

The Most Indifferent Disadvantaged

In four new books a political scientist, a psychologist, and two writers consider America's waste of a great human resource—women.

By BARBARA MILLER SOLOMON

WHAT is the proper sphere of women? The subject of discussion, debate, and increasing controversy in nineteenth-century America, there has never been one simple answer to "the woman question" since the founding of the republic. For as the nation expanded, social patterns became diversified to accommodate the needs of human beings in rural, seafaring, and industrial communities on the frontier, in the small town, and finally in the city. In time, ethnic factors and regional differences in the United States also affected the activities and attitudes of both sexes. As a result the status of women has varied in different segments of American society, changing from generation to generation and from place to place.

Not only have the majority of women always worked in their homes (and frequently in other people's), multitudes throughout our history have labored on farms, in factories or shops. Some have taught school, and many have joined associations for the improvement of society. Still others, relatively few, have become doctors, lawyers, judges, professors, journalists, politicians, novelists, nurses, and social workers, to enumerate some of their activities and occupations. Nevertheless, a complex, paradoxical tradition has developed. It sanctions what women do out of economic or familial or exceptional communal necessity (as in wartime) and still questions what women do voluntarily for individual reasons outside the home.

In our increasingly affluent society more wives and mothers can make their own decisions about whether or not to hold jobs or to pursue careers. However, the freedom to choose how to use their skills and talents is not liberating to all women. For some it creates conflicts which they meet by reducing the level of their expectations of personal achievement.

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Women in American Politics: An Assessment and Sourcebook, by Martin Gruberg (Academia Press. 336 pp. \$7.50); *Few Are Chosen: American Women in Political Life Today*, by Peggy Lamson (Houghton Mifflin. 240 pp. \$5.95); *Developing Woman's Potential*, by Edwin C. Lewis (Iowa State University Press. 389 pp. \$6.95); *Born Female: The High Cost of Keeping Women Down*, by Caroline Bird with Sara Welles Briller (McKay. 288 pp. \$5.95).

Political scientist Martin Gruberg, psychologist Edwin C. Lewis, and two writers, Caroline Bird and Peggy Lamson, express in their respective new books the constructive concern of thoughtful men and women who observe the current waste of America's great human resource, that is, the majority of her population—women. According to the Census estimate, in 1966 there were 99,942,000 women, 60,271,000 of whom were over twenty-one, and 96,900,000 men, 55,829,000 over twenty-one. Far from exploiting this numerical dominance, women, the authors observe, have accepted the psychology of a minority, expecting discrimination and taking it—apparently convinced of their inferiority as the second sex. Gruberg, Lewis, Lamson, and Bird all acknowledge that over the generations most women have been satisfied with a subordinate position in society. Historically, only in periods of great social ferment have small minorities of women, with the help of some men, acted to overcome the indifference of their sex to the attainment of their full rights as Americans.

In the 1960s a new impetus for women's advance has come from two Presidents of the United States, for both Kennedy and Johnson affirmed the importance of women's contributions not only at home but in the public sector of American life. The Commission on the Status of Women established by President Kennedy in 1963 made recommendations to President Johnson in 1965 on how the government could help improve conditions affecting the paid and voluntary employment of women. Since then many states have established their own commissions to continue investiga-

tions on a local basis. With Johnson's support Title VII became part of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, thus prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of "sex" as well as "race, color, religion, or national origin." More than any of his predecessors, Johnson has tried to recruit women for positions of responsibility and used his high office in many visible ways to help eliminate discrimination against women in governmental jobs.

Responsive to this official "climate for sex equality," Gruberg, Lamson, Lewis and Bird, within their specialized perspectives, examine the ways in which women spend their lives in the 1960s. The four agree that although more women hold jobs in the United States than ever before (a trend that is expected to grow), the proportion of those in positions of leadership in government and business is not rising, while in the professions the proportion is actually declining. Assuming that women have more opportunities than heretofore and that in principle they are free to do anything they want, how does one explain the limited number at the top in every field? The authors focus on different aspects of the problem.

IN his survey, *Women in American Politics*, Martin Gruberg assesses the activities of women from 1920 to the present as voters, interest-group members, party members, and government officials, and finds little evidence of distaff political influence. In contrast to the fears of opponents to their suffrage, women have not exploited their force in numbers to form a pressure group; nor have they resorted to bloc voting. Rather, they have lagged notably behind men in using their suffrage, the nonvoters tending to be young and unattached to a community, or citizens older than sixty and presumably remote from contemporary problems. Until fairly recently those who voted belonged primarily to economically and educationally favored groups (the fewest living in the South), and they proved even more conservative on public policies than their predominantly Republican husbands. Only in the Presidential election of 1964 did more women than men show preference for the candidates of the Democratic Party and,

significantly, at that time, according to the Gallup Poll, at least as many women as men voted (although proportionately fewer). Perhaps this aspect of activism in the 1960s foreshadows a new trend toward greater participation by women voters which will continue to expand. They have a long way to go, for even in 1964 twenty-two million eligible women did not vote.

