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[891-897]

The New Politics of Identity

By the end of the 1960s, as divisions continued to deepen among the American people, movements for social justice and racial equality had become stronger, louder, and often more radical. The civil rights movement, begun in a quest for equal rights and integration, splintered, as many young African Americans turned away from the tactics of nonviolence, rejected integration in favor of separatism, and embraced a distinct African American culture. Mexican Americans and Native Americans, inspired by the civil rights movement to struggle against their own marginalization in American society, had created powerful "Brown Power" and "Red Power" movements by the early 1970s. Like young African Americans, they demanded not only equal rights but also recognition of their distinct cultures. These movements fueled the development of a new "identity politics." Advocates of identity politics believed that differences among American racial and ethnic groups were critically important. Group identity, these Americans argued, must be the basis for political action. And government and social leaders must stop imagining the American public as individuals and instead address the needs of different identity-based groups.

African American Cultural Nationalism

By 1970, most African American activists no longer sought political power and racial justice through the universalist claim of the civil rights movement that "We are all the same but for the color of our skin." Instead, they emphasized the distinctiveness of black culture and society. These ideas attracted a large following, even among older, less radical people. Many black Americans, powerfully disillusioned by the racism that outlasted the end of legal segregation, had come to believe that integration would mean subordination in a white-dominated society that had no respect for their history and cultural traditions.

In the early 1970s, though mainstream groups like the NAACP continued to seek political and social equality through the nation's courts and ballot boxes, many African Americans (like the white youth of the counterculture) looked to culture rather than to narrow political action for social change. Rejecting current European American standards of beauty, young people let their hair grow into "naturals" and "Afros"; they claimed the power of black "soul." Seeking strength in their own histories and cultural heritages, black college students and young faculty members fought successfully to create black studies departments in American universities. African traditions were reclaimed -- or sometimes created. The new holiday Kwanzaa, created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, professor of black studies at California State University, Long Beach, offered celebration of a shared African heritage. Many African Americans found a new pride in their history and culture; the most radical activists gave up on the notion of a larger "American" culture altogether.

Mexican American Activism

In 1970 the nation's 9 million Mexican Americans (4.3 percent of America's total population) were heavily concentrated in the Southwest and California. Although these Americans were officially classified as white by the federal government -- all Hispanics were counted as white in the federal census -- discrimination in hiring, pay, housing, schools, and the courts was commonplace. In cities, poor Mexican Americans lived in rundown barrios. In rural areas, poverty was widespread. Almost half of Mexican Americans were functionally illiterate, and even among the young, high school drop-out rates were astronomical: in 1974, only 21 percent of Mexican American males

graduated high school. Although growing numbers of Mexican Americans were middle class, almost one-quarter of Mexican American families remained below the poverty level in the 1970s. Especially dire was the plight of migrant farm workers.

The national Mexican American movement for social justice began with these migrant workers. From 1965 through 1970, labor organizers Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta led migrant workers, the majority of whom were of Mexican ancestry, in a strike (huelga) against large grape growers in California's San Joaquin Valley. Chavez and the AFL-CIO-affiliated United Farm Workers (UFW) drew national attention to the working conditions of migrant laborers. Grape growers paid workers as little as 10 cents an hour (the minimum wage in 1965 was \$1.25) and often lodged them in squalid housing without running water or indoor toilets. A national consumer boycott of table grapes brought the growers to the bargaining table, and in 1970 the UFW won its fight for better wages and working conditions. The UFW's roots in the Mexican and Mexican American communities were critical to its success. The union resembled nineteenth-century Mexican mutualistas, or cooperative associations, as much as it did a traditional American labor union. Its members founded cooperative groceries, a Spanish-language newspaper, and a theater group; they called on the Virgin de Guadalupe for assistance in their struggle.

