

**The American Pageant: A History of the Republic, 11<sup>th</sup> Ed., Thomas A. Bailey, David M. Kennedy, and Lizabeth Cohen, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. [10-12]**

[929-930]

Exploding employment opportunities for women in the 1950s unleashed a groundswell of social and psychological shocks that mounted to tidal-wave proportions in the decades that followed. From one perspective, women's surge into the workplace was nothing new at all, but only a return to the days when the United States was an agricultural nation, and men and women alike toiled on the family farm. But the urban age was not the agricultural age, and women's new dual role as both workers and homemakers raised urgent questions about family life, and about traditional definitions of gender differences. Feminist Betty Friedan gave focus and fuel to women's feelings in 1963 when she published *The Feminine Mystique*, a runaway best-seller and a classic of feminist protest literature that launched the modern women's movement. Friedan spoke in rousing accents to millions of able, educated women who applauded her indictment of the stifling boredom of suburban housewifery. Many of those women were already working for wages, but they were also struggling against the guilt and frustration of leading an "un feminine" life as defined by the postwar "cult of domesticity."

(photo) The Booming Service Sector. Services displaced manufacturing as the most dynamic area of the economy in the post-World War II era, and women made up the majority of new workers in this vastly expanded area.

(photo) The Godmother. Feminist Betty Friedan (right, shown here with National Organization of Women chairperson Kathryn F. Clarenbach in 1967), gave birth to the modern women's movement with her publication in 1963 of *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that crystallized many of the issues that women had been facing throughout the postwar era.

[1028-1029]

**The Feminist Revolution**

All Americans were caught up in the great economic changes of the late twentieth century, but no group was more profoundly affected than women. When the century opened, women made up about 20 percent of all workers. Over the next five decades, they increased their presence in the labor force at a fairly steady rate, except for a temporary spurt during World War II. Then, beginning in the 1950s, women's entry into the workplace accelerated dramatically. By the 1990s nearly half of all workers were women, and the majority of working-age women held jobs outside the home. Most astonishing was the upsurge in employment of mothers. In 1950, 90 percent of mothers with children under the age of six did not work for pay. But by the 1990s, a majority of women with children as young as one year old were wage earners. Women now brought home the bacon and then cooked it, too.

Beginning in the 1960s, many all-male strong-holds, including Yale, Princeton, West Point, Annapolis, the Air Force Academy, and even, grudgingly and belatedly, southern military academies like the Citadel and Virginia Military Institute, opened their doors to women. Women are now piloting commercial airliners and orbiting in outer space. They govern states and cities, write Supreme Court decisions, and debate the law of the land in both houses of Congress. In 1996 women cracked another gender barrier when they launched a professional basketball league of their own.

Yet despite these gains, many feminists remained frustrated. Women continued to receive lower wages than men in corresponding jobs, and they tended to concentrate in a few low-prestige, low-paying occupations (the "pink-collar ghetto"). Although they made up more than half the population, women in the 1990s accounted for only 25 percent of lawyers and judges (up from 5 percent in 1970), and 22 percent of physicians

(up from 10 percent in 1970). Overt sexual discrimination explained some of this occupational segregation, but most of it seemed attributable to the greater burdens of parenthood on women than on men. Women were far more likely than men to interrupt their careers to bear and raise children, and even to choose less demanding career paths to allow for fulfilling those traditional roles.

As the revolution in women's status rolled on in the 1990s, men's lives changed as well. A men's movement sprang up that sought to redefine male roles in a new age of increasing gender equality. Some employers provided paternity leave as well as maternity leave, in recognition of the shared obligations of the two-worker household. As traditional female responsibilities such as cooking, laundry, and child care spilled over to men, many corporations sponsored highly popular fatherhood seminars and husbands' groups. Recognizing the new realities of the modern American household, Congress passed a Family Leave Bill in 1993, mandating job protection for working fathers as well as mothers who needed to take time off work for family-related reasons. (photo) **Women's World: Something Old, Something New.** By the 1990s revolutionary changes in the economy and in social values had opened new career possibilities to women, while not fully relieving them of their traditional duties as mothers and homemakers. Dramatic changes in race relations and the redefinition of gender roles at the end of the twentieth century transformed even tradition-bound institutions like the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, New York, as this gathering of cadets suggests. Women's athletics came into their own in the wake of the feminist revolution. Here the U.S. Women's Basketball Team is on its way to a gold medal in the 1996 Olympic Games.

(picture) The Justice Is a Lady, 1981. "Well, it's about time." Herblock hails Sandra Day O'Connor's appointment to the Supreme Court.

[1029-1030]

### **The Fading Family**

The nuclear family, once prized as the foundation of society and the nursery of the Republic, suffered heavy blows in modern America. By the 1990s one out of every two marriages ended in divorce. Seven times more children were affected by divorce than at the beginning of the century. Kids who commuted between separated parents were commonplace. The 1950s ideal of a family with two parents, only one of whom worked, was now a virtually useless way to picture the typical American household.

Traditional families were not only falling apart at an alarming rate but were also increasingly slow to form in the first place. The proportion of adults living alone tripled in the four decades after 1950, and by the 1990s nearly one-third of women aged twenty-five to twenty-nine had never married. In the 1960s, 5 percent of all births were to unmarried women, but three decades later one out of four white babies, one out of three Hispanic babies, and two out of three African-American babies were born to single mothers. Every fourth child in America was growing up in a household that lacked two parents. The collapse of the traditional family contributed heavily to the pauperization of many women and children, as single parents (usually mothers) struggled to keep their households economically afloat and their families emotionally intact.

Child-rearing, the family's foremost function, was being increasingly assigned to "parent-substitutes" at day-care centers or schools -- or to television, the modern age's "electronic babysitter." Estimates were that the average child by age sixteen had watched up to fifteen thousand hours of TV -- more time than was spent in the classroom. Parental anxieties multiplied with the advent of the Internet -- an electronic cornucopia where youngsters could "surf" through poetry and problem sets as well as pornography.

Born and raised without the family support enjoyed by their forebears, Americans were also increasingly likely to be lonely in their later years. Most elderly people in the 1990s depended on pension plans and government Social Security payments, but not on

their loved ones, for their daily bread. The great majority of them drew their last breaths not in their own homes but in hospitals and nursing facilities. From youth to old age, the role of the family was dwindling.

\* In his inaugural address in January 1989, President George Bush (b. 1924) declared, "My friends, we are not the sum of our possessions; they are not the measure of our lives, in our hearts we know what matters: ... to be a loyal friend, a loving parent, a citizen who leaves his home, his neighborhood, and his town better than he found it."

(picture) The Modern Family Tree. High divorce rates and the increasing numbers of "blended families" in modern American society could often be confusing.