The American Woman's Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals

James R. McGovern


Your use of the JSTOR database indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use. A copy of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use is available at http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html, by contacting JSTOR at jstor-info@umich.edu, or by calling JSTOR at (888)388-3574, (734)998-9101 or (FAX) (734)998-9113. No part of a JSTOR transmission may be copied, downloaded, stored, further transmitted, transferred, distributed, altered, or otherwise used, in any form or by any means, except: (1) one stored electronic and one paper copy of any article solely for your personal, non-commercial use, or (2) with prior written permission of JSTOR and the publisher of the article or other text.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

The Journal of American History is published by Organization of American Historians. Please contact the publisher for further permissions regarding the use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/journals/oah.html.

The Journal of American History
©1968 Organization of American Historians

JSTOR and the JSTOR logo are trademarks of JSTOR, and are Registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. For more information on JSTOR contact jstor-info@umich.edu.

©2001 JSTOR

http://www.jstor.org/
Thu Feb 15 11:23:50 2001
The American Woman’s Pre-World War I Freedom in Manners and Morals

JAMES R. McGovern

The Twenties have been alternately praised or blamed for almost everything and its opposite; but most historians hold, whether to praise or to condemn, that this decade launched the revolution in manners and morals through which we are still moving today. This judgment seems to be part of an even more inclusive one in American historiography to exceptionalize the Twenties. No other decade has invited such titles of historical caricature as The Jazz Age, This Was Normalcy, Fantastic Interim, or The Perils of Prosperity. Richard Hofstadter’s classic, The Age of Reform, subtly reinforces this view by seeing the Twenties as “Entracte,” an interim between two periods of reform, the Progressive era and the New Deal, which themselves display discontinuity.

Revisionism, in the form of a developmental interpretation of the relationship between the Progressive era and the Twenties, has been gaining strong support in recent years. De-emphasizing the disruptive impact of World War I, Henry F. May asked whether the 1920s could be understood fully “without giving more attention to the old regime.” He declared that “Immediately prewar America must be newly explored,” especially “its inarticulate assumptions—assumptions in such areas as morality, politics, class and race relations, popular art and literature, and family life.” May pursued his inquiry in The End of American Innocence and showed that for the purposes of intellectual history, at least, the Twenties

Mr. McGovern is professor of history in Newton College of the Sacred Heart.

3 May, “Shifting Perspectives on the 1920’s,” 426. See also Henry F. May, “The Rebellion of the Intellectuals, 1912-1917,” American Quarterly, VIII (Summer 1956), 115, wherein May describes 1912-1917 as a “pre-revolutionary or early revolutionary period.”
were not as significant as the preceding decade. Arthur Link has demonstrated that progressivism survived World War I and J. Joseph Huthmacher has established continuity between progressivism and the New Deal in the immigrant’s steadfast devotion to the ameliorative powers of the government. Together with May’s analysis, their writings suggest that the 1920s are much more the result of earlier intrinsic social changes than either the sudden, supposedly traumatic experiences of the war or unique developments in the Twenties. Since this assertion is certain to encounter the formidable claims that the 1920s, at least in manners and morals, amounted to a revolution, its viability can be tested by questioning if the American woman’s “emancipation” in manners and morals occurred even earlier than World War I.

Even a casual exploration of the popular literature of the Progressive era reveals that Americans then described and understood themselves to be undergoing significant changes in morals. “Sex o’clock in America” struck in 1913 about the same time as “The Repeal of Reticence.” One contemporary writer saw Americans as liberated from the strictures of “Victorianism,” now an epithet deserving criticism, and exulted, “Heaven defend us from a return to the prudery of the Victorian regime!” Conditions were

---

* “Sex O’clock in America,” *Current Opinion, LV* (Aug. 1913), 113–14. The anonymous author borrowed the phrase from William M. Reedy, editor of the *St. Louis Mirror.*
* H. W. Boynton, “Ideas, Sex, and the Novel,” *Dial, LX* (April 13, 1916), 561. In Robert W. Chambers, *The Reticent Sex* (New York, 1918), 141, the heroine remarks, “What was all wrong in our Victorian mothers’ days is all right now.”
such that another commentator asked self-consciously, "Are We Immoral?" And still another feared that the present "vice not often matched since [the time of] the Protestant Reformation" might invite a return to Puritanism. Yet, historians have not carefully investigated the possibility that the true beginnings of America's "New Freedom" in morals occurred prior to 1920. The most extensive, analytical writing on the subject of changing manners and morals is found in Frederick L. Allen's Only Yesterday (1931), William Leuchtenburg's The Perils of Prosperity (1958), May's The End of American Innocence (1959), and George Mowry's The Urban Nation (1965).

Allen and Leuchtenburg apply almost identical sharp-break interpretations, respectively entitled chapters "The Revolution in Manners and Morals" and "The Revolution in Morals." Both catalogue the same types of criteria for judgment. The flapper, as the "new woman" was called, was a creature of the 1920s. She smoked, drank, worked, and played side by side with men. She became preoccupied with sex—shocking and simultaneously unshockable. She danced close, became freer with her favors, kept her own latchkey, wore scantier attire which emphasized her boyish, athletic form, just as she used makeup and bobbed and dyed her hair. She and her comradely beau tried to abolish time and succeeded, at least to the extent that the elders asked to join the revelry. Although there were occasional "advance signals" of "rebellion" before the war, it was not until the 1920s that the code of women's innocence and ignorance crumbled.