Chicano Movement

During the same period, more radical struggles were also beginning. In northern New Mexico, Reies Tijerina created the Alianza Federal de Mercedes (Federal Alliance of Grants) to fight for the return of land that the organization claimed belonged to local hispano villagers, whose ancestors had occupied the territory before it was claimed by the United States, under the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. In Denver, former boxer Rudolfo "Corky" Gonzales drew Mexican American youth to his "Crusade for Justice"; more than one thousand young people gathered there for the National Chicano Liberation Youth Conference in 1969. They adopted a manifesto, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, which condemned the "brutal 'Gringo' invasion of our territories" and declared "the Independence of our... Nation."

These young activists called for the liberation of "La Raza" (from *La Raza de Bronze*, "the brown people") from the oppressive force of American society and culture, not for equal rights through integration. They also rejected a hyphenated "Mexican-American" identity. The "Mexican American," they explained in *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, "lacks respect for his culture and ethnic heritage... [and] seeks assimilation as a way out of his 'degraded' social status." These young people called themselves "Chicanos" or "Chicanas" -- a term drawn from barrio slang and associated with pachucos, the hip, rebellious, and sometimes criminal young men who symbolized much of what "respectable" Mexican Americans despised.

Many middle-class Mexican Americans and members of the older generations never embraced the term Chicano or the separatist, cultural nationalist agenda of *el movimiento*. Throughout the 1970s, however, younger activists continued to seek "Brown Power" based on a separate and distinct Chicano/Chicana culture. They succeeded in introducing Chicano studies into local high school and college curricula and in creating a strong and unifying sense of cultural identity for Mexican American youth. Some activists made clear political gains as well, founding *La Raza Unida* (RUP), a Southwest-based political party that registered tens of thousands of voters and won several local elections. The Chicano movement was never as influential nationally as the African American civil rights movement or the Black Power movement. However, it effectively challenged discrimination on the local level and created a basis for political action as the Mexican American (and broader Latino) population of the United States grew dramatically over the following decades.

Native American Activism

Between 1968 and 1975, Native American activists forced American society to hear

their demands and to reform U.S. government policies toward native peoples. Like African Americans and Mexican Americans, young Native American activists were greatly influenced by cultural nationalist beliefs. Many young activists, seeking a return to the "old ways," joined with "traditionalists" among their elders to challenge tribal leaders who advocated assimilation and cooperation with federal agencies.

In November 1969 a small group of activists, calling themselves "Indians of All Tribes," occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, demanding that the land be returned to native peoples for an Indian cultural center. The protest, which lasted nineteen months and eventually involved more than four hundred people from fifty different tribes, marked the consolidation of a "pan-Indian" approach to activism. Before Alcatraz, protests tended to be reservation based and concerned with specific local issues. Many of the Alcatraz activists were urban Indians, products in part of government policies that led Native Americans to leave reservations and seek jobs in the nation's cities. They were interested in claiming a shared "Indian" identity that transcended tribal differences. Although the protesters did not succeed in reclaiming Alcatraz Island, they drew national attention to their struggle and inspired the growing "Red Power" movement. In 1972 members of the radical American Indian Movement occupied a Bureau of Indian Affairs office in Washington, D.C., and then in 1973 a trading post at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, where U.S. Army troops had massacred three hundred Sioux men, women, and children in 1890.

At the same time, more moderate activists, working through such pan-tribal organizations as the National Congress of American Indians and the Native American Rights Fund, lobbied Congress for greater rights and resources to govern themselves and to strengthen their tribal cultures. In response to those demands, Congress and the federal courts returned millions of acres of land to tribal ownership, and in 1975 Congress passed the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Despite these successes, conditions for most Native Americans remained grim during the 1970s and 1980s: American Indians had a higher rate of tuberculosis, alcoholism, and suicide than any other group. Nine of ten lived in substandard housing, and unemployment rates for Indians were almost 40 percent.

