

Whither History of Women in the Americas?

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This article charts conceptual developments in the field of history of women in the Americas over the past forty years since the author began her career. It compares women's and gender history and the contributions of key figures such as Joan Scott, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Barbara Welter along with recent developments in the field such as the history of women in the Atlantic world. The article also proposes reasons for the separation of American women's history into North American, Latin American, and Caribbean fields.

Keywords: women, gender, Joan Scott, Alice Kessler-Harris, Barbara Welter, historiography

In the early 1970s, the chair of the Department of History in a small Pennsylvania college, eager for the enrollments he felt would come with a trendy new subject, drafted me to teach what I now realize was one of the first college courses in women's history. As a young adjunct with a BA from a small Catholic women's college and a master's degree in European diplomatic history, I was an unlikely pioneer and an even less likely feminist. But, quite simply, the experience changed my life. The class read Abigail McCarthy's autobiography, *Private Faces/Public Places*, Julia O'Faolain's *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians*, and Miriam Scher's *Feminism: the Essential Writings*. I managed to stay one-step ahead of students eager to learn more of a history that seemed to be in a daily process of excavation. When the job ended there was no doubt in my mind that I would return to graduate school to learn more about the subject I was teaching and, with few interruptions, have been teaching and writing about ever since. As our director of women's studies recently said to me in a faux reverential tone, "you *are* history." In forty years, the green shoots of women's history have grown, blossomed, and matured. Any concern for the health of the field can be assuaged by looking at the scholarship in terms of sheer numbers: thousands of monographs, multiple journals devoted to the field, and numerous books reviewed in major academic journals. Each issue of the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History* contain pages of book reviews whose titles indicate that while the archeological excavation of women's history continues, historians continually find new subjects and new approaches—the work of revision is well underway as young Turks mount critical responses to foundational texts in the field. By any index—journals, graduate programs, books, conferences, anthologies, and faculty positions—the field of women's history has become institutionalized.¹ Or has

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it? Is women's history increasingly thought of as a quaint remnant of 1970s politics, as dated as the miniskirts I wore when I taught my first women's history course? Is the more recently coined appellation "gender history" more in keeping with quieter postmodern times? Is gender a more powerful analytic tool or, as some critics feel, simply feminism neutered? Is the tension between women's history and gender history productive, and how essential is it to defining the history of women in the Americas?

The name of this journal itself—*History of Women in the Americas*—presents a dilemma. Like all utopian visions, women's history promised much—in this case that, like feminism itself, it could break the bonds of nationalist history and sketch the history of the universally second sex on a global canvas. And yet forty years on, that promise can only be seen fulfilled in certain pockets of the massive literature known as women's history. Even in a location where historians conceivably should or could be writing in a different vein—the history of women in the Americas—we still find discrete historiographies labeled "U.S.," "Latin American," "Canadian," and "Caribbean." As evidence of this, it is worth noting that my colleague, the distinguished historian of the Brazilian family, Elizabeth Kuznesof, has written an article separate from mine on the historiography of women in Latin America for this journal.² There are multiple and very real reasons for this Balkanized historiography of women in the Americas. These include the manner in which historical knowledge is organized and taught in U.S. and British universities, the inherent challenge of doing archival work in far-flung places and different languages, the varied ways colonialism shaped each of these areas, and the varied experiences of slavery throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, the Southern United States, and its absence in Canada. To consider the possibilities raised by the concept "history of women in the Americas," including the opportunity to bring together the disparate historiographies of the Americas, in this article, I plan to examine the ideas of several influential U.S. historians and the models they offer for women's history, and then discuss the potential usefulness of Atlantic world history for women's history in the Americas.

¹ One indicator of women's and gender history's robust health was a roundtable in a recent issue of the *Journal of American History*. Cornelia H. Dayton and Lisa Levenstein, "The Big Tent of U.S. Women's and Gender History: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 793-817; Ana Elizabeth Rosas, "Seeing Ourselves and for Ourselves: The Infinite Potential of Women's and Gender History," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 830-834; Elisabetta Vezzosi, "Gender, Generations, Leadership," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 835-838; Alice Kessler-Harris, "Gender Identity and the Gendered Process," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 827-829; Natsuki Aruga, "Can We Have a Total American History? A Comment on the Achievements of Women's and Gender History," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 818-821; Crystal N. Feimster, "The Impact of Racial and Sexual Politics on Women's History," *Journal of American History* 99 (2012): 822-826.

