

BOOK REVIEWS

*L*ouise V. North, Janet M. Wedge, and Landa M. Freeman. *In the Words of Women: The Revolutionary War and the Birth of the Nation, 1765–1799*. (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011) Pp. xxxv, 385. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$90.00. Paper \$39.95.

The editors of *In the Words of Women: The Revolutionary War and the Birth of a Nation* have created a vivid narrative of women's lives in the Revolutionary era. Weaving together short historical summaries, biographical context, and early American women's words, the book is unusually readable and fast-paced for its genre. For a general audience this work will be quite appealing (although the hardcover is priced out of this range, the paperback is only \$39.95) and it will be useful for college teaching.

The documents included in the book offer a wide range of women's voices. The editors have included Native, African American, and Jewish women, in addition to visiting European women and an abundance of loyalist women. The preponderance

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of documents is from the Northeast, which is to be expected, although there are a good number of writings from southern women. The addition of writings by women in the Caribbean and Canada would have added further diversity to this already quite varied collection.

The editors are transparent about their editorial practices, offering a detailed discussion of how they chose documents and what changes they have made. The documents range from the famous to the obscure, drawing on some archival finds but largely on previously published materials (although these have appeared in such a broad array of books that this compendium remains quite useful). For the most part, the editors have retained original spellings, although they have modernized punctuation and spelled out abbreviations. Such changes make the documents much easier to read, but suggest that the materials in this volume may be better used as teaching tools, references, and starting points rather than as original sources for scholarly research.

The editors occasionally explain names and developments mentioned in documents with parenthetical notes, making for a smooth reading experience without having to refer to footnotes. Each document is cited in detailed endnotes, and there is also a comprehensive bibliography of secondary works. A glossary of names accompanied by short biographies also helps readers keep track of the many women whose writings are included.

The book is divided into three sections: the Revolution, daily life, and life after the Revolution. The greatest focus is on the Revolution, with vivid descriptions of women's experiences of political unrest and war. From Hannah Griffitts's saucy poem "The female Patriots" to the Baroness Von Riedesel's vivid descriptions of life with the soldiers, the editors have included a wide range of voices and experiences of the war. Descriptions of political and military developments are interspersed with the documents to provide context.

The section on daily life is richly varied, with sections on healing, marriage, domestic work, and traveling. The entries range from letters and diaries to recipes and household account books. Love letters from women to their husbands are particularly powerful here and are among the most accessible to readers unfamiliar with the period. Many of the letters show the tight connection between social and political life; Cornelia Clinton's love letter to Edmond Genêt declared that "not withstanding your worth I do not think I could have been attached to you had you been any thing but a Republican" (188). It takes very few words to show, in this and many other

letters in the collection, the intimate dimensions of women's connection to politics. For the less-familiar letters, particularly those in the chapter on healing, the editors offer helpful explanations of eighteenth-century life and practices.

The final section on life after the Revolution is the shortest, in part because the previous chapters included plenty of documents from post-1783. The focus is largely on political developments and women's reactions to them, particularly Washington's inauguration and his death. Thus the section focuses more on a traditional narrative than on shifts in women's political roles, though it should be noted that scholars like Rosemarie Zagarri and Susan Branson have found many women's documents to demonstrate the latter.

Carol Berkin's short foreword to the book argues that women's voices "have sometimes been lost in the rush to provide analysis and narration of their roles" (x). She worries, rightly, that publications of women's papers are not keeping pace with the edited volumes of prominent men of the Revolutionary era. Yet analysis enables good interpretation and editing of primary source documents. Greater use of the analytical insights of the past thirty years of gender scholarship, on topics ranging from women's involvement in boycotts to companionate marriage to the professionalization of (and exclusion of women from) medicine, would have enriched the editorial context provided in this volume. Readers should make use of the volume's bibliography, which does highlight some of the rich historiography of women in the Revolutionary era.

This book is a result of the editors' passion for women's writings, and it is a pleasure to read history through the individual women the editors have chosen. Readers outside of academia will certainly enjoy the book and it may spark their interest in reading secondary scholarship on women's history. This book would also be a good addition to undergraduate courses on the American Revolution, exposing students to women's voices when they may be expecting to learn a male-dominated story. Finally, professors who advise senior thesis students or junior graduate students will find the volume helpful for locating easily accessible primary sources for research projects on women.

CASSANDRA GOOD

Papers of James Monroe, University of Mary Washington