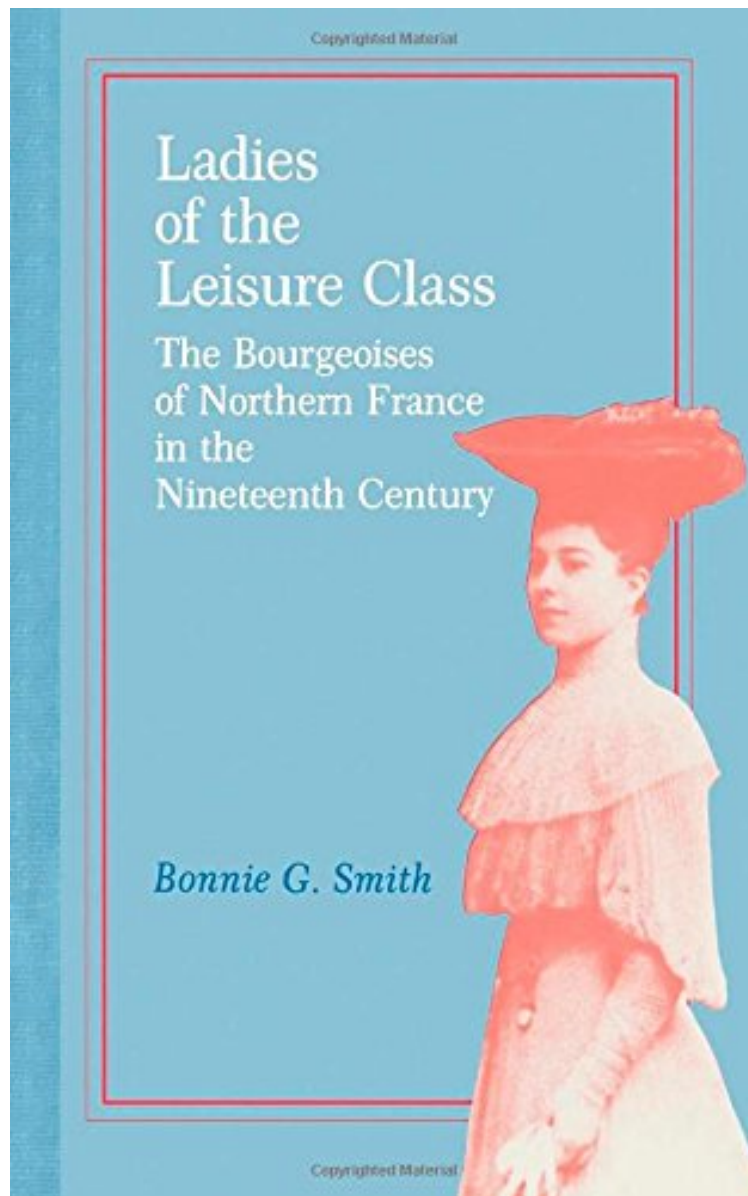


(Download pdf ebook) Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century

Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century

Bonnie G. Smith

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Bonnie G. Smith : Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoises of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The Angels of the HomeBy MarieI really enjoyed reading this scholarly book about the creation of the myth and reality of the upper class women in northern France in the second half of the 19th century. Many people do not know how reactionary, pro-monarchist, and anti-republican this group of women became. Given the need to protect their daughter's virginity because of its value on the 'marriage market,' many hardworking lady merchants (the wives or widows of businessmen and manufacturers) in the early 19th century placed their adolescent daughters in the safety of convent schools. The Church, worried by its loss of status in French society and appalled by the relative scarcity of 'true believing' Catholic men, took full advantage of this opportunity to mold these young women into pious and devoted Catholic matrons. Little attention was given to teaching the girls either academic subjects (Latin, for instance, was forbidden!) or even the useful arts and skills of homemaking. The story of the conflict between the resulting "Ladies Bountiful," who established creches and day-care for the children of poor women who had to work to feed their families (but which would only accept the baptized children of women who had married with Catholic religious rites) and the French government (which extended services to all children, regardless of their parents' religious, civil or 'virtuous' status), is fascinating. Deprived of their status as religious benefactresses by the French government, the society women largely refused their (still-desired) assistance to the government-run day-cares and schools. The rich women's refusal to support secular schools which did not discriminate against illegitimate children left the French government schools short-handed. Well worth reading!

In a social and cultural study of nineteenth-century bourgeois women in northern France, Bonnie Smith shows how the advent of industrialization removed women from the productive activity of the middle class and confined them to a largely reproductive experience. Out of this, she suggests, they created their own world, centered on domesticity, family, and religion. To understand these women, the author argues, it is necessary to examine their world on its own terms as a coherent whole. Professor Smith draws on demographic, psychoanalytic, anthropological, linguistic, as well as historical insights and uses a variety of evidence that includes personal interviews, photographs, letters, genealogical records, and traditional archival sources. Part One outlines the transition from mercantile to industrial manufacturing that terminated the relationship between home and business and that separated the sexes according to their respective functions. Part Two concentrates on the lives of the women following their acceptance of an exclusively reproductive function and shows how the interdependence and fusion of household chores, religious values, and social conscience fostered a unified cultural system. Part Three, then, explores the propagation of this domesticity by the convent, as the primary educational system, and by the sentimental novel, as the vehicle most suited for an ideological expression of domestic life.

From the Back CoverIn a social and cultural study of nineteenth-century bourgeois women in northern France, Bonnie Smith shows how the advent of industrialization removed women from the productive activity of the middle class and confined them to a largely reproductive experience. Out of this, she suggests, they created their own world centered on domesticity, family, and religion.