

# Guided Readings: The Changing Status of Women

*by Steven Mintz*

## READING 1

Man is or should be woman's protector and defender. The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life. . . . The paramount destiny and mission of women . . . to fulfill [is] the noble and benign office of wife and mother. This is the law of the Creator. And the rules of civil society must be adapted to the general constitution of things, and cannot be based on exceptional cases.

—Supreme Court, 1873, upholding an Illinois law which prohibited women from becoming attorneys

## READING 2

Under the operation of this amendment what will become of the family . . . ? You will have a family with two heads—a “house divided against itself.” You will no longer have that healthful and necessary subordination of wife to husband, and that unit of relationship which is required by a true and Christian marriage.

—Senator Thomas Bayard, 1874, attacking women's suffrage

## READING 3

Housewives! You do not need a ballot to clean out your sink spout. A handful of potash and some boiling water is quicker and cheaper. . . . Control of the temper makes a happier home than control of elections. . . . Good cooking lessens alcoholic craving quicker than a vote on local option.

—Women's Anti-Suffrage Association of Massachusetts

## READING 4

In a crowded city quarter, however, if the street is not cleaned by the city authorities no amount of private sweeping will keep the tenement free from grime; if the garbage is not properly collected and destroyed a tenement house mother may see her children sicken and die of diseases from which she alone is powerless to shield them, although her tenderness and devotion are unbounded. She cannot even secure untainted meat for her household, she cannot provide fresh fruit, unless the meat has been inspected by city officials, and the decayed fruit, which is so often placed upon sale in the tenement districts, has been destroyed in the interests of public health. . . . If women would effectively continue their old avocations they must take part in the slow upbuilding of that code of legislation which is alone sufficient to protect the home from the dangers incident to modern life.

—Jane Addams

## READING 5

This government is menaced with great danger. . . . That danger lies in the votes possessed by the males in the slums of the cities, and the ignorant foreign vote which was sought to be brought up by each party, to make political success. . . . There is but one way to avert the danger—cut off the vote of the slums and give to woman, who is bound to suffer all, and more than man can, of the evils his legislation has brought upon the nation, the power of protecting herself that man has secured for himself—the ballot.

—Carrie Chapman Catt

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Identify the arguments advanced to justify a second-class role for late nineteenth-century American women.
2. No group of American men opposed extending the vote to themselves; why did some women oppose extending the vote to women?
3. What were some of the arguments used by supporters of women's suffrage?