Their record since 1920 for holding office is still more deflating: ten women have served as United States Senators, of whom only five were elected (three Republicans and two Democrats); sixty-five have been members of the House of Representatives (thirty-seven Democrats and twenty-eight Republicans); women holding legislative posts approximate 2 per cent and those in executive and judicial posts still less. Gruberg found that the majority—widows of Representatives or Senators—had previously worked with their husbands and had access to large financial backing; or, increasingly, they were women whose husbands were able to cooperate because of flexible business or professional occupations. Although most of the early office-holders gained their posts through fortuitous circumstances, Gruberg observes there are now “fewer widows and more wives in Congress” who have professional orientation and training in the law.

This promising trend, evidenced in the caliber of women now in government, receives fuller treatment in *Few Are Chosen: American Women in Political Life Today*. In contrast to Gruberg’s broad coverage, Peggy Lamson concentrates on ten outstanding figures now in office: the one woman United States Senator, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine; four U.S. Representatives—Frances Bolton of Ohio; Martha Griffiths of Michigan; Patsy Mink of Hawaii, and Margaret Heckler of Massachusetts; the highest Presidential appointee, Assistant Secretary of Labor Esther Peterson, originally from Utah; a federal judge, Constance Baker Motley of New York; an Ambassador, Eugenie Anderson of Minnesota; Connecticut’s Assistant Secretary of State, Ella Grasso; and the only woman mayor in the United States, Ann Ucello of Hartford, Connecticut. Of diverse racial and ethnic origin, most of this select group grew up in modest economic circumstances; only one is not married and seven have living husbands; all but two are college graduates, and five hold advanced degrees. Varied in their personal life styles, they share an abundance of energy, tenacity, and toughness. And, like their male colleagues, they have learned the art of compromise; they are politicians.

Lamson neither idealizes nor attempts to evaluate these present-day successful contenders in politics. Rather, she por-

trays them as individuals with biases and vulnerabilities, showing what is possible for women with exceptional motivation, drive, and luck. They can win elections, sustain the support of a constituency, fight for legislation, run a city or an embassy. Of particular interest in this election year is the absorbing story of Eugenie Anderson’s rise in Minnesota politics along with Hubert Humphrey, and of her lost opportunity to become a Senator when Eugene McCarthy decided to run.

Although the examples of *Few Are Chosen* suggest that the younger women in public service show more confidence in resolving family-career commitments when they have the active, total support of their husbands, as yet there is no sign of a large-scale movement of women in the direction of political careers. Politics affords the most conspicuous evidence of the token integration of women in positions of public leadership but all professionalized enterprises, whether in business, labor, law, medicine, or academic organizations, reveal the same scarcity of women at the top.

THE authors admit that the presence of women at the higher levels will not be taken for granted without, as Gruberg states, “a fundamental alteration in our socialization process.” One aspect of this clearly involves a transformation in the attitudes of women reared not to take themselves too seriously and bound by misconceptions about their femininity. Edwin Lewis stresses the need for enlightened planning in the education of girls from childhood to maturity to lay the groundwork for such a change.

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His book *Developing Woman’s Potential* is addressed to parents, teachers, husbands, and employers, who in the final analysis determine the educational and vocational goals of women. Besides presenting a well-balanced synthesis of current research studies about female growth and development, Lewis provides a reference book for professional experts. He concludes, with somewhat more optimism than Gruberg, that “women have the opportunity to develop as individuals as never before in our history. Whether they will take full advantage of this opportunity cannot yet be determined.”

A recurring theme in these books is that American society will achieve complete equality of the sexes only when women demand it. But do they really want it? Lamson says they do but not enough to fight for it, especially since the barriers against their highest participation are “invisible and illusive.” Also, it would seem their passivity stems from the fact that most women regard themselves as working housewives rather than as careerists.

The militancy that Lamson misses among the majority is not altogether dead. Although organized feminism may have made slight headway thus far in
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—Bettmann Archive.



—Bettmann Archive.

British suffragette (l.) and American standard-bearer, Mrs. Herbert Carpenter (r.) —in contrast to the fears of opponents, women have not formed a pressure group.

Their Own Thing

They, by Marya Mannes (Doubleday, 215 pp. \$4.95), sets forth a brave new world in which militant youth has taken control and banished all those over fifty to a complex of suburban purgatories. Glendy Culligan is former book review editor of *The Washington Post*.

By GLENDY CULLIGAN

JEREMIAHS COME A DIME A DOZEN, thanks to mass circulation, but Cassandra still remain as scarce as they were in Troy. Clearly, it's a man's world even in the prophecy department. Marya Mannes is nevertheless a seer honored in her own country, the capital of which is Middlebrowtown. All of us who share her old-fashioned liberalism can welcome her lamentations.