Affirmative Action

As activists from various groups made all Americans increasingly aware of discrimination and inequality, policymakers struggled to frame remedies. As early as 1965, President Johnson had acknowledged the limits of civil rights legislation. "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,'" Johnson told an audience at Howard University, "and still justly believe that you have been completely fair." In this speech, Johnson called for "not just legal equality... but equality as a fact and equality as a result." Here Johnson joined his belief that the federal government must help individuals attain the skills necessary to compete in American society to a new concept: equality could be measured by group outcomes or results.

Practical issues also contributed to the shift in emphasis from individual opportunity to group outcomes. The 1964 Civil Rights Act had outlawed discrimination but seemingly had stipulated that action could be taken only when an employer "intentionally engaged" in discrimination against an individual. This individual, case-by-case approach to equal rights created a nightmare for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The tens of thousands of cases filed suggested a pervasive pattern of racial and sexual discrimination in American education and employment, but each required proof of "intentional" actions against an individual. Some people were beginning to argue that it was possible, instead, to prove discrimination by "results" -- by the relative number of African Americans or women, for example, an employer had hired or promoted.

In 1969 the Nixon administration implemented the first major government affirmative-action program to promote "equality of results." The Philadelphia Plan (so called because it targeted government contracts in that city) required businesses contracting with the federal government to show (in the words of President Nixon) "affirmative action to meet the goals of increasing minority employment" and set specific numerical "goals," or quotas, for employers. Affirmative action for women and members of racial and ethnic minorities was soon required by all major government contracts, and many large corporations and educational institutions began their own programs.

Supporters saw affirmative action as a remedy for the lasting effects of past discrimination. Critics (some of whom were supporters of racial and sexual equality) argued that attempts to create proportional representation for women and minorities meant discrimination against other individuals who had not created past discrimination, and that group-based remedies violated the principle that individuals should be judged on their own merits. As affirmative-action programs began to have an impact in hiring and university admissions, bringing members of underrepresented groups into college classrooms, law firms, schoolrooms, construction companies, police stations, and firehouses nationwide, a deepening recession made jobs scarce. Thus increasing the number of minorities and women hired often meant reducing the number of white men. White working-class men were most adversely affected by the policy, and many resented it.

The Women's Movement and Gay Liberation

During the 1950s, even as more and more women joined the paid work force and participated in the political life of the nation, American society and culture emphasized women's private roles as wives and mothers. The women's movement that had won American women the vote in the 1920s had all but disappeared. But during the 1960s, a "second wave" of the American women's movement emerged, and by the 1970s mainstream and radical activists waged a multifront battle for "women's liberation."

In 1963, the surprise popularity of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* signaled that there was ample fuel for a revived women's movement. Writing as a housewife and mother (though she had a long history of political activism as well), Friedan described "the problem with no name," the dissatisfaction of educated, middle-class wives and mothers like herself, who -- looking at their nice homes and families -- wondered guiltily if that was all there was to life. This "problem" was not new; the vague sense of dissatisfaction plaguing housewives had been a staple topic for women's magazines in the 1950s. But Friedan, instead of blaming individual women for failing to adapt to women's proper role, blamed the role itself and the society that created it.

Liberal and Radical Feminism

The organized, liberal wing of the women's movement emerged in 1966, with the founding of the National Organization for Women (NOW). NOW, made up primarily of educated, professional women, was a traditional lobbying group; its goal was to pressure the EEOC to enforce the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Racial discrimination was the EEOC's focus, and discrimination on the basis of sex was such a low priority that the topic could be treated as a joke. When a reporter asked EEOC chair Franklin Roosevelt Jr., "What about sex?" Roosevelt laughed, "Don't get me started. I'm all for it." Women who faced workplace discrimination were not amused by such comments, and by 1970, NOW had one hundred chapters with more than three thousand members nationwide.

