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# New Professional Opportunities for Women: Nursing, Teaching, Clerical

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# World History Encyclopedia

**Era 7: The Age of Revolutions, 1750-1914 ■ Volume 14**

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wife," were claimed to justify men abusing their wives. Women were regarded as children or possessions, and expected to "mind" and "behave." Marriage vows subtly enforced this biased attitude, and used the word "obey" in the woman's pledge but not in the man's. In France, certain parts of the Civil Code conformed to a belief in woman's connection to sex and sin, derived from the creation myth and Eve's disobedience. According to one source, Napoleon wanted certain portions of this code to be read by women during marriage ceremonies so that they remained aware of their inferiority and the requirement that they be submissive to their husbands.

In England, a husband could beat his wife and hold her prisoner, provided he did so without cruelty. It is difficult to understand how this could be done without cruelty, but this right to imprisonment remained law until the 1890s. Since divorce was extremely uncommon, economic circumstances forced unhappy marriages to remain intact. During the lifetime of a marriage, conflicts could escalate to the point that "till death do us part" meant murder instead of death by natural cause, although wife murder usually led to prosecution, even if not conviction.

The reasons for marital violence were varied, and although poverty added to the stresses of family life, the upper classes were not immune. The apparent preponderance of domestic violence in the lower classes was because their lives were more transparent. They did not have the means to protect their privacy from public scrutiny and documentation.

It was not until 1878 that the English Parliament passed a law that allowed women to petition the courts for separation on grounds of assault. However, in the nineteenth century, there were few options available for women to survive without the support of a husband. Furthermore, if a woman had an income, her husband could request, through a judge, that it be garnished. No proof was necessary.

Sexual relations in marriage were likewise unbalanced. A man could use violence to force his wife to perform her conjugal duty. There was no such thing as rape in marriage as long as a man used force for what was defined as normal. A woman's infidelity in marriage threatened

reproductive bloodlines and future distribution of property if she produced a child from that union. A man's adultery was tacitly acceptable as long as he kept his mistress away from the home he shared with his wife. However, in France, if a man caught his wife in a sexual act and killed her and her partner, he was excused under the "red article" of the French Penal Code.

Some critics of gender inequality, such as Frances Power Cobbe, assumed that wife beating, wife torture, and wife murder did not occur in the upper classes, but J. W. Kaye pointed out that educated and refined men expressed their disregard for women in different ways. The nineteenth century was an important time for changes in gender relationships within marriage. By the turn of the century, the nature of marriage was beginning to evolve from patriarchy to a more companionate character. Those changes were aided by the entry of women into the labor force during World War I and women's gradual political enfranchisement. Although domestic violence did not disappear, women's voices were given more agency, as their public presence was validated.

—Lana Thompson

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### New Professional Opportunities for Women—Nursing, Teaching, Clerical

In the nineteenth century, women in urbanized societies sought new employment in white-collar work and professions that required education and training. With the rise of industrial capitalism and the introduction of compulsory schooling in many European countries, women were eager to compete for jobs newly created by the expansion of the service sector of the economy. The important sites for women's work in this tertiary sector included government offices, banks, post offices, telephone and telegraph exchanges, schools, hospitals, and department stores. Women's entry into nursing, teaching, and office work feminized these fields, also contributing to the dismantling of gender inequalities.

Women's desire and need to work clashed with the prevailing view that most women should make marriage their primary occupation. In France, school curriculum throughout the nineteenth century encouraged girls to prepare for a life of domestic duties, while many boys aspired to university study or skilled work. Yet many women were obligated to work to assist the family economy. Necessity and opportunity led to the doubling of women's participation in

the workforce in Britain between 1851 and 1901. Simultaneously, feminists challenged the ideology of domesticity that sought to limit women to a smaller sphere of society. Europeans gradually came to accept female employees in nursing, teaching, clerical, and office jobs because such work was less well paid and less prestigious than the male-dominated professions such as medicine, law, science, and academia. Moreover, discrimination limited the numbers of women in the higher ranks of all occupations. At the end of the nineteenth century, most governments regulated women's labor, restricting their hours in certain industries to protect women from harm and to enhance men's wages and work opportunities. In the Middle East and Asia, women entered new professions later than in Europe and North America, typically after 1914.