What she sees in her glass darkly on this election eve offers little aid or comfort to adults whose tastes and beliefs were shaped in the 1930s. Although her "novel" might better be classed as an extension course in modern civilization, it contains just enough characterization to be racked on the poli-sci fiction shelf. From the title page, styled like an IBM punch-card, the alert reader takes his first clue. Next comes a prologue, in austere sans-serif type, by a citizen who signs himself 6B8953A-411-Y. He identifies the subsequent matter as a manuscript confiscated from the campus underground.

The testament that comprises the bulk of the novel is the pooled effort of five aging exiles holed up in a coastal beach-house more than ten years after "They"—militant youth—took over the government from "a reactionary coalition under a conservative President" who was elected (no date cited) to the cry of "law and order!"

The rebellious kids soon booted everyone over fifty out of the cities into a complex of suburban purgatories, intending no doubt to make the punishment fit the crime. Because they were creative persons in the old order, Barney, Joey, Lev, Annie, and Kate have been allowed the privacy of Kate's old summer home. The rest of the original beach colony went down in a hurricane years earlier, leaving our heroes alone with their memories. It's like a sentence to lifetime group therapy.

Thus set up, the novel becomes a long, movable gripe session, recorded by Kate, a former editor, with interpolated scraps of poetry, philosophy, epiphany, and querulous footnotes from her compan-

ions. Lev had been a symphony conductor, Barney a representational painter, Joey a Broadway lyricist, while Annie was Barney's illiterate, heart-of-gold model.

Two general targets emerge from the rambling conversation of these five. Kate's buddies all agree that much was wrong with the world of the 1960s: war in Vietnam, racial and social injustice. The exiles also agree that things must be worse since They took over, for, when last seen, the militants now in power displayed bad taste, bad manners, and a total disrespect for order, dignity, and the melodies of Jerome Kern.

Technically unique among anti-Utopian novels, this one presents the brave new world by inference only. Forcibly cut off from every contact except geriatric centers, our exiles surmise what may be happening from the foreshadowings of the 1960s. Violence still rages, they learn from an underground paper; none of humanity's ills has been cured. But the young are free now to indulge in *Their Own Thing* on the scale that makes a civilization. And baby, what a Thing it is! Nobody reads; books are a drag; knowledge is transmitted electronically. Computers handle all routine and, what's more, they run on time, like Mussolini's trains. On the other hand, the arts have become formless, a proliferation of the chaos Kate attributes to Their undisciplined minds.

Here, despite her praise of logic, the narrator indulges in a whopping non sequitur. Her complaint that They have abrogated all order seems at odds with the evidence that They are running a pretty tight ship. Somebody keeps feeding those computers as regularly as zookeepers used to feed lions, for supplies reach the exiles with regimental promptness. So do the ominous little white wagons that permanently remove everyone over sixty-five. As a result, there's an echo of *Götterdämmerung* in the final pages, as well as a provocative hint of the Second Coming. (Next time round, Christ won't look so pale.)

EXCEPT for those last minutes of suspense, most of the book consists of probing conversation. It's static, but so is a cocktail party. Much of the talk is predictable; all of it is provocative, sometimes venturing into liberal heresy. The "barbarians" and "primitives" blamed for the demise of the old order include "bearded groups who sang only four-letter words," the "money people" who



—Alex Gotfryd.

Marya Mannes—"indictments worth pondering."

sanctioned "monumental crap" on TV, "dirty, lazy" aficionados of "psychedelic nonsense," action painters, obscure poets, off-Broadway playwrights, and many other deviants from the taste of today's literate middle-aged.

Those who consider avant-garde art decadent will be tempted to share Kate's basic fallacy, a confusion of cause with effect. When she blames McLuhan ("the man who told us that writing was dead") for the electronic revolution, she sounds like a patient blaming his doctor for cancer. Surely the root causes of modern unrest and modern art must be located in broader economic and social phenomena than Rauchenstein and the Beatles.

Ironically, there's anti-intellectual bias lurking beneath Kate's own canon, although she blames the rebels for succumbing to sensation. ("We could not even understand the reviews," she complains, discussing books full of "pretentious symbolism.") It's too bad that when she and Barney first realized they were Number Two, they didn't try harder to understand a book like Wylie Sypher's *Loss of the Self in Modern Literature and Art*, which traces the identity crisis of today's depersonalized society back to the mid-nineteenth century.

Actually, that relentless shift away from "I" as the center of the universe began with Galileo and Locke, with Romanticism intruding its plaintive, egocentric howl for the brief span between "Lyrical Ballads" and Victoria. Ever since "Manfred" the tug of war between man and machine has been an uneven struggle. Creeping impersonality is really what many of today's neo-Romantic rebels seek to counter with their beads and bare feet. To imply, as Kate and her