

Women in European History

A generation ago, women's history, if it appeared at all in the textbooks, was generally relegated to a few sidebars. Now, women's history should be an integral part of your AP European History course. A study guide like the one here gives students a good grounding in some of the main trends and important individuals.

I. The Renaissance

A. Wealthy women

1. *Querelles des Femmes* ("The Problem of Women"). Starting with Christine de Pisan in the fourteenth century, a new debate emerged over women's nature and their proper role in society; the debate continued for 600 years.
2. Increased access to education
3. Lost some status compared to what they had had in the Middle Ages; women were to be "ornaments" to their husbands
4. Important Renaissance noblewomen at court in education and culture, including
 - a. Christine de Pisan
 - b. Isabella d'Este
 - c. Artemisia Gentileschi (famous for her paintings of Judith)

B. Women in general

1. Status did not change much compared to that in the Middle Ages
2. Marriage
 - a. European family pattern
 - i. Nuclear family (poor people tended to be unable to support extended families)
 - ii. Wealthier people (and some landowning peasants) tended to have extended families
 - b. Based on economic considerations, not love
 - i. Dowries were extremely important in wealthy families
 - ii. Women tended to play a more significant role in the economy in Northern Europe
 - c. Average age for women was under 20; for men it was mid- to late-20s
 - i. Class issues: the wealthy tended to marry earlier than the middle classes, and the poor tended to marry earlier as well, or not to marry at all
 - ii. In Italy the age gap between husbands and wives was much larger than in Northern Europe
 - d. Increased infanticide and abandonment (among the poor)
 - i. Increase of foundling hospitals (two-thirds of abandoned babies were girls)
 - e. Low rate of illegitimate births
 - f. Dramatic population growth until 1650
3. Divorce was available in certain areas (still very limited), unlike the Middle Ages when divorce was nonexistent
4. Women (only those in the upper classes) were to make themselves pleasing to men (Castiglione)
5. Sexual double-standard: women were to remain chaste until marriage, but men were permitted to sow their wild oats
6. More prostitution than in the Middle Ages
7. Rape was not considered a serious crime

C. Important female rulers

1. Caterina Sforza
2. Isabella I
3. Mary Tudor
4. Elizabeth I
5. Catherine de Médicis

Appendix

- D. Persecution of alleged witches
 - 1. Beginning of witchcraft as official Roman Catholic Church dogma in 1484
 - 2. Large number of accused witches were older women
 - 3. Reasons for targeting women
- E. Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, eds. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, 148-52 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977)

II. The Reformation

- A. Protestant women: occupation was in the home taking care of the family
 - 1. Protestant churches had greater official control over marriage
 - a. Suppressed common law marriages
 - b. Catholic governments followed suit
 - 2. Marriage became more companionate; Martin Luther and Katerina von Bora were a good example of the husband/helpmate model
 - 3. Increased women's literacy became valued because women needed to be able to read the Bible and teach their children
 - 4. Lost some opportunities in church service that Catholic women enjoyed
 - 5. Sex was an act to be enjoyed by a husband and wife (Luther)
- B. Catholic women
 - 1. Women continued to enjoy opportunities in the Church in religious orders
 - a. Theresa de Avila, Carmelite order
 - b. Angela Merici, Ursuline order

III. The Eighteenth Century, Including the Industrial Revolution

- A. Agricultural Revolution
 - 1. Enclosure movements significantly altered peasant life
 - a. Women had fewer opportunities to make profits from work on common lands
 - b. Some women worked away from home in the towns or cities
 - i. Most work was domestic
 - ii. Many women became prostitutes
 - iii. Social consequences of working away from home included more autonomy, the ability to save money for their own dowries, slightly greater choice in marriage partners (but still pretty much endogamous within their class and trade), and less communal protection from economic and sexual exploitation
 - 2. Growth of cottage industry
 - a. Women increasingly stayed home to work in the cottage industry
 - b. Young women became increasingly difficult for peasant families to feed due to the loss of common lands
 - i. Young women were sometimes sent away to work
- B. Industrial Revolution
 - 1. Large numbers of women worked in factories in late eighteenth-century England
 - 2. Family wage economy: families often worked together (especially women and children)
 - a. Declined somewhat after the Factory Act of 1833 put limits on child labor
- C. Marriage
 - 1. Based more on romance as the Enlightenment moved into the modern era
 - a. Average age for marriage was late 20s or later
 - b. Many women did not marry (spinsters); a large population of unmarried middle-class women was a new phenomenon
 - 2. Protestant women were still expected to manage the home
 - 3. Catholic women still had self-development options in the religious orders
 - 4. Views on childcare: spare the rod and spoil the child

