

INVASION OF OUR BODIES



THIS DRAWING BY NANCY O'HANIAN (FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES) DEPICTS THE ABORTION DEBATE AS TWO HANDS TUGGING AT A RAG DOLL — SUGGESTING THAT THE DEBATE IS ABOUT AN "UNBORN CHILD" RATHER THAN ABOUT A WOMAN'S RIGHTS.

BY CLAUDIA HARPER

"I will not give to a woman an instrument to procure abortion."
~HIPPOCRATES

On November 5, our President signed into law "partial birth abortion" ban legislation. George Bush seems willing to invade our bedrooms, our medical records and our library studies. And now he is willing to invade our very bodies.

This is the first time a medically safe procedure has been declared illegal. The bill forbids an abortion generally performed in the second or third trimester. This law prohibits doctors from committing an "overt act" designed to terminate a partially delivered fetus, regardless of the health and safety of the woman's health or the risk of impairment to the child.

This is yet another infringement on our privacy. Abortion is a privacy issue. Medical privacy is a basic American freedom. Until now we Americans have enjoyed access to the privacy of our doctors' and attorneys' counsel. The Bush administration strives to limit that access.

The White House would also limit our access to information about reproductive health.

Since taking office, Bush has attacked birth control education, sex education in the schools and family planning, as well as the abortion "guaranteed" us by *Roe vs. Wade* for the past 30 years. Even with the recommendation by the Surgeon General for comprehensive, medically accurate sex education, Bush responded with a \$33 million program for an abstinence-only program. This is a battle most of us never expected to have to fight again.

This recent legislation will jettison our mothers, sisters and daughters right back into the seamy, dangerous, pre-1970s world of illegal, unsupervised and often deadly homemade contrivances, unmonitored drugs and back-alley deaths.

At a time when advertisements for drugs that enhance sexual performance and pleasure for men inundate the Internet and television, women in the armed forces are denied the prophylactics issued every World War 2 soldier and forbidden to have an abortion — even at their own expense.

The Bush administration ignores the reality of unwanted pregnancy: curtailed education, diseased and malnourished and drug-addicted births, flooded county facilities and services, harshly under-funded programs for educating disadvantaged children whose chances in life are ruinously limited, and young, single mothers who can only turn to the desperate measures of abuse, abandonment or worse.

The kind of "morality" that allows the above scenario also ignores support for Head Start, adequate federal funding for schools and universal child health insurance.

Because of these reasons, challenges to this new law have already begun in federal courts in Nebraska, California and New York.

As Americans, we have a responsibility to safeguard the rights of women, families and unborn children to planned, prosperous and healthy lives. As voters, we must be vigilant and mindful of the infringements on our rights and the quality of the lives of all people.

Claudia Harper lives in Astoria. She is a poet and hosts a weekly public affairs program on KMUN-FM on Wednesday mornings, "Talk of Our Towns."

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

A NEW CIVIL WAR?

Probably unconscious of the ramifications of his words, a man who claimed leadership of the anti-abortion crusades at abortion clinics, once compared political decisions that transfer the right of abortion from women to the state to the Dred Scott decision of 1857. He said rulings to gut but preserve the façade of the 1973 abortion law (*Roe vs. Wade*) are analogous to Dred Scott, which was a major factor that precipitated the Civil War.

Scott, a slave, sued the U.S. Supreme Court for his freedom. Slave owners and their political and judicial cronies insisted the Court reject Scott's claim of citizenship because he was a slave (which meant he was hardly human). Abolitionists attempted to convince the Court that all persons were human beings and entitled to citizenship and freedom.

Chief Justice Roger Taney declared that the original intent of the Constitution favored only the freedom and citizenship of white males. The general consensus among the Founding Fathers and long afterward, he said, was that Negroes were "so far inferior that they had no rights that a white man was bound to respect."

The net effect of the Dred Scott decision was to make the issue of slavery too explosive for political or judicial settlement. It was later termed a "monumental indiscretion" and a "public calamity." Justice Felix Frankfurter once remarked that Supreme Court justices never mentioned Dred Scott after the Civil War, any more, he said, than a family whose son had been hanged mentioned ropes or scaffolds.

The abortion rights issue in the United States follows the same unfortunate premise, as evidenced by the recent "partial birth abortion ban" championed by the Bush administration and its Congressional zealots. Women are not regarded as equal citizens. They do not have the right to make elemental choices about abortion.

The hypocrisy is that women have had to make these decisions for thousands of years. Women have been responsible for birth control or forced to be the instruments of euthanasia in regards to unwanted children in the vacuum left by irresponsible men. Abortion at least allows a woman to dispose of an unwanted child before it is born. For some reason men who abdicate the responsibility for birth control yet believe they should control a woman's options, which has less to do with concern for the unborn fetus than it does retaining supremacy over women. Woman are not allowed to be free and equal citizens. For that matter, 140 years after emancipation, neither are black people who wish to be known as Afro-Americans in recognition of their long presence in this hemisphere.

