

points. First, the poor got poorer because of losses they suffered between 1979 and 1984; they actually began gaining ground again in 1985. Second, thanks largely to increases in social security payments, the elderly did spectacularly well during the decade. In 1979, 42 percent of the elderly were in the poorest "quintile" of the population; by 1988, only 30 percent were.

Most of the losses by poor nonelderly families are explained by reductions in the contributions of men to family income. As is well known, more and more families are poor because they lack a male breadwin-

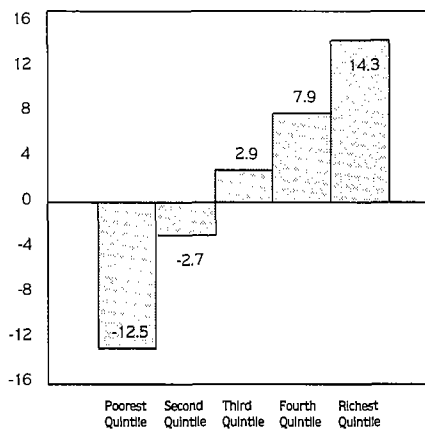
ner; by 1988, 60 percent of all families in the bottom income quintile (average income: \$9,150) were female-headed. But that is not the whole story. Unemployment among men in poor families also grew. Even more alarming, however, is the fact that poor men who did work earned less. Their annual incomes dropped from \$8,600 in 1979 to \$7,550 in 1988. One reason may be the disappearance of many factory jobs during the 1980s.

In fact, men in every quintile but the wealthiest experienced a drop in earnings during the 1980s. But even men in the top group (average 1988 income: \$83,400) increased their earnings by only a relatively meager seven percent.

The gains of the most affluent families were chiefly due to the fact that more women in these families went to work, and that employed women in general brought home bigger paychecks than they had before. In the top quintile, the proportion of women with jobs grew by 11 percent. By 1988, 80 percent of all women from these "wealthy" families were working, more than in any other income class. The earnings of these women also grew appreciably, jumping from \$17,650 in 1979 to \$23,300 in 1988.

In short, Bradbury says, most of the families that got ahead during the 1980s did so because of "increased family work effort." Whether that translates into increased family well-being, however, is another debate entirely.

**The Change in Family Incomes, 1979-88**  
(Nonelderly Families)



*The stark portrait of inequality above changes if the elderly are included: Then, only the poorest quintile loses ground (five percent).*

## Enlightening New England

In 18th-century France, embittered intellectuals who were excluded from the higher circles of the literati stayed in Paris and helped incite a revolution. In America, writes Jaffee, a historian at City College, many of their frustrated counterparts became rural cultural entrepreneurs, "adopting and enlarging for mass consumption the democratic impulses of the American Revolution." They achieved nothing less than a marriage of commerce

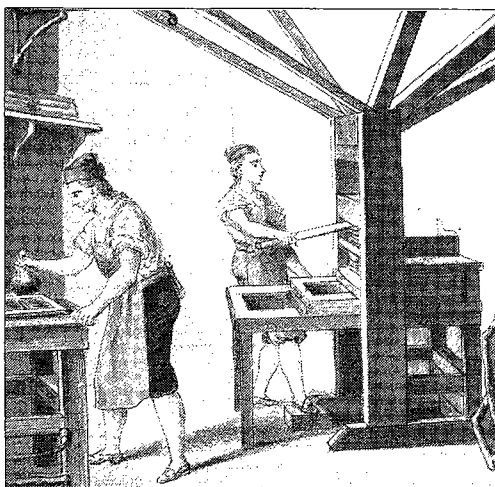
and culture, kindling what Jaffee calls the Village Enlightenment.

One of these new entrepreneurs was Robert Thomas, a Sterling, Massachusetts, farm-boy-turned-merchant who founded the *Farmer's Almanack* in 1793. Thomas went beyond the astrological and weather predictions that were almanac staples, filling his *Almanack* with advice about such matters as child-rearing and farming. "The knowledge he promoted was preeminently

"The Village Enlightenment in New England, 1760-1820" by David Jaffee, in *The William and Mary Quarterly* (July 1990), P.O. Box 220, Williamsburg, Va. 23187.

practical," writes Jaffee, "and the practical intent of that knowledge, for heedful and literate young farmers, was economic empowerment in the emerging world of the market."

The new republican popular culture was literally carried to the hinterlands by the likes of Amos Taylor, a former New Hampshire schoolteacher who took to peddling books and pamphlets during the 1780s. Taylor traveled the back roads of the Northeast selling such items as 17th-century English chapbooks, Indian captivity narratives, and even some of his own literary efforts. Taylor thought of his own role in heroic terms. Such "men of an excellent character," he wrote in *The Bookseller's Legacy* (1803), "may do much good in the christian world."



The "business of Enlightenment" was a growth enterprise. In 1760, Massachusetts had only nine print shops; by 1820, it had 120.

Massachusetts shopkeeper Silas Felton was a typical consumer of the new republican culture. In 1802, he formed the Society of Social Enquirers, which met weekly to discuss science, new farm methods, and foreign lands. "Doct. Franklin relates, in his life, that he received a considerable part of his information in this way," Felton

wrote, citing the hero of these men. "Will not every true Republican encourage all sincere social enquirers, who form themselves into societies like this?" From 1790 to 1815, some 500 New England towns created local libraries.

Ultimately, writes Jaffe, cultural entrepreneurs spread the Village Enlightenment throughout New England, and, more peaceably than their counterparts in France, swept away a world of traditions.

## Learning by Race

"Multiculturalism" by Diane Ravitch, in *The American Scholar* (Summer 1990), 1811 Q St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

America's public schools have long been the stage for conflicts over race, ethnicity, and religion. By the late 1960s, writes Ravitch, a historian of education at Columbia, the curriculum's old evasions (elite political history and the melting pot myth) no longer worked and a new "multicultural" perspective was introduced. In new textbooks, the experiences of blacks, immigrants, Indians, women, and other groups were written into American social and political history. Racism was acknowledged; the melting pot was discarded in favor of a new pluralistic view suggesting that variety is the spice of life. Ravitch sees it as a change for the better, providing a much richer portrait of America's com-

mon culture.

But "almost any idea, carried to its extreme, can be made pernicious," she writes, "and this is what is happening now to multiculturalism." In order to combat the so-called Eurocentrism of the schools, activists now advocate an approach to education which rejects any notion of a common culture. At the heart of what Ravitch calls "particularistic multiculturalism" is the unsupported assertion that minority students will have higher self-esteem and learn best when they are immersed in an ethnocentric curriculum that emphasizes the achievements of their own racial or ethnic groups. Thus, black students should be taught Afrocentric history rather than