May, who comes closest to an understanding of the moral permissiveness before the 1920s, describes in general terms such phenomena of the Progressive era as the "Dance Craze," birth control, the impact of the movies, and the "white-slave panic." He focuses on the intellectuals, how-

11Arthur Pollock, "Are We Immoral?" Forum, LI (Jan. 1914), 52. Pollock remarks that "in our literature and in our life today sex is paramount."
15May, The End of American Innocence, 334-47, is lightly documented; there are only twelve footnotes to support his discussion of these and similar developments.
ever, and therefore overlooks the depth of these and similar social movements. This causes him to view them as mere "Cracks in the Surface" of an essentially conservative society. He quotes approvingly of the distinction made by the Nation "between the fluttering tastes of the half-baked intellectuals, attracted by all these things, and the surviving soundness of the great majority.‖ His treatment also ignores one of the most significant areas of changing manners and morals as they affected the American woman: the decided shift in her sex role and identification in the direction of more masculine norms. Again, The End of American Innocence does not convincingly relate these changes to the growth of the cities. Perhaps these limitations explain Mowry’s preference for a "sharp-break" interpretation, although he wrote seven years after May.

Mowry, who acknowledges especial indebtedness to Leuchtenburg, is emphatic about the "startling" changes in manners and morals in the 1920s. He highlights "the new woman of the twenties" whose "modern feminine morality and attitudes toward the institution of marriage date from the twenties." Mowry concedes to the libidos of progressives only the exceptional goings-on in Greenwich Village society.

These hypotheses, excluding May's, hold that the flapper appeared in the postwar period mainly because American women en masse then first enjoyed considerable social and economic freedom. They also emphasize the effect of World War I on morals. By inference, of course, the Progressive era did not provide a suitable matrix. But an investigation of this period establishes that women had become sufficiently active and socially independent to prefigure the "emancipation" of the 1920s.

A significant deterioration of external controls over morality had occurred before 1920. One of the consequences of working and living conditions in the cities, especially as these affected women, was that Americans of the period 1900-1920 had experienced a vast dissolution of moral authority, which formerly had centered in the family and the small commu-

39 Ibid., 347. May's view of women's changing attitudes is contradicted by Margaret DeLand: "Of course there were women a generation ago, as in all generations, who asserted themselves; but they were practically 'sport.' Now, the simple, honest woman . . . the good wife, the good mother—is evolving ideals which are changing her life, and the lives of those people about her." Margaret DeLand, "The Change in the Feminine Ideal," Atlantic Monthly, CV (March 1910), 291.
36 Ibid., 24.
34 "By 1930 more than ten million women held jobs. Nothing did more to emancipate them." Leuchtenburg, Perils of Prosperity, 160. See also Allen, Only Yesterday, 95-98. For estimates of the effects of World War I on morals, see Leuchtenburg, Perils of Prosperity, 172-73; Allen, Only Yesterday, 94; Mowry, Urban Nation, 24.
nity. The traditional “straight and narrow” could not serve the choices and opportunities of city life. As against primary controls and contacts based on face-to-face association where the norms of family, church, and small community, usually reinforcing each other, could be internalized, the city made for a type of “individualization” through its distant, casual, specialized, and transient clusters of secondary associations. The individual came to determine his own behavioral norms.

The “home is in peril” became a fact of sociological literature as early as 1904. One of the most serious signs of its peril was the increasing inability of parents to influence their children in the delicate areas of propriety and morals. The car, already numerous enough to affect dating and pre-marital patterns, the phone coming to be used for purposes of romantic accommodation, and the variety of partners at the office or the factory, all together assured unparalleled privacy and permissiveness between the sexes.

---

29 Population in urban territory comprised only about 28 percent of the total American population in 1880; but by 1920, approximately 52 percent were living there. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957 (Washington, 1960), 14.

22 Scott Neaging and Nellie M. S. Neaging, Woman and Social Progress (New York, 1912), 137-41. The Nearings wrote: “The freedom which American Women have gained through recent social changes and the significance of their consequent choice, constitutes one of the profoundest and at the same time one of the most inscrutable problems in American life” (p. 138). William I. Thomas, The Unadjusted Girl: With Cases and Standpoint for Behavior Analysis (Boston, 1923), 86. Ernest R. Mayr, Family Disorganization (Chicago, 1927), 6-8. Mayr attributes “Family Disorganization” to the “conditions of city life” which resulted in a “rebellion against the old ideals of family life. . . .”


25 There was a surprisingly large number of cars sold and used in America between 1910 and 1920. Approximately 40 percent as many cars were produced each year between 1915 and 1917 as were manufactured between 1925 and 1927. Facts and Figures of the Automobile Industry (New York, 1929), 6, 22. There were approximately 7,500,000 cars registered in 1919. “Existing Surfaced Mileage Total” on a scale of 1,000 miles was 200 in 1910, 322 in 1918, 521 in 1925, and 694 in 1930. Historical Statistics of the United States, 458. Newspapers reported the impact of the automobile on dating and elopements. For a moralistic reaction to the phenomenon, see Dorothy Dix, Boston American, Sept. 3, 1912. For an enthusiast of “mobile privacy” in this period, see F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” Scribner’s Magazine, XX (Nov. 1931), 460. Fitzgerald wrote: “As far back as 1915 the unchaperoned young people of the smaller cities had discovered the mobile privacy of that automobile given to young Bill at sixteen to make him ‘self-reliant.’”

