

STILL A LONG WAY TO GO BABY



KEEFE

MS. PRESIDENT 2000

'Women must get into the political game and stay in it.'
—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

Despite the fact that the binary political party system seems determined to stick with two (white) males for the nation's highest office, a woman elected President of the United States in the year 2000 would be a proper beginning to the new millennium.

American women have had the vote for 80 years, an almost equal amount of time women spent fighting to attain it.* For most of those years women rather passively voted the way their husbands or boyfriends voted. Women voted for the first time in equal numbers as men in 1980, and in 1982 more women voted than men; though women voted differently than men that year and succeeding years, they did not necessarily vote for women.

A significant change was made in 1992 when women campaigned in unprecedented numbers for every conceivable office in the country: local, state and federal — including at least one woman for President. Women entered politics backed by other women, finally using their majority power to elect women to public office.

Prominent and well qualified women of the two major political parties could successfully campaign as candidates for the Millennial Presidency given half a chance and the bi-gender support of partisans and voters.

It is not an impossible idea. It is a much better idea than the knee-jerk assumption that only two (white) males are the only reasonable choices, a form of gender apartheid by a *status quo* unwilling to see beyond its own shriveled genitals.

There is certainly precedence. Liberals and leftists have periodically fronted women for President, more often as Veep in third parties and once in the Democratic Party with Geraldine Ferraro in 1980.

"All issues are women's issues," Ferraro said the year she campaigned as Vice President.

There are many reasons a woman should be elected the American President in 2000. Chances are very good she will probably be a much better leader than a male counterpart because male culture demands women possess and demonstrate superior skills simply to compete with the reigning supremacy of the killer gender.

An excellent reason a woman should be the Millennial President is that women generally represent the most generous and humane prospects of humanity. Women are literally pregnant with our future and provide the true compassion and *Gaia* wisdom of our species.

A common question asked by dubious men (and some women: Phyllis Schafley comes to mind) is: "Do you think a woman can do better than a man?" The response, proven by history, is that she certainly couldn't do worse.

But of course that is a piggyback negative. A woman ought to be President at the start of Western culture's third millennium simply because after all this time a woman deserves to be.

—MICHAEL McCUSKER

Adapted from *Ms. Smith Goes to Washington*, NCTE
July/Aug & Sept '97

*The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which was ratified on August 18, 1920 and became law August 26 that year, declares: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

BY RUTH ROSEN

'There shall never be another season of silence until women have the same rights men have on this green earth.'

—SUSAN B. ANTHONY

American women entered the 20th century without the right to vote and ended it with the right 'to have it all' as long as they 'do it all'. Progress? It depends on whom you ask.

The nation's citizens are deeply divided about the changes that have transformed the lives of women. At the center of the "cultural wars" remains the debate over the proper role of women in American society.

In many ways, this has been the longest revolution of the century. Bursts of artillery fire, mass strikes, massacred protesters, bomb explosions — these are our images of revolution. Some revolutions are harder to recognize: no cataclysms mark their beginnings or ends, no casualties are left lying in pools of blood. Though people may suffer greatly, their pain is hidden from public view. Such has been the case with the modern women's movement.

Women's rights activists didn't hurl tear gas canisters at the police, burn down buildings or fight in the streets. Nor did they overthrow the government, achieve economic dominance or political hegemony. But they did subvert authority and transform society in dramatic and irrevocable ways; so much so that young women who come of age in the 21st century may not even recognize the America that existed before the feminist revolution came about.

Consider the last half of the 20th century. Before the revolution began during the 1950s, the president of Harvard University saw no reason to increase the number of female undergraduates because the university's mission was to "train leaders."

Newspaper ads separated jobs by sex: employers paid women less than men for the same work. Bars often refused to serve women; banks routinely denied women credit or loans. Some states even excluded women from jury duty. Radio producers considered women's voices too abrasive to be on air; television executives believed women didn't have enough credibility to anchor the news; no women ran big corporations or universities, worked as firefighters or police officers, sat on the Supreme Court, installed electronic equipment or owned construction companies.

All hurricanes bore female names, thanks to the widely held view that women brought chaos and destruction to society. Few people knew more than a few women professors, doctors or lawyers. Everyone addressed a woman as either *Miss* or *Mrs.*, depending on her marital status, and if a woman wanted an abortion, legal nowhere in America, she risked her life searching among quacks in back alleys for a competent and compassionate doctor.

The public believed that any rape victims had probably "asked for it," most women felt too ashamed to report it, and no language existed to make sense of marital rape, date rape, domestic violence or sexual harassment. Just two words summed up the hidden injuries women suffered in silence: "That's life."

