I. Life in the 16th and 17th centuries
   A. Society was rigidly hierarchical
      1. Countryside
         a. In Catholic countries, the clergy was the most powerful group as they were viewed as intermediaries between the people and God; nobles were below the clergy.
         b. In Protestant countries, manorial lords (nobles) were at the top of the social ladder.
         c. Peasants constituted the largest percentage of the rural population; many owned land and most were involved in subsistence agriculture.
            - Subsistence farming is growing crops for your own or your village’s consumption
            - The further west in Europe a greater freedom and status was enjoyed by rural peasant “landowners?”
               - In England, the landed gentry were non-noble landowners who could live off the rents from their estates
               - Yeoman farmers were the owners or long-term renters of small family farms
               - In Western Europe, Atlantic trade and new monarchies allowed landowners to pay for agricultural labor
         d. Landless workers earned the lowest wages.
            - In eastern Europe (e.g., Muscovy, Poland, Prussia, and Austria) most peasants became serfs.
               - Due to a shortage of farm workers, Eastern European elites reinstated Medieval serfdom on large estates in what is known as “second serfdom”
               - Serfs were legally tied to the land and owed labor and obedience to the landowner.
                  - They had to ask permission to engage in certain life events (moving, marriage, etc.)
               - The nobles exercised great control but the serfs had some legal recourse (they could not be separated as families etc.)
            - However, this system was highly exploitative
      2. Towns:
         a. Merchants (bourgeoisie = “middle-class” business owners) were among the wealthiest and most powerful.
            - They became increasingly aligned with the “new monarchies”
            - They benefitted from Atlantic trade
         b. Artisans were skilled craftsmen such as weavers, blacksmiths, carpenters, masons, etc (often belonged to guilds).
         c. Laborers did mostly low-skilled jobs for low wages.
      3. Education or wealth became the means of moving up the social ladder (for the fortunate few).
B. Demography
1. "Long 16th century": population growth grew steadily between 1450 and 1650 (recovered to pre-Plague levels).
   a. Population growth leveled by 1650 until about 1750 when it rose again (due to the agricultural revolution).
2. Cities saw larger increases than the countryside.
3. Life expectancy
   a. Average lifespan: 27 years (men), 25 years (women)
   b. Infant and maternal mortality was high
C. Local authorities (religious and secular) continued to enforce norms
1. Controls on marriage
   a. Unwed mothers with illegitimate children were seen as a threat to the community.
   b. Young pregnant couples often received intense pressure from the community to marry.
2. Charivari (skimmington ride) was used as a means of public humiliation.
   a. Those who committed adultery or beat their spouse might be paraded around their village riding backwards on a donkey while holding up the donkey’s tail.
3. Offensive behavior could result in someone being placed in a stock for a brief period of time or suffering public whipping and branding.
D. Popular culture, leisure activities, and rituals reflecting the persistence of folk ideas reinforced and sometimes challenged communal ties and norms.
1. The culture of villages remained more oral, rather than written (despite increases in literacy).
2. Women often gathered in cottages to socialize.
3. Men often went to the village tavern to drink and socialize.
4. Blood sports such as bullbaiting/cockfighting were popular.
5. Carnival was popular in Catholic countries whereby excess partying preceded Lent (a 40-day period of fasting and penitence before Easter).
E. Marriage and family
1. European Family Pattern
   a. Nuclear family: only parents w/children dominated in Western Europe
      • Low life exp./late marriage limits multi-generational living
      • people tended to be unable to support extended families.
      • Only wealthier people (and some landowning peasants) tended to have extended families living together.
      • Eastern Europe had more extended families due to earlier marriage, new couple stayed with parents
         o Serfs not allowed by nobles to marry outside of community so as to maintain labor supply, therefore establish joint households with nearby relatives.
   b. Children leave home as early teens to work as "servant" or artisan's assistant
      • Not like Downton Abbey more like an apprentice
      • Earn/save money for family and to start own household
      • Accounts for late marriage
c. Marriage was based on economic considerations; not love.
   - Dowries were extremely important in wealthy families
   - Middle class needed to time to build funds for household
   - The avg. age of marriage for both men women in western Europe was between 25 and 27 years of age (this is surprisingly late); in eastern Europe the average age was about 20.
     - Class issues: the rich tend to marry earlier than middle classes, and poor tend to marry earlier too, or not to marry at all (10 to 20%).

F. Family economy
1. Rural households worked as units, with men and women engaged in complementary tasks.
   - The family remained the primary and social and economic institution of early modern Europe.
     - Outsiders viewed with suspicion
   - Everyone worked, funds held in family communally, outside work supplemented family pot.

2. Urban artisans trained eldest child in trade
   a. The “prosperous” employed apprentice servant(s)
   b. Wives ran shop while men crafted/travelled

3. Western Europe, death of father = disaster
   a. Widow must remarry quickly
   b. Lots of step-families (think fairy tales...there’s always an evil step-relative)

4. Eastern Europe, village structure under serfdom lessens pressures of family economy but mobility, both social and geographic, is limited.