26 Dorothy Dix, “A Modern Diana,” Boston American, April 7, 1910.

27 Beatrice Fairfax, ibid., May 28, 1908, Dorothy Dix, ibid., Sept. 9, 1912.
Individualization of members served to disrupt confidence between generations of the family, if not to threaten parents with the role of anachronistic irrelevance. Dorothy Dix observed in 1913 that there had been "so many changes in the conditions of life and point of view in the last twenty years that the parent of today is absolutely unfitted to decide the problems of life for the young man and woman of today. This is particularly the case with women because the whole economic and social position of women has been revolutionized since mother was a girl." Magazine articles lamented "The Passing of the Home Daughter" who preferred the blessed anonymity of the city to "dying of asphyxiation at home!" The same phenomenon helps to explain the popularity in this period of such standardized mothers as Dorothy Dix, Beatrice Fairfax, and Emily Post, each of whom was besieged with queries on the respective rights of mothers and daughters.

Woman's individualization resulted mainly because, whether single or married, gainfully employed or not, she spent more time outside her home. Evidence demonstrates that the so-called job and kitchen revolutions were already in advanced stages by 1910. The great leap forward in women's participation in economic life came between 1900 and 1910; the percentage of women who were employed changed only slightly from 1910 to 1930. A comparison of the percentages of gainfully employed women aged 16 to 44 between 1890 and 1930 shows that they comprised 21.7 percent of Americans employed in 1890, 23.5 percent in 1900, 28.1 percent in 1910, 28.3 percent in 1920, and 29.7 percent in 1930. While occupational activity for women appears to stagnate from 1910 to 1920, in reality considerable restructuring occurred with women leaving roles as domestics and assuming positions affording more personal independence as clerks and stenographers.

Married women, especially those in the upper and middle classes, enjoyed commensurate opportunities. Experts in household management advised women to rid themselves of the maid and turn to appliances as the "maid of all service." Statistics on money expended on those industries

32 Ibid., Aug. 21, 1913.
34 Sophonisba P. Breckinridge, Women in the Twentieth Century: A Study of Their Political, Social and Economic Activities (New York, 1933), 112. Overall percentages of women gainfully employed rose from 19 percent of the total work force in 1890 to 20.6 percent in 1900, 24.3 percent in 1910, 24 percent in 1920, and 23.3 percent in 1930. Ibid., 108.
35 While the number of women who worked as domestics declined after 1910, large numbers of women were employed for the first time as clerks and stenographers. In fact, more women were employed in both these occupations between 1910 and 1920 than between 1920 and 1930. Ibid., 129, 177.
which reduced home labor for the wife suggest that women in middle-income families gained considerable leisure after 1914. This idea is also corroborated from other sources, especially from the tone and content of advertising in popular magazines when they are compared with advertising at the turn of the century. Generally speaking, women depicted in advertising in or about 1900 are well rounded, have gentle, motherly expressions, soft billowy hair, and delicate hands. They are either sitting down or standing motionless; their facial expressions are immobile as are their corseted figures. After 1910, they are depicted as more active figures with more of their activity taking place outside their homes. One woman tells another over the phone: “Yes[,] drive over right away—I’ll be ready. My housework! Oh that’s all done. How do I do it? I just let electricity do my work nowadays.” Vacuum cleaners permitted the housewife to “Push the Button—and Enjoy the Springtime!” Van Camp’s “Pork and Beans” prom-


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1909</th>
<th>1914</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>1923</th>
<th>1929</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) canned fruits and vegetables</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>234</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>625</td>
<td>930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) cleaning and polishing preparations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) electricity in household operation</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>615.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) mechanical appliances (refrigerators,</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>533</td>
<td>804.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sewing machines, washers, cooking)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of expenditures on household</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>equipment to total expenditures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a-b) is found in William H. Lough, High-Level Consumption: Its Behavior; Its Consequences (New York, 1935), 236, 241. These figures are tabulated in millions of dollars for 1935. Items (c-d) and the percentage of expenditure on household equipment to total expenditures were taken from James Dewhurst, America’s Needs and Resources: A New Survey (New York, 1955), 702, 704, 180.

Realistic novelists note the leisure of the middle-class women. David Graham Phillips, The Hungry Heart (New York, 1909) and Old Wives’ Tales (New York, 1908); Robert Herrick, Together (New York, 1908), especially 515-17.

For example, see Cosmopolitan, XXXV (May-Oct. 1903); Ladies Home Journal, XXI (Dec. 1903-May 1904). A notable exception showing a woman riding a bicycle may be found in ibid. (April 1904), 39.

Ladies Home Journal, XXXIV (May 1917), for example, shows a woman entertaining stylish women friends (34, 89, 92), driving the car or on an automobile trip (36-37, 74), economizing on time spent in housework (42), the object of “outdoor girl” ads (78), beautifying at a social affair or appearing very chic (102, 106). Perhaps the best illustration for women’s activity in advertisements was employed in Ladies Home Journal by Williams Tell Powder. It read, “After the game, the tide, the brisk walk, or a day at the sea-shore, turn for comfort to Williams Tell Powder.” Ibid., XXXIV (July 1917), 74.

Collier’s, 56 (Nov. 27, 1915), 4.

Cosmopolitan, LIX (June 1915), advertising section, 50.
ised to save her "100 hours yearly," and Campbell's soups encouraged, "Get some fun out of life," since it was unnecessary to let the "three-meals-a-day problem tie you down to constant drudgery." Wizard Polish, Minute Tapioca, and Minute Gelatine also offered the same promise. The advertising image of women became more natural, even nonchalant. A lady entertaining a friend remarks: "I don't have to hurry nowadays. I have a Florence Automatic Oil Stove in my kitchen." It had become "so very easy" to wax the floors that well-dressed women could manage them. And they enjoyed a round of social activities driving the family car.