Humanity is crowding itself off its home planet. Abortion is a survival mechanism that attempts (consciously or subliminally) to alleviate the ever increasing ravage of the earth and the specter of incessant poverty and starvation by an over abundant species that seldom practices successful birth control. In the bad old days children were abandoned or slaughtered when a population overran its resources. Abortion and particularly the French abortion pill RU486 (still banned in the U.S.) is a more preferable option than an AIDS or ebola epidemic in stabilizing population growth.

Yet, as with slavery, abortion causes furious arguments and is such an emotional issue that a civil war of sorts is in the process of erupting. Like the infamous three-fifths compromise that allowed that much but no more consideration of being human beings to slaves, the Bush administration and its allies on the religious right have declared that women are "so far inferior that they have no rights a...man (is) bound to respect."

~MICHAEL McCUSKER

WOMEN WILL HAVE TO SAVE THE WORLD

BY MARLENE NADLE

President George Bush may not face much opposition in Congress to his plan for perpetual preemptive war, but he better watch out for the women.

Angry over the swagger of violence coming out of the White House, disgusted by the bring-'em-on itch for a fight as the solution to political problems, women around the globe are organizing in new ways.

These gender activists are all on the Internet, in the streets, packed into rooms forming more groups and pushing resolutions through the United Nations. Some are setting up an Occupation Watch Center in Baghdad, and others are building a transnational movement. They even have their first martyr in Rachel Corrie, the young American who was killed trying to stop an Israeli bulldozer from destroying Palestinian homes.

The surge of women's activism is happening now partly as a response to 9/11. That event accelerated the growth of new groups like England's 'Global Women's Strike' and Central Asia's 'Worldwide Sisterhood Against Terrorism & War'.

Explaining her own reaction to that trauma and the macho strut of both Osama bin Laden and George Bush, 'Code Pink' founder Medea Benjamin says, "I had feelings and fears I never had in all my years of organizing. The male aggressive voice was so very dominant. We needed to strengthen the voices opposed to that. Mobilizing women was one way to do it." Her reaction to violent solutions is shared by Indian writer Arundhati Roy who calls bin Laden Bush's "dark doppelganger."

The new organizing is more than an attack on personalities. As Jasmina Tesanovic, a member of 'Women in Black' in Serbia, says, "My enemy is no longer a bad hero, or a politician, or a person in power, but the culture that makes such primitive people possible and empowers them." The organizing is part of a culture war to end the love of military glory, power, dominance and hierarchy taught as part of male traditions.

'New Profile', a women's group in Israel, demands a complete reevaluation of its country's "military consciousness."

To counter a male habit of imposing power and dominance in postwar periods, women diplomats and nongovernment organizations pressured the United Nations to pass Resolution 1325, calling for women's full participation in nation building. Now, Iraqi women are organizing to stop Bush from running their country as a Boy's Club. They are being supported and advised by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the 'Network of Kosovo Women', 'Women to Women International', 'Peace Women', and a deluge of visiting groups.

This international alliance is aiding Iraqi women's own efforts to protest violent rapes, honor killings and the rise of fanatics. "We fear the threat of fundamentalist religious movements which an occupying army inspires," the 'Iraq Women's League' said in a recent statement.

The activists count on women in postwar and prewar situations to argue for political solutions to macho face-offs. They encourage them to use their social training in settling issues with words, cooperation, and even empathy for enemies.

There are no illusions about ovaries making all women good and peaceful. Instead, Ann Snitow of the 'Network of East-West Women' urges women to acknowledge their past complicity with men's wars. Few expect Bush National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice to give up her allegiance to traditional male stomp-and-rule values. But men who share their alternate vision are welcome in the movement.

The women may be waging a culture war, but that does not mean they can't do down-and-dirty politics. In an incident that is an early warning about the 2004 elections, a group of women greeted a fundraising George W. Bush in Los Angeles recently with a 40-foot pink rejection slip that read: "You're Fired!"

Most significant is the change in young women who haven't been voting. In a recent article in a weekly magazine on youth voting, 23 year old Chantel Azadeh said, "The last two years have done a number on a lot of people's minds. This election I plan on getting involved. I think it's crucial that we get Bush out of the White House." An MTV survey showed only 41% of the young are planning to vote for Bush.

The President's ominous mutterings about nuclear weapons in Iran and North Korea are enough to keep gender activism going. Ditto the economic attack on women's domestic needs in America and in countries that are its once and future allies. Niki Adams of London's 'Global Women's Strike' is helping to organize a demand for a Women's Budget in 24 countries where her group has members, including the United States.

"Our slogan is 'Invest in caring not in killing'," she says. Even Madonna has joined the post-9/11 resistance with her new music video "American Life" which satirizes the military superhero. Driven by dread, the women activists will continue to multiply. They are haunted by nightmare images of where the punch and counterpunch of superpower and terrorist, occupier and occupied, will lead.

"This is a desperate moment in our history," says playwright Karen Malpede, who only half-jokingly adds, "I guess women will have to save the world."

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