



All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America

Frances Cogan

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Our image of nineteenth-century American women is generally divided into two broad classifications: victims and revolutionaries. This divide has served the purposes of modern feminists well, allowing them to claim feminism as the only viable role model for women of the nineteenth century.

In *All-American Girl*, however, Frances B. Cogan identifies amid these extremes a third ideal of femininity: the “Real Woman.” Cogan’s Real Woman exists in advice books and manuals, as well as in magazine short stories whose characters did not dedicate their lives to passivity or demand the vote. Appearing in the popular reading of middle-class America from 1842 to 1880, these women embodied qualities that neither the “True Women”—conventional ladies of leisure—nor the early feminists fully advocated, such as intelligence, physical fitness, self sufficiency, economic self-reliance, judicious marriage, and a balance between self and family. Cogan’s *All-American Girl* reveals a system of feminine values that demanded women be neither idle nor militant.

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