

Making America: A History of the United States, 4th Ed., Carol Berkin, Christopher L. Miller, Robert W. Cherny, and James L. Gormly, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006. [13-]

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Rejecting the Feminine Mystique

The willingness of women to question their popular image was partially a response to the changing reality of society and the workplace. Since the 1950s, more women were entering the work force, graduating from college, getting divorces, and becoming heads of households. Households headed by single women were among the most impoverished group in America. Women complained that gender stereotyping denied them access to better-paying career jobs. The Kennedy administration's 1963 report of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women confirmed in stark statistics that women constituted a social and economic underclass. They worked for less pay than white males (on average 40 percent less), were more likely to be fired or laid off, and rarely reached top career positions. It was not solely in the workplace that women faced discrimination. Throughout the country, divorce, credit, and property laws generally favored men, and in several states women were not even allowed to serve on juries. The president's commission provided statistics, but it was Betty Friedan's 1963 bestseller *The Feminine Mystique* that many regard as the beginning of the women's movement. After reviewing the responsibilities of the housewife (making beds, grocery shopping, driving children everywhere, preparing meals and snacks, and pleasing her husband), Friedan asked: "Is this all?" She concluded it was not enough. Women needed to overcome the "feminine mystique" that promised them fulfillment in the domestic arts. She called on women to set their own goals and seek careers outside the home. Her book, combined with the presidential report, provided new perspectives to women and contributed to a renewed women's movement.

In 1963, Congress began to address women's issues when it passed the Equal Pay Act. Also engendering more activism was the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act with the inclusion of Title VII. The original version of the bill made no mention of discrimination on account of sex, but Representative Martha Griffin (D-Michigan) joined with conservative Democrat Howard Smith of Virginia to add the word sex to the civil rights act. As finally approved, Title VII prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, religion, creed, national origin, or sex.

Many people hoped Title VII marked the beginning of a serious effort by government to provide gender equality. But when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, established in 1964 to support the law, and the Johnson administration showed little interest in dealing with gender discrimination, women formed organizations to promote their interests and to persuade the government to enforce Title VII. The most prominent women's organization to emerge was the National Organization for Women (NOW), formed in 1966. With Betty Friedan as president, NOW launched an aggressive campaign to draw attention to sex discrimination and redress wrongs. It demanded an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution to ensure gender equality and pushed for easier access to birth-control devices and the right to have an abortion. NOW grew rapidly from about 300 in 1966 to 175,000 in 1968. But the women's movement was larger than NOW and represented a variety of voices.

Rejecting Gender Roles

By the end of the decade, some of those seeking change went beyond economics and politics in their critique of American society, taking aim at existing norms of sex and gender roles. Radical feminists, for example, called for a redefinition of sexuality and repudiated America's enchantment with family, marriage, and male-dominated society. "We identify the agents of our oppression as men,.... We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants and cheap labor," declared the Redstocking Manifesto in

1969. The New York group that issued the manifesto was among the first to use "consciousness-raising" groups to educate women about the oppression they faced because of the sex-gender system. Rita Mae Brown went further, leaving the Redstockings in order to advocate lesbian rights. In 1973 she published her first, acclaimed novel, *Rubyfruit*, which presented lesbianism in a positive light and provided a literary basis for discussion of lesbian life and attitudes.

By the late 1960s, Rita Brown and radical feminists were not the only ones asking society to reconsider its traditional views toward sexuality and gender. Since the 1950s, organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society had worked quietly to promote new attitudes toward homosexuality and to overturn laws that punished homosexual activities. But most homosexuals remained "in the closet," fearful of reprisals by the "straight" community and its institutions. The Stonewall Riot in 1969, however, brought increased visibility and renewed activism to the homosexual community.

The police raid on the Stonewall Inn in New York City resulted in an unexpected riot as gay patrons fought the police and were joined by other members of the community. A Gay Manifesto called for gays and lesbians to raise their consciousness and rid their minds of "garbage" poured into them by old values. "Liberation... is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live.... We are only at the beginning."

It was a beginning, and success came slowly. Polls indicated that the majority of Americans still considered homosexuality immoral and even a disease. But by the mid-1970s, those polls indicated a shift as a slight majority of Americans opposed job discrimination based on sexual orientation and seemed willing to show more tolerance of gay lifestyles. Responding to gay rights pressure in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association ended its classification of homosexuality as a mental disorder.

