Women of the Long Century

MixCache.com

Table of Contents

- **Introduction**
- **Chapter 1** Setting the Long Century: 1789–1914 as a Framework
- **Chapter 2** Revolution and Reaction: Women in the Age of Upheaval
- **Chapter 3** Law and the Household: Marriage, Property, and Authority
- **Chapter 4** Work and Wages: Women’s Labor in the Early Industrial Order
- **Chapter 5** Servants and Mobility: Domestic Service Economies
- **Chapter 6** Needle and Loom: Textiles, Home Production, and Factory Floors
- **Chapter 7** Education and Expertise: Governesses, Teachers, and New Professions
- **Chapter 8** Caring Labor: Midwives, Nurses, and the Medical Sphere
- **Chapter 9** Streets and Workshops: Urban Women and the Informal Economy
- **Chapter 10** Country Lives: Rural Households, Commons, and Seasonal Work
- **Chapter 11** Salons and Societies: Networks of Influence and Conversation
- **Chapter 12** Print and Publics: Journals, Novels, and the Feminine Reader
- **Chapter 13** Faith and Reform: Religious Activism and Philanthropy
- **Chapter 14** Protest and Petition: Collective Action from Bread Riots to Unions
- **Chapter 15** 1848 and After: Revolution, Counterrevolution, and Exile
- **Chapter 16** Empire and Encounter: Women in Colonial and Transnational Worlds
- **Chapter 17** Respectability and Transgression: Sexuality, Morality, and the Law
- **Chapter 18** Motherhood and the State: Welfare, Childcare, and Demography
- **Chapter 19** Culture Makers: Artists, Musicians, and the Stage
- **Chapter 20** Science, Technology, and the Female Practitioner
- **Chapter 21** The Paris Commune and Beyond: Radicalisms and Reprisals
- **Chapter 22** Nationalisms and Civil Wars: Borders, Languages, and Loyalties
- **Chapter 23** Suffrage and Citizenship: Campaigns for Political Rights
- **Chapter 24** 1900–1914: New Women, Mass Politics, and the Public Sphere
- **Chapter 25** Legacies of the Long Century: Memory, Archives, and Method

Introduction

This book examines how women—across classes, confessions, and regions—negotiated a century of revolution, industrialization, and reform. It contends that the nineteenth century was not merely a prelude to twentieth-century feminism but a long era in which women shaped political power, labor regimes, and cultural change from positions that were often informal, relational, or legally constrained. Taking Europe and its empires as the canvas, we follow women who organized households and workshops, sustained movements through correspondence and credit, and intervened in public life through philanthropy, petition, journalism, protest, and strike. These actions did not always announce themselves as “politics,” yet they altered law, markets, and the terms of citizenship.

The phrase “long century” signals a chronology stretching from the revolutions of 1789 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. Framing the period in this way allows us to track enduring structures—household economies, religious institutions, and imperial expansion—alongside punctuating crises such as the Napoleonic wars, the revolutions of 1830 and 1848, the Paris Commune, and the consolidation of mass politics around 1900. These events reordered opportunities and perils for women in ways that were decisively shaped by class and status: a merchant’s widow, a domestic servant, an enslaved or colonized woman, a textile spinner, a governess, and a concert artist inhabited radically different legal and material worlds even when their lives intersected in the same cities.

Our approach combines biography, legal history, and social analysis. Biographical vignettes restore contingency and agency to figures both renowned and obscure; legal chapters situate those lives within regimes of coverture, guardianship, guardianship reform, and marital property laws; and social analysis reconstructs networks of credit, care, knowledge, and reputation that linked households to workshops, parishes, union halls, salons, and colonial circuits. Sources include court records and police reports, parish registers and poor-law files, factory rules and union minutes, letters and diaries, philanthropic ledgers, medical casebooks, and the proliferating print cultures of the century. Reading these materials together reveals how women translated intimate decisions—about marriage, labor, migration, and motherhood—into public consequences.

