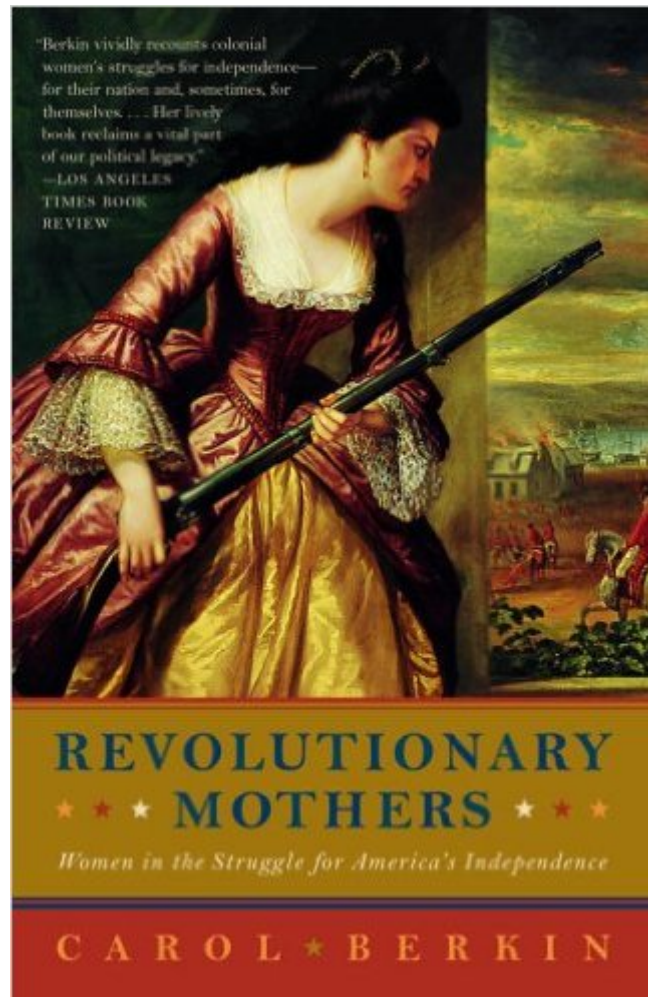


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Revolutionary Mothers: Women In The Struggle For America's Independence



Synopsis

The American Revolution was a home-front war that brought scarcity, bloodshed, and danger into the life of every American. In this groundbreaking history, Carol Berkin shows us how women played a vital role throughout the conflict. The women of the Revolution were most active at home, organizing boycotts of British goods, raising funds for the fledgling nation, and managing the family business while struggling to maintain a modicum of normalcy as husbands, brothers and fathers died. Yet Berkin also reveals that it was not just the men who fought on the front lines, as in the story of Margaret Corbin, who was crippled for life when she took her husband's place beside a cannon at Fort Monmouth. This incisive and comprehensive history illuminates a fascinating and unknown side of the struggle for American independence.

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Customer Reviews

Ask most people about women's involvement in the American Revolution and you are likely to hear about Betsy Ross or Molly Pitcher. But Ross may not have been the person who made the first American flag, and Molly Pitcher, says historian Carol Berkin, never existed --- she was an imaginative construct, comparable to World War II's Rosie the Riveter. Berkin, a history professor at Baruch College and the City University of New York, has sought out the stories of lesser-known but more authentic women --- people like Esther Reed, who organized a fund-raising drive among the women of Philadelphia in support of the Continental Army; Catharine Greene, who endured the rigors of Valley Forge in company with her husband, General Nathanael Greene; and Molly Brant, a Mohawk Indian and British sympathizer who performed skillfully in delicate diplomatic negotiations

