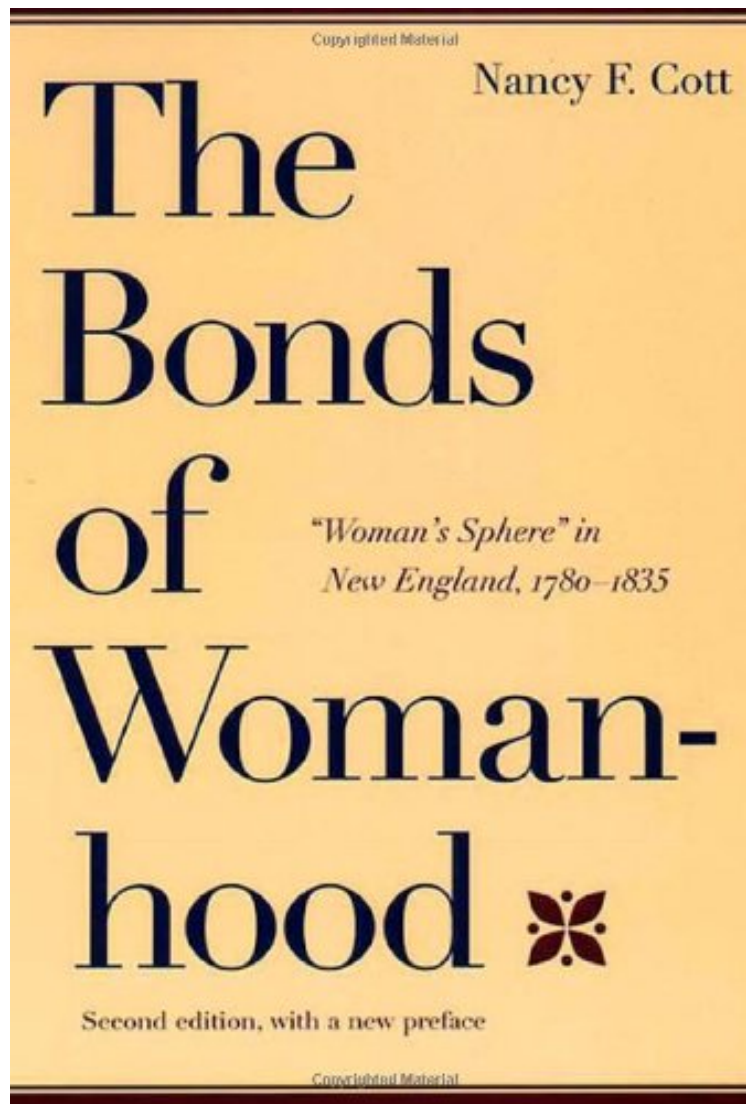


[Download pdf] The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835

## The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835

Nancy F. Cott

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**Nancy F. Cott : The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By btrimble Very informative. 20 of 21 people found the following review helpful. Groundbreaking work in women's history By A Customer Cott argues that the market

revolution in early America brought about the creation of a separate women's "sphere" of domesticity. She further contends that the placement of women in a separate "private sphere." can be termed the "cult of domesticity" She concludes by making the claim that the cult of domesticity allowed women to forge bonds through churches and fellow homemakers which helped bring about the first feminist movements of the early nineteenth century. The work stands as the primer for the revisionists' view of new women's "anti-victimization" history.<sup>5</sup> of 9 people found the following review helpful. Women in the Rise of American Capitalism By Alfred Johnson As I noted previously in a review of Paul E. Johnson's *A Shopkeeper's Millennium*, an account of the rise of the industrial capitalists of Rochester, New York in the 1830's, in any truly socialist understanding of history the role of the class struggle plays a central role. However, the uneven development of society throughout history has created other forms of oppression that need to be addressed. In America the question of the special oppression of blacks as a race clearly fits that demand. And everywhere the woman question cries out for solution. Any thoughtful socialist wants to, in fact needs to, know how the various classes in society were formed, and transformed, over time. I have mentioned previously that a lot of useful work in this area has been done by socialist scholars. One thinks of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, for example. One needs to have a sense about the evolution of the forms of woman's oppression, as well. One does not, however, need to be a socialist to do such research in order to provide us with plenty of ammunition in our fight for a better world. One of the great developments of the past thirty or forty years is the dramatic increase in research, led by the feminist resurgence, on woman's history. The book under review here Nancy Cott's study of the role of women in early capitalist America, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, is an early such addition. I have mentioned in other reviews of this period in American history that the changes from an agrarian/mercantile society as found at the time of the American Revolution to the contours of an industrial society in the Age of Jackson were dramatic and longstanding. This was also the case with the role of women. Women, due to their biological function, have always been central to the cohesion of the family throughout class history. The form that has taken however has varied with changes in the economic superstructure. Thus such occurrences, due to the nature of industrial development, as the decrease in extended families, the dividing of work from the home, the putting out system, the dominance of the male as 'breadwinner' and the domestication of women as center of family life had profound changes in the way the family related to the world, the way children were socialized and the way woman subordinated their desires and creativity to the tasks at hand. Sound familiar? Professor Cott makes her case for this observable change by looking at changes of various types of New England families from self-sufficient farmers to producers for the market, etc. She also relies heavily, as all historians of necessity must, on the record left behind by women mainly through their diaries. There are certain methodological problems inherent in that approach and a tendency to generalize off of the relatively small numbers for whom a record survives but nevertheless her early work is the starting place for a better understanding of the crisis in the family that occurred with the rise of capitalism in America. I would note as a sidelight that her digging up various self-help manuals for child-rearing and other domestic responsibilities was quite interesting. Dr. Spock in the last generation and today Oprah and Doctor Phil and their ilk thus come from a long pedigree of those who had something to say about the correct raising of YOUR children. Read on.

This twentieth anniversary edition of Nancy F. Cott's acclaimed study includes a new preface in which Cott assesses her own and other historians' development of the concept of domesticity from the 1970s to the 1990s. Nancy Cott's *Bonds of Womanhood* is not just a pioneer work in women's history. It is a classic. Despite all the work published since, it is still an essential starting place for understanding New England in the early republic. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, still the best historian of women's bonds and bondage, foresaw twenty years ago the tendency of domesticity's bonds to lead both to feminism and the far right. An essential book for understanding today's women. Carolyn Heilbrun, *Reviews of the earlier edition*: A lovely, gentle, scholarly, and valuable book. Doris Grumbach, *New York Times Book Review* *Women's history at its best*. Phyllis Krieger, *New Directions for Women*

About the Author Nancy F. Cott is Stanley Woodward Professor of History and American Studies at Yale University. She is also the author of *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* and *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, published by Yale University Press.