



Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History

By Laurel Thatcher Ulrich

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From admired historian—and coiner of one of feminism's most popular slogans—Laurel Thatcher Ulrich comes an exploration of what it means for women to make history.

In 1976, in an obscure scholarly article, Ulrich wrote, "Well behaved women seldom make history." Today these words appear on t-shirts, mugs, bumper stickers, greeting cards, and all sorts of Web sites and blogs. Ulrich explains how that happened and what it means by looking back at women of the past who challenged the way history was written. She ranges from the fifteenth-century writer Christine de Pizan, who wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*, to the twentieth century's Virginia Woolf, author of *A Room of One's Own*. Ulrich updates their attempts to reimagine female possibilities and looks at the women who didn't try to make history but did. And she concludes by showing how the 1970s activists who created "second-wave feminism" also created a renaissance in the study of history.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1976, graduate student Ulrich asserted in an obscure scholarly article that well-behaved women seldom make history. But Ulrich, now at Harvard, made history, winning the Pulitzer and the Bancroft Prizes for *A Midwife's Tale*—and her slogan did, too: it began popping up on T-shirts, greeting cards and buttons. Why the appeal, Ulrich wondered? And what makes a woman qualify as well-behaved or rebellious? Several chapters of this accessible and beautifully written study are brilliant. In one, Ulrich follows the lead of Virginia Woolf (who invented an ill-fated fictional sister of Shakespeare) by digging into what we know—and don't know—about the women in the Bard's family. In another, she offers a piercing analysis of four 19th-century Harriets—ex-slaves Tubman, Jacobs and Powell, and novelist Stowe—to uncover the interplay of race and gender in questions of liberation. And in a third, richly illustrated chapter, she utilizes a medieval book of days as a window into women's labor through the ages. If other chapters, such as a wide-ranging exploration of the Amazon myth and a rumination on second-wave feminism, don't cohere as tightly or showcase Ulrich's strengths as an extraordinary interpreter of ordinary records, this can be forgiven in a work that is so often sharp and insightful. 26 illus. (Sept. 7)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Unlike her previous works, which focused on a single location, era, or life, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's fifth work of nonfiction takes a broad view of women's history. Though critics felt that her associations and organizing devices were clever, a few questioned some of the connections between stories. Critics also diverged over Ulrich's style: some found it dry and academic; others considered it clear and compelling. Ulrich, a pioneer in women's history in the 1970s and 1980s, continues to produce works that provide a fascinating peek into the past into what a woman's life was, and might still be, were it not for these spirited pioneers whose stories deserve to be remembered.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Ulrich never could have imagined that a comment she made in a scholarly article in 1976 would end up emblazoned on T-shirts, buttons, and coffee mugs. With that immortal line as the title of her latest inquiry into overlooked aspects of women's lives, the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian focuses on three accomplished women who behaved badly according to the standards of their times. She presents a fascinating profile of Christine de Pizan, the remarkable fourteenth-century author of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, a novel that advocates for women's education. Picking up the thread of Pizan's recounting of the myth of the Amazons, Ulrich portrays real-life women warriors throughout the ages, including today's women soldiers in Iraq. Ulrich provides a bracing answer to Virginia Woolf's pointed question—If Shakespeare had an equally talented sister, what would her life have been like?—after scrutinizing and shrewdly interpreting court documents of the time. Elizabeth Cady Stanton is the catalyst for a far-reaching analysis of the abolition and women's rights movements. Ultimately, Ulrich amends her famous bon mot: Well-behaved women make history when they do the unexpected, when their actions produce records, and when later generations care. Seaman, Donna

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Jonathan Flannagan:

As people who live in the modest era should be upgrade about what going on or data even knowledge to make them keep up with the era which is always change and progress. Some of you maybe will certainly update themselves by examining books. It is a good choice for you but the problems coming to an individual is you don't know what one you should start with. This Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History is our recommendation so you keep up with the world. Why, since this book serves what you want and want in this era.

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Lois Schooley:

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