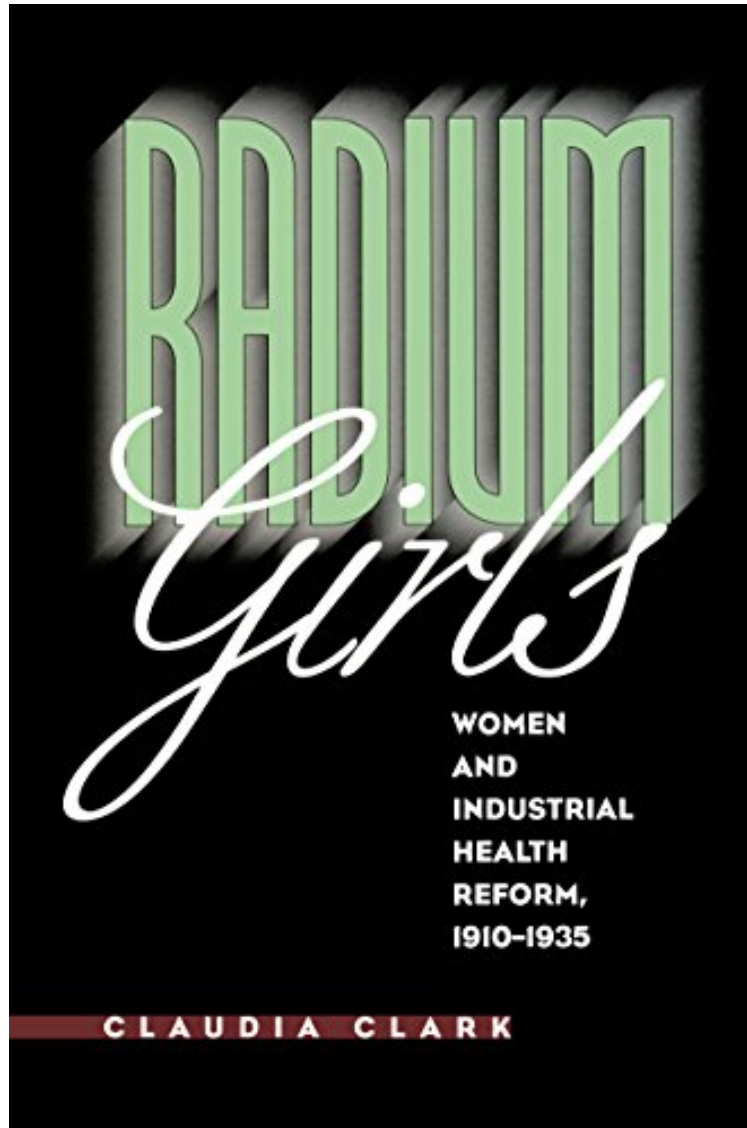



Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935

Claudia Clark

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Claudia Clark : Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Radium Girls: Women and Industrial Health Reform, 1910-1935:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A terrific readBy Elizabeth Comberwow. This is an amazing account of women who unknowingly gave their lives to furthering the information about radium. Well worth reading, so that we can all be aware of potential dangers in the workplace.7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. A "Glowing" Account of Women Struggling for Their HealthBy M. BroderickThis book is fascinating--It is readable, non-technical, and covers an intriguing and little-known subject. It describes an episode of women's activism on health

issues before activism was considered the proper province of women. During and after World War I, hundreds of women, mostly young and unmarried, were employed to paint the dials of watches with self-illuminating paint containing Radium. Some of the women began to fear for the job's effects on their health, but had great difficulty in getting any action taken. This book describes their efforts to have these hazards corrected, and the problems they had dealing with uncaring factory management, inept government officials, skeptical members of the medical community, and eventually with the courts. It is disturbing, yet fascinating! Highly recommended 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Howard Spencer great incite into public health laws

In the early twentieth century, a group of women workers hired to apply luminous paint to watch faces and instrument dials found themselves among the first victims of radium poisoning. Claudia Clark's book tells the compelling story of these women, who at first had no idea that the tedious task of dialpainting was any different from the other factory jobs available to them. But after repeated exposure to the radium-laced paint, they began to develop mysterious, often fatal illnesses that they traced to conditions in the workplace. Their fight to have their symptoms recognized as an industrial disease represents an important chapter in the history of modern health and labor policy. Clark's account emphasizes the social and political factors that influenced the responses of the workers, managers, government officials, medical specialists, and legal authorities involved in the case. She enriches the story by exploring contemporary disputes over workplace control, government intervention, and industry-backed medical research. Finally, in appraising the dialpainters' campaign to secure compensation and prevention of further incidents--efforts launched with the help of the reform-minded, middle-class women of the Consumers' League--Clark is able to evaluate the achievements and shortcomings of the industrial health movement as a whole.