² Elizabeth Kuznesof, "The House, the Street and the Brothel: Gender in Latin American History," *Journal of History of Women in the Americas* 1 (2013).

Joan Scott and Alice Kessler-Harris

Joan Scott and Alice Kessler-Harris arguably have shaped, transformed, and commented on women/gender history as few others have in the past forty years. An assessment of their careers and their most recent insights demonstrates the maturation of women's history as well as the influence of postmodern, feminist, and gender theories on that history. At the outset I want to make clear that I am not setting Scott and Kessler-Harris against each other as representatives of opposite poles of women's and gender history—the complexity of their publications defy such easy categorization; rather, they offer different riffs on similar themes.

Like many historians of their generation, Scott and Kessler-Harris began their professional lives studying workers. Reviewers noted Joan Scott's first book, *The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth Century City*, published in 1974, as a "thoughtful study."³ Like many other labor histories published in the 1970s and 1980s, work and community were the center of Scott's analysis. Evidence from newspapers, trade unions, administrative archives, and demographic records answered questions about the decline of skilled glassworkers from artisans to factory operatives. Class dominated other categories of analysis, and gender, other than the gender implicit in the term *craftsmen*, was notably absent.

Four years after the publication of her first book, Scott had found a new subject and a new coauthor. I remember the excitement in 1978 among my graduate school cohort at the publication of Louise Tilly and Joan Scott's *Women, Work and Family*. Tilly and Scott were some of the first historians to recognize that women's history could not be written without acknowledging the inextricable link between public and private life and the tension between work and family, particularly for working-class women. Drawing on methods mined from the Cambridge Group for the Study of Demography and Family History, Tilly and Scott compared women's work in England and France framed in light of age at marriage, sex ratio, household structure, illegitimate births, and myriad other facts of women's experience. The "audacity" of their ambitious theorizing of the effect of industrial capitalism on women's economic and family roles was felt across the boundaries of national histories. In 1999, the *Journal of Women's History* marked the twenty-year anniversary of the publication of *Women, Work and*

³ Michael S. Smith, review of *The Glassworkers of Carmaux: French Craftsmen and Political Action in a Nineteenth Century City* by Joan Wallach Scott, *American Historical Review* 80 (1975): 1347.

Family with articles written by historians of Asian, American, and preindustrial women, thus tracing the impact of this book in their respective fields.⁴

Like most historians, Tilly and Scott manifested an interest in questions about power: how is it exercised historically and by whom? As many labor historians writing in the 1970s did, Tilly and Scott answered questions about power by determining the relationship of individuals and groups to the means of production. Frustrated by the limitations of this approach, particularly for women's history, Scott began to move away from the social science methods that characterized her early work and published a series of influential articles in the 1980s inflected with post-structural theory. In reading Michel Foucault, she recognized the possibilities that post-structural thought offered for historians of women. Rather than simply adding the activities of women to conventional historical narratives, historians could inquire what the terms "woman" and "man" meant and how those meanings changed over time. Influenced by colleagues at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women at Brown University, Scott's reasoning began to reflect theories of postmodernism and post-structuralism rather than the Marxist materialism of her earlier work. She explained her theoretical transition in practical terms. *Discovering* a historical past for women did not correspondingly give historical importance to women's activities. Gender, understood as "the social organization of sexual difference," offered the opportunity to explain the significance of women's presence in the past. "It is in analyzing the process of making meaning that gender becomes important. Concepts such as class are created through differentiation. Historically, gender has provided a way of articulating and naturalizing difference."⁵ Scott carried her message about gender's historical significance to the general historical profession with the publication in 1986 of her article, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" in the *American Historical Review*. In the article, she sounded a clarion and controversial cry to all historians to understand gender as an essential dynamic in historical processes. Her bold critique of E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* acknowledged the presence of women in Thompson's seminal work, but explained that women appeared in *The Making* in walk-on roles rather than participating in the actual process of class formation described by Thompson.⁶ Scott's article embraced the "linguistic turn" now seen as the point where cultural history began to displace social history in the vanguard of the profession.

