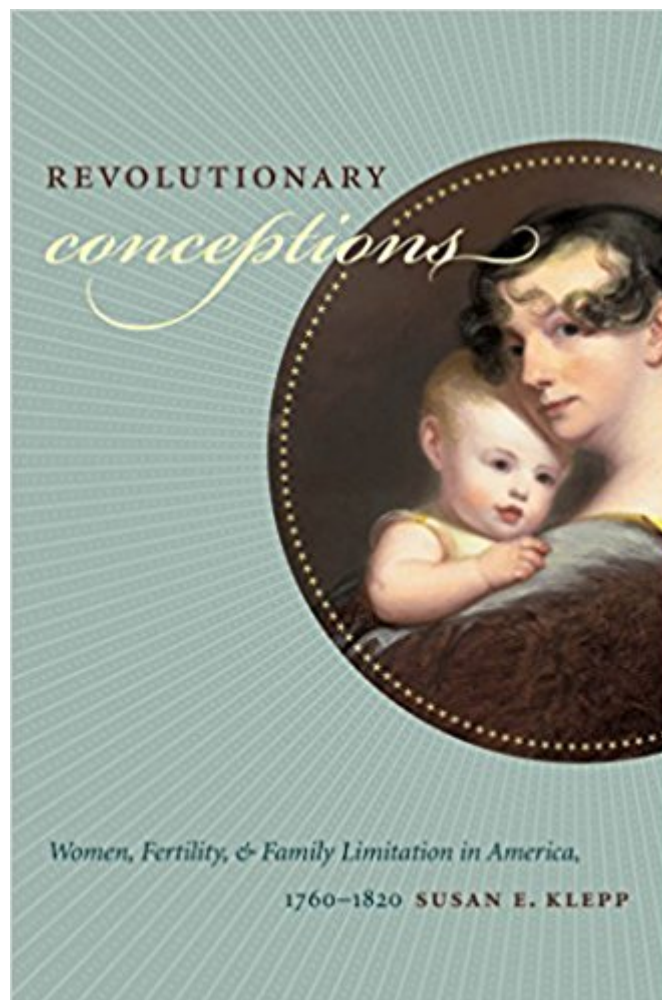


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Revolutionary Conceptions: Women, Fertility, And Family Limitation In America, 1760-1820 (Published For The Omohundro Institute Of Early American History And Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia)





Synopsis

In the Age of Revolution, how did American women conceive their lives and marital obligations? By examining the attitudes and behaviors surrounding the contentious issues of family, contraception, abortion, sexuality, beauty, and identity, Susan E. Klepp demonstrates that many women--rural and urban, free and enslaved--began to radically redefine motherhood. They asserted, or attempted to assert, control over their bodies, their marriages, and their daughters'

opportunities. Late-eighteenth-century American women were among the first in the world to disavow the continual childbearing and large families that had long been considered ideal. Liberty, equality, and heartfelt religion led to new conceptions of virtuous, rational womanhood and responsible parenthood. These changes can be seen in falling birthrates, in advice to friends and kin, in portraits, and in a gradual, even reluctant, shift in men's opinions. Revolutionary-era women redefined femininity, fertility, family, and their futures by limiting births. Women might not have won the vote in the new Republic, they might not have gained formal rights in other spheres, but, Klepp argues, there was a women's revolution nonetheless.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The United States did not seek to regulate contraception and abortion until the mid-nineteenth century. Family size peaked in the mid-eighteenth century. What happened in between? That, in a

nutshell, is Klepp's topic in *Revolutionary Conceptions*. Klepp maintains that while the American Revolution was unfolding on the world stage, another, female-led revolution was unfolding behind the scenes as American couples began to delay marriage, space births, and curtail childbearing several years before the wives reached menopause. These changes transformed the pattern of women's lives and their very conception of their purpose in life. This engaging book is a surprisingly quick read as scholarly works go. It has a strong statistical foundation, with due attention to regional and class differences. Klepp approaches her topic imaginatively: in one lavishly illustrated chapter, she explores how images of women gradually changed from emphasizing fertility to emphasizing self-control. The chapter on the technology of birth control is less satisfactory because Klepp doesn't wrap it up with a clear assessment of exactly how the typical Revolutionary-era woman limited family size, but she does at least provide a comprehensive overview of the full range of methods available, with an emphasis on emmenagogues. In short, *Revolutionary Conceptions* is a well-researched and fascinating book that challenges many previous theories about when and why Americans began to limit family size. Highly recommended.

This was a really good and exciting book although it didn't completely answer my questions about the time the author researched.

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