



Fame found Henry Morton Stanley after he searched through Africa for the missionary David Livingstone, as depicted in this 1872 illustration.

But again and again, Stanley undermined his own accomplishments by failing to tell the truth. Because, as Jeal notes, finding “a forgotten saint made a better story than to have found an embittered recluse” (which Livingstone was), he “gave birth, almost single-handedly, to the Livingstone myth of the noble, self-sacrificing missionary,” and suffered by comparison ever after. Far more troubling are his exaggerated accounts of beating his bearers and killing the natives, which Jeal convincingly argues were the product of a workhouse boy’s desire to appear tough and a journalist’s desire to tell a sensational story. Stanley also published a book that inflated the number of treaties he negotiated on King Leopold’s behalf, setting himself up for criticism that he stole Africans’ land.

In reality, Stanley viewed Europeans as tenants rather than sovereigns in Africa and did his best to negotiate fair treaties with local rulers. He became a “blood brother” of several African chiefs, formed lifelong friendships with many Africans, and “preferred the company of his ‘Dark Companions’ to that of most Europeans,” Jeal says. In

Africa, as in America, Stanley escaped from the rigid class system of his own society and felt free to create a new life for himself. By uncovering the truth behind the myth, Jeal paints a sympathetic portrait of the ultimate self-made man.

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## The Vice Squad

By Amy E. Schwartz

MOST AMERICAN ACADEMICS start their careers researching something small and obscure, and then—if they’re lucky—work their way up to topics of larger import and scope. Only at the pinnacle of their profession are they permitted to muse on sweeping themes. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich is at or near that pinnacle. She has received a MacArthur Foundation “genius grant” and is the 300th Anniversary University

**WELL-BEHAVED  
WOMEN SELDOM  
MAKE HISTORY.**

By Laurel Thatcher  
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Professor at Harvard. And the urge to muse, rather than strictly analyze, is evident in *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History*, a quirky meditation on women's lives and the ways they are portrayed or, more often, forgotten by the retellers of history.

Women's lives are Ulrich's scholarly territory. In 1990, after raising a family and starting a career late, she leapt to prominence with the publication of *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. In this painstaking, groundbreaking tour de force, Ulrich reconstructed a Maine midwife's life from her diary and teased out of it a vast trove of information concerning the workings of a New England community in the early days of the American republic, from how people traveled and what drugs they took for their ailments to the way they dealt with sexual liaisons outside marriage.

The book won a Pulitzer Prize, a Bancroft Prize, and half a dozen other honors, and was made into a PBS documentary. Meanwhile, a line from a scholarly article Ulrich had written in 1976, "Well-behaved women seldom make history," had achieved escape velocity. Taken up as a feminist mantra by young activists, it started appearing online, then on T-shirts. Ulrich began to wonder what larger lesson she had stumbled on about her chosen work, the unearthing and teaching of women's history.

Exploring that lesson requires a technique very different from the one Ulrich used to rediscover Ballard. The midwife, rare among women of her era, kept a record of a regular life filled with such "women's work" as delivering babies, bartering goods, and doing laundry. But women who "made history" in the standard sense were different: To attain anything recognizable to historians as status or influence, Ulrich suggests, women have had to "misbehave." And misbehavior brought danger and, frequently, oblivion. We remember only those who successfully "negotiated the boundary between invisibility and scandal."

Of necessity, this story must feature women heard of before. Ulrich weighs the conflicting views and accounts of figures as various as the classical Amazons, Harriet Tubman, and Virginia Woolf, pondering their forms of "misbehavior" and where they led. Sometimes women are remembered for things they didn't even do. Lady Godiva, for example, was a pious 11th-century philanthropist who would have soon been forgotten, but the story of her riding naked through the streets to spare her people heavy taxes, likely later concocted by an English monk, earned her a place in history.

Ulrich's imaginative way with sources occasionally shows itself, notably in her use of records from English "bawdy courts"

of Shakespeare's day, in which the church tried women (and men) for sexual crimes such as fornication. Documentation abounds, of course, of women accused of misbehavior as a way of stymieing their other activities.

But some finds are still striking. The antebellum Southern writer William Gilmore Simms exclaims of abolitionist writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Mrs. Stowe betrays a malignity so remarkable that the petticoat lifts of itself, and we see the hoof of the beast under the table."

Yet Ulrich's true soul mates in this book are not her eminent troublemakers but women such as the medieval writer Christine de Pizan, who recast women's history and argued for their dignity in *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405). Pizan herself was rediscovered during a wave of transformation in the field of history in the 1970s and '80s, when narrow visions of how women *should* behave were expanded as evidence amassed of how women *have* behaved over the centuries. As a historian who draws intellectual sustenance from that movement, Ulrich knows deep down that a fascinating fact trumps a clever aphorism every time. "Details," she writes, "let us out of boxes created by slogans."

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