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Review of Innovation in History: The New Woman Resources Book

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INNOVATION IN HISTORY: THE NEW WOMAN RESOURCE BOOK

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Abstract

Charney reviews INNOVATION IN HISTORY: THE NEW WOMAN RESOURCE BOOK edited by Lynn Jurgensen.

Full Text

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY Lynn Jurgensen, ed., INNOVATION IN HISTORY: THE NEW WOMAN RESOURCE BOOK. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009. 237p. $39.00, ISBN 978-1598842920.

Reviewed by Madeleine Charney

ABC-CLIO teamed up with National History Day, an academic history program designed for elementary- and secondary-school students, to create the Innovation in History series of illustrated workbooks. The development team for The New Woman Resource Book is the complementary duo of Brett Piersma, a high school history teacher, and Danielle Swiontek, a university professor specializing in U.S. women's political activism in the twentieth century. With an emphasis on active participation, this workbook offers teachers and students a fresh look at how the innovative thinking and actions of two women helped shape U.S. history. The thematic approach is a welcome contrast to teaching our children history as ossified chronological facts.

The main text of this book is divided into two "Defining Moments." The first centers on Julia Morgan, an early twentieth-century pioneer of architecture as a woman's profession, and the second covers Betty Friedan, a powerful feminist writer most prolific in the 1960s. A brief introduction provides historical context, offering a timeline of each woman's life, pithy excerpts from her work, and notable quotes that illuminate her individuality. The cumulative lessons that follow vary in length and may easily be adapted to fit teachers' instructional goals and time constraints as well as their students' needs. The well-organized format includes a list of materials needed and step-by-step instructions for completing related projects. Primary and secondary sources, including documents, images, and cartoons, form

the basis of relevant handouts. Biographies of other individuals from the same period, outlines of important laws, and concise descriptions of places and events provide background. The graphics are compelling, despite being entirely in black and white.

With the resources in Part I, for example, students can read correspondence between Julia Morgan and William Randolf Hearst about the designing of his estate, her most well-known architectural work, and then roleplay the parts of Morgan and Hearst. Part II, on Betty Friedan, helps students learn about The Feminine Mystique, a seminal work of the women's movement that uncovered hidden truths about women's lives in America after World War II. Based on the material in the book, students are asked to analyze images and excerpts from issues of Life magazine that were published in the 1950s.

The "Additional Resources" section at the end of the book suggests ways to use ABC-CLIO research databases and integrate what has been learned into National History Day projects; it also lists additional topics about women's roles, such as Title IX and women's sports, free love in the Victorian era, and the third wave of feminism.

The book's table of contents would be more useful if it listed each activity. Also, tabs identifying each activity would allow teachers to move more easily between different sections. Otherwise, The New Woman Resource Book is content-rich and overflowing with possibilities to suit a wide range of teachers' styles and diverse students' needs. Recommended for teachers in elementary and secondary schools as well as for university libraries with education collections.

AuthorAffiliation

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