(photo) In 1972, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 required gender equality in school and college sports, dramatically changing the nature of women's athletics by igniting a women's sports boom. In this 1967 picture, the first woman to attempt the running of the Boston Marathon -- a previously all-male event -- is attacked by a race official and prevented from finishing the race. Today, the Boston Marathon celebrates both men and women marathon runners. © Bettmann/Corbis.

[Black Panthers: Black revolutionary party founded in 1966 that endorsed violence as a means of social change; many of its leaders were killed in confrontations with police or imprisoned.

Underclass: The lowest economic class; the term carries the implication that members of this class are so disadvantaged by poverty that they have little or no chance to escape it.

Betty Friedan: Feminist who wrote *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 and helped found the National Organization for Women in 1966.

Equal Pay Act: Forbids employers engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for commerce to pay different wages for equal work based on sex. Some employers continued to pay lower wages to women arguing that the jobs were not exactly equal.

Title VII: Provision of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that guarantees women legal protection against discrimination.

National Organization for Women: Women's rights organization founded in 1966 to fight discrimination against women; to improve educational, employment, and political opportunities for women; and to fight for equal pay for equal work.

consciousness-raising: Achieving greater awareness of the nature of political or social issues through group interaction.]

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Women and Family Values

Throughout American history, people and politicians have expressed concern about the poor and about social change. The liberal activism of the 1960s provided one

vantage point, and the conservative reaction on the New Right provided another. For the past two decades, conflict between the two views has raged around issues of economic and social opportunity, welfare, sexuality, and family values. Connecting several of the issues, Kate O'Beirne of the conservative Heritage Foundation stressed the importance of the traditional American family. "Why experiment with new antipoverty programs," she asked, "when the most important indicator of poverty is whether there are two parents at home?" She and others firmly advocated what they labeled strong family values and blamed feminism for many of society's problems.

O'Beirne's antifeminist attitude seemed by the 1990s to be gaining acceptance as a backlash against feminism gained momentum. By 1995, only 20 percent of women college freshmen accepted the label "feminist," and in an article titled "What Happened to the Women's Movement?" Newsweek suggested the death of feminism. Central to the conservative attack on feminism was that it presented women as victims of a heterosexual, male-dominated culture. Unwilling to make a distinction between the radical "gender feminists" and the feminist movement, conservative groups like Concerned Women of America in large part blamed the women's movement for the decline in moral values and "traditional" families. As one antifeminist explained: "It all comes down to values. Traditional values work because they are the guidelines most consistent with human nature."

Abortion remained one of the most divisive issues. Since *Roe v. Wade* (1972), pro-choice supporters had worried that the growing power of the New Right and an increasingly conservative Supreme Court might restrict access to abortions (see Chapter 30). In 1992, the Supreme Court's decision in *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey* confirmed a woman's right to have an abortion. But it offset that affirmation with the condition that, in some cases, the state could modify that right. Advocates of a "woman's right to choose" also worried about the violent tactics that some opponents were adopting.

Opponents of abortion, on the other hand, were more and more frustrated and angered by the inability of the Court and Congress to ban, or at least limit, abortions. Acting on their anger, a minority within the Right to Life movement decided to take more direct and forceful tactics. Abortion clinic doctors, staff, and patients became targets. By 1994, more than half of all abortion clinics reported varied cases of intimidation and violence, and a hundred clinics had been targets of arson or bombings. In an effort to prevent these occurrences, in 1994 the federal government passed the Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act. It restricted the tactics of intimidation that pro-life supporters such as Operation Rescue could use. Nonetheless, opponents vowed to maintain the struggle against abortion and feminism.

Many feminist leaders, however, asserted that the women's movement was alive and well, despite internal tensions. They pointed out that most within the women's movement disagreed with the views held by gender feminists, and that a "new wave" of more inclusive and less ideological feminism was emerging. Most women, they said, including the vast majority who worked, wanted to "fit their new gains at work and in the public world into... the story of marriage and family that they... inherited from their mothers." They wanted to keep the gains women had made, while at the same time strengthening marriage and family, reducing sexual permissiveness, and softening the impact on young children whose mothers worked. As signs of the movement's continuing achievements, new-wave feminists pointed to efforts to combat sexual harassment, changes in the workplace, women's breaking through the "glass ceiling," and the growing number of women in the professions.

