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## Introduction

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## Introduction

Although the editors of *Historical Perspectives* do not look for articles that fit a particular theme, the 2001 edition happens to feature several that focus in one way or another on issues of power and authority. Shannon LeCompte treats Joan of Arc's manipulation of late medieval societal roles to give authority to the power she believed she had from God. Joan's success, as well as her eventual downfall, depended heavily on her ability to transcend the limitations placed on medieval women by presenting herself in both feminine and masculine roles that commanded respect and obedience. Marcia Howlett's study of Eva Péron traces a poor girl's continuing reinvention of herself to gain status, wealth, and power in mid-twentieth century Argentine. Eva's willingness to transform her persona was married to a remarkable sensitivity to the needs of those around her. Ironically, both her friends and her enemies continued to remake her image long after her death.

If Joan of Arc and Eva Péron strove, in their very different ways, to project their power over others, the African American writer Zora Neale Hurston sought to protect her unique talent and vision from critics both black and white. Lezley Hightower considers the rise and decline of a writer celebrated in the 1920s and 1930s, yet ignored by the 1950s. Hurston never gave in to the cultural authorities around her, though the consequence was trenchant criticism of her views and dismissive indifference to her work. Zora Neale Hurston's critics threatened her art; the Sioux people faced cultural obliteration and extermination at the hands of the U.S. government. Hilary Armstrong analyses the peculiar Sioux reaction to military defeat and condemnation to reservation life, the Ghost Dance. She finds this strange amalgam of Native American and Christian religious beliefs to be both a spiritual defense against the threat of annihilation and an assertion of culture and identity as the Sioux were being stripped of both.

A world away from the Sioux, but in some ways similarly confined,

were the suburban housewives of Jennifer Veitch's study. Women were the main force in the move to the suburbs after World War II; they sought freedom from the constraints of urban life. They were not prepared, however, for the isolation and consequent boredom that the peculiar construction of the suburbs imposed upon them. Their strategies to contend with this were ingenious, but only partly successful. In a similar vein, the women athletes treated by Rosario Lopez attempted to break bonds imposed on them, but their pursuit of contradictory goals frustrated their efforts. The turn of the century saw women pushing into sports from which they had previously been excluded, notably basketball. Yet an unwillingness to challenge the dominant notion that competition made women masculine led proponents of women's sports to maintain an image of femininity inherently at odds with athleticism. Women's basketball in the first decades of the twentieth century was consequently a watered-down version of the men's game designed specifically to reduce competition.

Each of these articles demonstrates great imagination and skill in both conception and execution. They treat complex issues with considerable sophistication. Together, they represent a high level of accomplishment, for which their authors are to be congratulated.