It was in this setting that the flapper appeared along with her older married sister who sought to imitate her. No one at the office or in the next block cared much about their morals as long as the one was efficient and the other paid her bills on time. And given the fact that both these women had more leisure and wished "to participate in what men call 'the game of life'" rather than accept "the mere humdrum of household duties," it is little wonder that contemporaries rightly assessed the danger of the situation for traditional morals by 1910.

The ensuing decade was marked by the development of a revolution in manners and morals; its chief embodiment was the flapper who was urban based and came primarily from the middle and upper classes. Young—whether in fact or fancy—assertive, and independent, she experimented with intimate dancing, permissive favors, and casual courtships or affairs. She joined men as comrades, and the differences in behavior of the sexes were narrowed. She became in fact in some degree desexualized. She might ask herself, "Am I Not a Boy? Yes, I Am—Not." Her speech, her interest in thrills and excitement, her dress and hair, her more aggressive sexuality, even perhaps her elaborate beautification, which was a statement of intentions, all point to this. Women, whether single or married, became at once more attractive and freer in their morals and paradoxically less feminine. Indeed, the term sexual revolution as applied to the Progressive era means reversal in the traditional role of women just as it describes a pronounced familiarity of the sexes.

40 Collier's, 56 (Sept. 25, 1915), 22.
41 Ibid. (Nov. 27, 1915), 23.
42 Ladies Home Journal, XXXV (April 1918), 58.
43 Ibid., 57.
44 Ibid., XXXIII (Jan. 1916), 46-47. Women drove their friends and families about in their cars. Ibid., XXXII (July 1915), 34-35; (Aug. 1915), 38-39; (Oct. 1915), 86; XXXIII (Nov. 1916), 71.
46 Nell Brinkley, a nationally syndicated cartoonist and commentator on women's activities, asked this question of one of her young women. Boston American, July 14, 1913.
The unmarried woman after 1910 was living in the "Day of the Girl." Dorothy Dix described "the type of girl that the modern young man falls for" in 1915 as a "husky young woman who can play golf all day and dance all night, and drive a motor car, and give first aid to the injured if anybody gets hurt, and who is in no more danger of swooning than he is." Little wonder she was celebrated in song as "A Dangerous Girl"; the lyrics of one of the popular songs for 1916 read, "You dare me, you scare me, and still I like you more each day. But you're the kind that will charm; and then do harm; you've got a dangerous way." The "most popular art print . . . ever issued" by Puck depicts a made-up young lady puckering her lips and saying "Take It From Me!" The American girl of 1900 was not described in similar terms. The lovely and gracious Gibson Girl was too idealized to be real. And when young lovers trysted in advertising, they met at Horlick's Malted Milk Bar; he with his guitar, and she with her parasol. Beatrice Fairfax could still reply archaically about the need for "maidenly reserve" to such queries as those on the proprieties of men staring at women on the streets. And the Wellesley College News in 1902 reported that students were not permitted to have a Junior Prom because it would be an occasion for meeting "promiscuous men," although the college sanctioned "girl dances."

The girls, however, dispensed with "maidenly reserve." In 1910, Margaret Deland, the novelist, could announce a "Change in the Feminine Ideal."

This young person . . . with surprisingly bad manners—has gone to college, and when she graduates she is going to earn her own living . . . she won't go to church; she has views upon marriage and the birth-rate, and she utters them calmly, while her mother blushes with embarrassment; she occupies herself, passionately, with everything except the things that used to occupy the minds of girls.

Many young women carried their own latchkeys. Meanwhile, as Doro-
thy Dix noted, it had become "literally true that the average father does not know, by name or sight, the young man who visits his daughter and who takes her out to places of amusement." She was distressed over the widespread use by young people of the car which she called the "devil's wagon." Another writer asked: "Where Is Your Daughter This Afternoon?" "Are you sure that she is not being drawn into the whirling vortex of afternoon 'trots'?"

Polly, Cliff Sterrett's remarkable comic-strip, modern girl from *Polly and Her Pals*, washed dishes under the shower and dried them with an electric fan; and while her mother tried hard to domesticate her, Polly wondered, "Gee Whiz! I wish I knew what made my nose shine!"

Since young women were working side by side with men and recreating more freely and intimately with them, it was inevitable that they behave like men. Older people sometimes carped that growing familiarity meant that romance was dead or that "nowadays brides hardly blush, much less faint." And Beatrice Fairfax asked, "Has Sweet Sixteen Vanished?" But some observers were encouraged to note that as girls' ways approximated men's, the sexes were, at least, more comradely. The modern unmarried woman had become a "Diana, Hunting in the Open." Dorothy Dix reported that "nice girls, good girls, girls in good positions in society—frankly take the initiative in furthering an acquaintance with any man who happens to strike their fancy." The new ideal in feminine figure, dress, and hair styles was all semi-masculine. The "1914 Girl" with her "slim hips and boy-carriage" was a "slim, boylike creature." The "new figure is Amazonian, rather than Milian. It is boyish rather than womanly. It is strong rather than soft." Her dress styles, meanwhile, de-emphasized both