⁴ Leila J. Rupp ed., "Women's History in the New Millennium: *Women, Work, and Family* after Two Decades" Special Issue, *Journal of Women's History* 11 (1999): 363-386.

⁵ Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 60.

⁶ Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053-1075. *The American Historical Review* marked the significance of this article, the most cited in the journal's history, with a multi-essay forum, "Revisiting 'Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis,'" *American Historical Review* 113 (2008).

At this point it is only fair to ask how this reflection on Joan Scott's intellectual biography relates to the goal of this new journal to write the history of women in the Americas. What is the link between a historian of France located in the United States and historians of American women's history principally in Europe and the Americas? Latin American historian Heidi Tinsman, writing in the *American Historical Review* as part of a commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the publication of Joan Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," goes a long way to answer that question. Initially Tinsman expresses a resentment commonly felt by Latin American historians that "feminist paradigms" originating in Europe and the United States "trickle down" to influence Latin American women's history. An exception to this generalization is Scott's "Gender" article, which Tinsman notes "helped to strengthen paradigms specific to Latina American history" and encouraged Latin American women's historians to "critique empiricism and study gendered meanings." The many histories Tinsman enumerates that reflect Scott's influence from Chilean women's history to Mexico, Brazil, and elsewhere demonstrate a theoretical underpinning that unites many histories of women in the Americas even in diverse national settings.⁷

Turning to another historian of Scott's generation, Alice Kessler-Harris, who, unlike Scott, writes almost exclusively about women in the United States, we can see a somewhat different scholarly path. Like Scott, Kessler-Harris was present at the creation of women's history, and, like Scott, she began her career as a labor historian. In their early publications, Scott, Kessler-Harris, and a myriad of others reacted against what appeared to be a bias toward white elite women in the emerging women's history historiography.⁸ In the introduction to a recently published collection of her essays, Kessler-Harris identifies herself as a historian of working-class women. Important as well, both Scott and Kessler-Harris see their scholarship as part of a feminist political project.

Beginning with four influential articles published between 1975 and 1985, to her recently released biography of the American playwright Lillian Hellman, Kessler-Harris's subject has always been women.⁹

⁷ From Chile, Lorena Godoy, Elizabeth Hutchinson, Karin Rosenblatt, and M. Soledad Zárate eds., *Disciplina y desacato: Construcción de identidad en Chile, siglos XIX y XX* (Santiago de Chile: Inversiones Ñipaco 1995). From México, Carmen Ramos Escandón et al., *Presencia y transparencia: La mujer en la historia de México* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 1987). From Brazil, Elisabeth Souza-Lobo, *A classe operária tem dois sexos: Trabalho, dominação e Resistência* (Sao Paulo: Brasiliense, 1991). All cited in Heidi Tinsman, "A Paradigm of Our Own: Joan Scott in Latin American History," *American Historical Review* 11 (2008).

⁸ Barbara Welter's pioneering article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151–174, was notable for this bias.

⁹ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Difficult Woman: The Challenging Life and Times of Lillian Hellman* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2012).

Ironically, Kessler-Harris admits that she “systematically discarded everything to do with women” when writing her own dissertation on “the lower class as a factor in reform.” Participation in the civil rights, anti-war, and the feminist movements changed Kessler-Harris’s sense of the subject and purpose of history.¹⁰ By the late 1970s, her articles on labor reformers and women in trade unions were standard readings for graduate students; without question, they legitimated and informed my own early research on the gendered nature of trade-union ideology.¹¹ Kessler-Harris recently discussed the viability of women’s history in a lead article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* entitled “Do We Still Need Women’s History?” Although she vigorously endorsed gender history, Kessler-Harris answered the title’s question with a resounding “yes.” She reminded readers of the politics of history and specifically of the historical profession where graduate advisors still tell young scholars that identifying as a historian of women could limit their career possibilities. Women’s history, redolent of its feminist origins and orientation, seems less appealing than its genteel and seemingly less transgressive cousin, gender history. Kessler-Harris’s response to her own question—do we still need women’s history?—mediates between the categories of women’s and gender history. She clearly states: “I want to fight for a history of women and gender where gender constitutes the relational category, and the history of women the arena that we have yet to excavate.” Yet Kessler-Harris goes on to caution: “As a scholar, I believe that the cost of mainstreaming women’s history may well be to diminish the power of gender as an analytic category.”¹²

