

# OPINION

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## Stop Using Female Lives as Bartering Tool

### Reauthorize Violence Against Women Act

BY LAURA FINLEY

That the U.S. is divided on political issues is old news. Both the Left and the Right are deeply entrenched, resulting in distrust, animosity, and political gridlock. One troubling example is with the Violence Against Women Act Reauthorization of 2018. Sadly, it isn't the first time that Republicans have attempted to block the law, literally using women's lives as a bartering tool.

The original Violence Against Women Act was introduced by Senator Joe Biden in 1990. It took four years before it passed Congress with bipartisan support and was signed by President Bill Clinton. This is in large part due

to a provision that allowed victims the private civil rights remedy of suing their attackers.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist was a vocal opponent, asserting that the provision would bring so many cases before the courts it would overwhelm them, and the Supreme Court declared that portion of the law to be unconstitutional in 2000. Interestingly, the court said that congress did not have the right to enforce the civil remedy under the Commerce Clause because domestic violence is not "economic" in nature, despite evidence that it costs taxpayers between \$5-10 billion a year in healthcare and law enforcement costs, lost productivity, and more.

Yet the other provisions remained, and the Violence Against Women Act has helped hundreds of thousands of victims. It pro-

vides funds for training law enforcement, court officials, victim advocates and healthcare professionals. The law was reauthorized again in 2000 and 2005.

The 2000 version improved provisions for immigrant victims, victims of sexual assault, stalking, and dating violence. The 2005 reauthorization extended benefits to underserved populations and prohibited requirements that sexual assault victims take polygraph tests before an investigation into their reports ensues.

The 2012 renewal was also contentious, as conservatives opposed extending the Violence Against Women Act's provisions to same-sex couples. Great debate also surrounded extending the protections of the law to Native American women, as this brought up the typical jurisdictional battle that occurs with crime-related topics on tribal lands. Further, conservatives op-

posed extending the law's provisions to undocumented immigrant victims through the U Visa program. After expiring with the adjournment of the 112th Congress, the law was again reauthorized with all of the contentious provisions included in 2013.

The latest reauthorization was originally scheduled to occur by Sept. 30 but has been extended twice. It is temporarily reauthorized, but as of now, it appears Republicans intend to block the reauthorization before the year's end, and out of 173 co-sponsors of the bill proposed by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, D-Texas, none are Republicans.

In all likelihood, the influx of women who were elected in the 2018 midterms in January 2019 would result in the Violence Against Women Act being reconsidered, but it is horrifying to see that once again there's even debate about supporting resources for victims. While no federal

legislation is perfect, and the law can be legitimately critiqued for focusing too much on criminal justice and less on root causes of abuse, the 2018 reauthorization is still important. Jackson Lee's bill increases funding for sexual assault centers and expands the law related to removing guns from convicted abusers.

We should all implore Congress to act on the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act. As it becomes clearer that, according to a new study by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, the least safe place for women globally is in the home, it is essential that our politicians take seriously the issues of domestic and sexual violence and not let political division disrupt these much-needed services.

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## The Power of Personal Growth and Change

### A happy warrior ready to act justly

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN



"Up until I was 16 years old and a senior in high school, I did the same thing my friends did. We drove through the Black side of town throwing pears at Black guys and yelling racial epithets. We were the White oppressors. I was the White oppressor."

(reg. copy, italics at end)

My dear friend Dr. John Maguire readily admitted his childhood in Montgomery, Ala. and Jacksonville, Fla. didn't make him a likely champion of racial equality. But when he passed away recently at age 86, John—the president emeritus of Claremont Graduate University, former president of the State University of New York Old Westbury, and recipient of many accolades and honors—was widely respected as an extraordinarily committed advocate for civil rights and social justice. His story is a powerful example of the power and possibility of personal growth and change.

John described his parents

as "radical segregationists," although he also said they didn't see themselves as "bigots" and believed there was a difference between the two. But he was a product of his place and time until that senior year of high school when everything began to change. He was chosen to go to an integrated YMCA baseball camp in Ohio where players were deliberately assigned roommates of other races. He remembered passing a soda around among his new group of friends and suddenly realizing it was the first time his lips had touched something a Black person's lips had touched, a simple moment that shattered an imaginary taboo.

When he enrolled at Washington and Lee University the following fall, professors there slowly began to challenge his old racial assumptions. He attended a conference at Crozer Theological Seminary during his sophomore year where he was again assigned a Black roommate: Martin Luther King, Jr. Right away he found Dr. King and his ideas brilliant and compelling. It was the start of a friendship that lasted until Dr. King's death and a relationship that influenced my friend John deeply as he was starting to change his own world view.

Throughout a Fulbright year in Edinburgh, divinity school and doctorate at Yale, and postdoctor-

al research at Yale, Berkeley, and in Germany and the Philippines, my friend John's perspective kept broadening. Eventually, he didn't just come to understand and accept the Civil Rights Movement in the South—he jumped in himself as a fervent ally and participant. This was true to who he was: a "happy warrior" ready to act justly.

In 1961 Dr. King encouraged him to join the Freedom Rides with his divinity school classmate and friend Dr. William Sloane Coffin Jr. I begged to join them but they thought it too dangerous for a woman! I was furious having grown up in the South and having been jailed for sitting in at Atlanta City Hall's cafeteria in 1960 without shields from Jim Crow. Life magazine featured John Maguire's experience seeing the South's violent racism from the other side and being arrested in Montgomery, his former hometown, for trying to order coffee at a bus station. He was eventually represented by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund's Thurgood Marshall and Jack Greenberg and Yale Law professor Lou Pollak in a case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. By then John was a faculty member at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn. While many of his colleagues cheered him

on and helped pay his fines and legal costs, some colleagues and alumni were deeply critical of his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. But John was not turning back.

A few years later he helped Vincent Harding draft the historic antiwar sermon "Beyond Vietnam" that Dr. King gave at Riverside Church on April 4, 1967, exactly a year before his assassination, warning America against succumbing to the "giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism" and telling us we needed a revolution of values.

John told an interviewer he knew he'd made a difference during the Civil Rights Movement when he realized he'd opened his parents' eyes. One day his mother said to him, "We see your friend Martin King on TV all the time, and he looks so tired. Tell him that if he wants a place to rest...he can rest here. We won't bother him." When he heard her say that he wept. After Dr. King was killed John became director of the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Social Change, and throughout his life he kept helping transform people's points of view—especially the generations of students whose lives he touched and who learned from his example.

My friend John fought passionately for increasing diversity

in and access to higher education throughout his life and remained convinced that solving the problem of access to higher education had to start long before students entered the doors of a university or graduate school. He also knew that the problem was much wider than education and spoke out against disparities in health care, the criminal justice system, economic development and more.

John and his extraordinary wife Billie were loving and faithful friends and unceasing supporters of the Children's Defense Fund and other organizations and people who, like them, wanted to help bend the arc of the universe towards justice. At every step he did it with a trademark sense of joy and with his beloved Billie and their daughters and grandchildren at his side.

At a dinner party many years ago John was reportedly asked what he would want his epitaph to be, and answered: "He had a passion for justice and excellence and he was steadfast." No words better sum up his marvelous legacy. And like him, we and our nation must embrace his lessons, example and bold willingness to change to ensure a more just nation and world fit for all God's children.

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