



From the Field to the Legislature: A History of Women in the Virgin Islands (Contributions in Women's Studies)

Eugenia O'Neal

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Women of the Virgin Islands: From the Field to the Legislature recognizes and restores women to their central role in the history of the Virgin Islands by examining their lives from the earliest days of the colony's settlement. Constrained by their sex, race, and colonized status, women, nevertheless, led lives of ordinary heroism, which ensured the territory's economic, social, and cultural survival. In this comprehensive history of women in one of the world's last British colonies, O'Neal shows how women continue to define and redefine themselves and their roles in both their public and private lives, even as the colony itself undergoes its own transformation. As the twenty-first century begins, this book takes a look back at the role colonialism played in the twentieth century in furthering male political leadership and patriarchal norms. While party politics might have had the potential to advance women's political careers, O'Neal concludes they have largely failed to do so despite the advances women have made.

Beginning in the late 1600s, when the islands were first colonized by the British, O'Neal examines the growth of slavery and shows how women exercised leadership roles in their community while preserving some of the traditions of their native Africa. She moves on to discuss the shaping of women's roles after the abolition of slavery and the struggles women faced as a result. Moving into the twentieth century, the book takes a look at women in the economy, society, government, education, and even in the family, and explores how roles have grown and changed even as the islands themselves continue to be transformed. O'Neal shows that while patriarchal attitudes were strengthened, women still found their way into the public arena, albeit with difficulty, influencing all areas of social policy. This book represents a truly original and enlightening addition to the literature on the Virgin Islands and Caribbean history.

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