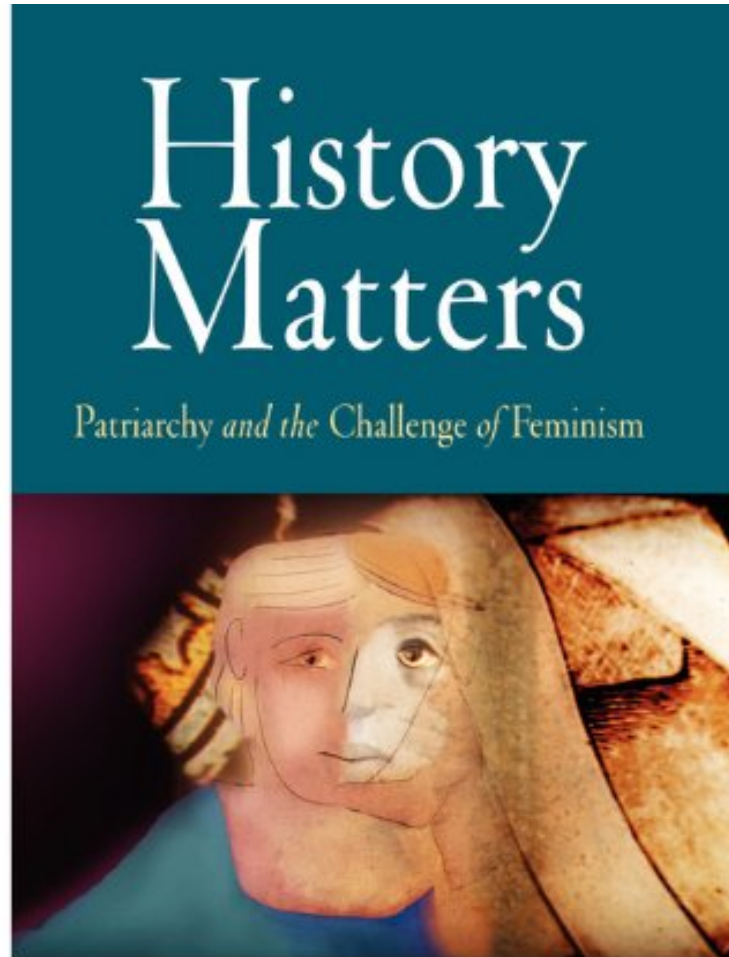


(Read now) History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism

## History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism

*Judith M. Bennett*

*\*Download PDF / ePub / DOC / audiobook / ebooks*



Judith M. Bennett

[Download](#)

[Read Online](#)

#1140192 in Books University of Pennsylvania Press 2007-08-24 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.52 x .64 x 5.571, .67 #File Name: 0812220048224 pages | File size: 51.Mb

**Judith M. Bennett : History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Challenging and Visionary By J. Jamakaya I thoroughly enjoyed this thoughtful critique of the current state of women's history and its feminist implications. "History Matters" by Judith M. Bennett presents an unapologetic feminist vision that is cognizant and respectful of all three "waves" of feminist

thought/action at the same time that it chides some feminists for their historical blinders. Bennett challenges the historical profession on many fronts but is also committed to establishing high standards and producing sound research that will enlighten our understanding of the past and have practical application today. I found most interesting (and a bit aggravating!) her survey of how women's history has morphed into the broader arena of "gender studies" over the past few decades and how the once seemingly clear concept of "patriarchy" has been replaced by less polarizing but rather tepid terms like "gender differences," often obscuring power dynamics and deleting critical agent(s). Her critique of "presentism" is compelling. She warns that the increasing focus by historians - including feminist historians - on 19th and 20th century history ignores the longer view and prevents us from identifying the continuities as well as the transformations which have occurred over millennia. Perhaps most illuminating is her promotion of the concept of "lesbian-like" to get a better handle on the lives and experiences of woman-identified women in the past. The narrow definition of sexual contact and the impossibility of proving it centuries later limits inquiry about women who may have been lesbians. Bennett urges a broadening of our criteria and analysis for identifying women who lived "like" lesbians that makes a lot of sense. Over all, I especially appreciated the clarity of Professor Bennett's writing. Her analysis is logical and presented in precise, unambiguous prose. So much academic writing today is marred by arcane language and labyrinthine theorizing, much of it intelligible to only a small number of eggheads. That's not a problem in this book. It is easy to follow Bennett's arguments, and her recommendations for research and teaching are constructive and concrete. I highlighted dozens of lines in the book because of their clarity and, sometimes, their wit. There are many insightful passages, but I really fancied this one from the conclusion, which captures the spirit of the book: "To my mind, our history should be less safe and more offensive."

