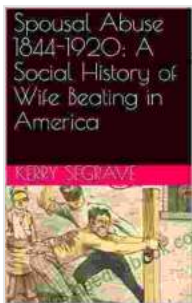


Spousal Abuse: A Social History of Wife Beating in America, 1844-1920

Spousal abuse, also known as domestic violence or wife beating, has been a pervasive issue throughout American history. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was widely accepted as a normal part of marriage. This article explores the social and cultural factors that influenced the prevalence of spousal abuse in America during this period, as well as the ways in which it was perceived and addressed.

The Prevalence of Spousal Abuse

There is no reliable data on the prevalence of spousal abuse in 19th-century America. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that it was widespread. In a study of 1,000 married women in New York City in 1844, one-third reported having been physically abused by their husbands. A similar study in Boston in 1870 found that one-quarter of married women had been abused.



Spousal Abuse 1844-1920; A Social History of Wife Beating in America by Kerry Segrave

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language	: English
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Text-to-Speech	: Enabled
Screen Reader	: Supported
Enhanced typesetting	: Enabled
Word Wise	: Enabled
Print length	: 373 pages
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The prevalence of spousal abuse was likely due to a number of factors, including the social and economic inequality between men and women. Men were considered the heads of households and had the legal right to discipline their wives. Women were often economically dependent on their husbands and had few opportunities to escape abusive relationships.

The Cultural Acceptance of Spousal Abuse

Spousal abuse was widely accepted as a normal part of marriage in 19th-century America. This was due in part to the prevailing belief that women were inferior to men and that they deserved to be punished for any perceived wrongdoing. The Bible was often cited as justification for wife beating, with passages such as "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Ephesians 5:22) being used to support the idea that husbands had the right to discipline their wives.

Domestic violence was also seen as a private matter that should not be interfered with by the government. The police were reluctant to intervene in domestic disputes, and courts often dismissed charges of wife battery.

The Legal Response to Spousal Abuse

The legal response to spousal abuse in the 19th century was weak. Most states had laws against assault and battery, but these laws were rarely enforced when the victim was a wife. In some cases, judges and juries even refused to convict men who had beaten their wives.

In the late 19th century, a number of states began to pass laws specifically addressing spousal abuse. These laws varied in their severity, but they all made it clear that wife beating was a crime. However, these laws were often difficult to enforce, as victims were often reluctant to testify against their husbands.

The Rise of the Anti-Domestic Violence Movement

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of the anti-domestic violence movement. This movement was led by a number of women's rights activists, who argued that spousal abuse was a serious problem that needed to be addressed. These activists worked to raise awareness of the issue and to lobby for stronger laws to protect victims of domestic violence.

In 1911, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) passed a resolution calling for the establishment of "wife protection societies." These societies would provide support and assistance to victims of domestic violence and would lobby for stronger laws.

The 20th Century

The 20th century saw a gradual increase in awareness of the problem of spousal abuse and a growing movement to address it. In 1920, the National Conference of Social Work adopted a resolution calling for the end of wife beating. In 1925, the American Medical Association published a report condemning domestic violence as a "crime against society." And in 1931, the first state law specifically addressing domestic violence was passed in California.

Despite these advances, domestic violence remained a widespread problem in America throughout the 20th century. In the 1970s, the feminist

movement brought renewed attention to the issue and led to the passage of a number of new laws to protect victims of domestic violence. These laws included the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which was passed in 1994 and is considered to be the most comprehensive federal law addressing domestic violence.

Spousal abuse has been a persistent problem in American history. The prevalence of spousal abuse in the 19th and early 20th centuries was due to a number of factors, including the social and economic inequality between men and women, the cultural acceptance of domestic violence, and the weak legal response to the issue. The anti-domestic violence movement has made significant progress in raising awareness of the issue and in advocating for stronger laws to protect victims of domestic violence. However, domestic violence remains a serious problem in America today, and more needs to be done to address it.

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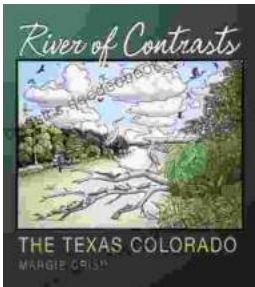
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