"Did Women Have a Renaissance?"

That is the question posed by Joan Kelly in an essay she wrote in 1977. Kelly claims that "the state, early capitalism, and the social relations formed by them, impinged on the lives of Renaissance women in different ways according to their different positions in society (20)." As the family and political structures moved from the medieval feudal system, consisting of "medieval courtly love," which allowed for the "expression of sexual love by women," and of some allowance of participation by noblewomen in politics, to the more classical, "early modern state," regardless of class, all women saw a decrease in their personal and social options that men did not (Kelly, 20,22). Indicated by the sources used to represent the nobility and bourgeoisie, chastity became the female norm and "the relations of the sexes were restructured to one of female dependency and male domination (Kelly, 22)." The voices of women diminished, as their "access to power became indirect and provisional (Kelly, 33)." Ultimately, a clear division was made between the personal and private realm and with that "the modern relation of the sexes made its appearance (Kelly, 47)." Kelly's essay has been contested, yet, her "general claims about gender as an analytical category have offered compelling accounts of the relationship between Renaissance structures of economic exploitation and the oppression of women (Kegl, 7)."