400-1750)," Barbara Watson Andaya explores gender history in Southeast Asia and the "world regions" framework. While calling for caution in lumping together groups that possess distinct religious, linguistic, and historical experiences, she notes that an area studies framework has been fundamental in shaping academic research in Asia and the Pacific. She indicates that in practical terms, the evolution of gender history would benefit from a comparative study of the region. In "Gender and the Modern World" (1750-1920), Sonya Lipsett-Rivera analyzes gender roles in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her study reveals that changes in female-male social roles included a "reconfiguration of the concept of female utility and the embracing of the concept of social motherhood" (p. 477). In the section on "Gender in the Contemporary World (1920-2003)," Barbara Evans Clements, writing on "Continuities amid Change: Gender Ideas and Arrangements in Twentieth Century Russia and Eastern Europe," contends that collapsing the vast geopolitical area known as Eastern Europe into one category of study tends to underestimate critical cultural, political, religious, economic, and ethnic differences. She urges caution in interpreting changing gender ideas and practices from the pre-Soviet era through the Soviet era, so as not to view them as more revolutionary than they actually are. Furthermore, she notes that greater interaction with the rest of Europe in the post-Soviet era will continue to affect gender constructions throughout this area.

There is no doubt that this book is a reference masterpiece, both because of its scope and the contributors' clear and comprehensible writing. The authors show great courage as well in their search for answers to the nagging questions of gender and women's history, reaching beyond the ample data on the United States and Europe to present a truly global study. Given the scope of the book, it would have been extremely useful if the editors had provided an abstract or introductory paragraph for each article to explain how it illuminates issues of gender history. Despite this minor flaw, we recommend this work as an addition to the historiography on women and gender, and to students and scholars who are interested in broadening their views on gender issues

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