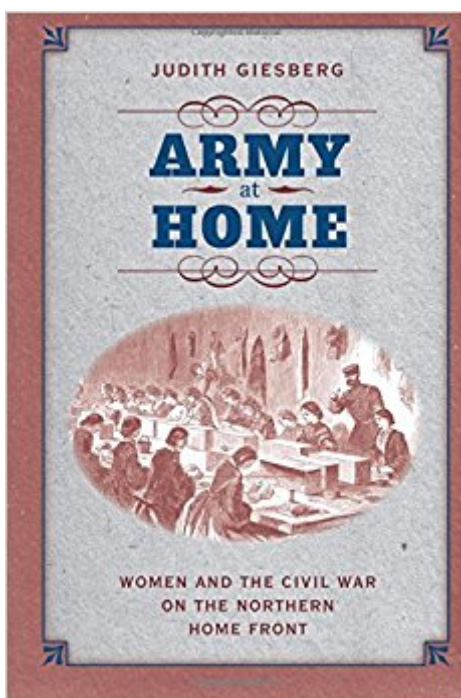


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# Army At Home: Women And The Civil War On The Northern Home Front (Civil War America)



## Synopsis

Introducing readers to women whose Civil War experiences have long been ignored, Judith Giesberg examines the lives of working-class women in the North, for whom the home front was a battlefield of its own. Black and white working-class women managed farms that had been left without a male head of household, worked in munitions factories, made uniforms, and located and cared for injured or dead soldiers. As they became more active in their new roles, they became visible as political actors, writing letters, signing petitions, moving (or refusing to move) from their homes, and confronting civilian and military officials. At the heart of the book are stories of women who fought the draft in New York and Pennsylvania, protested segregated streetcars in San Francisco and Philadelphia, and demanded a living wage in the needle trades and safer conditions at the Federal arsenals where they labored. Giesberg challenges readers to think about women and children who were caught up in the military conflict but nonetheless refused to become its collateral damage. She offers a dramatic reinterpretation of how America's Civil War reshaped the lived experience of race and gender and brought swift and lasting changes to working-class family life.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Engaging. . . . Offers a distinctly new vantage point. . . . Original, thought-provoking, and insightful, this is a very valuable addition to Civil War scholarship.--Civil War History"An excellent job addressing a topic not discussed in adequate detail previously. This book deserves a place in local

libraries and on the bookshelves of anyone interested in the contributions of women made during the American Civil War.--Civil War News

In Giesberg's action-packed Civil War study, women risk body and soul to make a living and to protest segregation, conscription, and low wages. These are not teary-eyed maidens waiting out the war with hankies gripped to their throats; they embody home front struggles that paralleled battlefields in transforming U.S. society.--Victoria Bynum, author of *The Free State of Jones: Mississippi's Longest Civil War* A highly original analysis of how the war affected working-class women and how those women affected the war effort in heretofore underrecognized ways, *Army at Home* is also a very valuable case study in how to apply larger theoretical insights to the Civil War era.--J. Matthew Gallman, author of *America's Joan of Arc: The Life of Anna Elizabeth Dickinson*

True or false: "It may well have been because of its women that the South lost the Civil War." It is often a statement, often a question, and always conjecture; for Judith Giesberg this question rests at the heart of her book, *Army at Home - Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front*. In less than two hundred pages, Giesberg attempts to quickly illustrate that Northern women were instrumental in national social reform, and that women were instrumental in the war effort. Arguably, Giesberg would disagree with the opening line of this paper.

Giesberg's attempt to reconcile the aforementioned question, while addressing the seriously marginalized working-class, immigrant, and African American women of the Civil War, is a noble task; one she accomplishes fairly well. Despite the book being one of war, how women responded in various ways to war, Giesberg employs a thematic, not a chronologic, outline for her narrative. While the war was literally in the backyards of Southern women, Northern women faced issues of their own. Giesberg's thesis essentially contends the Northern home front was not restricted to the battlefield, the women were an "army at home," influencing the entirety of the war in every regard. (p. 12) Each chapter serves as a brief case study of sorts, addressing issues relevant to Northern women who were experiencing the war as a "withdrawal of labor from their farms and their rural communities." (p. 19) The brief chapters cover a wide range of motifs, from women learning to how to cope with managing the family farm in place of their soldier husbands (chapter one), to the relocation of thousands of women at the hands of the military; a commonly shared experience in the South (chapter two). She also tackles the broken social dichotomy created, or rather emphasized, when women entered the male dominated workforce (chapter three). Giesberg

