



The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century

By Martha Hodes



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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.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.)

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Review

"[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)

About the Author

Martha Hodes, a professor of history at New York University, is the author of *White Women, Black Men*, which won the Allan Nevins Prize for Literary Distinction. She lives in New York City and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

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Louis Watson:

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