5. Families became smaller, children lived longer, and people invested more love and economic resources in their children as time went on
- D. Explosion in illegitimate births
 1. Increased infanticide
 2. Foundling hospitals created
- E. Decrease in witch hunts. Why? Most people say it relates to both the new scientific ideas about evidence and the decline of political power of the Roman Catholic Church.
- F. Decline in women's opportunities as midwives, and increased professionalization of medicine
- G. Important female rulers included:
 1. Catherine the Great
 2. Maria Theresa

IV. Women in the Enlightenment

- A. Science
 1. Emilie du Châtelet (Voltaire's mistress) translated Newton's *Principia* (see the DBQ on women and science from the 1997 AP Exam)
- B. Salons
 1. Madame de Geoffrin (Marie-Thérèse Rodet Geoffrin)
 2. Madame de Warens (Louise de Warens)
 3. Madame de Staël (Germaine de Staël)
 4. Madame Roland (Jeanne Manon Roland de Platière)
- C. Arts
 1. Elizabeth Vigée-Lebrun
- D. Views on female education
 1. Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Émile* (1762)
 2. Catharine Macaulay, *Letters on Education* (1787)
 3. Hannah More, a "bluestocking"
- E. Generally, the Enlightenment ideology did not like or have much respect for women, and when women tried to apply its ideas of freedom and equality to their own sex, even the most radical leaders of the French Revolution repressed them.

V. The French Revolution

- A. Bread riots
- B. March on Versailles
- C. Olympe de Gouges, *The Rights of Women* (1791)
- D. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792)
- E. Participation with the Sans-Culottes (Society of Revolutionary Republican Women)
- F. National Convention closed women's political clubs
 1. French Revolutionary leaders identified women with the debauchery and effete style of the ancien régime. They thought the Old Regime style was not "manly" and sought to keep women out of public life.
- G. Charlotte Corday
- H. Salons during the Revolution (e.g., Jeanne Roland, Girondins)
- I. Victims of the Reign of Terror (e.g., Olympe de Gouges, Jeanne Roland)
- J. Napoleonic France
 1. Civil Code reasserted Old Regime's patriarchal system
 - a. Women viewed as legal incompetents
 2. Women gained few rights (except inheritance rights), which led to increased use of birth control and smaller families
 3. State paternalism
 4. Criticism of Napoleon's regime by Madame de Staël

Appendix

- K. Compare the role of women in the French Revolution with the role of women in the Russian Revolution
 - 1. Ideals
 - 2. What rights and privileges did they ultimately receive?

Emerging ideology about women following the French Revolution grappled with the problem of women's nature and what it meant for women's rights. **Individualist feminists** argued that women had the same "natural" rights as men and therefore were entitled to the same legal, economic, social, and educational opportunities. Their ideas derived from Enlightenment ideology and were later embraced by such thinkers as John Stuart Mill. **Relational feminists** argued that women's nature was fundamentally different from men's and, significantly, just as important. They argued that women needed education to fulfill their special role as mothers and homemakers, to preserve and impart the native culture of their homelands, and to provide healthy children for the nation (the so-called "mother-educator"). Relational feminists were sympathetic to the new movements of romanticism and nationalism.

VI. The Nineteenth Century

- A. Industrial Revolution
- B. Marriage and family
 - 1. Ideal of romantic love became important
 - 2. Fewer children per family; more love toward children
 - 3. Middle class more inclined to consider economic reasons
 - a. Many men married late
 - b. Women were closely monitored
 - c. Sexual double-standard existed
 - 4. Illegitimacy rate declined after 1850 in the working classes
 - 5. Prostitutes were sought by middle- and upper-middle-class men
 - 6. Early childhood is vital (Freud)
 - 7. Lower-class children were less financially dependent on their parents than middle-class children
- C. Status of women
 - 1. After 1850 increasingly separate spheres existed: men worked in factories and women stayed at home
 - 2. Protective legislation drove women out of certain kinds of employment. As the century progressed, more jobs were gendered; in jobs defined as women's work (e.g., teaching and office work), wages went down.
 - 3. Ideology of domesticity
 - a. Reinforced in homeschooling or church schools
 - b. Victorian ideal
 - 4. By the late-nineteenth century, mostly women in poor families worked outside the home
 - 5. Middle-class women began working to organize and expand their rights
 - 6. Marxist view of women
 - a. Marxist women argued that women were doubly oppressed, both by capitalist society and also by men. Their program was to work for Socialism first, because they thought that socialism (and later communism) would lead to equality between the sexes.
 - 7. Socialist views of women
 - a. Saint-Simonian Socialism emphasized complementary aspects of the sexes, motherhood as the common denominator of female experience, and free love
 - i. Suzanne Voilquin
 - ii. Flora Tristan
 - iii. Desiree Gay

