

Women
through
time

A review

The Renaissance

- **Women and work in Renaissance society**

- Most women married, were responsible for domestic affairs, and frequently worked outside the home.
- Women worked in ship building, textiles, agriculture, as well as midwives and servants.
- Compared to women in the previous age, the status of upper-class women declined during the Renaissance.
- The Renaissance did not include women in the general improvement of educational opportunities. Women were expected to use their education solely to run a household.

- **Culture and sexuality**

- With respect to sex and love, a double standard was applied as sex for women was restricted to marriage, while men could pursue sex outside of marriage.
- The rape of women by upper-class men was frequent and not considered a serious offense.

Reformation

- Luther's impact on women
 - Luther gave dignity to domestic work, stressed the idea of marriage and the Christian home, ended confession, and encouraged education for girls.
 - Luther held enlightened views on sex and marriage, although he claimed that women should be no more than efficient wives.

15th and 16th Centuries

- The status of women declined.
 - Literature on women and marriage called for a subservient wife, whose household was her first priority, and a protective, firm ruling, and loyal husband.
 - Catholic marriages could not be dissolved, while Protestants held that divorce and remarriage were possible.
 - Women did not lose their identity or meaningful work, but their subordinate status did not change.
 - Prostitution was common, and brothels were licensed.
 - Protestant reformers believed that convents were antifeminist and that women would find freedom in marriage and sex.
 - With the closing of convents, marriage became virtually the only occupation for upper-class Protestant women.

The Enlightenment

- New ideas about women's rights were spread in the salons of upper-class women.
 - Madame Geoffrin's salon was famous; she was the unofficial godmother of the *Encyclopedia*.
 - These salons seemed to have functioned as informal "schools" for women.

The 18th Century

- Early marriage was not common prior to 1750, and many women (perhaps as much as half) never married at all.
- Marriage was commonly delayed because of poverty and/or local law and tradition.
- Girls left to work as servants--where they often were physically and sexually mistreated.
- Illegitimate children were not common in pre-industrial society; premarital sex was common, but marriage usually followed.
- Birth control methods were primitive and undependable.

The 18th Century (cont.)

- Coitus interruptus was the most common form of birth control.
- Between about 1750 and 1850 the number of illegitimate births soared--in some places from 2 to 25 percent of all births.
 - Fewer young women were abstaining from premarital intercourse and fewer young men were marrying the women they got pregnant.
- One cause for this was that the growth of cottage industry (and later, the factory) resulted in people marrying earlier and for love.
- Low wages, inequality, and changing economic and social conditions made it difficult for women to acquire a marriage based on romance.

The Industrial Revolution

- The man emerged as the family's primary wage earner, while the woman found only limited job opportunities.
- Married women were much less likely to work outside the house after the first child arrived.
- Women were confined to low paying, dead-end jobs.

The 19th Century

- "Romantic love" had triumphed over economic considerations in the working class by 1850.
- After 1850, illegitimacy decreased, indicating the growing morality and stability of the working class.
- The pre-industrial pattern of women working outside the home disappeared, except for working-class women.
- Women became fulltime mothers and homemakers, not wage earners.
- Women were excluded from good jobs; the law placed women in an inferior position.
 - A wife in England had no legal identity and no right to own property.
 - In France, the Napoleonic Code gave women few legal rights.

The 19th Century (Cont)

- Women struggled for rights.
 - Middle class feminists campaigned for equal legal rights, equal education, access to the professions, and work for women.
 - These women scored some victories, but still in Germany in 1900 women were kept out of universities and the professions.
 - Socialist women called for the liberation of working-class women through revolution.
- The home increased in emotional importance in all social classes; it symbolized shelter from the harsh working world.
- Strong emotional bonds between mothers and children and between wives and husbands developed.

The 19th Century (Cont)

- Child rearing
 - The indifference of mothers toward their children came to an end--as mothers developed deep emotional ties with their children.
 - The birthrate declined, so each child became more important and could receive more advantages.
 - The main reason for the reduction in family size was the parents' desire to improve the family's economic and social position.
 - Children were no longer seen as an economic asset.

World War I

- The social impact
 - Labor shortages brought about benefits for organized labor.
 - Unions and socialists became partners in government.
 - The role of women changed dramatically as many women entered the labor force.
 - Some European women gained the right to vote after the war.
 - Women displayed a growing spirit of independence.
 - War brought about greater social equality.

The 20th Century

- Emancipation of women
- Women married earlier and bore their children quickly; a baby-boom occurred in the 1950s but in the 1960s the birth rate declined--reaching a no-growth level by the mid-1970s.
- Therefore, most women had smaller families
- After World War II almost all women had to go outside the home to find cash income--this helped by an economic boom of 1950-1973.