Written for everyone interested in women's and gender history, *History Matters* reaffirms the importance to feminist theory and activism of long-term historical perspectives. Judith M. Bennett, who has been commenting on developments in women's and gender history since the 1980s, argues that the achievement of a more feminist future relies on a rich, plausible, and well-informed knowledge of the past, and she asks her readers to consider what sorts of feminist history can best advance the struggles of the twenty-first century. Bennett takes as her central problem the growing chasm between feminism and history. Closely allied in the 1970s, each has now moved away from the other. Seeking to narrow this gap, Bennett proposes that feminist historians turn their attention to the intellectual challenges posed by the persistence of patriarchy. She posits a "patriarchal equilibrium" whereby, despite many changes in women's experiences over past centuries, women's status vis--vis that of men has remained remarkably unchanged. Although, for example, women today find employment in occupations unimaginable to medieval women, medieval and modern women have both encountered the same wage gap, earning on average only three-fourths of the wages earned by men. Bennett argues that the theoretical challenge posed by this patriarchal equilibrium will be best met by long-term historical perspectives that reach back well before the modern era. In chapters focused on women's work and lesbian sexuality, Bennett demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the distant past to feminist theory and politics. She concludes with a chapter that adds a new twist to the challenges of textbooks and classrooms to viewing women's history from a distance and with feminist intent. A new manifesto, *History Matters* engages forthrightly with the challenges faced by feminist historians today. It argues for the radical potential of a history that is focused on feminist issues, aware of the distant past, attentive to continuities over time, and alert to the workings of patriarchal power.

"This is a remarkable work, at once erudite, insightful, witty, provocative, and analytically brilliant. Bennett writes with narrative verve and energy that captures the reader in both her compelling argument and detailed evidence." Bonnie G. Smith, Rutgers University  
"This is a book that will help us think deeper, and better, about the history we practice and its impact in the world." Laura Gowing, King's College, London  
Judith Bennett offers a striking analysis of the current state of feminist history. In a series of lucid chapters, she demonstrates the political and intellectual consequences of forgetting the past. This book should be required reading for every feminist who cares about the future.  
Martha Vicinus, University of Michigan  
"This book should be required reading for anyone who believes that studying history 'for its own sake' misses the inherent revolutionary potential of the enterprise."  
Choice  
Bennett argues convincingly that our understanding of modern women's condition and contemporary feminist dilemmas must be rooted in the *longue dure*. From that perspective, we can develop a more nuanced and sophisticated analysis of the 'patriarchal equilibrium' that has so long constrained women's lives and efforts to transform them."  
Nancy A. Hewitt, Rutgers University  
From the Publisher  
Judith M. Bennett is Professor of History at the University of Southern California. She is the author of numerous books, including *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* and *Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock Before the Plague*. She is also the editor (with Amy M. Froide) of *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (also available from the University of Pennsylvania Press).  
About the Author  
Judith M. Bennett is Professor of History at the University of Southern California. She is the author of numerous books, including *Ale, Beer and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* and

Women in the Medieval English Countryside: Gender and Household in Brigstock Before the Plague. She is coeditor, with Amy M. Froide, of *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800*, also available from the University of Pennsylvania Press.