Long before the modern women's movement began, American women's participation in both the labor force and the sexual revolution had already dramatically altered their lives. But it took the modern women's movement to address the many ways women felt exploited to lend legitimacy to their growing

*The ERA has been sent to the grave more than once in the 77 years since Alice Paul wrote the amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which has not changed its wording since first introduced in Congress in 1923: "Equality of Rights shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of sex." A national referendum would probably make the ERA law within a few months. —MPMc

sense of injustice and to name customs and practices which had long been accepted, but for which there was no language.

Many men and women did not see it coming. In 1967, the well-respected and internationally renowned sociologist David Riesman, then a professor at Harvard University, uttered what has to be one of the most hilarious predictions in recent history. Writing in *Time* magazine, he declared that "If anything remains more or less unchanged, it will be the role of women." Poor timing. This was the year that the modern women's movement began spreading across the country and entering ordinary parlance.

As women activists learned to see the world through their own eyes, the feminist movement fragmented, and new populations of women — trade unionists, the old, the young, racial and ethnic minorities, some of whom had initially spurned feminism—began to assert different priorities. With that broadening constituency many feminisms began permeating American society.

A backlash was inevitable, though few anticipated its religious and political ferocity. "If you're on the right track, you can expect some pretty savage criticism," veteran feminist Phyllis Chesler warned young women. "Trust it. Revel in it. It is the truest measure of your success."

With its rallying cry of "family values" in the 1980s, the Republican right successfully tied up the Equal Rights Amendment in state legislatures and took the first steps to curtail the right to an abortion. But the backlash masked another reality. By the end of the 20th century, feminist ideas had burrowed too deeply into our culture for any resistance or politics to root them out. The backlash, in short, reflected a society deeply divided and disturbed by rapid changes in men's and women's lives at home and at work*

But at the height of the backlash, ironically, more American women, not fewer, grasped the importance of the goals of the women's movement. In 1986, a Gallup poll asked women, "Do you consider yourself a feminist?" At a time when identifying yourself as a feminist felt like a risky admission, 56% of American women were willing to do so. Women of all classes were also becoming aware of the ways in which gender shaped their lives: 67% of all women, including those who earned under \$12,500 and those who made more than \$50,000, favored a strong women's movement. Pollsters consistently found that more African-American women approved of the goals of the women's movement than did white women.

In 1985, commenting on legislation that would advocate child support for all families and would give wives access to their husbands' pensions, a newspaper editorial declared that "Women's issues have already become everyone's." And so they had. Perhaps the most important legacy was precisely that "women's issues" had entered mainstream national politics where they had changed the terms of political debate. Everyday life had also changed in small but significant ways. Strangers addressed women as *Ms.*; meteorologists named hurricanes after both men and women; schoolchildren learned about sexism before they became teenagers; language became more gender-neutral; and two decades after the movement's first years, the number of women politicians doubled. Even more significantly, millions of women entered jobs that had once been reserved for men.

Although women had not gained the power to change institutions, they had joined men in colleges and universities in unprecedented numbers. In the 1950s, women had constituted only 20% of college undergraduates and their two most common aspirations, according to polls of the time, were to become the wife of a prominent man and mother of several accomplished children. By 1990, women constituted 54% of undergraduates and they wanted to do anything and everything. Women had also joined men in both blue-collar and professional jobs in startling numbers. In 1960, 35% of women had worked outside the home; by 1990, that figure had jumped to 58%.

Women in other parts of the globe, fueled by international conferences, began challenging different forms of patriarchal authority and inventing feminism all over again. Each generation of female activists leaves an unfinished agenda for the next generation. First Wave suffragists fought for women's citizenship, created international organizations dedicated to universal disarmament, but left many customs and beliefs unchallenged. Second Wave feminists questioned nearly everything, transformed much of American culture, expanded the idea of democracy by insisting that equality had to include the realities of its women citizens, and catapulted women's issues onto a global stage.

The greatest accomplishment was to change the terms of debate, so that women mattered. But they left much unfinished as well. They were unable to change most institutions, to gain greater economic justice for poor women, or even to convince society that child care is the responsibility of the whole society. As a result, American women won the right to "have it all," but only if they "did it all."

It is for a new generation to identify what they need to achieve greater equality. As we enter a new century, it is wise to remember that the struggle for women's human rights has just begun. As each generation shares its secrets, women learn to see the world through their own eyes, and discover, much to their surprise, that their problems are not theirs alone. The poet Muriel Requirer once asked, "What would happen if one woman told the truth about her life?" Her answer: "The world would split open." And, so it has. A revolution is under way and there is no end in sight.

Ruth Rosen is a history professor at the University of California at Davis and the author of *The World Split Open: How The Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, published in February by Viking. She wrote this article for the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Downtown
COFFEE SHOP

DEBBIE THOMSEN



MON-FRI 8AM-4PM

(503) 325-4950

332 10TH · ASTORIA, OREGON 97103