

LIBERTYS' DAUGHTERS: THE REVOLUTIONARY EXPERIENCE OF AMERICAN WOMEN, 1750-1800.

MARY BETH NORTON. Boston-Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, 1980. Pp. 384.

There are many things that could be said about Mary Beth Norton's new book and they would all be superlative. The focus is on the impact of the Revolution on the lives of American women, and the vast array of well documented data is dazzling; in fact, almost overwhelming. This can hardly be considered a flaw; nevertheless, this remarkable research might well boggle the mind of the reader who is by now accustomed to the more sterile anecdotal approach to women's history where, for instance, emphasis might rest on the contributions of the women to the Revolution.

Throughout this fascinating book Norton overcomes the predominantly middle-class bias of her sources by deftly interweaving their words about servants, slaves and other women with such unlikely documents as plantation lists and observations of travellers. She clearly demonstrates the differential life experiences of the women of the scattered thirteen colonies.

The book begins appropriately with "the great Province of Women," the family, and includes courtship, marriage, pregnancy and childrearing practices depicting the "constant pattern" of the lives of American women. Norton contends that even though they accepted their subordinate and limited status, that after the mid 1700s American women began to seek a state of personal independence. One of the many examples is their undisguised discontent with "Domestick business," seeing it as endless and restricting, allowing no time for "anything New and improving" while "Chain'd down to domestic Dutys" that "Stagnate(d) the Blood and Stupefie(d) the Senses." (pp. 36, 39).

The War encouraged the women to extend their female roles outside the home, thereby reshaping and adding respect to the concept of womanhood. With the "egalitarian rhetoric of the Revolution" the dividing line between the "female sphere and the masculine realm" became less distinct and, as Norton shows in Part 2, this did not entirely disappear despite the constrictions of the Victorian era. The Revolution left an indelible mark on American colonial women in ways that were unique and significant for the status of North American women. Norton suggests that it was not by chance that the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 based its demands for the rights of women on the Declaration of Independence.

The Essay on Sources provides an excellent perspective on major archival holdings and identifies scattered family letters and papers for those who still tend to think the cupboard is bare of data on eighteenth century American women. The bulk of the book is based on letters from about 450 American families although other research is included such as an analysis of the claims to the crown by 468 American loyalist women. The selected illustrations further enhance this remarkable collection of evidence.

A brief review cannot do justice to *Liberty's Daughters*. The book represents eight years of research and contains much hitherto unpublished material that dispels old myths about colonial women. In the last chapter Norton illumines the relationship between the Revolution and formal education for women, concluding that the Republican vision of the "ideal woman" led to the "first generation of educated female Americans."

The Canadian reader cannot but be reminded of the irony of history, recalling that many American women who were married to loyalists and consequently banished from their homeland after the Revolution left a mark on what became the Canadian nation. The Republican ideology did not enhance their status but it surely affected their lives in ways now made more visible by Norton's sensitive appraisal of the changed status of the

American woman and the colonial family after the War for Independence.

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Western Canadian Studies Conference

The 1981 Western Canadian Studies Conference will be held January 23 and 24 at the Banff Springs Hotel in Banff, Alberta. The theme of the meeting will be "War and Society in Western Canada: 1914 to 1945." The focus will be on the impact of war on different aspects of western Canadian life and society, and the role played by the west and westerners in World Wars One and Two. The following sessions have been planned: War, Agriculture and Industry in the West; Women and War in Western Canada; War and the Western Canadian Economy; War and Propaganda in Western Canada; Manpower and War in Western Canada: World War

One; Western Canada and Western Canadians in Action, 1914-1945. Banquet speaker will be Col. C.P. Stacey.

Registration information may be obtained from Ms. Madeline Aldridge, c/o Conference Office, Faculty of Continuing Education, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta T2N 1N4. Those who plan to attend are urged to write early since only a limited number of rooms will be available at the Banff Springs Hotel at the special conference rate.