- iv. Jeanne Deroin, like the majority of these women, was a feminist first and a Socialist second. She petitioned, unsuccessfully, to run for the Legislative Assembly as a candidate of the Democratic Socialist Party.
 - b. German Socialist Louise Otto emphasized women's special nature and importance to the state, even though she saw marriage as a "degraded" institution that impaired the development of women's character.
 - c. German Social Democratic Party had a special auxiliary for women
 - i. August Bebel
 - ii. Clara Zetkin
 - d. French feminist Socialists included:
 - i. Hubertine Auclert
 - ii. Louise Saumoneau
 - iii. Elisabeth Renaud
- D. Romanticism
- 1. George Sand (Amandine Aurore Lucie Dupin)
- E. Realism
- 1. George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans)
- F. Women played a major role in social reforms in the mid- to late-nineteenth century
- 1. Catholic orders organized schools and hospitals
 - 2. Temperance
 - 3. Number of female teachers increased in the late-nineteenth century (e.g., preschool education)
 - 4. Trend toward gendering certain occupations had the effect of kicking men out and also lowering wages
 - 5. Pacifism
 - a. Bertha von Suttner, *Lay Down Your Arms* (1889)
 - b. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; the role of Jane Addams
- G. Active participation in the Socialist movement
- 1. Owenites
 - 2. Emma Martin
 - 3. Flora Tristan
- H. Modernism in Western Europe: the "New Woman"
- 1. Drop in the birth rate became alarming
 - 2. Ellen Key, Nelly Roussel, and Marguerite Durand (Durand published the French women's daily newspaper, *La Fronde*)
 - 3. Reformers sought to reform marriage to increase its attractiveness to women
 - 4. Women gained the legal right to wages and property ownership
 - 5. Women gained the right to work without their husband's permission
 - a. Many educated women worked in white-collar jobs
 - 6. Legalization of divorce in some countries (e.g., France)
 - 7. Government subsidies to needy mothers (e.g., Britain in 1913)
- VII. Female Suffrage
- A. Finland was the first country to grant female suffrage (1906)
 - B. Countries that had granted female suffrage by 1920 were Austria, Britain, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, and Russia
 - 1. Suffrage was largely the result of women's participation during WWI
 - C. England
 - 1. John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1869)
 - 2. Suffrage was predominantly a middle-class movement

Appendix

3. Because England did not get universal manhood suffrage until after World War I, many feminists and Socialists were frustrated in their efforts to work for female rights. Leadership of suffrage reform movements felt that arguing for woman suffrage would hurt the cause of suffrage for men.
 4. Rise of professional suffrage associations
 5. Millicent Garrett Fawcett
 6. Emmeline Pankhurst (Women's Social and Political Union) and her even more radical daughters, Christabel and Sylvia
 - a. Militant tactics: violence, bombings, destruction of property, picketing Parliament
 7. Women's participation in WWI
 8. Representation of the People Act of 1918 (suffrage for women age 30 and over)
 9. Representation of the People Act of 1928 (suffrage for women age 21 and over, the same terms as for men)
- D. Female suffrage after WWI in Western and Central Europe

VIII. The Twentieth Century

- A. Russia
1. Equality (in theory) after the Russian Revolution
 - a. Voting rights
 - b. Equal access to education
 - c. Job opportunities
 - d. No sexual double-standard; increased abortion
 2. Compare the role of women in the Russian Revolution to the role of women in the French Revolution
 3. Compare the status of women in the Soviet Union with the status of women in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany
- B. Women made huge contributions to the war effort during WWI and WWII
- C. Traditional and oppressed roles in fascist Italy and Nazi Germany
1. Women were encouraged to have many children for the benefit of the state
 2. Women were denied access to high-paying job opportunities
- D. After WWI, several countries (not just fascist countries) passed repressive legislation against women in the areas of reproductive freedom and employment opportunities. This was due to the unemployment that followed the war combined with the huge death rate and oversupply of women and undersupply of babies.
- E. Post-WWII
1. Baby boom after World War II
 2. Middle-class children were less economically dependent on their parents
 3. Women remained in the workforce in larger numbers
- F. Women's rights movement and feminism
1. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (1949)
 2. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963)
 3. France ended its ban on birth control in 1965
 4. Protest marches in favor of abortion rights and decriminalization of homosexuality
 5. Some feminists rejected such "feminine" conventions as bras, cosmetics, and high heels
 6. Demand for equal pay for equal work
 7. In Italy in the 1970s women gained divorce rights, access to birth control information, and abortion rights
 8. Sharp drop in the birth rate, starting in the 1960s; native-born European women began having fewer children, later in life