---

82 *Boston American*, May 6, 1910.
84 Ethel Watts Mumford, "Where Is Your Daughter This Afternoon?" *Harper's Weekly*, LVIII (Jan. 17, 1914), 28
87 Deland, "Change in the Feminine Ideal," 293.
88 *Boston American*, March 24, 1916. In a letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, one critic of the "women of New York" complained that they seemed to be part of a "new race" or even a "super sex." He waxed poetic: "Sweet seventeen is rouge-pot mad, And bobbles to her tasks blaze, ... Where are the girls of yesterday?" *New York Times*, July 26, 1914.
89 Miller, "New Dances and the Younger Generation," 250. According to Helen Rowland, the woman was "no longer Man's plaything, but his playmate ..." Helen Rowland, "The Emancipation of the Rib," *Delineator*, LXXVII (March 1911), 233.
90 *Boston American*, April 7, 1910.
hips and bust while they permitted the large waist. The boyish coiffure began in 1912 when young women began to tuck-under their hair with a ribbon; and by 1913-1914, Newport ladies, actresses like Pauline Frederick, then said to be the prettiest girl in America, and the willowy, popular dancer Irene Castle were wearing short hair. By 1915, the Ladies' Home Journal featured women with short hair on its covers, and even the pure type of woman who advertised Ivory Soap appeared to be shorn.

The unmarried flapper was a determined pleasure-seeker whom novelist Owen Johnson described collectively as "determined to liberate their lives and claim the same rights of judgment as their brothers." The product of a "feminine revolution startling in the shock of its abruptness," she was living in the city independently of her family. Johnson noted: "She is sure of one life only and that one she passionately desires. She wants to live that life to its fullest. . . . She wants adventure. She wants excitement and mystery. She wants to see, to know, to experience. . . ." She expressed both a "passionate revolt against the commonplace" and a "scorn of conventions." Johnson's heroine in The Salamander, Doré Baxter, embodied his views. Her carefree motto is reminiscent of Fitzgerald's flappers of the Twenties. "'How do I know what I'll do to-morrow?' "'Her nightly prayer, the modest 'O Lord! give me everything I want!' "'Love was her 'supreme law of conduct,'" and she, like the literary flappers of the Twenties, feared "thirty as a sort of sepulcher, an end of all things!'" Johnson believed that all young women in all sections of the country had "a little touch of the Salamander," each alike being impelled by "an impetuous frenzy . . . to sample each new excitement;" both the "safe and the dangerous." Girls "seemed determined to have their fling like men," the novelist Gertrude Atherton noted in Current Opinion, "and some of the stories [about them] made even my sophisticated hair crackle at the roots. . . ." Beatrice Fairfax deplored

"Ibid., Nov. 27, Dec. 8, 1912.
On Newport and Boston society women see ibid., July 6, 27, Aug. 10, 24, 1913. Pauline Frederick's picture may be found in ibid., Aug. 2, 1913. For Irene Castle, see Mrs. and Mrs. Vernon Castle, Modern Dancing (New York, 1914), 98, 105.
"Ladies' Home Journal, XXXII (July and Sept. 1915); ibid. (Nov. 1915), 8.
"Ibid., 9.
"Ibid., 129.
"Ibid., 66.
"Ibid., 61.
""Mrs. Atherton Tells of Her 'Porch of the Devil,'" Current Opinion, LVII (Nov. 1914), 349.
the trends, especially the fact that “Making love lightly, boldly and promiscuously seems to be part of our social structure.” Young men and women kissed though they did not intend to marry. And kissing was shading into spooning (“’To Spoon’ or ’Not to Spoon’ Seems to Be the Burning Question with Modern Young America”) and even “petting,” which was modish among the collegiate set. In fact, excerpts from the diary of a co-ed written before World War I suggest that experimentation was virtually complete within her peer group. She discussed her “adventures” with other college girls. “We were healthy animals and we were demanding our rights to spring’s awakening.” As for men, she wrote, “I played square with the men. I always told them I was not out to pin them down to marriage, but that this intimacy was pleasant and I wanted it as much as they did. We indulged in sex talk, birth control. . . . We thought too much about it.”

One of the most interesting developments in changing sexual behavior which characterized these years was the blurring of age lines between young and middle-aged women in silhouette, dress, and cosmetics. A fashion commentator warned matrons, “This is the day of the figure. . . . The face alone, no matter how pretty, counts for nothing unless the body is as straight and yielding as every young girl’s.” With only slight variations, the optimum style for women’s dress between 1908 and 1918 was a modified sheath, straight up and down and clinging. How different from the styles of the high-busted, broad-hipped mother of the race of 1904 for whom Ella Wheeler Wilcox, the journalist and poet, advised the use of veils because “the slightest approach to masculinity in woman’s attire is always unlovely and disappointing.”

The sloughing off of numerous undergarments and loosening of others underscored women’s quickening activity and increasingly self-reliant mor-

---

78 Boston American, Feb. 8, 1917.
79 The “kiss of friendship” criticized by Fairfax had become a major issue of her mail by 1913. See, for example, ibid., July 5, 1913. Girls shocked her with inquiries as to whether it was permissible to “soul kiss” on a first date. Ibid., Feb. 13, 1914. An engaged girl asked whether it would be all right to kiss men other than her fiancé. Ibid., May 2, 1916.
80 Ibid., Feb. 8, 1917.
81 Fitzgerald, “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” 460.
82 Thomas, Unadjusted Girl, 95.
83 “Today in the world of fashion, all women are young, and they grow more so all the time.” Doeullet, “When All The World Looks Young,” Delineator, LXXXIII (Aug. 1913), 70. Advertisements used flattery or played up the value of youth for women and warned that they might age unless certain products were used. Cosmopolitan, LX (Nov. 1915), 112; Ibid. (July 1915), 81; Ladies Home Journal, XXXII (Nov. 1915), 65; Cosmopolitan, LIX (Oct. 1915), 57.
85 Boston American, March 20, 1910; Delineator, LXXXIX (Oct. 1916), 66.
86 Boston American, March 28, 1904.
Clinging dresses and their "accompanying lack of undergarments" eliminated, according to the president of the New York Cotton Exchange, "at least twelve yards of finished goods for each adult female inhabitant." Corset makers were forced to make adjustments too and use more supple materials. Nevertheless, their sales declined.

