

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-19161-6 - Women and Justice for the Poor: A History of Legal Aid, 1863–1945

Felice Batlan

Excerpt

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## **Women and Justice for the Poor**

*A History of Legal Aid, 1863–1945*

This book reexamines fundamental assumptions about the American legal profession and the boundaries between “professional” lawyers, “lay” lawyers, and social workers. Creating a dialogue between legal history and women’s history, it demonstrates that nineteenth-century women’s organizations were the first to offer legal aid to the poor, and that middle-class women, functioning as lay lawyers, provided that assistance. Felice Batlan illustrates that by the early twentieth century, male lawyers had founded their own legal aid societies. These new legal aid lawyers created an imagined history of legal aid and a blueprint for its future in which women played no role and their accomplishments were intentionally omitted. In response, women social workers offered harsh criticisms of legal aid leaders and developed a more robust social work model of legal aid. These different models produced conflicting understandings of legal expertise, professionalism, the rule of law, and, ultimately, the meaning of justice for the poor.

Felice Batlan is professor of law and associate dean at IIT/Chicago–Kent College of Law. Her groundbreaking work, which explores interactions among law, gender, history, and the legal profession, has appeared in numerous law reviews, history journals, and anthologies. She is a book review editor for *Law and History Review* and was an associate editor of the *Encyclopedia of the Supreme Court* and *Continuity and Change*. She has been a New York University Golieb Fellow, a Hurst Fellow, and a Freehling Fellow, and she received the Coordinating Council for Women in History (CCWH)/Berkshire Women’s History Dissertation Award.

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*In memory of my mother, Syrene R. Batlan,  
Who stood with me on the starting line  
In dedication to my husband, the Honorable Robert Balanoff,  
Who took each step with me*

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**CAMBRIDGE**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107446410](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107446410)

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First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Batlan, Felice, 1965– author.

Women and justice for the poor : a history of legal aid, 1863–1945 / Felice Batlan.  
pages cm. – (Studies in legal history)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-08453-7 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-44641-0 (paperback)

1. Legal aid – United States – History. 2. Women – United States – History. I. Title.

KF336.B38 2015

362.5'8–dc23 2014046191

ISBN 978-1-107-08453-7 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-44641-0 Paperback

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