



CITY OF WOMEN

Christine Stansell

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In this brilliant and vivid study of life in New York City during the years between the creation of the republic and the Civil War, a distinguished historian explores the position of men and women in both the poor and middle classes, the conflict between women of the laboring poor and those of the genteel classes who tried to help them and the ways in which laboring women traced out unforeseen possibilities for themselves in work and in politics.

Christine Stansell shows how a new concept of womanhood took shape in America as middle-class women constituted themselves the moral guardians of their families and of the nation, while poor workingwomen, cut adrift from the family ties that both sustained and oppressed them, were subverting—through their sudden entry into the working and political worlds outside the home—the strict notions of female domesticity and propriety, of “woman’s place” and “woman’s nature,” that were central to the flowering and the image of bourgeois life in America.

Here we have a passionate and enlightening portrait of New York during the years in which it was becoming a center of world capitalist development, years in which it was evolving in dramatic ways, becoming the city it fundamentally is. And we have, as well, a radically illuminating depiction of a class conflict in which the dialectic of female vice and virtue was a central issue.

City of Women is a prime work of scholarship, the first full-scale work by a major new voice in the fields of American and urban history.

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