

***The Brief American Pageant: A History of the Republic, 7th Ed., David M. Kennedy, Lizabeth Cohen, and Thomas A. Bailey, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2008. [10-12]***

[593-594]

Exploding employment opportunities for women unleashed a groundswell of social and psychological change that mounted to tidal-wave proportions in the decades that followed. In the new urban age, women's 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 the modern women's movement. Friedan spoke in rousing accents to millions of able, educated women who were already working for wages but also struggling against the guilt and frustration of trying to live up to the feminine "ideal" as defined by the postwar "cult of domesticity."

[638-639, 641]

**Feminist Victories and Defeats**

As the army limped home from Vietnam, most of the protest movements of the 1960s, including the antiwar movement, had long since splintered and stalled. One major exception to this pattern stood out: the American feminist movement. Although they had their differences, feminists showed vitality and momentum by winning legislative and judicial victories and provoking an intense rethinking of gender roles. (On the roots of this movement, see "Makers of America: The Feminists," p. 642).

Thousands of women marched in the Women's Stride for Equality on the fiftieth anniversary of woman suffrage in 1970. In 1972 Congress passed Title IX of the Education Amendments, prohibiting sex discrimination in any federally assisted educational program. This act created opportunities for girls' and women's athletics at schools and colleges, giving birth to a new "Title IX generation" that would reach maturity in the 1980s and 1990s and help professionalize women's sports as well. The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution won congressional approval in 1972. It declared, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Twenty-eight states quickly ratified the amendment, first proposed by suffragists in 1923. Hopes rose that the ERA would soon be the law of the land.

Even the Supreme Court seemed to be on the movement's side. In *Reed v. Reed* and *Frontiero v. Richardson* (1973), the Court challenged sex discrimination in legislation and employment. And in the landmark case of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the Court struck down laws prohibiting abortion, arguing that a woman's decision to terminate a pregnancy was protected by the constitutional right of privacy.

But the feminist movement soon faced a formidable backlash. In 1972 President Nixon vetoed a proposal to set up nationwide public day care, saying it would weaken the American family. The Catholic Church and the religious right organized a powerful grassroots movement to oppose the legalization of abortion. The most bitter defeat for feminists was a campaign, orchestrated by conservative spokeswoman Phyllis Schlafly, that killed the ERA. Its advocates, Schlafly charged, were just "bitter women seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems." In 1979 Congress extended the deadline for ratification, but ERA opponents dug in their heels. The amendment died in 1982, three states short of success.

[642]

**MAKERS OF AMERICA**

**The Feminists**

A well-to-do housewife and mother of seven, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

was an unlikely revolutionary. Yet this founding mother of American feminism devoted seven decades of her life to the fight for women's rights.

Young Elizabeth Cady drew her inspiration from the fight against slavery. When she and her new husband, abolitionist Henry Stanton, attended the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, she was insulted that women were forced to sit in a screened-off balcony above the convention floor. Stanton went on to organize the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. There she presented her Declaration of Sentiments, which proclaimed that "all men and women are created equal" and demanded women's rights to own property, enter the professions, and vote.

Early feminists encountered a mountain of hostility to their cause. Stanton failed to have women included in the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which granted equal citizenship to African Americans, and she died nearly twenty years before her dream of woman suffrage was realized in the Nineteenth Amendment (1920). Yet by imagining women's emancipation as an expansion of America's founding principles of citizenship, Stanton charted a path that other feminists would follow a century later.

Historians use the terms "first wave" and "second wave" to distinguish the women's movement of the nineteenth century from that of the late twentieth century. The woman most often credited with launching the "second wave" is Betty Friedan (1921-2006). Friedan had seen her mother sacrifice her own career in journalism to raise a family, and wrote the best-seller *The Feminine Mystique* to expose the quiet desperation of millions of her housewives trapped in the "comfortable concentration camp" of the suburban home. In 1966 Friedan co-founded the National Organization for Women (NOW), the chief political arm of second-wave feminism.

Just as first-wave feminism grew out of abolitionism, the second wave drew ideas, leaders, and tactics from the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Civil rights workers and feminists alike focused on equal rights. NOW campaigned vigorously for an Equal Rights Amendment, which in 1982 fell just three states short of ratification.

Second-wave feminism also had an avowedly radical wing, supported by younger women eager to challenge almost every traditional male and female gender role and to take the feminist cause to the streets. Among these women was Robin Morgan, a civil rights activist in organizations like the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee). Women in the movement who protested against gender discrimination met ridicule, as in SNCC leader Stokely Carmichael's retort that "the only position for women in SNCC is prone." Morgan went on to found WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), made famous by its protest at the 1968 Miss America pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. There demonstrators threw symbols of women's oppression -- bras, girdles, dishcloths -- into trash cans. (Contrary to news stories, they did not burn the bras.)

As the contrast between WITCH and NOW suggests, second-wave feminism was a remarkably diverse movement. Feminists in the late twentieth century disagreed over many issues -- from pornography and marriage to how much to expect from government, capitalism, and men. Some feminists placed a priority on gender equality, whereas others defended a feminism of gender difference.