Another strand of the women's movement developed from the nation's increasingly radical movements for social change and justice. Many women, as they worked for civil rights or against the war in Vietnam, found themselves treated as second-class citizens -- making coffee, not policy. As they analyzed inequality in America's social and political structure, these young women began to discuss their own oppression, and the oppression of all women, in American society. In 1968 a group of women gathered

outside the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City to protest the "degrading mindless-boob girlie symbol" represented by the beauty pageant. Although nothing was burned, the pejorative 1970s term for feminists, "braburners," came from this event, in which women threw items of "enslavement" (girdles, high heels, curlers, and bras) into a "Freedom Trashcan."

The feminism embraced by these young activists and others who challenged women's oppression was never a single, coherent set of beliefs. Some argued that the world should be governed by peaceful, noncompetitive values, which they believed were intrinsically female; others claimed that society imposed gender roles and that there were no innate differences between men and women. Most radical feminists, however, practiced what they called "personal politics." They believed, as feminist author Charlotte Bunch explained, that "there is no private domain of a person's life that is not political, and there is no political issue that is not ultimately personal." Some of these young women began to meet in "consciousness-raising" groups to discuss how, in their personal, everyday lives, women were subordinated by men and by a patriarchal society. In the early 1970s, women throughout the nation came together, in suburban kitchens, college dorm rooms, and churches or synagogues, to create their own consciousness-raising groups, exploring topics such as power relationships in romance and marriage, sexuality, abortion, healthcare, work, and family.

Accomplishments of the Women's Movement

During the 1970s, the diverse groups that made up the women's movement claimed significant achievements. Feminists worked for reforms that touched all aspects of American life: the right of a married woman to obtain credit in her own name; the right of an unmarried woman to obtain birth control; the right of women to serve on juries; the end of sex-segregated help wanted ads. They sought to change attitudes about rape and procedures for dealing with rape victims, such as the claim by a psychiatrist at the University of Kansas student health center in 1970: "A woman sometimes plays a big part in provoking her attacker by... her overall attitude and appearance." But by the end of the decade, activists working on the state and local level had established rape crisis centers, educated local police and hospital officials about procedures for protecting survivors of rape, and even changed laws.

As most of the medical establishment paid little attention to women's desires to understand -- and take control of -- their own sexual and reproductive health, the Boston Women's Health Collective published *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in 1971 (the original edition sold more than 3 million copies). And women who sought the right to safe and legal abortions won a major victory in 1973 when the Supreme Court, in a 7-to-2 decision on *Roe v. Wade*, ruled that privacy rights protected a woman's choice to end a pregnancy.

NOW and many other women's organizations worked together to promote an Equal Rights Amendment that would end all discriminatory treatment on the basis of sex, the same amendment first proposed by the National Woman's Party in the 1920s. On March 22, 1972, Congress approved the amendment, stating simply that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." By the end of the year, 22 states (of the 38 necessary to amend the Constitution) had ratified the ERA. Also in 1972, Congress passed Title IX of the Higher Education Act, which prevented federal funds from going to any college or university that discriminated against women. As a result, universities began to channel money to women's athletics, and women's participation in sports boomed.

Women's applications to graduate programs also boomed. In 1970 only 8.4 percent of medical school graduates and 5.4 percent of law school graduates were women. By 1979, 23 percent of the graduating class of America's medical schools was female, and 28.5 percent of new lawyers were women. During the 1970s, women greatly increased their roles in religious organizations, including the Church of Christ, the Unitarian and

Episcopalian churches, and Reform and Conservative Judaism. Some denominations began to ordain women. Colleges and universities established women's studies departments, and by 1980 more than thirty thousand college courses focused on the study of women or gender relations.

Opposition to the Women's Movement

The women's movement encompassed a broad range of women, but it was met by powerful opposition, much of it from women. Many women believed that middle-class feminists did not understand the realities of their world. They had no desire to be "equal" if that meant giving up traditional gender roles in marriage or going out to work at low-wage, physically exhausting jobs. African American women and Latinas, many of whom had been active in movements for the liberation of their peoples and some of whom had helped create second-wave feminism, often came to regard feminism as a "white" movement that ignored their cultural traditions and needs; some believed that the women's movement diverted time and energy away from the fight for racial equality.

