

Summer 2013

**Review of A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to Present edited by Margo Culley New York: The Feminist Press, 1993. Pbk, \$16.69. ISBN: 9780935312515**

Monica Reyes

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.utrgv.edu/jostes>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

---

**Recommended Citation**

Reyes, M. (2013). Review of A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to Present edited by Margo Culley. Jostes: The Journal of South Texas English Studies, 4(2), 134-135.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of South Texas English Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks @ UTRGV. For more information, please contact [justin.white@utrgv.edu](mailto:justin.white@utrgv.edu), [william.flores01@utrgv.edu](mailto:william.flores01@utrgv.edu).

Review of *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to Present* edited by Margo Culley  
New York: The Feminist Press, 1993. Pbk, \$16.69.  
ISBN: 978-0935312515

Monica Reyes

In this varying compilation of excerpts of diary literature from 29 American women spanning over two centuries, editor Margo Culley weaves together a diverse patchwork of perspectives, struggles and lives of women in America. *A Day at a Time: The Diary Literature of American Women from 1764 to Present* contains snippets of women's lives from Early America, such as the heroic Abigail Abbot Bailey who confronted her husband about his incest with their daughter and risked everything to do so in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the daring Juanita Harrison, a black house-maid who abruptly decided to leave her work and travel the world in the early 1900s. Culley's purpose in this chronological compilation is to showcase the multi-faceted dailiness of women's lives in America and also to study how the diary changed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from a record which may be read by family to become a place where "self" was center.

Culley's decision to include such varying representations of female diary work allows this compilation to stand apart from the usual surveys of white American colonial female diaries. The excerpts are well chosen and usually are as engaging as fiction, and those that are not as lively only remind readers of the recycled days early American women faced in their domestic sphere.

Culley's compilations defend her claim about the artistic value of diary writing appropriately: "this periodic life-writing springs from the same source as the art created for a public audience: the urge to give shape and meaning to life with

words, and to endow this meaning-making with a permanence that transcends time” (xi).

Culley’s thorough introduction provides background which is especially helpful to the novice researcher of diaries and journals; her insights include information about common patterns in female diary writing, the social and political influences on the diary as a genre, and the idiosyncrasies of diary writing in the larger scope of autobiographical writing. The editor also provides a lengthy and useful bibliography which will no doubt assist the diary researcher.

*A Day at a Time* adds to Culley’s previous works about the female writer’s experience—works such as *Women’s Personal Narratives: Essays in Criticism and Pedagogy*. The past decade has offered little in the discussion of American women’s personal narratives, yet *A Day at a Time* remains to be relevant and fascinating.