Political power in this narrative is both institutional and relational. It includes the franchise campaigns that crescendoed near the century’s end, but it also resides in the quotidian authority of household managers, in the credit extended by shopkeepers and widows, in the moral capital mobilized by religious activists, and in the leverage of collective action in markets and streets. Women rarely entered parliaments before

1914, yet they shaped public agendas through petitions, boycotts, charitable federations, strike funds, and the circulation of texts and images. The book foregrounds the paradox that women's influence often expanded through roles coded as private—motherhood, nursing, teaching, worship—precisely because those roles mediated between state and society.

Industrialization and empire reorganized these mediations. Factory discipline and domestic service forged new hierarchies, while migration—rural-to-urban, continental, and imperial—reconfigured intimate economies and cultural identities. Colonial projects opened some professions and closed others, entangling European women with structures of racial domination and with the labor of colonized women who pursued strategies of survival and resistance of their own. Respectability politics policed sexuality and mobility, but women also exploited the language of virtue and care to advance claims on wages, welfare, and education. By tracing these dynamics across Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish communities, the book underscores the religious grammars through which gender and authority were negotiated.

Throughout, family is treated not as a static backdrop but as an economic and political institution. Marital property reforms, custody battles, child-labor debates, and poor-relief regimes reshaped the balance of power within households and between households and states. Demographic change—the timing of marriage, fertility, infant survival, and life expectancy—altered how families calculated risk and opportunity, influencing women's choices about paid work, migration, and association. The life cycle mattered: daughters, wives, and widows encountered the law and the labor market differently, and female headship could be both vulnerability and leverage.

The chapters that follow move between chronology and theme. Early chapters set the legal and economic foundations of the long century; middle chapters map the spaces where women worked, organized, and produced knowledge; later chapters examine moments of rupture and the emergence of mass politics, culminating in the campaigns for suffrage and redefinitions of citizenship on the eve of war. Taken together, they reconstruct a political history that begins in kitchens and courtyards as much as in assemblies and ministries. Women of the Long Century argues that to understand nineteenth-century Europe we must recover these dispersed, relational forms of power—and recognize how they made the modern world.

CHAPTER ONE: Setting the Long Century: 1789–1914 as a Framework

The nineteenth century rarely kept tidy hours. It began with the cannon fire of revolutions and ended, for many, with the rattle of mobilization and the promise of the franchise. Historians call it the “long century” because its political tempo slowed and accelerated unevenly across Europe and its empires. For women, that rhythm mattered. A grandmother in 1789 might have seen the fall of the Bastille and lived into the 1850s, watching empires fall and rise while her granddaughter learned to telegraph, to strike, to petition, and to plan for a vote that still felt distant in 1900. Time stretched; deadlines shifted; rights arrived late and in pieces.

“Europe” itself was a moving target. In 1800 the map was a jigsaw of monarchies, city-states, and imperial provinces; by 1900 it bristled with nation-states and bureaucratic machines. Borders moved, and people moved with them. Women migrated from Irish villages to Lancashire mills, from Castilian farms to Buenos Aires cafés, from Ukrainian fields to Odessa workshops. The unit of analysis is not a single nation but a braided continent where law, language, and labor traveled alongside soldiers, missionaries, merchants, and letters. When we track women’s strategies, we must track these routes.

In 1789, the guiding question of politics was about who counted as a political actor. The Revolution shouted about “rights of man,” and women immediately asked what that meant for the rights of women, mothers, and workers. Olympe de Gouges wrote that if women could mount the scaffold, they could also mount the rostrum. Her execution in 1793 dramatized the stakes: the politics of the body and the politics of the street were inseparable. Across Europe, governments watched women’s assemblies, clubs, and petitions with alarm and curiosity. The century’s first experiment asked what women could say and where they could say it.

Napoleon Bonaparte gave one answer in code. The Code Civil of 1804—later carried into Italy, the Netherlands, parts of Germany, and beyond by conquest and imitation—made coverture the legal default for much of continental Europe. A married woman’s property was administered by her husband; she needed his consent for contracts and lawsuits. The Code treated women as legally dependent, yet it also codified rules that many families had practiced informally for centuries. Its influence lasted well into the new century, shaping inheritance, divorce, and the management of dowries.

