



# **Uncovering the Hidden Work of Women in Family Businesses : A History of Census Underenumeration (Garland Studies in the History of American Labor)**

*Lisa Geib-Gunderson*

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This book provides new estimates of labour force participation for married women during the development of the U.S. economy. New census data reveals that a large number of women were excluded from the count of "gainfully occupied" persons in 1880, 1900, and 1910. This undercount was due in part to enumerator neglect, but also to the omission of many women performing work in family-run businesses. The traditionally accepted pattern of an initial decrease in women's labor force participation before 1940 followed by a rapid increase in the post-war period is replaced by one of relative constancy across the 20th-century. The new work rates estimated for women in the United States in the critical period of 1880 to 1910 are as high or higher than those reported in the post-World War II decades. This underenumeration also reveals a crucial link between the racial gap in married women's labour force participation and the racial gap in male self-employment. A long-standing puzzle in the economics literature is the high labor force participation of black married women relative to white women with otherwise identical characteristics. This study demonstrates that because the majority of family businesses were owned by white men and the unreported family labourers were primarily white women, variations in husbands' self-employment status explain a significant portion of the previously elusive gap in women's labour force participation by race.

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