A poll conducted in 1991 revealed that 42 percent of women had been sexually harassed, and the National Organization for Women claimed that physical abuse of women was a cultural norm. Responding to sexual harassment lawsuits, courts began to define its legal dimensions. In 1993 the Supreme Court decided in *Harris v. Forklift*

Systems that sexual harassment involved not only "verbal and physical conduct" but also the creation of a "hostile environment." The following year, Congress passed the Violence Against Women Act. Part of a larger anticrime bill, the act provided funds and federal support for efforts to more harshly punish sexual violence and other attacks on women and to provide resources to aid victims and prevent future attacks.

Supporters of the women's movement also stated that their efforts to fight harassment were only one part of a continuing effort to improve the workplace for women. The gap between salaries for men and women was narrowing, and greater numbers of women were entering the professions, but more needed to be done to adjust the workplace to fit the needs of women with families. Programs such as flextime and flexplace, job sharing, and family leave needed to be more widely adopted and more accessible daycare provided. The editor of Ms. magazine noted that the central issues for working women were recognizing choices and their consequences and promoting a "woman-friendly family and a family-friendly workplace."

While feminists listed their accomplishments on behalf of women, their critics remained focused on the "threats" to the family and the need for a moral society. They argued that even "mommy-friendly" workplaces were not a replacement for full-time mothers and an environment that respected moral values. Echoing the concerns of many in the public, they pressed for more controls to ban pornography and to limit the amount of sex and violence in the media. During the 1980s, sexual content had become standard fare in books, magazines, music, movies, and television. In 1987 it was estimated that more than sixty-five thousand sexual references were broadcast each year on prime-time television programs. During the day, sex and sex-related issues became more daring and numerous on the soaps, and talk-show hosts probed guests for intimate details about their sex lives. Violence, too, seemed everywhere, including on video games. A 1997 study indicated that 44 percent of all network programming had violent content, 73 percent of which went unpunished in the story line. On cable and satellite television, another study concluded, it was worse, with 85 percent of the programming having violent content. As usage of the Internet expanded, many argued that legislation was needed to keep some types of sexual content from being easily accessed.

The impact of a climate of sex and violence, some believed, was especially detrimental to children and contributed to increasingly violent incidents involving children, such as the April 1999 shooting at Columbine High School in Colorado. Although admitting that these problems existed, the nation, as expected, responded in varying ways. Many conservatives wanted tougher laws and more stringent enforcement. Some proposed that juveniles who committed violent crimes be tried as adults. Others believed that more gun-control measures were the best means to reduce crime and violence. To some, the best way to combat the amount of sex and violence in society was to curb the amount of sex and violence in the media. But efforts to impose censorship usually were rejected by the courts, as in 1997 when the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional an effort to censor the Internet in *Reno v. ACLU*. Rather than governmental censorship, others supported technology that would allow individual or parental control within the home, and rating systems that indicated the level of sex and violence in songs, music videos, movies, and television shows.

(photo) Ever since the controversial *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973, opponents of abortion have petitioned the Supreme Court, lobbied Congress, and demonstrated to ban abortions. Some radical pro-life supporters have even advocated violence against and murder of those performing abortions as a moral choice in the "war" against abortion. Evan Richman/*The Boston Globe*. Published with permission of the *Globe Newspaper Company, Inc.*

[gender feminists: Term applied to those within the feminist movement who focus on the subordination of women and on the need for radical changes in gender related roles and

traditions.

Operation Rescue: A militant anti-abortion group that advocates intimidation and physical confrontation as a means to stop abortion.

sexual harassment: Unwanted sexual advances, sexually derogatory remarks, gender-related discrimination, or the existence of a sexually hostile work environment.

glass ceiling: Term used to express an intangible barrier within the hierarchy of a company that prevents women or minorities from rising to upper-level positions.

Violence Against Women Act: Law passed by Congress in 1994 that provided federal funds and support to judicial and law-enforcement agencies to prevent violence against women, to aid victims, and to punish those convicted of sexual violence and attacks on women.

Flextime: Allows an employee to select the hours of work. There are usually specified limits set by the employer. Employees on a flexible schedule may work a condensed workweek or may work a regular work week. In 2001 approximately 30 percent of the national work force was using some type of flextime.

Flexplace: Allows employees to work at the office or from an alternate work site during part of their scheduled hours. Working at home is the most common alternative site, and in 2001 about 15 percent of the work force was paid to work at home.

Columbine High School: Located in Littleton, Colorado, this was the sight of one of the most violent school shootings, when two students entered the lunchroom with a variety of weapons and homemade bombs. They killed 1 teacher and 12 students, and injured 12 others before they committed suicide, 34 students escaped.]