The American woman of 1910, in contrast with her sister of 1900, avidly cultivated beauty of face and form. In fact, the first American woman whose photographs and advertising image we can clearly recognize as belonging to our times lived between 1910 and 1920. "Nowadays," the speaker for a woman's club declared in 1916, "only the very poor or the extremely careless are old or ugly. You can go to a beauty shop and choose the kind of beauty you will have." Beautification included the use of powder, rouge, lipstick, eyelash and eyebrow stain. Advertising was now manipulating such images for face powder as "Mother tried it and decided to keep it for herself," or "You can have beautiful Eyebrows and Eyelashes . . . . Society women and actresses get them by using Lash-Brow-Ine." Nearly every one of the numerous advertisements for cosmetics promised some variation of "How to Become Beautiful, Fascinating, Attractive."

In her dress as well as her use of cosmetics, the American woman gave evidence that she had abandoned passivity. An unprecedented public display of the female figure characterized the period. Limbs now became legs and more of them showed after 1910, although they were less revealing than the promising hosiery advertisements. Rolled-down hose first appeared in 1917. Dresses for opera and restaurant were deeply cut in front and back, and not even the rumor that Mrs. John Jacob Astor had suffered a chest cold as a result of wearing deep decolleté deterred their wearers.

"Boston American, Dec. 10, 1916."
"Delineator, LXXV (July 1914), 35."
"Boston American, Sept. 3, 1916."
"Cosmopolitan, LXV (July 1913)."
"An editorial declared that women's dresses in 1913 had approached "the danger line of indecency about as closely as they could." New York Times, July 6, 1914."
"Ladies Home Journal, XXXIV (Oct. 1917), 98."
"Boston American, June 8, 1907. "The conventions of evening dress have changed radically in the last four or five years. Not so very long ago a high-necked gown was considered at law for all evening functions except formal dinners and the opera. Nowadays, well-dressed women wear decolleté dresses even for home dinners, and semi-decolleté gowns for restaurants and theaters." Delineator, LXXV (Jan. 1919), 66."
"Eleanor Chalmers, Delineator, LXXXIV (April 1914), 38. The sense of relief these changes brought is amusingly described in Dorothy A. Plum, comp., The Magnificent Enterprise: A Chronicle of Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, 1961), 43-44."
As for gowns, "Fashion says—Evening gowns must be sleeveless. . . . afternoon gowns are made with semi-transparent yokes and sleeves."\(^{22}\) Undoubtedly, this vogue for transparent blouses and dresses\(^{23}\) caused the editor of the *Unpopular Review* to declare: "At no time and place under Christianity, except the most corrupt periods in France. . . . certainly never before in America, has woman's form been so freely displayed in society and on the street."\(^{30}\)

In addition to following the example of young women in dress and beautification, middle-aged women, especially those from the middle and upper classes, were espousing their permissive manners and morals.\(^{32}\) Smoking and, to a lesser extent, drinking in public were becoming fashionable for married women of the upper class and were making headway at other class levels.\(^{33}\) As early as 1910, a prominent clubwoman stated: "It has become a well-established habit for women to drink cocktails. It is thought the smart thing to do."\(^{194}\) Even before Gertrude Atherton described in the novel *Black Oxen* the phenomenon of the middle-aged women who sought to be attractive to younger men, supposedly typifying the 1920s,\(^{34}\) it was evident in the play "Years of Discretion." Written by Frederic Hatton and Fanny Locke Hatton, and staged by Belasco, the play was "welcomed cordially both in New York and Chicago" in 1912. It featured a widowed mother forty-eight years of age, who announces, "I intend to look under forty—lots under. I have never attracted men, but I know I can."\(^{35}\) Again, "I mean to have a wonderful time. To have all sorts and kinds of experience. I intend to love and be loved, to lie and cheat."\(^{36}\) Dorothy Dix was dismayed over "the interest that women . . . have in what we are pleased to euphoniously term the 'erotic.'"\(^{192}\) She continued, "I'll bet there are not ten thousand women in the whole United States who couldn't

\(^{22}\) *Cosmopolitan*, LIX (July 1913).

\(^{23}\) *Ladies Home Journal*, XXXII (Oct. 1915), 108; *ibid.*, XXXIII (Oct. 1916), 82; *ibid.*, XXXIII (Nov. 1916), 78-79; *ibid.*, XXXIV (Jan. 1917), 53.

\(^{32}\) *The Cult of St. Vitus,* *Unpopular Review*, III (Jan.-March 1915), 94.

\(^{34}\) *Boston American*, July 6, 1912. Dix noted "flirtatious" middle-aged women were "sping the airs and graces of the debutante" and "trying to act kittenish" with men.


\(^{36}\) *Boston American*, March 7, 1910.

\(^{194}\) *Leuchtenburg, Perils of Prosperity*, 174-75.

