



American Nursing: A History of Knowledge, Authority, and the Meaning of Work

Patricia D'Antonio

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This new interpretation of the history of nursing in the United States captures the many ways women reframed the most traditional of all gender expectations—that of caring for the sick—to create new possibilities for themselves, to renegotiate the terms of some of their life experiences, and to reshape their own sense of worth and power.

For much of modern U.S. history, nursing was informal, often uncompensated, and almost wholly the province of female family and community members. This began to change at the end of the nineteenth century when the prospect of formal training opened for women doors that had been previously closed. Nurses became respected professionals, and becoming a formally trained nurse granted women a range of new social choices and opportunities that eventually translated into economic mobility and stability.

Patricia D'Antonio looks closely at this history—using a new analytic framework and a rich trove of archival sources—and finds complex, multiple meanings in the individual choices of women who elected a nursing career. New relationships and social and professional options empowered nurses in constructing consequential lives, supporting their families, and participating both in their communities and in the health care system.

Narrating the experiences of nurses, D'Antonio captures the possibilities, power, and problems inherent in the different ways women defined their work and lived their lives. Scholars in the history of medicine, nursing, and public policy, those interested in the intersections of identity, work, gender, education, and race, and nurses will find this a provocative book.

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