At the same time, the Austrian Empire under Metternich sought to tame the political

imagination. The Carlsbad Decrees of 1819 policed universities, the press, and clubs. Women's associations, if they existed, were watched for "subversive" tendencies. In practice, the police gaze varied by city and social class. Elite salons might survive if they steered clear of sedition and confined themselves to literature or charity. Working women's gatherings—bread committees, market guilds, festival committees—faced a rougher reception. Bureaucrats feared the crowd; women learned to code their politics as care.

War remade family economies. The Napoleonic Wars drew men into conscript armies and left women as household heads, farm managers, and suppliers. In many regions, war taxes and requisitions demanded improvisation. Women bargained with quartermasters, hid livestock, and organized collective petitions for relief. In Spain and Portugal, the guerrilla war and British supply lines brought opportunities for trade and new risks of violence. After 1815, peace did not restore the old order so much as install a new one built on state debt, policing, and a fresh hunger for colonial markets.

Industrialization altered domestic as well as public space. Where cotton mills rose, mothers calculated the age at which a child's wage could offset lost home labor. Where coal pits deepened, wives and daughters sold miners' tools and kept informal credit books. The "factory question" soon included debates about women's hours, health, and moral supervision. As parish relief gave way to workhouses and "less eligibility," the line between family support and state provision grew sharper. These changes, unevenly felt, taught women to navigate new rules and new risks.

The century's political vocabulary also evolved. Terms such as "civil society," "public opinion," and "the social question" entered everyday talk. For women, this meant new venues: philanthropic committees, mutual aid societies, reading circles, and later trade unions. Many of these spaces were technically apolitical, yet they formed the connective tissue of activism. A subscription list for an orphanage might also be a rehearsal for a petition. A sewing circle could double as a place to discuss the price of bread and the news from Paris.

Revolutions erupted again in 1830 and 1848, and both times women were present in the streets, barricades, and committees. Belgian women marched for bread and constitutional rights; Polish women joined the insurrection and took on nursing and smuggling; German women participated in political clubs and welfare initiatives. In 1848, Berlin women petitioned the National Assembly for the franchise and labor protections. Even when these movements were suppressed, they left behind networks of trust and habits of organizing that proved durable.

Law reform crept forward unevenly. In Britain, the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 created a civil divorce court and allowed a woman to sue for separation on grounds of cruelty, though property rights remained tilted toward husbands. In Prussia, reforms in the 1860s and later loosened some guardianship rules, but not uniformly. In France,

married women’s property rights remained largely restricted until 1965. Local custom mattered as much as national code: Scandinavian customary laws, Iberian regional traditions, and Russian peasant practices produced distinct gendered economies of land and labor. The map of rights was a patchwork, not a gradient.

States also began to count people more systematically. Censuses from the 1850s onward tallied occupations, marital status, and fertility with new precision. These statistics helped governments plan schools, barracks, and asylums. Women appeared in the numbers as workers, mothers, and “dependents.” The categories were blunt, but they mattered: they made women’s unpaid labor visible to reformers and bureaucrats, sometimes for the first time. They also sharpened arguments about the “family wage,” domestic work, and the social value of care.

The public sphere thickened with print. Cheap newspapers, serialized novels, and pamphlets circulated in coffeehouses, workplaces, and parlors. Women were both readers and writers. Some used male pseudonyms; others founded journals. As literacy widened, domestic manuals, medical advice books, and “conduct literature” became guides to navigating new urban and industrial life. There were how-to guides for running a household, for starting a small business, for nursing a sick child. The page gave authority to women who otherwise lacked official credentials.

Empire put European women into novel relationships with race, caste, and labor. Missionary wives and single women traveled to colonies, set up schools, and wrote home about “customs.” Settler women in Algeria, Kenya, and Rhodesia acquired land and servants; colonial administrators’ wives managed households that doubled as small bureaucracies. Meanwhile, colonized women appeared in European debates about labor, marriage, and morality. The famous case of the “coolie” trade and the regulation of prostitution in colonial ports revealed how gender and empire co-produced exploitation and control.