Organized opposition to feminism came primarily from conservative, often religiously motivated men and women. As one conservative Christian writer claimed, "The Bible clearly states that the wife is to submit to her husband's leadership... just as she would to Christ her Lord." Such beliefs, along with fears about changing gender roles and expectations, fueled the STOP-ERA movement led by Phyllis Schlafly, a lawyer and prominent conservative political activist. Schlafly argued that ERA supporters were "a bunch of bitter women seeking a constitutional cure for their personal problems." She attacked the women's movement as "a total assault on the role of the American woman as wife and mother, and on the family as the basic unit of society." Schlafly and her supporters argued that the ERA would foster federal intervention in personal life, decriminalize rape, force Americans to use unisex toilets, and make women subject to the military draft.

Many women saw feminism as an attack on the choices they had made and felt that by opposing the ERA they were defending their traditional roles. In fighting the ERA, tens of thousands of women became politically experienced; they fed a growing grassroots conservative movement that would come into its own in the 1980s. And by the mid-1970s, the STOP-ERA movement had stalled the Equal Rights Amendment. Despite Congress's extension of the ratification deadline, the amendment would fall three states short of ratification and expire in 1982.

Gay Liberation

In the early 1970s, gay men and lesbians faced widespread discrimination. Consensual sexual intercourse between people of the same sex was illegal in almost every state, and until 1973 homosexuality was labeled a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association. Homosexual couples did not receive partnership benefits, such as health insurance; they could not marry or adopt children. The issue of gay and lesbian rights divided even progressive organizations: in 1970 the New York City chapter of NOW expelled its lesbian officers. As open racism declined, gay men and women remained targets of discrimination in hiring and endured public ridicule, harassment, and physical attacks.

Gay men and lesbians, unlike most members of racial minorities, could conceal the identity that made them vulnerable to discrimination and harassment. Remaining "in the closet" offered individuals some protection, but that option also made it very difficult to organize a political movement. There were small "homophile" organizations, such as the Mattachine Society (named for the Societe Mattachine, a medieval musical organization whose members performed in masks, to evoke the "masked" lives of gay Americans) and the Daughters of Bilitis (after a work of love poems between women), which had worked for gay rights since the 1950s. But the symbolic beginning of the gay liberation movement came on June 28, 1969, when New York City police raided the

Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in Greenwich Village, for violating the New York City law that made it illegal for more than three homosexual patrons to occupy a bar at the same time. That night, for the first time, patrons stood up to the police. As word spread through New York's gay community, hundreds more joined the confrontation. The next morning, New Yorkers found a new slogan spray-painted on neighborhood walls: "Gay Power."

Inspired by the Stonewall riot, some men and women worked openly and militantly for gay rights. They focused on a dual agenda: legal equality and the promotion of Gay Pride. In a version of the identity politics adopted by racial and ethnic communities, some rejected the notion of fitting into straight (heterosexual) culture and helped create distinctive gay communities. "Look out, straights," wrote gay liberation activist Martha Shelley in 1970. "We're gonna make our own revolution." By 1973, there were about eight hundred gay organizations in the United States. Centered in big cities and on college campuses, most organizations tried to create supportive environments for gay men and lesbians to come "out of the closet." Once "out," they could use their numbers ("We are everywhere" was a popular slogan) to push for political reform, such as nondiscrimination statutes similar to those that protected women and racial minority groups. By the end of the decade, gay men and lesbians were a public political force in cities including New York, Miami, and San Francisco, and played an increasingly visible role in the social and political life of the nation.