The professionalization of nursing was one of the major developments shaping the medical field and women's job opportunities during the second half of the nineteenth century. Previously, unpaid nursing was performed by family members, religious orders, or charitable institutions. In hospitals, nursing was traditionally associated with manual labor performed by the uneducated working classes. Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) professionalized nursing by elevating it to a scientific and medical practice. The

#### THE NEW WOMAN

During the 1890s, the term "new woman" emerged in vocabularies to signify the women who were pursuing lives of their own in a broadening public sphere. In most respects the new type of woman seemed to reject Victorian concepts of home and domesticity by seeking a life independent of marriage, entering previously all-male professions, and pursuing a freer lifestyle. Literary figures mirrored real women's lives as innovators and activists. Playwright Henrik Ibsen's protagonist Nora walked out on her stifling bourgeois marriage in *A Doll's House* (1879) to seek self-actualization. Career women were emblematic of this modern trend. When law graduate Jeanne Chauvin (1862-1926) demanded that the hitherto all-male bastion of the Paris bar admit qualified

women, she stirred up a vociferous controversy about the future of gender relations, work, and family. Her successful entry into the profession in 1900 was rightly seen as a triumph of feminism, while critics warned that women would abandon the home and forsake children, bringing an end to society as they knew it. The modern urban working woman was conspicuous in her conventional-defying choices to smoke, ride a bicycle, and wear rational dress, notably pants. While pursuing new fashions in attitudes and lifestyle, women also became participants in an expanding consumer market that fostered desire for individual pleasure and the means of gratification through consumerism.

—Sara Kimble



introduction of her exacting hygiene practices to reduce infections led to the dramatic reduction in preventable deaths in military hospitals during the Crimean War (1854-1856). On the opposing side of this conflict, at least 160 Russian women volunteered as nurses. Nightingale's reforms changed the perception of nursing into a respectable field eagerly pursued by daughters of the educated middle classes.

By the 1880s, large hospitals employed formally trained nurses. The rising popularity of nursing was evident in the British census. In 1851 nurses numbered fewer than 2,300. In 1901 their ranks swelled to more than 25,000. In France, competition between Catholic sisters and lay nurses resulted in a greater proportion of secular staff by 1911. European women also joined colonial missions to provide medical aid while reinforcing imperialism. Whether at home or overseas, nursing remained a low-pay labor-intensive field employing youthful, docile, and unmarried women. During World War I (1914-1918), tens of thousands of women from all warring nations served their country out of a sense of duty, a desire to be useful, and for the promise of adventure. Nursing at the front lines exposed women to the same dangers and hardships as men, and women performed with alacrity and won the respect of the public. Nursing in wartime was seen as a young woman's obligation to the nation, the virtuous counterpart to men's duty in soldiering.

Teaching became a prototypical feminine job with the development of public schools. Teaching was seen as an extension of women's traditional roles as educators and also served as preparation for motherhood. In 1800 few girls entered a classroom, yet by 1914 nearly all attended school if they lived in Northern or Western Europe. At the end of the nineteenth century, women flocked to educational institutions such as Girton College at Cambridge University for advanced study or Sèvres in France for teacher training. American Catherine Beecher (1800-1878) facilitated women's entry into teaching by arguing that their nature suited them to care for youths. By 1907 female teachers held 70 percent of all teaching positions in public primary schools in Italy and Spain. In Britain by 1911, three-quarters of all teachers were female. Teaching was also

an important path for social mobility. In Russia, 40 percent of all female teachers in rural schools came from economically modest backgrounds.

The marriage bar cut short women's careers in teaching in many countries, including Britain, Germany, and Russia. However, France permitted women to continue working after marriage, and the state encouraged married couples to seek positions together in rural schools. Female teachers were typically paid less for the same work until unionization eliminated wage differentials between men and women. In France, female teachers won the right to equal pay for equal work in 1909. Only rarely, however, did women become university professors, such as did the Nobel Prize winning Marie Curie (1867-1934).

The growth of government bureaucracies, an evolution in the nature of white-collar work, and an expansion of educational opportunities for women all encouraged women to enter the tertiary sector. Middle-class women sought respectable and meaningful work in offices, shops, and professions that could provide them with the means to support themselves if they could not or chose not to marry. Female workers could be paid a third to a half as much as men and were subject to paternalistic rules and sexual harassment, but they were less likely to complain about conditions.

Job opportunities for women expanded across the European continent during World War I as men abandoned their jobs for the front. While the majority of women worked in war industries, women broke into other white-collar occupations hitherto closed to them due to exigencies of the war. Women's participation in traditionally masculine work was intended for the duration of the war only. In fact, the war resulted in the long-term destabilization of conservative views of women's abilities and changed young women's expectations for the future.

