



**INTEGRATING
“HERSTORY”
INTO
HISTORY**

Helping Students Appreciate Women's Contributions to Civilization

By Brian E. Strayer

Should Seventh-day Adventist schools teach classes in male history?

Probably your initial reaction to that question falls into one of three categories: (1) The word *male* is a misprint; the author meant "female history"; (2) since most of the history now taught is male oriented, why introduce a new course in the subject? or (3) No! We need more emphasis on *women's* roles in history. If you recognize the narrow emphases in the traditional curricula and want to broaden your students' understanding, this article is for you.

During the 1960s and 1970s many colleges and universities began to teach interdisciplinary courses in women's studies. By 1978, according to Gerda Lerner,¹ 301 schools featured women's studies programs. Of these, 275 offered a B.A. degree in the area; 21, an M.A.; and 5, a Ph.D.

Recognizing that women constitute half of humankind, not some small subgroup, and that traditional history emphasizes male exploits and values to the exclusion of female contributions and ideals, Lerner suggests that teachers need both a new conceptual framework and different sources for teaching

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women's history.

Having taught courses in women's history at the University of Iowa, Southern College of SDA, and being scheduled to teach the subject next year in the Honors Sections of the History of Civilization courses program at Andrews University, I have found that the key to integrating "herstory" into my classes is asking the right questions. Regardless of the textbook, class level or size, or the historical topic, one can highlight the significance of women's roles, attitudes, and values by asking several of the following probing questions:

Probing Questions

1. Who and where are the "missing women" during this era?
2. What roles did women play during the American Revolution, Civil War, and so forth?
3. How did women live in ancient Greece, the American West, in London's slums?
4. What did women contribute to abolitionism, the progressive movement, labor movement, or socialism?

5. How was life different for women in schools, at work, in marriage?
6. What kind of paid work did women do during this period?
7. How would this event or epoch be different if seen through the eyes of a woman and interpreted by her values?
8. How did women in this century or country view their world?
9. What has been the experience of women of different classes (nobility, peasants, middle class), races (black, white, Asian, native American), religions (Roman Catholic, Puritan, Moslem, Quaker), and ethnic groups (German, Dutch, English) during a specific era?
10. How can these differences and similarities be explained?

Good questions, however, may fall flat unless you introduce your students to fresh, provocative interpretations of women's views and roles as portrayed in textbooks, films, and reading material. For background, read two booklets available from the American Historical Association: *Recent United States Scholarship on the History of*
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stage in earth's history. Christian education can combine the spiritual aspects of life with the insights gained through social studies.

As Adventists we have a mission that requires us to be alert to changes in society and to prepare for the ultimate showdown between good and evil. This should encourage us to take the lead in strengthening the social-studies program where we have church-operated primary and secondary schools as well as in our teacher-training programs. □

REFERENCES

¹ Henry O. Ayot, Stephen Mutunga, Sylvester N. Diah, "African Curriculum Organisation, Course Six: Curriculum Development in Social Studies" (Nairobi: 1981). Unpublished.

² A. Irumba, "Social Studies in the Third World. A Luxury or Necessity?" Unpublished paper prepared at the University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Kenya, 1987, page 3.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

⁴ Henry O. Ayot, "African Studies Programme. Evaluation and Present State of Social Studies Education in Africa." Unpublished paper used at Kenyatta Teachers College, 1981, pp. 1, 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸ Educational Development Unit, Ministry of Education, "Social Studies Syllabus for Primary Schools," Zimbabwe, March 1980.

⁹ Irumba, p. 6.

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*Women and Teaching Women's History.*²

Once armed with this material and a new conceptual framework for broadening the study of history, choose textbooks, films, and other materials to enhance students' awareness of women's contributions. At the K-8 level where history is introduced as social studies, films like "And Everything Nice," "Other Women, Other Work," "Women's Place," and "Young Women in Sports," (see bibliography) can spark open-ended discussions on male/female roles in society.

Hands-on Projects

Elementary teachers can assign projects that offer "hands-on" experiences to expand students' understanding, apply research

skills to history, and make women's history "come alive." Students can design bulletin boards featuring pictures of women in nontraditional jobs; leading out in great moments of U.S. or world history; guiding the suffrage, labor, birth control, or other movements; and showing how women's work has changed in America from colonial days to the present.

Younger pupils also enjoy role-playing, acting out the lives of others. Why not have them compose plays, skits, or charades on the theme "If I were a(n) . . ." (Puritan woman, suffragist, female abolitionist, et cetera). In these dramas the students can imagine their feelings and responses during a specific event or era in a male-dominated society.

Gifted students can be assigned to do oral book reports on famous women in U.S. or world history or on topics related to women. Such reports will be interesting and stimulating for the whole class.

Be sure to include church and community resource people in broadening the curriculum. Talks by female professionals, skilled laborers, and craftswomen can generate much dialogue and help young people think more broadly about their own potential.