\(^{192}\) "Years of Discretion"—A Play of Cupid at Fifty," *Current Opinion*, LIV (Feb. 1913), 116.

get one hundred in an examination of the life and habits of Evelyn Nesbitt and Harry Thaw. ... Married women among the fashionable set held the great parties, at times scandalous ones which made the 1920s seem staid by comparison. They hired the Negro orchestras at Newport and performed and sometimes invented the daring dances. They conscientiously practiced birth control, as did women of other classes. And they initiated divorce proceedings, secure in the knowledge that many of their best friends had done the same thing.

Perhaps the best insights on the mores and morals of this group are to be found in the writings of the contemporary, realistic novelist, Robert Herrick. Herrick derived his heroines from "the higher income groups, the wealthy, upper middle, and professional classes among which he preferred to move." His heroines resemble literary flappers of the 1920s in their repudiation of childbearing. "It takes a year out of a woman's life, of course, no matter how she is situated," they say, or, "Cows do that." Since their lives were seldom more than a meaningless round of social experiences, relieved principally by romantic literature, many of them either contemplated or consented to infidelity. Thus Margaret Pole confesses to her friend, Conny Woodyard, "I'd like to lie out on the beach and forget children and servants and husbands, and stop wondering what life is. Yes, I'd like a vacation—in the Windward Islands, with somebody who understood. 'To wit, a man!' added Conny. 'Yes, a man! But only for the trip.' They came finally to live for love in a manner that is startlingly reminiscent of some of the famous literary women of the Twenties."

108 Boston American, April 16, 1908. Evelyn Nesbitt, the wife of Harry Thaw, was romantically involved with architect Stanford White, whom Thaw shot to death.
109 Ibid., Aug. 25, Sept. 1, 1912.
110 Most of the dances which became very popular after 1910, such as the Turkey Trot, the Bunny Hug, and the Grizzly Bear, afforded a maximum of motion in a minimum of space. The Chicken Flip was invented by a Boston society woman. Ibid., Nov. 11, 1912. See also "New Reflections on the Dancing Mania," Current Opinion, LV (Oct. 1913), 262.
112 Alfred Kazin, "Three Pioneer Realists," Saturday Review of Literature, XX (July 8, 1939), 15. Herrick's biographer, Blake Nevius, declares, "It can be argued that Herrick is the most comprehensive and reliable social historian in American fiction to appear in the interregnum between Howells and the writers of the Twenties. ..." Blake Nevius, Robert Herrick: The Development of a Novelist (Berkeley, 1962). Preface.
113 Nevius, Robert Herrick, 177.
116 Herrick describes the temperament of the modern woman as one of "mistress rather than the wife. ... I shall be a person with a soul of my own. To have one man must win me not once, but daily." Ibid., 516. The last sentence above nearly duplicates Rosalind's statement to her beau in This Side of Paradise, "I have to be won all over again.
Insights regarding the attitudes of married women from the urban lower middle class can be found in the diary of Ruth Vail Randall, who lived in Chicago from 1910 to the date of her suicide, March 6, 1920. A document of urban sociology, the diary transcends mere personal experience and becomes a commentary on group behavior of the times. Mrs. Randall was reared in a family that owned a grocery store, was graduated from high school in Chicago, and was married at twenty to Norman B. Randall, then twenty-one. She worked after marriage in a department store and later for a brief period as a model. She looked to marriage, especially its romance, as the supreme fulfillment of her life and was bitterly disappointed with her husband. She began to turn to other men whom she met at work or places of recreation, and her husband left her. Fearing that her lover would leave her eventually as well, she killed him and herself.

The diary focuses on those conditions which made the revolution in morals a reality. The young couple lived anonymously in a highly mobile neighborhood where their morals were of their own making. Mrs. Randall did not want children; she aborted their only child. She was also averse to the reserved "womanly" role, which her husband insisted that she assume. She complained, "Why cannot a woman do all man does?" She wished that men and women were more alike in their social roles. She repudiated involvement in her home, resolved to exploit equally every privilege which her husband assumed, drank, flirted, and lived promiscuously. Telephones and cars made her extramarital liaisons possible. Even before her divorce, she found another companion; flouting convention, she wrote, "He and I have entered a marriage pact according to our own ideas." Throughout her diary she entertained enormous, almost magical, expectations of love. She complained that her lovers no more than her husband provided what she craved—tenderness and companionship. Disillusionment with one of them caused her to cry out, "I am miserable. I have the utmost contempt for myself. But the lake is near and soon it will be warm. Oh, God to rest in your arms. To rest—and to have peace."

That America was experiencing a major upheaval in morals during the Progressive era is nowhere better ascertained than in the comprehensive ef-

every time you see me." F. Scott Fitzgerald, This Side of Paradise (New York, 1920), 194.