Under the Russian Empire, women were formally prohibited from working in civil service. However, in the 1880s and 1890s, women found work in minor government positions, banking, and railroads and as office secretaries. Liberal feminists were victorious in bringing about equal employment opportunities and political rights during the Russian Revolution of 1917. By the 1930s, the Soviet Union led the world with

the numerically successful integration of female professionals into all major fields.

—Sara Kimble

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#### Housework

Housework has been a consistent, while often overlooked, aspect of labor history, though its scope and meaning have changed over time. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries housework was mainly undertaken by women, with or without the help of servants, and was centered on three main tasks: laundry, cooking, and general cleaning. Most historians agree that aside from regional variations, housework was relatively static prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Changes occurred during the Industrial Revolution as a result of technological innovation; however, many historians argue that these innovations actually created more work by raising standards of cleanliness. Yet these modifications were not adopted evenly across time and space. Rural dwellers had to wait for proper infrastructure in order to utilize new products, and the poor could not always afford them. For many, modern conveniences were unavailable until the 1920s and 1930s.

Laundry remained by far the most onerous household task well into the late nineteenth century, as few houses had indoor plumbing. Most rural houses received their water supply from wells or streams, and urban residents relied on communal taps. This meant that women had to haul their water before even beginning

to wash their clothing. However, in some areas such as rural France, Ireland, and Scotland, women preferred to construct freestanding washhouses near streams. The washing procedure consisted of forcing the water, mixed with a cleaning agent, through the clothing by beating it, scrubbing it, or even stomping on it. Soap was expensive and rarely used until the mid-eighteenth century. Instead, stale urine, due to its ammonia content, and lye were the main cleansing agents. After washing, linens were given a blue rinse made from powdered glass and then were starched before being wrung out and hung to dry. Finally, most clothing and linen had to be ironed with solid irons of varying weights, which were heated on the fire or, later, the stove. Laundry remained a time-consuming and difficult chore until the invention of the electric washing machine in 1914, though innovations such as the wringer and the electric iron did alleviate some of the burden. Consequently, many households chose to send some of their laundry out to a local washerwoman.

In contrast, cooking underwent several changes during this time period. Prior to the mid-nineteenth century the majority of cooking

#### SPRING CLEANING

The term "spring cleaning" has a historical basis. When houses were heated by a central fire pit or stove and lit by rush, tapers, candles, or lamps, soot and grime accumulated throughout the winter months. When spring finally arrived the household was turned upside down, as carpets were pulled up and beaten outside and the underlying floor was swept and the tacks cleaned. Curtains were taken down and washed, walls were wiped down, furniture was polished, and the house was generally aired out. Even ironing was not directly involved in this endeavor; instead, it was put up with matted meals, crocked-off rooms, and exhausted housewives and servants. However, spring cleaning was also a relief, as it heralded the warmer weather, the return of laundry drying outside instead of inside, where it dripped onto the heads of the inhabitants; and a return of privacy, as the household no longer had to crowd around light and heat sources.

—Heather Stanley



opposed the Fifteenth Amendment (which guaranteed blacks the right to vote) because it failed to give women the vote and also advocated for reform of divorce laws and the end of discrimination in matters of work and pay. The less-militant American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was founded by staunch abolitionists who feared that the Fifteenth Amendment would be defeated if it included a provision on women's voting rights. They avoided issues other than gaining the vote for women, which they believed could best be achieved on a state-by-state basis rather than by a constitutional amendment. In 1890 the two groups reconciled and joined forces as the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Under the leadership of Susan B. Anthony, the NAWSA oversaw the work of hundreds of smaller local and state groups that supported woman suffrage legislation in their states and communities. It was the most important suffrage organization in the United States and was instrumental in winning the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920. With the achievement of this long-sought goal, First-wave Feminism in the United States came to an end.

—Jennifer Janson

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#### Feminist Movements in Europe

Feminism is the critical response to the systematic subordination of women as a group to men as a group within a given cultural setting.

A feminist believes that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities. The word *féminisme* emerged first in France in the 1870s, yet the goal of righting the imbalance of power between the sexes dates from centuries earlier.

