

Narratives of Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism



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著者:Pickering, Jean (EDT)/ Kehde, Suzanne (EDT)

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Most Americans think of Betsy Ross as she was depicted in Charles Weisberger's popular painting *The Birth of Our Nation's Flag*--a motherly figure, sewing at the hearth. In fact, as Jo Ann Menezes's analysis in *Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism* points out, Ross was a widowed businesswoman who ran an upholstery shop out of her house. In Weisberger's painting, all signs of economic industry are erased and Ross's house is transformed into a home rather than the site of cottage industry. Ross is constructed as the perfect heroic mother, worthy of sacred creation; thus, our flag was born. Ross's transformation into an icon neatly illustrates the conjunction of soaring nationalism and the establishment of woman as a fixed domestic presence and serves as an excellent example of the master narratives revealed in *Nostalgia, Gender, and Nationalism*. The essays in this provocative anthology explore the connections between nation and gender and the ways in which nostalgia functions to bind these two presumably unrelated constructions together. Collectively they suggest that women pay a special fee on behalf of the nation, even though it is traditionally represented as an honorarium given to them and that, in fact, the nation-state takes as a foundational principle the subordination of women.

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