

***Our American Heritage*, Herbert J. Bass, George A. Billias, and Emma Jones Lapsansky, NJ: Silber Burdett Company, 1983. [10-12]**

[754-756]

American Society

The 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s saw a breaking away from the sameness in behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that had marked the 1950s. The signs were everywhere: from changed hair styles and clothing to loud rock music; from different ideas of morality to experimenting with drugs. At least a part of this was related to the desire of the young to declare their independence from the old. But the changes were related to something more. A sizable minority of young people, and some older ones, rejected what they saw as the bigness, impersonality, and hectic pace of modern life. They also turned their backs on materialism and on the idea of success through disciplined hard work. These people experimented with different lifestyles. They declared that feeling and emotion were as important paths to truth as was reason. Some talked about reshaping American society through revolutionary change. Others were content simply to "do their own thing."

Many Americans, young and old, found such changes in behavior bewildering, and the questioning of their beliefs and moral values threatening. What was remarkable, however, was the high tolerance for diversity that American society showed.

During these same years, there were important steps in the direction of greater openness and equality. The cry of black power was joined by cries of red power (by American Indians), Chicano power (by Mexican Americans), and gray power (by older citizens), among others. The most notable gains, however, were made, not by a minority, but by a majority -- women.

Women's Liberation. The feminist movement, quiet since the 1920s, came to life again in the 1960s. It was not just the old matter of women receiving less pay than men for the same work, although that was part of it. Nor was it only that women's opportunities for advancement were still limited, although that was part of it too. The challenge raised by feminists in the '60s, '70s, and '80s dealt with the basic subject of the roles assigned to women in a male-dominated society. Females were conditioned from childhood, it was argued, to think of themselves only as wives and mothers. Males were taught to believe that they would do "man's work" and become the leaders in business and politics. Such conditioning, wrote Betty Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), limited women's chances to achieve their full potential as human beings.

Led by Betty Friedan, a group of 300 Americans -- men as well as women -- formed the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1966. This organization's aim was to eliminate sex stereotypes and to open the way to political and economic power for women. NOW and similar organizations were aided by the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law, you will recall, forbade discrimination on the grounds of sex as well as race and religion. Another law in 1968 led businesses, schools, and universities to set Affirmative Action goals for bringing qualified women and minorities into the labor force.

Some changes came quickly, others slowly. The number of women in politics increased dramatically. So did the numbers in the professions, and in the work force generally. As in the 1950s, the wish to add to the family income was one of the reasons. But there were additional reasons, as one mother of four explained: "I wanted some adult companionship, a feeling of accomplishment; having the cleanest floor on the block isn't the greatest thing that can happen to you." However, women still found it difficult to rise to the top of their professions. Perhaps the greatest changes came about through thousands of small consciousness-raising groups. Through these groups, women came to think about themselves and their place in society differently from before.

At the same time, it must be noted that not all women agreed with all the goals of

the Women's Liberation movement. Many said they felt entirely fulfilled as wives and mothers and did not wish to change. Supporters of the women's movement said that this was a choice all women should be free to make.

In 1972, Congress approved and sent to the states an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). It reads: "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." Debate about this amendment helped keep the issue of women's rights before the public during the 1970s and into the 1980s. (photo) In 1981, Sandra Day O'Connor became the first woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States.