Still, beyond these differences feminists had much in common. Most advocated a woman's right to choose abortion and regarded the law as a key weapon against gender discrimination. By century's end radical and moderate feminists alike could take pride in a host of achievements that had changed the landscape of gender relations. Yet, like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, second-wave feminists also shared the burden of understanding that the goals of genuine equality would take more than a lifetime to achieve.

[682-684]

### **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 twentieth 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 half a century later, a majority of women with children as young as one year old were wage earners. Women brought home the bacon and cooked it, too.

Beginning in the 1960s, many all-male strongholds -- including Yale, Princeton, and West Point -- opened their doors to women. By the 1980s, women became the majority on college campuses; by 2006 they made up 58 percent of the nation's college students. After graduation, women were piloting commercial airliners, orbiting outer space, governing states and cities, and writing Supreme Court decisions.

Yet despite those gains, many feminists remained frustrated. Women continued to receive lower wages, on average 77 cents on the dollar in 2002 compared with men doing the same full-time work -- 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 2004 accounted for only 30 percent of lawyers and judges (up from 5 percent in 1970) and 25 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. Discrimination and a focus on children also helped account for the persistence of a "gender gap" in national elections. Women continued to vote in greater numbers than men for Democratic candidates, who were often perceived to be more willing to favor government support for health and child care, education, and job equality.

As the revolution in women's status rolled on in the 2000s, men's lives changed as well. Men assumed traditional female responsibilities such as cooking, laundry, and child care. 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 beginning of the twenty-first century, 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. In 1999 the U.S. Women's World Cup Soccer Team brought home the trophy to a nation suddenly enthralled with women's soccer.

### **Changing Families and Aging Citizens**

The nuclear family, once prized as the foundation of society and the nursery of the Republic, suffered heavy blows in postwar America. By the 1990s one out of every two marriages ended in divorce, although the divorce rate appeared to ebb a bit by the century's end. Seven times more children were affected by divorce than at the beginning of the twentieth century, and kids who commuted between separated parents were commonplace.

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 five decades after 1950, and by the 2000s about one-third of women age twenty-five to twenty-nine had never married. In the 1960s, 5 percent of all births were to unmarried women, but four 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.

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.

But if the traditional family was increasingly rare, the family itself remained a bedrock of American society in the early twenty-first century, as viable families now assumed a variety of forms. Children in households led by a single parent, stepparent, or grandparent encountered a degree of acceptance that would have been unimaginable a generation earlier. Even the notion of gay marriage, which emerged as a major public controversy when the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled it legal in 2003, signaled that the idea of marriage retained its luster.

Americans were living longer than ever before. A person born at the dawn of the twentieth century could expect to survive less than fifty years, whereas someone born in 2000 could expect a life span of seventy-seven years. Miraculous medical advances like the development of antibiotics after 1940 and Dr. Jonas Salk's discovery in 1953 of a polio vaccine lengthened and strengthened lives.

Longer lives spelled more older people. One American in eight was over sixty-five years of age in 2000, and projections were that one of every five people would be in the "sunset years" by 2050. This aging of the population raised a host of political, social, and economic questions. Elderly people formed a potent electoral bloc that aggressively lobbied for government favors and achieved real gains for senior citizens. As late as the 1960s nearly a quarter of Americans over the age of sixty-five lived in poverty; three decades later only about one in ten did.

These triumphs for senior citizens also brought fiscal strains, especially on the Social Security system, established in 1935 to provide income for retired workers. When Social Security began, most workers continued to toil after age sixty-five (if they were among the lucky few who lived that long). By century's end the majority of the elderly population relied primarily on Social Security checks for their living expenses. Contrary to popular mythology, Social Security payments were funded from the taxes of current workers, not from the retirees' own earlier payments. By the time the new century opened, the ratio of active workers to retirees had dropped so low that drastic adjustments were necessary.

At the beginning of the new century, as the huge wave of post-World War II baby boomers approached retirement age, it seemed that the "unfunded liability" -- the difference between what the government promised to pay to the elderly and the taxes it expected to take in -- might rise above \$7 trillion, a sum that threatened to bankrupt the Republic unless sweeping reforms were adopted. Yet because of the electoral power of older Americans, Social Security and Medicare reform remained the "third rail" of American politics, which politicians dared not touch. President George W. Bush's proposal in 2005 to privatize a portion of Social Security by giving younger workers the option to invest some of their payroll taxes in individual retirement accounts failed in the face of strong opposition from most Republicans and Democrats alike. In the

absence of bold reforms, a war between the generations loomed in the twenty-first century, as payments to the nonworking elderly threatened to soak up fully half the working population's income by about 2040.

[nuclear family: A parent or parents and their immediate off spring.

Cornucopia: An overflowing abundance of good things, as in the bountiful outpouring of fruits and flowers in Greek mythology's "horn of plenty."]