As early as the fifteenth century, writers defended women's equality and called for ending women's subordination in the family, law, and society. The Venetian-born French writer Christine de Pisan (1364–1431) authored a political treatise, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), in which she condemned the demeaning remarks made about women by ancient authorities, such as Aristotle and Ovid, and defended women's capacity for intellectual achievement and their right to govern. Important humanists viewed women as spiritually equal to men, and the Cartesian theorist François Poulain de la Barre (1647–1723) pushed this notion into the secular sphere by arguing that "the mind had no sex." Enlightenment philosophers from Sweden to Spain engaged in rich intellectual debates about gender roles and developed a literary movement on the "woman question." While many authors denounced women's subordinate existence, others, most famously Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), developed an antifeminist resistance by denigrating women and prescribed for them a limited sphere of action in domesticity. The patriarchal worldview that women were uniquely suited for the private realm profoundly influenced European social structures during the nineteenth century.

The French Revolution was an extremely important moment for the rise of a popular movement for women's rights. In France, women's activism existed alongside men's activism. However, women's activism made monumental impacts at particular moments, including the march in October 1789 when women brought the king to Paris, in 1793 when women protested for political rights, and during the insurrections of May 1795. The revolutionary government recognized women's civil rights but not their civic rights, permitting women equal inheritance and divorce rights but excluding them from political rights. A former actress turned writer, Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), enumerated the universal rights that belonged to women, including property, taxation, and citizenship, in her *Declaration of the*

#### FAMILY PLANNING IN LATE-NINETEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE

Family planning was one of the most controversial issues in late-nineteenth-century Europe. At a time of declining birthrates, most governments criminalized birth control devices, contraceptive information, and abortion in the interest of encouraging larger families. Critics equated contraception with obscenity and the encouragement of promiscuity. Christian churches and the medical establishment likewise opposed any artificial controls of fertility. Consistent with the double moral standard, most governments regulated prostitution as a necessary outlet for men's licentious nature.

In Britain from the 1820s onward, anyone who published pamphlets about methods to prevent pregnancy ran the risk of prosecution under obscenity laws. Contraception became a public issue in 1877 when Charles Bradlaugh (1833–1891) and Annie Besant (1847–1933) were brought to trial for one such publication. Their guilty verdict led to the creation of the British neo-Malthusian

League that advocated family planning and eugenics. By 1882, the pioneering Dutch female doctor Aletta Jacobs (1851–1929) opened the world's first birth control clinic. Working with poor patients, Jacobs witnessed the physical toll and poverty associated with too-frequent pregnancies. Believing that abstinence was impracticable, she began fitting women with diaphragms developed by German physician Wilhelm Mensinga. In France, Nelly Roussel (1878–1922) touted the health and social benefits of smaller families in her national lecture tours. The most radical campaigns were in Germany, where Helene Stöcker (1869–1943) founded the German League for the Protection of Motherhood in 1905. This group uniquely criticized the double standard of sexual morality, supported sex education, and called for the end of state-regulated prostitution and the decriminalization of abortion.

—Sara Kirshole

*Rights of Woman and Citizens* (1791). Revolutionary women could count on a few supporters such as the Marquis de Condorcet (1743–1794), a mathematician and philosopher, who condemned sex and race discrimination as an injustice. De Gouges and other women's rights leaders were put to death by guillotine for their ideas. After the radical pamphleteer Thomas Paine (1737–1809) called for individual rights based on capacity to reason rather than property, British author Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) claimed women's rights on the same basis in her essay *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). Wollstonecraft championed the most acceptable feminist ideas that women needed education and economic opportunities to aid their families and live with dignity.

The counterrevolution and the rise of Napoleon ushered in a culturally conservative era that narrowed the vision of women to that of subordinate wives who owed obedience to their husbands under strict laws. The dominant politics of liberalism left a conflicted legacy, as liberal ideas legitimated challenges to traditional authority and served to enfranchise men but denied women's claims to citizenship on the

basis of sex differences. In the early nineteenth century, married women had no legal right to property or to their earnings; no freedom of movement or conscience; no freedom regarding their bodies; and no rights in regard to their children. Feminists criticized the laws that stripped women of their basic rights, and they objected to additional regulations that prohibited paternity suits, required women to take their spouse's nationality, and decreed adultery a crime only if committed by wives. Reformers Josephine Butler (1828–1906) in Britain and Hubertine Auclert (1848–1914) in France argued that under such laws matrimony more closely resembled slavery rather than the ideal of companionate love as described by romantics. Writer Caroline Sheridan Norton (1808–1877), falsely accused of adultery by her drunken husband and denied custody of her children, published critical pamphlets and thus helped secure a series of legal improvements achieved by parliamentary acts. Married women's property rights followed in England (1870), Germany (1900), and France (1907), primarily benefiting bourgeois women.