Nor should worship time and after-lunch story time be overlooked as opportunities for introducing women's roles in SDA history. Try reading books like *Lucy Miller, The Girl Who Waited for Jesus; Mary Andrews, Companion of Sorrows; Journey to Freedom* (Anna Knight's story); or *Amy Carmichael, Rebel Turned Missionary*, all available at your Adventist Book Center. These books emphasize the invaluable contributions women have made to our church's past and present.

Ideas for Secondary Teaching

At the academy level, the history teacher has greater freedom to choose a quality textbook and materials to integrate "herstory" into the curricula. Mazour, Peoples, and Rabb's *People and Nations, A World History*³ gives significant emphasis to women in ancient Egypt, Babylon, Sparta, Athens, India, China, and Japan, as well as

women in the African kingdoms, Islamic nations, and feudal Europe. The book also highlights women's roles during the French and Industrial revolutions, suffrage struggle, the two World Wars, as well as marriage customs through the ages, 19th-century family reform laws, and women's education and jobs.

For an academy-level U.S. history textbook sensitive to women's issues, none surpasses Risjord and Haywoode's *People and Our Country*.⁴ This amazing text has 186 page references to 63 topics relating to women (including one page favorably devoted to Ellen Harmon White). Some of the topics include women in abolitionism, education, feminism, employment, government, labor unions, literature, and medicine, as well as black and native American women, and women during key eras (colonial, Revolutionary War, Civil War, New Deal, et cetera). Fascinating photo features highlight little-known women such as Margaret Brent (president of Maryland's colonial assembly), Deborah Sampson (Revolutionary soldier), Belle Boyd (Confederate spy), Vinnie Ream (sculptress), and Dorothy Lange (Depression-era photographer).

Moreover, a host of color films at low rentals (\$10 to \$20) await the social studies and history teacher at city, county, and university film libraries. Academy-age youth will enjoy provocative movies such as "Doll's House: Oppression and Emancipation of Women," "How We Got the Vote," "She's Nobody's Baby," and "You've Come a Long Way, Maybe?"

Students in grades 9-12 civics, world, and U.S. history classes are also ready to tackle more challenging projects as well. Bulletin boards could feature female roles in U.S. history; women in various careers (medicine, law, aviation, art, or politics); women in Seventh-day Adventist history; or women's struggle for the vote, higher wages, entry into colleges and medical schools.

Book reviews (which by now should include some critical thinking skills) on female leaders such as Eleanor of Aquitaine, Mother Theresa, or Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as women's roles in industrial-

ization, 19th-century suffrage movements, abortion and birth-control clinics, and female ordination issues could also stimulate thought.

Students' reasoning abilities and skills in logic can be polished by debates on topics related to women in historical contexts: Should SDA women be ordained as elders or pastors? Is the best man for the job sometimes a woman? Did the Protestant Reformation help or hinder women's roles? Cooperation between teachers of Bible, civics and history, and guidance counselors can lead to presentations by women who serve as elders or pastors, chaplains in hospitals or the armed services, or as counselors to abused women. Listening to these women describe the challenges of their careers and how they prepared for the work they do would be an eye-opening experience for many students.

Suggestions for College-Level Instruction

For the Seventh-day Adventist college or university professor, the market is flooded with textbooks sensitive to religious, minority, and women's issues. Certainly one of the best for a Western civilization course, however, is Kagan, Ozment, and Turner's new textbook *The Western Heritage*.⁵ The authors place significant emphasis on social

and cultural history, including women's roles and family history through the ages. Topics include women in Athens; the Roman family; medieval women and children; the Reformation and changing roles of women; and family life in early modern Europe. In their survey of the modern period, the authors give extensive coverage to why witchcraft and witch hunts occurred; explain the family structure and economy of 18th-century Europe, during the Industrial Revolution in England, and in the late-Victorian era; and explore the new patterns of women's work and roles in post-1945 Europe.

For the Western Civilization instructor, O'Faolain and Martines' book *Not in God's Image: Women in History From the Greeks to the Victorians*⁶ provides a marvelous compendium of primary sources and readings for each era of European history. For U.S. history, Miriam Schneir's *Feminism: The Essential Historical Writings*⁷ includes a broad and often witty selection of period pieces that reflect the spectrum of opinions by and about women for each epoch.

Other Resources

A vast array of audio-visual materials also awaits the enterprising college professor. Some of the best color films, available for nominal rental fees at university media centers, include "Hey! What About Us?"; "Job Discrimination: Doing Something About It"; "The Role of Women in the Movies"; "Sexual Harassment: No Place in the Workplace"; "Sugar and Spice," as well as a host of film biographies on such topics as "Coalmining Women," "Georgia O'Keefe," "Mary Cassatt," and many more.

Hands-on history for college students could include book re-

views on major issues related to women (which should represent in-depth critical analyses, not summary reports); comparative studies (women's roles in ancient Greece compared with Rome; American versus British suffrage movements; Moslem versus Christian women's roles); and significant life-and-times biographies of women.

Student debates on current issues like equal pay, women's ordination, and abortion could explore the prejudices and historical roots of contemporary conditions for women. Panel discussions featuring short reports, dialogue, and question-and-answer periods with audience participation can be beneficial in heightening the awareness of college students of both sexes.