Kessler-Harris elaborated on her distinction between women’s and gender history in the introduction to a collection of her essays entitled *Gendering Labor History*. As she reflected on her pioneering work on women labor activists, she embraced gender as a way of deepening her analysis. “The identification and celebration of female labor leaders now seemed less important than finding out how gender has worked within the labor movement, how the play of gender could help to explain why labor leaders act in apparently idiosyncratic ways.” Most importantly, Kessler-Harris claims “the process of gender seemed

¹⁰ Kessler-Harris also acknowledges mentor Herbert Gutman and her involvement in the Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession, the Radical Caucus of the American Studies Association, and the Berkshire Conference of Women’s Historians in a recent interview. Melanie Gustafson, “Long Road from Home: An Interview with Alice Kessler-Harris,” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 3 (2006): 59–86.

¹¹ Ann Schofield, “Rebel Girls and Union Maids: The Women Question in the Journals of the AFL and CIO,” *Feminist Studies* 9 (1984): 335–358; Ann Schofield, “The Uprising of the 20,000: The Making of a Labor Legend,” *A Needle, A Bobbin, A Strike*, eds. Joan Jensen and Sara Davidson (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 167–182; Ann Schofield, “From ‘Sealskin and Shoddy’ to ‘The Pig-headed Girl: Fables for Workers,’” *To Toil the Livelong Day: America’s Women at Work, 1780–1980*, eds. Carole Groneman and Mary Beth Norton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 112–124.

¹² Alice Kessler-Harris, “Do We Still Need Women’s History?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 54 (2007): B6.

to provide the clearest illustration of how culture might influence class relations...Gender...participates in class formation by setting normative standards for appropriate behavior, education, and aspirations in ways that further influence class relations, structures, and values."¹³

Like Scott, Kessler-Harris acknowledges the enormous role E. P. Thompson played in shaping social history, and, also like Scott, she identifies the limitations of his framework. Rather than rejecting Thompson and a Marxist analysis of history she writes,

Marxist-feminism precipitated my own turn to gender as an explanatory device. I came to gender not out of an effort to reject class but as an attempt to understand it in its full complexity...For me the moment of epiphany came when I imagined gender not as an organizational category but as a normative device that influences conceptions of appropriate work and regulates the aspirations and goals of women and men. Like Thompson's notion of class, gender began to look more like a process—protean enough to be shaped by historical circumstance, and yet powerful enough to influence structures and institutions.¹⁴

Where Scott's critique of Thompson, and implicitly of social history, led her to turn to post-structural theory, Kessler-Harris' work then moved in the direction of the history of ideas. Consider her scholarship following the publication of Scott's "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis": *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (1996), *Parité: Sexual Equality and the Crisis of French Universalism* (2005), and *The Politics of the Veil* (2007). Her 2002 book, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship*, won the prestigious Bancroft Prize annually awarded to "authors of books of exceptional merit and distinction in the fields of American history, biography or diplomacy."¹⁵ Key to her analysis of U.S. social policy from the New Deal to the 1970s is her notion of "gendered imagination", quite simply the deeply felt ideas women and men had about appropriate gender roles at home and the workplace.¹⁶ Kessler-Harris has remained resolutely committed to writing a more inclusive and robust labor history with its concerns for work and class relations. She worries that the "thriving subfield called 'women's labor history'" means labor history remains male and "gender differences still appear to some scholars to run parallel with, rather than to be constitutive of, class.

¹³ Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History*, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–8.

¹⁵ Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Question of Economic Citizenship in 20th Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lauren Marshall, "Leading Historians Alice Kessler-Harris and David W. Blight Awarded 2002 Bancroft Prizes," *Columbia News* 17 April 2002.

¹⁶ "Gendered imagination" is a concept with rich analytic possibilities for historians of women in the Caribbean, Canada, and Latin America.