(photo) On August 26, 1977, supporters of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) march down Pennsylvania Avenue following a ceremony in the White House Rose Garden that had proclaimed it "Women's Equality Day." The ERA initially had broad support from both Democrats and Republicans, but was ratified by only thirty-five of the necessary thirty-eight states. (AP Images)

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Sexuality and the Family

One such self-help book was *The Joy of Sex* (1972), which sold 3.8 million copies in two years. Sex became much more visible in America's public culture during the 1970s, as network television loosened its regulation of sexual content. At the beginning of the 1960s, married couples in television shows were required to occupy twin beds; in the 1970s, hit television shows included *Three's Company*, a situation comedy based on the then-scandalous premise that a single man shared an apartment with two beautiful female roommates -- and got away with it only by pretending to their suspicious landlord that he was gay. *Charlie's Angels*, another major television hit, capitalized on what people called the "jiggle factor," and displayed (for the time) lots of bare female flesh. A major youth fad of the era was "streaking," running naked through public places. Donna Summers's 1975 disco hit "Love to Love You Baby" contained sixteen minutes of sexual moaning. And though very few Americans participated in heterosexual orgies at New York City's Plato's Retreat, many knew about them through a *Time* magazine feature story.

Sexual behaviors had also changed. The seventies were the era of singles bars and gay bathhouses, and some Americans led sexual lives virtually unrestrained by the old rules. For most Americans, however, the major changes brought about by the "sexual revolution" were a broader public acceptance of premarital sex and a limited acceptance of homosexuality, especially among more educated Americans. More and more heterosexual young people "lived together" without marriage during the 1970s; the census bureau even coined the term POSSLQ ("persons of opposite sex sharing living quarters") to describe the relationship. When First Lady Betty Ford said on *60 Minutes* that she would not be surprised if her then-seventeen-year-old daughter Susan began a sexual relationship, it was clear that much had changed in the course of a decade.

Changes in sexual mores and in the roles possible for women helped to alter the shape of the American family as well. Both men and women married later than in recent decades, and American women had fewer children. By the end of the 1970s, the

birth rate had dropped almost 40 percent from its 1957 peak. Almost one-quarter of young single women in 1980 said that they did not plan to have children. And a steadily rising percentage of babies were born to unmarried women, as the number of families headed by never-married women rose 400 percent during the 1970s. The divorce rate also rose, in part because states implemented "no fault" divorce, which did not require evidence of adultery, physical cruelty, abandonment, or other wrongdoing. Although families seemed less stable in the 1970s than in the previous postwar decades, Americans also developed a greater acceptance of various family forms (the blended family of television's Brady Bunch, for example), and many young couples sought greater equality between the sexes in romantic relationships or marriages.

Diversity

The racial-justice and identity movements of the late 1960s and 1970s made all Americans more aware of differences among the nation's peoples -- an awareness made stronger by the great influx of new immigrants, not from Europe but from Latin America and Asia. It was a challenge, however, to figure out how to acknowledge the new importance of "difference" in public policy. The solution developed in the 1970s was the idea of "diversity." Difference was not a problem but a strength; the nation should not seek policies to diminish differences among its peoples but should instead seek to foster the "diversity" of its schools, workplaces, and public culture.

One major move in this direction came in the 1978 Supreme Court decision *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*. Allan Bakke, a thirty-three-year-old white man with a strong academic record, had been denied admission to the medical school of the University of California at Davis. Bakke sued, charging that he had been denied "equal protection" of the law because the medical school's affirmative-action program reserved 16 percent of its slots for racial-minority candidates, who were held to lower standards than other applicants. The case set off furious debates nationwide over the legitimacy of affirmative action. In 1978 the Supreme Court, in a split decision, decided in favor of Bakke. Four justices argued that any race-based decision violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964; four saw affirmative-action programs as constitutionally acceptable remedies for past discrimination. The deciding vote, though for Bakke, contained an important qualification. A "diverse student body," Justice Lewis Powell wrote, is "a constitutionally permissible goal for an institution of higher education." To achieve the positive quality of "diversity," educational institutions could take race into account when making decisions about admissions.