---

11 Chicago Herald and Examiner, March 10-17, 1920.
12 ibid., March 10, 1920.
13 ibid., March 16, 1920.
14 ibid.
15 ibid., March 11-12, 1920.
16 ibid., March 13, 14, 1920.
17 ibid., March 13, 1920.
forts by civic officials and censorial citizens to control them. Disapproval extended not only to such well-known staples as alcohol, divorce, and prostitution, but also to dancing, woman’s dress, cabarets, theaters and movies, and birth control. “Mrs. Warren’s Profession” was withdrawn from the New York stage in 1905 after a one night performance, the manager of the theater later being charged with offending public decency.\footnote{122} When a grand jury in New York condemned the “turkey trot and kindred dances” as “indecent,” the judge who accepted the presentment noted that “Rome’s downfall was due to the degenerate nature of its dancers, and I only hope that we will not suffer the same result.”\footnote{122} Public dancing was henceforth to be licensed. Mayor John Fitzgerald personally assisted the morals campaign in Boston by ordering the removal from a store of an objectionable picture which portrayed a “show-girl” with her legs crossed.\footnote{124} Meanwhile, the “X-Ray Skirt” was outlawed in Portland, Oregon, and Los Angeles;\footnote{125} and the police chief of Louisville, Kentucky, ordered the arrest of a number of women appearing on the streets with slit skirts.\footnote{126} Witnessing to a general fear that the spreading knowledge of contraception might bring on sexual license, the federal and several state governments enacted sumptuary legislation.\footnote{127} And in two celebrated incidents, the offenders, Van K. Allison (1916) in Boston and Margaret Sanger (1917) in New York, were prosecuted and sent to jail.\footnote{128}

Public officials were apprehensive about the sweeping influence of the movies on the masses, “at once their book, their drama, their art. To some it has become society, school, and even church.”\footnote{129} They proceeded to set up boards of censorship with powers to review and condemn movies in four states: Pennsylvania (1911), Ohio (1913), Maryland (1916), and Kansas (1917), and in numerous cities beginning with Chicago in 1907.\footnote{130} The Pennsylvania board, for example, prohibited pictures which displayed nudity, prolonged passion, women drinking and smoking, and infidelity. It protected Pennsylvanians from such films produced between 1915 and

\begin{itemize}
\item 122 New York Tribune, Nov. 1, 1905.
\item 123 New York Times, May 28, 1913.
\item 124 Ibid., Dec. 20, 1912.
\item 125 Ibid., Aug. 20, 23, 1915.
\item 126 Ibid., June 29, 1915.
\item 130 Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, The Morals of the Movie (Philadelphia, 1922), 115-23.
\end{itemize}
1918 as "What Every Girl Should Know," "A Factory Magdalene," and "Damaged Goodness."'132

Such determination proved unavailing, however, even as the regulatory strictures were being applied. According to one critic the "sex drama" using "plain, blunt language" had become "a commonplace" of the theater after 1910 and gave the "tender passion rather the worst for it in recent years."133 Vice films packed them in every night, especially after the smashing success of "Traffic in Souls," which reportedly grossed $450,000.134 In Boston the anti-vice campaign itself languished because there was no means of controlling "the kitchenette-apartment section." "In these apartment houses, there are hundreds of women who live as they please and who entertain as they will."135 Mayor Fitzgerald's "show-girl," evicted from her saucy perch, gained more notoriety when she appeared in a Boston newspaper the following day.136 Even Anthony Comstock, that indefatigable guardian of public morals, had probably come to look a bit like a comic character living beyond his times.137

When Mrs. Sanger was arrested for propagating birth control information in 1917, she confidently stated, "I have nothing to fear... Regardless of the outcome I shall continue my work, supported by thousands of men and women throughout the country."138 Her assurance was well founded. Three years earlier her supporters had founded a National Birth Control League; and in 1919, this organization opened its first public clinic.139 But most encouraging for Mrs. Sanger was the impressive testimony that many Americans were now practicing or interested in birth control.140 When Paul B. Blanchard, pastor of the Maverick Congregational Church in East Boston, protested the arrest of Van K. Allison, he charged, "If the truth were made public and the laws which prevent the spreading of even oral information about birth control were strictly enforced how very few of the married society leaders, judges, doctors, ministers, and businessmen would be outside the prison dock!"141

133 Boston American, Aug. 10, 1913.
134 Ramsey, A Million and One Nights, II, 617.
135 Boston American, July 7, 1917.
136 Ibid., Dec. 20, 1912.
138 Boston American, Jan. 4, 1917.
The American Woman

The foregoing demonstrates that a major shift in American manners and morals occurred in the Progressive era, especially after 1910. Changes at this time, though developing out of still earlier conditions, represented such visible departures from the past and were so commonly practiced as to warrant calling them revolutionary. Too often scholars have emphasized the Twenties as the period of significant transition and World War I as a major cause of the phenomenon. Americans of the 1920s, fresh from the innovative wartime atmosphere, undoubtedly quickened and deepened the revolution. Women from smaller cities and towns contested what was familiar terrain to an already seasoned cadre of urban women and a formidable group of defectors. Both in their rhetoric and their practices, apparent even before the war, the earlier group had provided the shibboleths for the 1920s; they first asked, “What are Patterns for?” The revolution in manners and morals was, of course, but an integral part of numerous, contemporary, political and social movements to free the individual by reordering society. Obviously, the Progressive era, more than the 1920s, represents the substantial beginnings of contemporary American civilization.

The revolution in manners and morals, particularly as it affected women, took the twofold form of more permissive sexuality and diminished femininity. Women from the upper classes participated earlier, as is evidenced by their introductory exhibition of fashions, hair styles, dances, cosmetics, smoking, and drinking. Realistic novels concerned with marriage suggest that they entertained ideas of promiscuity and even infidelity before women of the lower classes. Yet the cardinal condition of change was not sophistication but urban living and the freedom it conferred. As technology and economic progress narrowed the gap between the classes, middle-class women and even those below were free to do many of the same things almost at the same time. Above all, the revolution in manners and morals after 1910 demonstrates that sexual freedom and the twentieth-century American city go together.

Rose Pastor Stokes was literally mobbed by an eager crowd in Carnegie Hall when she offered, in defiance of the police, to distribute printed slips bearing a formula for birth control.” Ibid., May 6, 1916.