

Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice

Jack Holland

New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006

Reviewed by Stephanie Knaak

Jack Holland's *Misogyny: The World's Oldest Prejudice* is a well-written historical roadmap of the various forms of female oppression evident in western civilizations over the millennia. The book "sets out to answer a daunting question: how do you explain the oppression and brutalization of half the world's population by the other half, throughout history?" In fact, the key strength of this book is its ability to describe rather than explain the history of women's oppression.

For Holland, misogyny—the contempt or hatred of women—is neither simple nor straightforward. His central argument is that misogyny both degrades and exalts women. He believes that the end result of misogyny, whether it shuns or celebrates women, "is the same: woman dehumanized" (6).

Holland takes readers on an eight-chapter historical journey, beginning with the Greeks of classical antiquity and ending with the Taliban regime of Afghanistan (including a brief discussion of American rap culture in the concluding chapter). Each chapter discusses the key political, religious, philosophical, and literary influences that shaped and reflected that period's prevailing ideas, practices, and cultural attitudes towards women. It is worth pointing out—principally for readers of this journal—that Holland pays scant attention to the subject of motherhood. Although he attends to how women's sexuality and reproductive capacities have been historically understood, organized, and controlled, he provides too little history of women's roles as mothers, the institution of motherhood, or cultural attitudes towards mothering and motherhood.

In the concluding chapter, Holland attempts to explain the "pervasive, persistent, pernicious and protean" (270) character of misogyny itself. Here, he emphasizes the significance of the rise of dualistic thought and its historical entrenchment in religion, politics, and the social organization of gender across time and place. While his explanation is little more than a reiteration of some of feminist theory's foundational arguments, his provocative statement, "it is probably a safe generalization that philosophers and priests have done more to harm women than pornographers" (164), could be used as a topic for classroom debate, or as a springboard for further theoretical elaboration and investigation.

Misogyny is a valuable reference work and instructional resource—well suited to the undergraduate classroom—an informative and interesting book.