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"Culture Wars"

Although the New Right often found an ally in the Reagan White House, many other Americans vigorously opposed a movement that they saw as preaching a doctrine of intolerance and threatening basic freedoms -- including freedom of religion for those whose beliefs did not accord with the conservative Christianity of the New Right. In 1982 politically progressive television producer Norman Lear, influential former congresswoman Barbara Jordan, and other prominent figures from the fields of business, religion, politics, and entertainment founded People for the American Way to support American civil liberties and freedoms, the separation of church and state, and the values of tolerance and diversity. The struggle between the religious right and their opponents for the future of the nation came to be known as the "culture wars."

It was not only organized groups, however, that opposed the agenda of the religious right. Many beliefs of Christian fundamentalists ran counter to the way most Americans lived -- especially when it came to women's roles. The women's movement, like the civil rights movement, had brought about significant changes in American society. By the 1980s, a generation of girls had grown up expecting freedoms and opportunities that their mothers never had. Legislation such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX had opened both academic and athletic programs to girls and women.

In 1960 there were thirty-eight male lawyers for every female lawyer in the United States; by 1983, the ratio was 5.5 to 1. By 1985, more than half of married women with children under three worked outside the home -- many from economic necessity. The religious right's insistence that women's place was in the home, subordinated to her husband, contradicted not only the gains made toward sexual equality in American society but also the reality of many women's lives.

The New Inequality

As Americans fought the "culture wars" of the 1980s, another major social divide threatened the nation. A 1988 national report on race relations looked back to the 1968 Kerner Commission report to claim, "America is again becoming two separate societies," white and black. It argued that African Americans endured poverty, segregation, and crime in inner-city ghettos while most whites lived comfortably in suburban enclaves. In fact, America's separate societies of comfort and hardship were not wholly determined by race. The majority of America's poor were white, and the black middle class was strong and expanding. But people of color made up a disproportionate share of America's poor. In 1980, 33 percent of blacks and 26 percent of Latinos lived in poverty, compared with 10 percent of whites (see Figure 32.3).

Reasons for poverty varied. For people of color, the legacies of racism played a role. The changing job structure was partly responsible, as the overall number of well-paid jobs for both skilled and unskilled workers decreased, replaced by lower-paid service jobs. New York alone had 234,000 fewer blue-collar workers in 1980 than at the beginning of the 1970s. In addition, families headed by a single mother were more likely to be poor -- five times more likely than families of the same race maintained by a married couple. By 1990, a high rate of unwed pregnancy and a rising divorce rate meant that about one-quarter of all

Social Crises in American Cities

As inequality increased, so, too, did social pathology. In impoverished and often hopeless inner-city neighborhoods, violent crime -- particularly homicides and gang warfare -- grew alarmingly, as did school dropout rates, crime rates, and child abuse. Some people tried to find escape in hard drugs, especially crack, a derivative of cocaine, which first struck New York City's poorest neighborhoods in 1985. Crack's legacy included destroyed families, abused children, and heavily armed teenage drug dealers. Gang shootouts over drugs were deadly: the toll in Los Angeles in 1987 was 387 deaths, more than half of them innocent bystanders. Shocked by the violence, many states instituted mandatory prison sentences for possessing small amounts of crack, making penalties for a gram of crack equivalent to those for 100 grams of cocaine, the drug of choice for more-affluent, white Americans during the 1980s. Such policies increased America's prison population almost fourfold from 1980 to the mid-1990s, with black and Latino youth arrested in disproportionate numbers. By 2000, young black men were more likely to have been arrested than to have graduated from a four-year college.

Rates of homelessness also grew during the 1980s, in part because of major cuts to low-income housing subsidies. Some of the homeless were impoverished families; many of the people living on the streets had problems with drugs or alcohol. About one-third of the homeless were former psychiatric patients discharged from psychiatric wards in a burst of enthusiasm for "deinstitutionalization." By 1985, 80 percent of the total number of beds in state mental hospitals had been eliminated on the premise that small neighborhood programs would be more responsive to people's needs than large state hospitals. Such local programs failed to materialize. Without adequate medical supervision and medication, many of America's mentally ill citizens wandered the streets.

