

**The American Nation, Paul Boyer, FL: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1998.**

[7-9]

[854]

**A REVIVED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT**

One of the most lasting legacies of the 1960s was its challenge to traditional views of women. After years of inaction, the women's movement experienced a widespread revival.

**Sparks of unrest.** This revival was sparked in part by the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), which rejected the popular notion that women were content with the roles of wife, mother, and homemaker. Many women, she charged, felt stifled by the "comfortable concentration camp" of domestic life:

"Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies,... she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question -- "Is this all?""

Other women agreed with Friedan. Her book helped motivate women to demand greater opportunities and fairer treatment in the workplace. Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed sexual discrimination in employment, the government seemed reluctant to deal with women's grievances. As a result, in 1966 Friedan and other feminists founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) to lobby for women's rights. Women began to stand up for themselves in a variety of ways. Some held consciousness-raising sessions to improve their self-esteem. Others took direct action. In 1968, for example, some feminists disrupted the Miss America pageant, charging that beauty contests degraded women.

(856)

**A new generation.** Many young women who had participated in the civil rights movement and counterculture realized that they faced just as much sexual discrimination in those realms as they did in mainstream society. One activist recalled a friend telling her that "you'll never be a radical as long as you don't see how the system affects you. You always think it affects other people." By the late 1960s more women inspired by other movements were beginning to stand up for their own rights. One woman who became so inspired was journalist Gloria Steinem.

Gloria Steinem was born on March 25, 1934, in Toledo, Ohio. In 1946 her parents divorced. She spent most of her teenage years taking care of her invalid mother. In 1952 Steinem entered Smith College, where she graduated with honors. "I loved Smith," she recalled. "They gave you three meals a day to eat, and all the books you wanted to read -- what more could you want?" Steinem's love of reading and writing led to her desire to become a journalist.

In 1968 she started writing a political column for *New York* magazine, which brought her into contact with activists such as Cesar Chavez and African American Communist Angela Davis. Later that year she wrote her first openly feminist article, "After Black Power, Women's Liberation," which established her as an advocate of the movement. In 1971 she helped found the National Women's Political Caucus to encourage women to run for political office. That same year, she became editor of a new magazine for women entitled *Ms.*

"There is nothing outside of [the movement]," Steinem said. "I once thought I would do this for two or three years and go home to my real life." But she has continued to be a leader in the women's movement, writing several books, lobbying for causes such as the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (see Chapter 31), and helping found numerous organizations for women, including the Coalition of Labor Union Women and Women Against Pornography.

\*\* The 1960s revival of the women's movement challenged traditional views of women.  
(photo) Gloria Steinem

[855]

### **HISTORY in the Making: Social History**

Until relatively recently, most American history textbooks focused on political history, recounting the deeds of the nation's political, military, and social leaders. Today, however, textbooks have begun to place a greater emphasis on social history.

What is social history? Some 50 years ago the well-known British historian G. M. Trevelyan described social history as "the history of a people with the politics left out." Social historians studied people's private lives rather than political events. They concentrated on the household, giving details about the daily lives of men, women, and children. Though colorful, this history failed to explain larger historical themes.

But social history changed in the 1960s. The civil rights movement, antiwar protests, and the women's movement inspired a new generation of historians. In order to explain how these protest movements arose, historians began studying how African Americans, women, and ethnic groups other than white Protestants contributed to American history. Focusing on ordinary people -- workers, women, city dwellers, farmers, immigrants -- social historians set out to expand the history of the United States.

To do so, these historians sought out new sources and used new methods to reconstruct the daily lives and thoughts of ordinary people. Earlier historians had analyzed only written sources left by political and intellectual leaders. The new social historians uncovered new sources -- workers' speeches and letters, oral histories, autobiographies, songs, folklore, reports of charitable societies, and ethnic and immigrant newspapers. These historians used statistical methods to study how people voted, where they moved, what they ate and drank, how they spent and saved their money, and the size of their families.

The new social historians have created a body of work whose strength lies in its respect for cultural diversity. Their work explores the values and ideas that Americans of different racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds share and do not share. For example, Julia Kirk Blackwelder's *Women of the Depression: Caste and Culture in San Antonio, 1929-39* (1984) shows how people's racial and ethnic backgrounds helped them cope with economic distress.

The new social history also explores the social institutions -- families, schools, churches, and so on -- that both preserve traditional values and help introduce new ones. This history, however, goes beyond the "old" social history by using social institutions to help explain broader political, economic, or technological changes. For example, Kenneth Jackson's *Crabgrass Frontier* (1985) explains that American families' preference for detached homes of their own helped lead to the growth of suburbs -- an important economic and geographic change.