during the war. Martha Washington too wins an honorable place in Berkin's female pantheon for her annual trips to be with her husband and his troops even during the war's darkest days. Berkin is even-handed, devoting space to the activities of Loyalist women as well as American patriots, and not neglecting the lives of black and Indian women. In fact, the single most arresting story in her book is that of Frederika von Riedesel, the wife of a Hessian general who was present at the pivotal battle of Saratoga (where her husband commanded his men on the British side), later endured captivity and long, harsh, forced travels with her husband and small children, was befriended by Thomas Jefferson during a stay in Virginia, and eventually returned to Europe, seemingly with the good will of major players on both sides of the conflict. Frederika was lucky, of course; her husband's high rank ensured her treatment far better than that accorded to prisoners of lesser rank. But she obviously was a woman of grit and resourcefulness who managed at several key junctures in her American years to turn misfortune to her and her family's advantage. Berkin gives the reader quick and necessarily somewhat superficial summaries of the active role of women as organizers of pre-war boycotts of British goods, as "camp followers" who did laundry, cooking and sewing for troops on both sides of the fight, and as couriers, spies and other such covert operatives. She is honest enough to admit that some of the stories she tells are based on flimsy evidence --- the perhaps embellished recollections of participants or stories that may have become distorted as they were passed down through familial generations. But the common thread that runs through her narrative is clear --- women were active participants in the great events of 1775-1783, not stay-at-homes. It is a corner of American history worth illuminating. Berkin's tone is popular rather than scholarly. She does not trumpet the feminist angle vehemently, preferring to let her well-written narrative make its obvious point. She begins with a survey of the subservient position occupied by women in pre-Revolutionary America, and ends by considering how the wartime activities of women altered post-war male perceptions and led to changes for the better. Her last paragraph leaves the definite impression that there is more to come from Carol Berkin on the subsequent course of American women's emergence from the long shadows of their husbands. In this slim but deftly executed book, she has made a good start on what easily could become a long story. --- Reviewed by Robert Finn

Never in my history lessons have I heard these stories. The struggles of women during the American Revolution were many. I'm embarrassed that I never considered what they went through; partly because we have always been taught only about the hardships on the battlefield. But, in this book, you will read about the many woman who followed the soldiers (camp followers), women who

had no other choice but maintain the farms during their husband's absence, women who volunteered in support of the war (spinners, etc), and general's wives who helped boost the soldiers' moral. There are many interesting facts about Martha Washington, Abigail Adams, and many other "celebrity" wives contributions during the war. A great book that I will talk about for a very long time.

I enjoy personal stories of the Revolutionary War. This was a good book, but not as detailed about the women's stories as I thought it might be. It was more detail about the state of American and gender roles with personal stories thrown in. What prompted me to look for more Revolutionary times books about women was *Founding Mothers: The Women Who Raised Our Nation* by Cokie Roberts. *Founding Mothers* was a wonderful detail of how these women were raised and their roles in the revolution. The book *Revolutionary Mothers* did cover more than the white upper-crust, it covered Native American roles, African American roles, and both sides of the war, patriot and loyalist. Overall, I am glad I read it.

This is the second book I've read by Carol Berkin ("*Brilliant Solution*"), and the pattern that emerges in those two is that she isn't unnecessarily long-winded and her writing is very easy to follow. "*Revolutionary Mothers*" isn't a 5-star book because it's a brief survey of the topic that breaks no new ground. But it's a book that can be read in a couple of days, and because of how well it's organized, you'll have a strong understanding of the various roles women played during the American Revolution. Berkin provides nice background to gender roles and expectations prior to the conflict with Britain, and then she discusses the stories of women living in the colonies during the war -- housewives, loyalists, spies, African-Americans, native Americans, etc. It's clear from the length of the book and the amount of context she provides that primary-source materials from women of that era are not readily available. In fact, the chapter on African-American women is almost entirely context, but then, slave women in the 1770s weren't keeping diaries or writing letters. This book included some stuff I knew and plenty that I didn't know about women during the Revolutionary period and put all of it in one easy-to-read place, compiled by a respected historian. It would appeal to almost anyone with any interest in history. Highly recommended.

This book captured the time period of the American Revolution and the role women played in it like no other book I have ever read. I appreciated the focus on particular individuals which really helped bring it to life for me. I recommend this book to anyone wanting to know more about what part women played during the American Revolution. I'm sure you will be both surprised and delighted at

your findings.

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