Showing provocative films such as those listed above and in the bibliography can make young people sensitive to biases, historical context, photo slant, and emotional undertones of which they may not be aware. One stunning film in this genre is "Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women," which deals with the sexist imagery perpetuated by alcohol ads in the media.

Broadening the Curriculum

By far the most important step a college professor can take to increase awareness of women's issues in the classroom, however, is to introduce courses that address history, literature, government, sociology, and religion from a woman's perspective.

At present, no Adventist college offers a B.A. degree in women's studies. None even offers regular courses in women's history, though an occasional course featuring women in history, literature, or

BOOK REVIEWS

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Because of the rather widespread misconception of Foy's commission, *The Unknown Prophet* deserves careful reading by all educators in denominational history. Its narrative style, illustrations, and unusually short chapters make the book inviting for secondary-level students while adult readers will enjoy the mix of social, historical, and theological insights that come from getting better acquainted with the first prophet of the Advent Movement.—Tim Poirier. □

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SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY: FILMS

Elementary (K-8)

- "And Everything Nice" (20 min., color, 1974)
- "Katy" (17 min., color, 1974)
- "Olga" (47 min., color, 1975)
- "Other Women, Other Work" (20 min., color, 1973)
- "Rookie of the Year" (47 min., color, 1973)
- "Susan B. Anthony" (20 min., B&W, 1951)
- "Woman's Place" (52 min., color, 1974)
- "Women at Work: Change, Choice, Challenge" (19 min., color, 1977)
- "Young Women in Sports" (16 min., color, 1975)

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the arts has been taught on some campuses.

Colleges offer courses in black history regularly, so why not women's history? Perhaps if we had even *one* SDA woman with a Ph.D. in history teaching at one of our colleges (at present, no such creature exists!), or better yet, an Adventist professional with a master's degree in women's studies, such a program might get off the ground. Maybe the General Conference Department of Education or the Association of Adventist Women could sponsor a likely candidate or endow a chair in women's studies at one college.

Meanwhile, if "herstory" is to be integrated into the K-16 social studies and history curriculum, then teachers must accept the responsibility of including women's issues in their syllabi. Through the use of sensitive textbooks, provocative films, and cooperative student projects, teachers *can* make this vital difference in the classroom. This will pay rich dividends by making classes more interesting for every student, helping young people become more socially aware and sensitive to women's concerns, and training them to be more tolerant citizens and church members in a rapidly changing church and world. As Gerda Lerner states in *Teaching Women's History*:

only after this scholarly effort [to integrate women's issues] has continued for several decades and its results have entered into the general culture, can we hope to define the parameters by which a new, universal history can be created and taught.⁸

You can be a part of that ongoing effort to develop a "new, universal history" sensitive to the concerns of women. Will you accept the challenge? □

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Gerda Lerner, *Teaching Women's History* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1981), p. 1.

² *Recent U.S. Scholarship on the History of Women* (1980) costs \$4.50; *Teaching Women's History* (1981) costs \$5.00. To obtain, send a check or money order to the American Historical Association, 400 A Street SE, Washington, D.C. 20003. A.H.A. will waive handling and shipping charges if teachers identify themselves and their organization.

³ New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

⁴ New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1982.

⁵ New York: Macmillan, 1987.

⁶ New York: 1973 Harper & Row.

⁷ New York: 1972 Vintage Books.

⁸ Lerner, p. 66.

Secondary (9-12)

- "The Bill of Rights in Action: Women's Rights" (23 min., color, 1981)
- "[Shirley] Chisholm: Pursuing the Dream" (42 min., color, 1974)
- "Doll's House: Oppression and Emancipation of Women" (31 min., color, 1986)
- "Emerging Woman" (40 min., B&W, 1974)
- "How We Got the Vote" (55 min., color, 1976)
- "Killing Us Softly: Advertising's Image of Women" (30 min., color, 1986)
- "Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter" (60 min., color, 1980)
- "Nine to Five" (22 min., color, 1975)
- "She's Nobody's Baby" (36 min., color, 1983)
- "Take This Woman" (25 min., color, 1971)
- "Women in Defense" (10 min., B&W, 1941)
- "Women on the March, Parts I & II" (58 min., B&W, 1958)

College (13-16)

- "Coalmining Women" (40 min., color, 1983)
- "Georgia O'Keefe" (60 min., color, 1977)
- "Hey! What About Us?" (15 min., color, 1974)
- "Job Discrimination: Doing Something About It" (59 min., color, 1977)
- "Mary Cassatt Impressionist from Philadelphia" (28 min., color, 1975)
- "Masculine and Feminine: Your Role in Society" (19 min., color, 1971)
- "Role of Women in the Movies" (28 min., color)
- "Sex-role Development" (23 min., color, 1974)
- "Sexual Harrassment: No Place in the Workplace" (23 min., color, 1974)
- "Sugar and Spice" (32 min., color, 1974)
- "Sylvia, Fran, and Joy" (25 min., B&W, 1973)
- "Women in Management: Threat or Opportunity" (29 min., color, 1975)
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BOOKS TO ORDER FOR YOUR LIBRARY

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