G. Women during the Renaissance era
1. The status and lifestyle of peasant and working-class women changed little compared to the Middle Ages.
   a. Marriage was a necessity, few women could survive outside the institution.
   - Noble women with wealth, nuns

b. Bearing/raising children NOT the priority
   - Lower/Middle-class women went from helping with family economy, to assisting husband...too busy
     - Women use wet nurses, so they can return to work
       - But this opens them to pregnancy again.
     - Rudimentary birth control
   - Childbirth is dangerous (even for wealthy)
   - Increased infanticide and abandonment (among the poor) occurred.
     - An increase of foundling hospitals (2/3 of abandoned babies were girls) resulted.
       - Only 10% of foundlings survive to adulthood.
     - There was a low rate of illegitimate births.

c. Most occupations closed to women

d. Some widows or unmarried women must resort to begging or prostitution to survive.
   - Divorce available in certain areas (still limited) vs. the Middle Ages when divorce was non-existent.
     - modest increase in divorce in Reformation countries.

e. Rape was not considered a serious crime.
2. Wealthy women
   a. *La Querelle des Femmes* ("The Issue of Women"): A new debate emerged over the proper role of women in society (starting with Christine de Pisan in the 14th century); the debate continued for six hundred years.
   b. Women enjoyed increased access to education.
      • Protestant believed all Christians should read the Bible for themselves ("Priesthood of all believers")
   c. However, lost some status compared to women in the Middle Ages; women functioned now as "ornaments" to their middle-class or upper-class husbands.
      • Women were to make themselves pleasing to the man (Castiglione)—only applied to the upper classes.
      • Sexual double-standard: women were to remain chaste until marriage; men were permitted to be sexually active.
   d. Important Renaissance noblewomen in education and culture:
      • **Christine de Pisan** (1363?-1434?): *The City of Ladies* (1405); *The Book of Three Virtues*
         o chronicled accomplishments of great women in history.
         o She was perhaps Europe’s first feminist.
         o She had been extremely well-educated in France.
      • **Isabella d’Este** (1474-1539): "First Lady" of Renaissance
         ▪ set example for women to break away from their traditional roles as ornaments to their husbands.
         ▪ ruled Mantua after her husband died.
         ▪ major patron of the arts.
         ▪ founded a school for young women.

3. Joan Kelly (historian): *Did Women have a Renaissance?* (1977)
   a. Kelly asserts that middle class (bourgeois) women especially suffered a marked decline in their status along with that of noble women during the Italian Renaissance.
      • Middle class women were exclusively relegated to the private sphere while men monopolized political and economic issues in the public sphere.
      • Medieval feudalism permitted homage to female vassals but in Renaissance Italy feudalism came to be replaced by powerful city-states. Thus, the political power of women in many cases vanished.
      • Noble women thus experienced a state of almost universal dependence on her family and husband.
   b. Non-military education by tutors for young noblemen (and women) had often been done by females in the Middle Ages. During the Renaissance female tutors were replaced with male humanistic tutors or boarding schools (that emphasized patriarchal and misogynous bias), thus reducing the educational influence of women.
H. Witch Hunts

1. 70,000-100,000 people were killed between 1400 and 1700.

2. Caused by continuing superstitions
   a. Popular belief in magic
      • “Cunning folk” had been common in European villages for centuries: played a positive role in helping villagers deal with tragedies such as plagues, famines, physical disabilities, and impotence
      • Claims to power often by the elderly or impoverished, and especially, women
   b. *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Hammer of the Witches*) (1486)
      • Title is in the feminine
      • How to manual and justification for hunting witches
      • Women were seen as “weaker vessels” and prone to temptation: constituted 80% of victims
      • Most between age 45 and 60; unmarried
      • Misogyny (hatred of women) may have played a role as Europe was a highly patriarchal society
      • Most midwives were women; if babies died in childbirth midwives could be blamed
   c. Catholic Church claimed powers came from either God or Devil
      • Its magic was the only true magic
   d. Both Church and secular leaders used witch hunts to gain control over village life.
      • Reformation, religious wars and divisions created a panic environment; the scapegoating of “witches” ensued.
      • Leaders tried to gain the loyalty of their people and appeared to be protecting them.

3. End of witch hunts
   a. The Scientific Revolution of the 16th and 17th centuries increasingly discredited superstition.
   b. Advances in medicine enabled people to better take care of themselves when calamities struck.
   c. Witch trials had become chaotic; accusers could be “accused” (thus, using witch trials for political gain could be very risky).
   d. The Protestant Reformation emphasized God as the only spiritual force in the universe.
      • Yet, witch trials did occur in great numbers in Protestant countries as well.
   e. Some literature of the 16th & 17th century implied that people had a large degree of control over their own lives and did not need to rely on superstition.