[975]

(map) Map 33.3. Mapping America's Diversity. Aggregate figures (more than 12 percent of the U.S. population was African American and about 4 percent Asian American in

2000, for example) convey America's ethnic and racial diversity. However, as this map shows, members of racial and ethnic groups are not distributed evenly throughout the nation. (Source: Adapted from the New York Times National Edition, April 1, 2001, "Portrait of a Nation," p. 18. Copyright © 2001 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission.)

[976-978]

The Changing American Family

Americans were divided over the meaning of other changes as well -- especially the changing shape of American families (see Figure 33.4). The median age at marriage continued to rise, reaching 27.1 for men and 25.8 for women in 2006 (for women who pursued graduate degrees, the median age at first marriage was almost 30). The number of people living together without marriage also increased. In 2006, when households composed of married couples slipped below 50 percent for the first time, unmarried, opposite-sex partners made up about 5 percent of households, and same-sex couples accounted for slightly less than 1 percent. One-third of female-partner households and one-fifth of male-partner households had children, and in 2002 the American Academy of Pediatrics endorsed adoption by gay couples. A vocal antigay movement coexisted with rising support for the legal equality of gay, lesbian, transgendered, and bisexual Americans. Although many states and private corporations extended domestic-partner benefits to gay couples, the federal Defense of Marriage Act, passed by Congress in 1996, defined marriage as "only" a union between one man and one woman, and state legislatures continue to grapple with the issue.

Early in the twenty-first century, one-third of all American children and more than two-thirds of African American children were born to unmarried women. (In Britain, the rate was 42 percent.) In the majority of married-couple families with children under eighteen, both parents held jobs. Although almost one-third of families with children had only one parent present -- usually the mother -- children also lived in blended families created by second marriages or moved back and forth between households of parents who had joint custody. Based on current statistical analysis, for couples who married in the mid-1990s the woman's level of education was the clearest predictor of divorce: if the woman graduated from a four-year college, the couple had a 25 percent likelihood of divorce; if she had not, the rate jumped to 50 percent.

In 2006 the leading edge of the baby-boom generation turned 60; the median age of the American population was 36.2, up from 29.5 in 1967. Although baby boomers are not aging in the same manner as their parents and, grandparents -- "Sixty is the new forty," the saying goes -- the large and growing proportion of older people will have a major impact on American society. As life expectancy increases, the growing number of elderly Americans will put enormous pressure on the nation's healthcare system and family structure -- who will care for people as they can no longer live independently? -- and strain the Social Security and Medicare systems.

Other health issues have become increasingly important as well. In a rapid change over the course of a decade, more than 65 percent of American adults are now overweight or obese -- conditions linked to hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes. In 1995 no state had an adult obesity rate that hit 20 percent. By 2005, only four states were under that 20 percent marker, and Louisiana, Mississippi, and West Virginia topped 30 percent. On the other hand, cigarette smoking continues a slow but steady decline. About one-fifth of American adults smoked in 2005, down from about one-third of adults in 1980. Approximately 440,000 people die each year from illness caused by smoking, and medical costs and lost productivity total about \$157 billion a year. With clearer understanding of the danger of second-hand smoke, local governments have increasingly banned smoking in public spaces, including restaurants and bars.

(photo) This twenty-first-century American family shows the increasing complexity of

racial and ethnic identities. The father is Chinese, Irish, French, German, and Swedish; the mother, Italian, Irish, and Japanese. (Terrence Mielse/Newsweek)

(graph) Figure 33.4. The Changing American Family. American households became smaller in the latter part of the twentieth century, as more people lived alone and women had, on average, fewer children. (Source: Adapted from U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf> and <http://www.census.gov/population/pop-profile/2000/chap04.pdf>)