The best social history combines research on political and economic institutions with research on how ordinary people think and act. This combination helps us understand politics and the forces that ultimately create change. In doing so, the new social historians can rightly claim to have updated Trevelyan's definition of social history by creating a history of all Americans with the politics mixed in.

[921-922]

### **THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT GAINS MOMENTUM**

The women's movement made many advances in the 1970s as leaders worked to shape public policy and elect more women to public office. Many all-male colleges opened their doors to women, while other universities instituted courses in women's studies. In 1972 Congress passed the Education Amendments Act, which outlawed sexual discrimination in higher education.

The following year, the Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision affecting women. In the case *Roe v. Wade*, the Court overturned a state law limiting women's access to abortion. The Court ruled that a woman and her doctor, not the state, should make such decisions. While most feminists hailed *Roe v. Wade* as a victory, opponents

protested that the ruling violated the right to life of the unborn.

The 1970s also saw a major battle over the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the proposed constitutional amendment barring discrimination on the basis of sex (see Chapter 21). The ERA received strong support from the National Organization for Women (NOW) and other women's groups. In testimony before Congress, feminist leader Gloria Steinem asserted:

“Women suffer second-class treatment from the moment they are born. They are expected to be rather than achieve, to function biologically rather than learn. A brother, whatever his intellect, is more likely to get the family's encouragement and education money, while girls are often pressured to conceal ambition and intelligence.”

Congress passed the ERA in 1972, but the amendment still required the approval of at least 38 states. At first, ratification seemed certain, but by the 1982 deadline set by Congress, the ERA was still three states short of ratification. As a result, it failed to become law.

The women's movement made many political gains; however, it also alienated many women who viewed it as a movement primarily for privileged white women. Many women from working-class and ethnic communities felt that the leaders of NOW could not identify with the problems they faced every day.

The movement also alienated many middleclass women who felt that it downgraded the family and condemned women who chose to be full-time homemakers. These women viewed *Roe v. Wade* and the ERA as threats to traditional family life. Critics warned that the ERA would “nullify any laws that make any distinction between men and women.” Eventually, they claimed, men and women would even be forced to share public restrooms! When the ERA failed to win ratification, conservative critic Phyllis Schlafly proclaimed: “The defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment is the greatest victory for women's rights since the woman's suffrage movement of 1920.”

\*\* The women's movement was encouraged by legislation such as the ERA, but the issues alienated many women from the movement.

(photo) During a news conference, National Women's Political Caucus leaders Gloria Steinem, Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, and Betty Friedan announced their goal to increase the number of women delegates to the 1972 presidential conventions.

(photo) Phyllis Schlafly was one of the most vocal critics of the ERA during the 1970s and the 1980s.

[947, 949]

## **WORK AND FAMILY**

Many observers expressed concern about the growing number of single-parent families in the 1980s and 1990s. From 1970 to 1991 the number of children living in single-parent households more than doubled. In 1991 some 20 percent of all white children, 60 percent of all African American children, and 30 percent of all Hispanic children lived with one parent, usually their mothers.

Most single parents faced serious financial burdens. Patricia Mull, a Los Angeles seamstress who stretched her income to send her daughter to private school, described the stress she faced: “I worry about the rent. I worry if I can make the payment in time. I worry if I have enough money left for other things. I worry about money every day, every night.”

Many two-parent families shared Mull's concerns as they struggled to balance job and family responsibilities. More than 60 percent of married women worked outside the home in 1995, up from about one third in 1960. The increase in single-parent families and in families with both parents in the work force created the need for affordable day care. Employers increasingly began to realize that family concerns affected the job performance of their employees. To help employees balance work and family, a coalition of businesses in 1992 announced a program to build more day-care and elder-care

centers across the country.

The U.S. government also recognized the need to help working families. In February 1993, two weeks after his inauguration, President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act, which President Bush had twice vetoed. The legislation requires large companies to provide workers up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave for family and medical emergencies without losing their medical coverage or their jobs.

This legislation reflected the significant changes in attitudes toward work and family that have occurred in the 1990s. Florence Skelly, the vice chairperson of a market-research firm, noted in 1993 that "rather than trying to climb the economic ladder, people are becoming more concerned with relationships and family and community involvement."

\*\* Government and businesses issued new policies to help working parents juggle home and work life.