Mainstream feminists hoped to ameliorate women's condition and to remake society



according to their values. As legal and social distinctions drove a wedge between men's and women's roles in the family and society, women became increasingly associated with all that was civilized, spiritual, and moral. Activists, organized into solidarity groups, utilized the perception of women's domestic virtue to justify moral reformation in the outside world. Women joined political campaigns to abolish slavery and prostitution. They formed temperance associations to end the abuse of alcohol and condemn male domestic violence. Other feminists concerned with the condition of the working classes called for labor regulations to protect pregnant laborers and new mothers and end exploitation. The global nature of these concerns and the technological advances in travel and communication led to the growth of international associations such as the International Council of Women. Many reform objectives were successfully achieved piecemeal and gradually during the twentieth century.

The repeated appeal for women's voting rights punctuated modern history, often corresponding with democratic reforms. Many male and female feminists came to see political rights as the key to achieving all their goals. In 1848 French utopian socialist and working-class journalist Jeanne Deroin (1805-1894) demanded that the provisional government grant women suffrage rights, for which she was thrown in prison. Under a less-repressive regime, moderate republicans Maria Deraismes (1828-1894) and Léon Richer (1824-1911) cofounded a French society for women's rights to secure an equal share of rights and liberty for women. Deraismes, a persuasive writer, argued that women's inferiority was not a fact of nature but "a human invention and a social fiction." In Britain, Barbara Smith Bodichon (1827-1891) and her allies gathered signatures for a voting rights petition in 1866 that Liberal members of Parliament John Stuart Mill and Henry Fawcett presented to the House of Commons. This act began a decades-long effort for suffrage dominated by the peaceful methods of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. In 1905 Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928), leader of the Women's Social and Political Union, urged "deeds, not words," and spearheaded a militant campaign

characterized by civil disobedience and hunger strikes.

In Germany, where women were prohibited from attending political meetings, cautious leaders, including Louis Otto-Peters (1819-1895), initially focused on moderate demands for education and economic rights rather than the vote. The German women's movement was divided over class issues, whereby socialist leaders such as Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) espoused the belief that only the overthrow of capitalism could emancipate women. Women's suffrage was granted more readily in countries with less-divisive women's movements including Finland (1906), Norway (1913), and the Soviet Union (1917). Over 20 nations granted women the right to vote after the First World War (1914-1918), partly in recognition of women's wartime patriotism. With few exceptions, formal constitutional equality for women hung in abeyance until after the Second World War (1939-1945).

—Sara Kimble

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## European Women and Imperialism

In recent decades, historians interested in a wide range of subjects have shown that European imperialism was not solely a masculine affair. Conceptually and in practice, women were at the heart of the imperialist project. The gendered social dynamics of European societies provided Europeans with models and metaphors for their relationships with foreign lands and their peoples. Empires and their constituent parts were regularly represented by Europeans in gendered terms, while imperial projects were commonly depicted as masculine adventures involving the domination of female virgin territory. At the same time, European women were both physically and intellectually fully involved in the accumulation and management of imperial possessions. European women were actively engaged in the processes of building and reorganizing empires in a variety of roles: as wealthy and influential investors in imperial ventures; as authors, artists, and social scientists involved in studying and representing their empires' subjects; and as missionaries, colonists, and sight-seeing travelers.

### ELLEN JOYCE

Almost 50 years of dedicated service to the British imperial cause had earned Ellen Joyce the prestigious titles "Lady of Grace of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem" and "Commander of the British Empire" by the time of her death in 1924. Joyce stands out as a particularly ambitious, energetic, and effective female imperialist, but she was far from alone in her work for empire, which involved promoting and facilitating the emigration of thousands of British women to colonial destinations over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like hundreds of other middle- and upper-class British women, Joyce worked as a private individual and as a member of women's organizations to feminize an empire that she saw as both glorious and in desperate need of women's civilizing influences. The photograph of Joyce featured here is situated in a page taken from the golden anniversary history of the Girls'



(The Women's Library)

Friendly Society, an imperially oriented society for the encouragement of purity, humility, and religiosity in working-class girls. Joyce served as the primary figure in this society's Emigration Department from 1883 and as the president of the British Women's Emigration Association until 1919.

—Lisa Chilton