



# Siblings: Brothers and Sisters in American History

*C. Dallett Hemphill*

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Brothers and sisters are so much a part of our lives that we can overlook their importance. Even scholars of the family tend to forget siblings, focusing instead on marriage and parent-child relations. Based on a wealth of family papers, period images, and popular literature, this is the first book devoted to the broad history of sibling relations, spanning the long period of transition from early to modern America.

Illuminating the evolution of the modern family system, *Siblings* shows how brothers and sisters have helped each other in the face of the dramatic political, economic, and cultural changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The book reveals that, in colonial America, sibling relations offered an egalitarian space to soften the challenges of the larger patriarchal family and society, while after the Revolution, in antebellum America, sibling relations provided order and authority in a more democratic nation. Moreover, Hemphill explains that siblings serve as the bridge between generations. Brothers and sisters grow up in a shared family culture influenced by their parents, but they are different from their parents in being part of the next generation. Responding to new economic and political conditions, they form and influence their own families, but their continuing relationships with brothers and sisters serve as a link to the past. Siblings thus experience and promote the new, but share the comforting context of the old. Indeed, in all races, siblings function as humanity's shock-absorbers, as well as valued kin and keepers of memory.

This wide-ranging book offers a new understanding of the relationship between families and history in an evolving world. It is also a timely reminder of the role our siblings play in our own lives.

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