From The New England Journal of Medicine The story of the radium watch-dial painters is a classic case in the history of occupational disease. Attracted by easy work and high wages, these young women painted the luminous numbers on wristwatches that, designed for soldiers involved in the trench warfare of World War I, became a consumer fad in the 1920s. The women were taught to sharpen the tips of their paintbrushes between their lips and, as a result, they absorbed substantial quantities of radium. Their tragic illnesses and deaths led to crucial discoveries in radiobiology and contributed to the establishment of standards for the level of exposure to radiation in the workplace. The basic details of this episode are well known, but the story has only now received the detailed historical analysis it deserves. In *Radium Girls* Claudia Clark focuses on the experiences of the painters. She integrates startling anecdotes with sophisticated analyses to explore the politics of occupational disease. For example, Clark describes the excitement of the women who worked on these "sensational" products: told that radium would "put a glow in [their] cheeks," they painted their clothing, fingernails, and even their teeth, "for a smile that glowed in the dark." How could this have happened? As Clark reminds us, these women worked at a time before the bombing of Hiroshima, when radiation was seen as the key to the future. Though some researchers had documented the dangers of radium, it was hailed as a panacea and sold for a variety of medicinal purposes. The deposition of radium in workers' bones was even seen as beneficial: their bodies were bathed in the healing power of radiation. Clark traces how this excitement turned into fear and "furious frustration." When workers began to suffer from anemia, fractures, and necrosis of the jaw, some of them, as well as their physicians and dentists, suggested that there was a connection to the radium paint. The watch-dial companies rejected these claims. Government regulators concluded that the existing evidence did not warrant further investigation. Recognition of radium poisoning took years of effort by the women and workers' advocates. This narrative is rich in tragedy and scandal: researchers accepted companies' requests that they not release their damning data; a dentist offered his testimony to the highest bidder. Although settlements did provide some financial compensation, the companies neither admitted guilt nor submitted to formal regulation. Although the government was slow to intervene on behalf of the dial painters, it took rapid action to prevent any injuries from radium medications; it "acted with far greater alacrity to help consumers than to assist workers." The most valuable contribution of *Radium Girls* lies in its ability to explode myths about the nature of scientific discovery. As Clark shows, the recognition of radium poisoning was not an event, a flash of medical insight. Instead, it was a political process, negotiated by labor, management, government, and medicine. Clark also explores a host of other important issues, providing helpful histories of industrial disease, workers' compensation, women's reform movements, and radiation medicine. *Radium Girls* does have two shortcomings. First, by weaving multiple histories into her central narrative of the dial painters, Clark sacrifices a linear chronology, sometimes leaving the reader struggling to place the many details into a consistent time line. Second, Clark struggles with her self-assigned goal of analyzing "death and fairness." Her narrative clearly shows the tragedy of women who lost their lives for the sake of glow-in-the-dark watches. Who should be blamed? Clark identifies the negligence of radium companies and of researchers who could have acted earlier in defense of the dial painters' health. But Clark also suggests that the women were the canaries in the coal mine: their suffering was an inevitable step in the recognition of radium poisoning. And by raising the issue of innocent victims, Clark enters the dangerous ground of implying that other people deserve their illnesses and deaths. Overall, *Radium Girls* is an important book for anyone interested in industrial health, women's health, or the history of

