H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Gertrude Matyoka Yeager. *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Woman in Latin American History (Jaguar Books on Latin America).* Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1994. $65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8420-2479-2; $27.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8420-2480-8.

Reviewed by Virginia W. Leonard (Western Illinois University)

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Gertrude Yeager is an associate professor of Latin American history at Tulane University, where she and her students worked on this book. It is meant for introducing undergraduates to the history of women in Latin America.

The book consists of articles published elsewhere, and is divided into two parts: "Culture and Status of Women" and "Reconstructing the Past." A list of the contents follows this review.

In an excellent introduction, Yeager stresses that continuity rather than change determines the history of women in Latin America. She summarizes the constants of their lives as home, family, and honor. The marianismo model of femininity has two aspects: meaning and moral superiority imbue women's lives of sacrifice for home and family, yet there are limitations on their self-determinism and autonomy. This is a terrific point of departure for class discussion.

The main points of the articles are concisely summarized as introductions. Interestingly, Yeager found the nineteenth century to be the least studied period, made difficult because women did not write about themselves. Yet, there are no articles dealing with the colonial period per se. The reader is left thinking that three centuries of colonial rule were stagnant and uniform, and generalizations about women can be studied via colonial laws and concepts of marianismo and machismo. The bulk of these articles encompass the political, economic and legal changes in the lives of women in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A couple of them are in the realm of popular culture.

Some reviewers might criticize this book for its perspective and its lack of recent research and articles that could be considered more radical and controversial. In addition, there are no articles by Latin American women that were translated specifically for this book. However, it could be argued that this book on Latin American women will be understandable to a great number of undergraduates, and this is of great value in itself. It is good for stimulating class discussion, it is very readable, and it is a good introduction to Latin American women.

There is an emphasis on legal changes in this book, and the explanations of the changes in Mexican family law by Sylvia Arrom were outstanding. The reader can only wish that the Cuban family law and its impact had been examined as thoroughly instead of being offered as *de facto* and *de jure*.

This book accomplishes its purpose–it can be utilized in a classroom to introduce undergraduates to the history of Latin American women, especially for the modern period. Instructors might want to supplement it with other articles. The instructor might also question some of the premises of the articles, such as "the question of personal identity is much less troublesome to Latin American women than to their North American sisters" (Stevens, p. 13), and "the war in Peru has radically transformed women's perceptions of themselves and their role in society, and, regardless of the outcome, the future does not augur well for the survival of the traditional patterns of gender oppression" (Daniel Castro, p. 223). Most of the articles will generate good class discussions.

Part I. Culture and Status of Women

Evelyn P. Stevens, Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo

Josefina Zoraida Vasquez, Women's Liberation in Latin America: Toward a History of the Present

Mercedes Cabello de Carbonera, Concerning Women's Intelligence and Beauty

Teresa Gonzalez de Fanning, Concerning the Education of Women

Lillian Estelle Fisher, The Influence of the Present Mexican Revolution upon the Status of Mexican Women

Daphne Patai, Jorge Amado: Champion of Women's Sexual Freedom

Donald Castro, Women in the World of Tango

Part II. Reconstructing the Past

Isaac F. Holton, Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century Colombia

Silvia M. Arrom, Changes in Mexican Family Law in the Nineteenth Century

Donna J. Guy, Women, Peonage, and Industrialization: Argentina, 1810-1914

Sandra McGee Deutsch, The Catholic Church, Work, and Womanhood IN ARGENTINA, 1890-1930

Josephine Hoeppner Woods, The "Chola"

Francesca Miller, The Suffrage Movement in Latin America

Larissa Lomnitz and Marisol Perez-Lizaur, Kinship Structure and the Role of Women in the Urban Upper Class of Mexico

Republic of Cuba, Law No. 1263: The Revolution Protects Motherhood

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, A Typology of Poor Women

Barbara Seitz, From Home to Street: Women and Revolution in Nicaragua

Thomas Niehaus, Interview with Indiana Acevedo, July 21, 1992, Managua, Nicaragua

Daniel Niehaus, "War Is Our Daily Life": Women's Participation in Sendero Luminoso

Carolyn Lehmann, Bread and Roses: Women Who Live Poverty

At the end of the book there is a list of Suggested Readings that is topical, followed by a list of Suggested Films.

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