Science and medicine professionalized in ways that both included and excluded women. Midwives faced new licensing regimes; nurses formed professional associations; female healers were pushed to the margins by credentialed doctors. The bacteriological revolution of the later century created demand for hygienic practices in homes and hospitals alike. Women were expected to be the foot soldiers of sanitation. Some turned this assignment into expertise, carving out roles in public health and, eventually, in laboratories. But access to formal training remained uneven and often required the endorsement of male gatekeepers.

Urbanization expanded the stage. The city became a theater of visibility and anonymity. Women who worked in markets, laundries, and workshops learned the rhythm of municipal regulation: license fees, market stalls, street vending times. Police records show negotiations over space and livelihood. The street was a workplace for many and a site of political action for some. The anonymity of the crowd

allowed women to speak publicly while maintaining a private reputation; the risk was that anonymity could also invite surveillance and punishment.

Class and status were not just backdrops; they were mechanisms. A domestic servant in London or Vienna lived under an employment contract that regulated her movement and speech. A shopkeeper’s widow might hold property under customary law and extend credit to neighbors. A peasant woman in Galicia might share rights to common land and be subject to communal decisions. A factory girl might navigate piece rates, dormitories, and the new factory acts. These positions defined the repertoire of action, the networks available, and the dangers of missteps.

The timing of life events mattered. In 1800, average marriage ages were late in much of Northwestern Europe and earlier in Eastern and Southern regions. By 1900, patterns had shifted, and the gap between marriage and first birth widened. This simple metric had enormous consequences for women’s control over their bodies and schedules. It shaped whether they entered waged work before marriage, whether they could save, and whether they could plan for old age. These demographic habits were not private; they were tuned to local economies and expectations.

War and famine punctuated the century with shocks. The Irish Famine of the late 1840s propelled mass emigration, including many single women, altering family structures on both sides of the Atlantic. The Crimean War produced the celebrity of Florence Nightingale and the quiet labor of thousands of women who ran field kitchens and hospital wards. The American Civil War and the wars of German and Italian unification moved supplies and people, and women adapted to supply lines, nursing corps, and fundraising committees. Each crisis taught new techniques of mobilization.

As states modernized, they also claimed authority over childhood. Factory acts and school laws redefined the age of labor and the scope of compulsory education. Mothers were pressed to produce “good citizens,” and the state intruded into domestic decisions about work and health. These measures constrained poor families and offered some protection to children. For women, they created new obligations and new allies—teachers, inspectors, and social workers who sometimes bridged the gap between household and bureaucracy.

The century’s religious landscapes were plural. Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, and Jewish communities had different rules about marriage, divorce, inheritance, and female leadership. These differences mattered on the ground. A Jewish woman in the Pale of Settlement faced a different legal regime than a Protestant in Hamburg. Yet religious institutions also offered women channels for influence: charity sisterhoods, lay associations, pilgrimage committees, and church-based schools. Faith provided a language of obligation and a network of trust.

By 1900, the scale of political life had changed again. Mass parties, trade unions, and

women’s organizations competed for attention. New technologies—telegraph, telephone, bicycle, railway—shrank distances and widened horizons. A letter could cross the continent in days; a newspaper could reach a village the next morning. Women used these infrastructures to coordinate campaigns, to circulate petitions, to travel for lectures, to build solidarity. The “public” was now something you could call, mail, and sometimes join.

All of this unfolded in a world still reeling from and reorganizing after the early revolutions. The memory of 1789 and the shock of 1848 shaped the strategies of reformers and the fears of rulers. Between those poles, women wrote petitions, managed workshops, smuggled pamphlets, raised children, attended lectures, testified in court, and learned new trades. They did so under laws that often denied them full citizenship, yet they carved out arenas of action where they could influence the distribution of resources and the meaning of belonging.

The “long century” is thus a useful container for a set of interlocking transformations that did not proceed in lockstep. It begins with the assertion that political power flows through households and streets as well as parliaments. It follows women as they turn domestic skills into public authority, and as they push at the boundaries of what counts as political. It ends on the eve of a war that would shatter old orders and open new questions about citizenship and labor. The chapters to come will show how these changes were lived from the margins and the middle, by women whose everyday decisions made the modern world.

This is a sample preview. Purchase the book to read the full content.

Visit MixCache.com to purchase the complete book.