radiation. It captures the often neglected experiences and contributions of the painters. Most important, it powerfully reminds us that it is not enough to take precautions only against known toxins. Instead, we must struggle to anticipate new risks in our changing industrial and social environments. ed by David S. Jones, M.A. Copyright copy; 1998 Massachusetts Medical Society. All rights reserved. The New England Journal of Medicine is a registered trademark of the MMS. "Radium Girls" is an important book for anyone interested in industrial health, women 's health, or the history of radiation."New England Journal of Medicine" A considerable achievement. . . . A salutary and sobering story of the damage inflicted on a very vulnerable group of young women and of the reactions of confusion, denial, subterfuge and sometimes frank dishonesty which the emerging facts provoked.--Medical History|Radium Girls is an important book for anyone interested in industrial health, women's health, or the history of radiation.--New England Journal of Medicine|An extraordinarily rich and rewarding book. . . . Clark provides a sophisticated and complex analysis of the interaction of labor, reformers, industrial physicians, academics, and industry that illuminates the specifics of this case as well as the development of industrial hygiene in general.--Journal of American History|A model study of the process by which job-related illness was recognized and remedied in the first third of the twentieth century. Clark's thoughtful analysis raises important ethical questions about scientific and governmental expertise.--Kathryn Kish Sklar, author of Florence Kelly and the Nation's Work|Adroitly combines social, industrial, and labor history to demonstrate the impressive power of determined, organized women.--Kirkus s|The best histories of medicine and public health describe the political, economic, legal, and social ingredients of disease. Clark deftly adds gender to that mix, but perhaps most importantly, she cogently argues that the moral issues inherent in controlling knowledge about what makes people sick (and who is responsible) continue to determine environmental and industrial health policy today.--Environmental History|Clark deepens our understanding of the National Consumers' League by extending the time of its activism, by moving from the national to the local, and by expanding the scope of its quest for labor standards beyond protective legislation.--Journal of Interdisciplinary History|Provides an understanding of the situation of one sector of working class women, and the strengths and weaknesses of one of the major middle-class women's social reform organizations of the Progressive Era in the period of World War I. . . . Clark does an excellent job of showing the weaknesses of the company and state medical investigators, and the economic and political ties which kept them from conscientiously defending worker or public health. Her story also makes clear many of the limitations of the middle-class reform movement and of Progressive Era reformers in general.--Against the Current|Drawing on a rich array of medical, scientific, business, government, and legal sources, Clark offers a many-sided analysis of a significant chapter in modern political history. . . . She contributes to a body of scholarship that promotes the idea of science as a political realm and the importance of working-class organization around the issue of industrial health and safety.--American Historical |A rich education in how 'knowledge about industrial diseases is a contested site of power'. . . . Contributes to the cultural history of the atomic age.--Labor Studies Journal|Provides judicious and engaging summaries, not shunning ethical issues and moral challenges. It is these deliberations which make the book a pleasure and a profit to read.--Labor History|Provides an interesting social and human perspective on a classic health physics case.--Health Physics|An extraordinarily rich and rewarding book. . . . Clark provides a sophisticated and complex analysis of the interaction of labor, reformers, industrial physicians, academics, and industry that illuminates the specifics of this case as well as the development of industrial hygiene in general. . . . Radium Girls is a brilliant case study of the radium dial industry. But it is much more. It should be of interest to those interested in social history, women's history, and labor history and the development of public health in the United States.--Journal of American History|Well written and provocative . . . illuminate[s] the significance of occupational disease in American workplaces, while exploring how reformers during the Progressive period sought to draw attention to them.--Technology Culture|This well-researched book. . . . provides an interesting social and human perspective on a classic health physics case.--Health Physics|An intelligent book that is both meticulously researched and highly readable. [Clark] demonstrates an impressive mastery of many disparate sub-disciplines, and weaves dominant debates of these fields into a tapestry of narrative that is cogent, compelling and compassionate. . . . Highly recommended to all those interested in women's history, labour history and the social history of medicine within and without the United States.--Labour History |[An] exemplary historical account. . . . Highly recommended.--Choice|A compelling and eminently readable book.--Social History of Medicine|A dramatic and important story. By so heedfully unearthing workers' perspectives and experiences and by broaching extra-workplace questions about consumption, Clark helps transport the history of 'occupational health' beyond the framework first forged by George Rosen and Henry Sigerist, based on 1920s and 1930s industrial hygiene.--Bulletin of the History of Medicine|This book is an important addition to the somewhat murky history of occupational health.--Michigan Historical |An important contribution to the historiography of the occupational hygiene movement in the United States.--Industrial and Labor Relations |This is a first rate book that provides the most detailed and focussed discussion to date of an important episode in occupational health history. It should be read by social and labor historians as well as policy makers concerned with contemporary issues in occupational disease regulation. It is a very important book that combines social, women's, and public policy history.--David Rosner, author of Deadly Dust: Silicosis and the Politics