argues traditional antebellum concepts of separate spaces for men and women collapsed during the Civil War, "women produced spaces where they ceased being the object of war and became its subjects; even if unknowingly so at the time. (p. 13) Among other topics for discussion in *Army at Home* is the "fight for civil rights" (chapter four), how white Northern women attempted to protect their communities from the draft, the ramifications of emancipation and from integration (chapter five), and lastly, women traveling to the battlefield to retrieve their perished loved ones, and the question of to what extent soldiers and their families were the "responsibility of the state" (chapter six). (p. 93, 143) 'Each of these points is significant to the successes and drawbacks of Giesberg's book. A success in her formatting is that in a short space she manages to cover a wide spectrum of topics, traditionally not broached in conventional Civil War historiography. She does not cover just one city, one state, but rather a significant portion of the country, from Philadelphia to San Francisco. Giesberg demonstrates how something as simple as women's attire played against them in travel; restricting not only their movement, but the impression of their independence juxtaposed with their male counterparts. While Giesberg purports a general idea of Northern women versus Southern women, she generally deals with the Northeast and California, a state not typically associated with the Civil War. However, her greatest success in demonstrating social change is with the Streetcar Battles, which led to case law with lasting ramifications. There is, however, a great deal of speculation throughout the chapters of her book, some to a good extent she could have controlled. Giesberg considerably overstates in saying, "The Civil War changed the way people on the home front saw space and moved through it." (p. 164) In the beginning of the book she acknowledges the "reallocations of work and space in which women had to adjust when their soldier husbands enlisted, as if to suggest women were stationary and change was altogether foreign. (p. 27) Even taking into account the dichotomy of domestic and public domains, women did travel for charity work, families did relocate, and on occasion women did run the family farm, even before the Civil War. " Gaps in military, state, and family records exclude some of the more intimate details surrounding what women's "thoughts were about the war, as such it is impossible to paint a complete picture of the period. (p. 37) Giesberg adequately depicts the hardships Northern women of various socio-economic backgrounds were facing. Giesberg opens the door for other historians interested in pursuing women's history, especially pertaining to the Civil War; clearly there is a precedent set for further research to be done.'

As an admitted Women in History enthusiast, this book touched on so many "women at home" issues I was unaware of during the Civil War in the North. A plus is my ancestor Elizabeth Schwalm is included in Chapter 1 as an example of women in rural Pennsylvania. I had the added pleasure of meeting the author, Dr. Giesberg, at a recent event; she was very gracious in sharing her time and love of 19th century history and women's issues. This book is a must read as telling the full story of the Civil War.

Of all the books I have read on northern women during the Civil War, this was the most interesting and offered more information and insight beyond the overresearched USSC, local aid societies, and nursing (though it did not neglect them). I really enjoyed the way it was written making it an easy read.

The author tends to be somewhat repetitive but I am only on chapter 5. I haven't seen any evidence of the Sanitary Commission yet.

Has good historical value about those at home in the North during the Civil War that we don't often hear much about. For those who like historical facts this would be a good read, but it is not a novel.

Well written accounts of events that are often lost in the breadth of information written about the Civil War. Dr. Judith Giesberg tells six broad stories of women in the Northern States coping with the issues that surfaced during the support vacuum created when millions of men enlisted or were drafted for service in the Union Army. What resonated with me were the leadership roles the women took on - some for keeping their families together, some for changing society for the better and some for attempting to keep society at an antebellum state. These women made huge sacrifices for the war effort, fought to earn the right to be respected for their contributions to the Union and many became "casualties" through bodily injury, mental stress, a lack of government support and even death at arsenal explosions. This book should serve as a text for exploring women as leaders and it is directly related to the ongoing modern debate about women in combat and in government/corporate environments. I see a direct line from the arsenal explosions of the Civil War and during World War I written about so eloquently by Dr. Giesberg to the events that occurred on 9/11. In all three cases, the horror and reality of war was brought to the home front in the death of innocent women. I bought this book to learn about my ancestor, Elizabeth Schwalm, but found the

other stories very compelling. I learned many new things that added to my overall understanding of Civil War history. Highly recommend this book as a source to develop leaders for the future through a study of the past.

Looking for books on women at this time is challenging -this had lots of information

Excellent information on women during the period. Will use for research for an article I hope to publish this year.

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