Unlike class, gender differences are said to be culturally, if not biologically, ordained, and thus to permeate class boundaries."¹⁷ She concludes, "we must refuse a separate 'women's labor history' in favor of a healthy and vigorous labor history that conceives gender as part and parcel of the cultural experience—and which therefore can neither marginalize women nor neutralize gender."¹⁸

Although undeniably influential, historians other than Scott and Kessler-Harris created paradigms for understanding the history of women. Implicitly, Scott and Kessler-Harris wrote in tension with Barbara Welter's enormously influential 1966 article "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860." Analyzing antebellum prescriptive literature, Welter claimed that the moral pillars of purity, piety, domesticity, and submissiveness determined women's lives in the United States in the decades before the Civil War. Although Leila Rupp rightly noted "There may be no more frequently cited article," the limitations of Welter's analysis are clear.¹⁹ The ideals she so effectively described were only accessible to the white middle class. For working-class women and women of color these ideals were aspirational at best and more widely served to reinscribe their socially inferior status. In 1980, five women's historians contributed essays to a *Feminist Studies* symposium in which they expressed appreciation as well as criticism for the notion of separate spheres inherent in "true womanhood."²⁰ And, in 2002, the *Journal of Women's History* announced it was time for a "fresh read" of Welter's article. Five historians wrote with appreciation of the impact of the "Cult of True Womanhood," in particular calling for it to be understood in the pre-Foucauldian period in which it was written.²¹

Donna Guy, writing in that *Journal of Women's History* special issue about the relevance of the "True Woman" paradigm to Latina American history highlights some of the difficulties of finding models useful for both North and South American women's history. The world of strong Protestant values and patriarchal households described by Welter as formative of "The Cult of True Womanhood" ideology did

¹⁷ Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* 10.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁹ Leila J. Rupp, "Women's History in the New Millennium: A Retrospective Analysis of Barbara Welter's 'The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860,'" *Journal of Women's History* 14 (2002): 149. This symposium also included essays by Mary Louise Roberts, Nancy Hewitt, Tracy Fessenden, and Donna Guy.

²⁰ Ellen DuBois, Mari Jo Buhle, Temma Kaplen, Gerda Lerner, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Politics and Culture in Women's History: A Symposium," *Feminist Studies* 6 (1980): 26–64. See also, Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History (1988)" in *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, ed. Linda Kerber (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 159–199.

²¹ Mary Louise Roberts, "True Womanhood Revisited," *Journal of Women's History* 14 (2002), 150.

not exist in nineteenth-century Latin America. Guy suggests that twentieth-century nationalism and public health campaigns fostered the development of a feminine ideal more akin to the “new” woman than the “true” woman.²²

Unlike Welter, Joan Scott and Alice Kessler-Harris stand out among pioneering women’s historians in developing models and paradigms sufficiently plastic to be adapted outside a national context. It is that plasticity that makes them useful models for writing a history of women in the Americas that incorporates the Caribbean, Latin America, Canada, Mexico and the United States. However, theirs are not the only potential models. A recent arrival on the scene of historical scholarship, the paradigm of the Atlantic world, also offers the possibility of writing history, particularly the history of the Americas, in a transnational manner. Initially conceived by early modernists as a way of conceptualizing the circulation of ideas, people, goods, pathogens, and more outside of a state/colonization model, its historiography has expanded to include gender [cite key works]. See note 25 Can a historical model originating outside the field of women’s history and without a feminist orientation offer a way of bringing a discussion of women in the Americas—Latin America, the Caribbean, and North America—into a single field?

The Atlantic World

A preliminary answer to that question is not hopeful. Since 1995, Harvard University has hosted an annual International Seminar on the History of the Atlantic World. The seminar’s website states its purpose is advancing

the scholarship of young historians of many nations interested in the common, comparative, and interactive aspects of lives of the peoples in the Atlantic lands that form the Atlantic basin, mainly in the early modern period; to contribute to the study of this large transnational historical subject; and to help create an international community of scholars familiar with approaches, archives, and intellectual traditions different from their own.²³

As promising as this Pan-American inclusiveness sounds for the history of women in the Americas, a quick survey of papers presented since the seminar’s beginning sixteen years ago yields disappointingly

²² Donna Guy, “True Womanhood in Latin America,” *Journal of Women’s History* 14 (2002): 170 -173.

