

Goldin, Claudia Dale. *Understanding the gender gap: an economic history of American women*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1990. 287pp. (NBER series on long-term factors in economic development). ISBN: 978-0-19-505077-6

In this important study of the female labor force in the United States, Goldin uses quantitative history methods and new data series to argue that both the advances in the economic position of American women and the ongoing gender distinction in the workplace are the result of long-standing societal trends rather than a recent social transformation. Topics discussed include: the male-female wage gap; occupational segregation by sex; the emergence of “wage discrimination”; and the experience of married women in the labor force. The author’s findings include: labor force participation of married, adult women declined before its noted rise over the last half-century; work experience among working women had been substantial since the beginning of the 20th century, but work experience among married women did not advance significantly over the last half-century; and the gap in earnings between men and women was not as constant in the past as it was from the 1950s to the early 1980s. The same changes that brought advancement for women in some areas, established barriers in others. For example, the rise of the white-collar sector increased women’s labor force participation, but also saw the establishment of marriage bars and other policies that segregated men and women in certain jobs.