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The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story Of Love, Race, And War In The Nineteenth Century



Synopsis

A finalist for the Lincoln Prize, *The Sea Captain's Wife* "comes surprisingly, and movingly, alive" (Tina Jordan, *Entertainment Weekly*). Award-winning historian Martha Hodes brings us into the extraordinary world of Eunice Connolly. Born white and poor in New England, Eunice moved from countryside to factory city, worked in the mills, then followed her husband to the Deep South. When the Civil War came, Eunice's brothers joined the Union army while her husband fought and died for the Confederacy. Back in New England, a widow and the mother of two, Eunice barely got by as a washerwoman, struggling with crushing depression. Four years later, she fell in love with a black sea captain, married him, and moved to his home in the West Indies. Following every lead in a collection of 500 family letters, Hodes traced Eunice's footsteps and met descendants along the way. This story of misfortune and defiance takes up grand themes of American history—opportunity and racism, war and freedom—and illuminates the lives of ordinary people in the past. A Library Journal Best Book of the Year and a selection of the Book of the Month Club, Literary Guild, and Quality Paperback Book Club. 47 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Hodes reconstructs the intriguing and unusual life of Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly, a mill laborer in mid-19th-century New England who went South with her husband to seek their fortune; homesick, even as her husband fought for the Confederacy, she returned to New Hampshire, where she was reduced to working as a washerwoman. The only thing that brought an

impoverished Eunice respectability was her white skin. But then she heard of her husband's death, and in 1869, mystifying some of her relatives, Connolly put that respectability at risk, too, marrying a well-to-do black sea captain from Grand Cayman Island and moving there with him. Hodes, a historian at NYU (*White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*), relies on a rich cache of Connolly's letters, which are housed at Duke University. Unfortunately, the letters don't reveal how Connolly met her second husband or explain in depth why she decided to marry him. Hodes's prose, though sometimes a bit affected ("In place of fiction, I offer the craft of history, assisted by the art of speculation"), is lucid and her account is engaging, though for readers steeped in the subject not pathbreaking; what Hodes has to tell us about the 19th century—that race was socially constructed and complicated, for example—is nothing new. 47 b&w illus., 2 maps. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"[Hodes] has done an extraordinary job of writing the story of an ordinary New England woman who was a prolific letter writer and who made unusual decisions for her time." - Washington Post
"Few researchers have the imagination or tenacity to reconstruct a lost life as carefully as Hodes has done—an absorbing account of a life reclaimed from obscurity." - Times Literary Supplement
"Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly's life is a road map to learning about 19th-century America. Those who love books about history will revel in the book's detail." - Cape Cod Times

Martha Hodes, the author, spent eight years researching this book. *The Sea Captain's Wife* examines the life of Eunice Richardson a white woman from New England whose life spanned the civil war. It was a life of poverty and loss until she discovered love and comfort with a black sea captain from the Cayman Islands. Even though Eunice found what she had always desired she still had to deal with isolation and disappointment until her tragic death. This is a fascinating story that despite all the research leaves many unanswered questions. An A+ read.

This scholarly treatment of women and race in the 19th Century comes alive with its case study: Eunice Richardson Stone Connolly. Born poor and white to farmers in New England, her family migrated to the mills in Lowell before her father gave in to the bottle and left. Eunice left the mills to marry but William Stone was unlucky at work and not a good provider. They moved to Mobile just in time for the Civil War; her husband fought for the South against her brothers in the Union Army.

Back home in New England and widowed, she eked out an existence cleaning other people's homes, doing washing and sewing, keeping herself and two children dependent on charity. She is the classic example of a woman who will keep going for the sake of the children, strong in the circumstance and despite her fragile health. Smiley Connelly was well-to-do, handsome and considerate of both Eunice and the children; he was also a black sea captain from the Cayman's. With him, Eunice was to find peace and comfort but lose contact with her family. Based on a long-treasured chest of letters among the Richardsons and augmented by other memoirs of the times and places, the text gives a complex picture of America before and after the Civil War: social mores, economic parameters, women's roles, religious developments (Eunice is a Universalist), and history made personal. Highly readable.

I tremendously enjoyed this telescopic view of a "slice of life" 150+ years ago-- and during the civil war-- of a young woman, her children, and her extended family. I found myself interested and emotionally moved by the heavy labor that she performed daily just to maintain a near-below subsistence level of living. She made some momentous and courageous decisions to pull herself up from abject poverty, choosing directions that went against society's norms and finally, against even what she had thought were her own beliefs. It was so inspiring to read that the happiest days of her life followed as a result of her own earlier choices. The true life of this young woman is such an inspiration for us here today. A fascinating, inspiring read that has left its' mark upon me long after I have put down the book.

Martha Hodes' book is both fascinating and beautifully written. She's taken a wonderful archive of previously unexplored family letters and drawn from many other historical resources to illuminate them and the times in which they were written. I took it up one evening, intending to read a couple of chapters, but the writing was so compelling that I couldn't put it down. One can see the massive amount of research that went into this project, but the book is never so dense with facts that it is overbearing in any way. (She has avoided the "information dump" that I recently heard another historian refer to, where the writer is so anxious to include every last bit of information discovered that the work becomes ponderous.) A great read and a worthy subject.

Good book.

Moving, exciting and realistic is a great mixture in this historical fiction tale.!!

Great story! Tragic ending.

very good enjoyed it

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