²³ Harvard University, *International Seminar on History of the Atlantic World*, <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~atlantic/> (last revised 24 February 2011).

few gender topics. Yet those whose titles include women or gender tantalize with the possibility of comparative and transatlantic work. Consider the following: Sharilyn Geistfeld's "Plotting Females from Paris to Salvador: Women's Agency and Struggles for Equality in the 1796 'Conspiracy of Equals' and in the 1798 'Tailor's Conspiracy' in Salvador, Brazil"; Astrid Steverlynck's "The Women of Matinino: Amazons, Exchange, and the Origins of Society"; Sophie White's "Dressed in the French Manner: Illinivek Wives of Frenchmen in the Illinois Country during the French Regime"; and Lorelle Semley's "Here all Men are Born, Live and Die Free and French: Race, Gender, and Empire in the Revolutionary Constitutions of France and Haiti."²⁴ , The recently published *Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World, 1450–1850* includes only one which touches on women or gender history, namely Carole Shammas's "Household Formation, Lineage, and Gender Relations in the Early Modern Atlantic World" among its thirty-seven articles.²⁵

By comparison with this paucity of gender topics in general Atlantic world surveys, several recently published books illustrate a serious effort to incorporate gender into the Atlantic world paradigm: Mary Beth Norton's *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World*, Jon Sensbach's *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World*, and two anthologies, Daniella Kostroun and Lisa Vollendorf's *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World (1600–1800)* and Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling's *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700–1920*.²⁶ Norton, a founding mother of U.S. women's history, identifies *Separated by Their Sex* as a "prequel" to her path-breaking 1980 book *Liberty's Daughters: the Revolutionary Experience of American Women 1750–1800*. *Separated by Their Sex* asks and answers how the rigid separation of public and private that Norton observed in Revolutionary America originated in England and was reinforced in colonial America during the decades immediately before the American Revolution. Jon Sensbach's *Rebecca's Revival* illustrates the intersectional potential of an Atlantic-world approach for women's history in the Americas, incorporating race, class, and gender into his narrative of Rebecca, a free woman of color living in the Danish West Indies and a convert to Moravian Christianity. Rebecca

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Carole Shammas, "Household Formation, Lineage, and Gender Relations in the Early Modern Atlantic World," *The Oxford Handbook of the Atlantic World*, eds. Nicolas Canny and Philip Morgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁶ Mary Beth Norton, *Separated by Their Sex: Women in Public and Private in the Colonial Atlantic World* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011); Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca's Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005), Daniella Kostroun and Lisa Vollendorf eds., *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World (1600–1800)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling eds., *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700–1920* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

traveled to Europe, Africa, and back to the Caribbean along with other “Atlantic Creoles” who, through their missionary activities, helped make Christianity central to Black identity in the New World as well as to the abolitionist movement.²⁷ The Kostroun–Vollendorf and Creighton–Norling anthologies take religion and seafaring respectively as their organizing themes. What is notable about both these collections is the implicit comparison that happens when the reader is asked to consider articles about women in Peru, Mexico, the Indies, North America, and other locations in the Americas in a single volume. Collections such as these offer the most promising model for the ambitious undertaking of this journal: writing a history of women in the Americas.

History of Women in the Americas

Joan Scott, Alice Kessler-Harris, and other historians of women and gender, as well as historians of the Atlantic world, offer models that encourage us to break the boundaries of nationalist histories and defy the historical hegemony of American exceptionalism. In addition to these models, topics such as migration, transatlantic cooperation and exchange, and borders provide meaningful contexts for understanding women’s history in the Americas. And, most especially, a journal such as the *History of Women in the Americas* offers a forum for envisioning a more inclusive and comparative history as we move forward into a new era of women’s history.

²⁷ Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival*. Also Jon F. Sensbach, “Prophets and Helpers: African American Women and the Rise of Black Christianity in the Age of the Slave Trade” in *Women, Religion, and the Atlantic World (1600–1800)*, Kostroun and Vollendorf eds., 115–135.