THE THIRD WAVE

by Rita Kramer

On the afternoon of March 22, 1972, a packed gallery in the United States Senate erupted in applause, cheers, and cowboy yells as the roll call vote revealed that, 49 years after it had first been proposed, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) had been approved by a lopsided margin of 84 to 8. Within a half-hour, Hawaii's state legislature became the first in the Union to ratify the amendment.

"There seems little question now," the *Washington Evening Star* observed after the Senate vote, "that [feminists will] have their Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution."

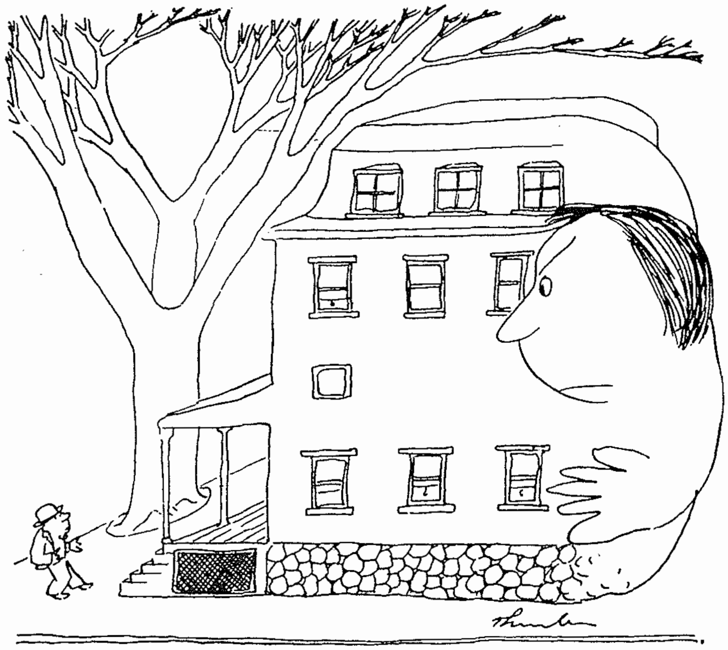
Public opinion polls earlier had revealed a rapid shift in popular sentiment: An overwhelming majority of Americans now seemed to favor the measure. "Equality of rights under the law," the amendment stated, "shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex."

From the White House, a conservative Republican president, Richard M. Nixon, offered his unqualified endorsement. Representative Martha Griffiths (D.-Mich.), who had engineered the ERA's passage in the House of Representatives the year before, confidently predicted ratification "in less than two years."

In the spring of 1972, the ERA did not seem like a particularly radical measure either to Washington politicians or to media folk. It was still a time of rapid change. The impact of Lyndon Johnson's 1964–68 surge of Great Society legislation was still being felt; the 1964 Civil Rights Act, banning sexism as well as racism in hiring and promotions, was being enforced; the federal government was pushing affirmative action quotas for women and minorities; spokesmen for every aggrieved group, from Hispanics to Native Americans to homosexuals, seemed to be seeking, and often gaining, redress.

Indeed, during 1967–72, perhaps the most rapid, and certainly the most pervasive, changes in American attitudes, opportunities, and customs had involved both women and men. Unlike black civil rights leaders after *Brown* v. *Board of Education* (1954), feminists did not have to overcome "massive resistance" as they sought to eliminate scores of barriers to women in education, employment, and behavior long sanctioned by custom or (less often) by statute.

Spurred by new laws and regulations, these changes had occurred *without* any ERAs, and often without much argument. For example, after one day of picketing by feminist protesters in 1967, *New York Times* advertising executives ended their practice of seg-



While feminists view the housewife as a captive of domesticity, to the New Yorker*'s James Thurber in 1943 she appeared all-powerful in her domain.*

regating help wanted ads by sex. Under federal mandates, corporations doing business with the government had to show "progress" in the hiring and promotion of women. Yale opened its doors to women in 1969; San Diego State College created the first "women's studies" program in 1970, and dozens of other colleges did the same (providing what amounted to ready-made pulpits for feminism). In 1970, Alaska, Hawaii, and New York liberalized their abortion laws; the Episcopal Church allowed women to be ordained as deacons; the U.S. Department of Justice filed its first sex discrimination suits against private employers. In 1971, Congress passed the Comprehensive Child Development Bill, a federally subsidized day care program, only to have it vetoed by President Nixon.

The 1972 Equal Rights Amendment was seemingly nothing more than a constitutional buttress to changes already under way.* But, after its initial successes, the ERA never made it through the state-by-state ratification process.

Today, despite a long, devoted campaign on its behalf, the ERA is dead. The various prospects, which its feminist champions once offered, of a "gender-blind society" seem to have lost whatever allure they may have had. And, in ideological-political terms, feminism is, once again, in deep disarray.

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*Two states, Wyoming and Utah, had added ERAs to their state constitutions many years earlier; nine states adopted ERAs during 1971 and 1972. Today, 16 state constitutions contain ERAs.

In retrospect, the eventual schism between feminist political "spokespersons" and the immensely varied population they claimed to represent seems to have been foreordained by the politics of feminists themselves. When the movement re-awakened during the 1960s, four decades after woman suffrage was won, feminism was not aimed at a single tangible goal such as winning the vote. Rather, its advocates harked back to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had sought to challenge women's own notions of their role in society, indeed, America's very notions of the good society. It was a tall order.

The Feminine Mystique

During the 1950s, after the insecurities of the Great Depression and the stresses of World War II, the popular norm was suburban domesticity. Although divorcées were entitled to alimony, they bore a certain stigma (except among the very poor and the wealthy); "career women" were rare outside teaching or nursing; husbands, white-collar or blue-collar, were expected to bring home the bacon. Most young college-educated women worked, but only until they married Mr. Right, if he could be found. The wives of farmers, shopkeepers, and clergymen were often partners in the enterprise; working wives in poor households had no choice. Middle- and upper-class wives governed family social life, and supplied vital energy and talent to church and civic groups (e.g., the League of Women Voters) and political campaigns, but left the limelight to men.

In women's magazines, in church sermons, in commencement speeches at Smith or Vassar, in all but a few women's organizations, the old ideal of mutually supporting "separate spheres" for husbands and wives was widely, if tacitly, accepted as best for the marriage, the home, the children, and the larger community.

"The ideal American woman today," anthropologist Margaret Mead observed in a special *Life* issue on women midway through the 1950s, "is a woman who can afford to have the number of children she and her husband want, who has as well-equipped a house as she needs, a car at her disposal to drive her children to parties and herself to volunteer or paid work, and a cooperative, successful husband engaged in challenging work."

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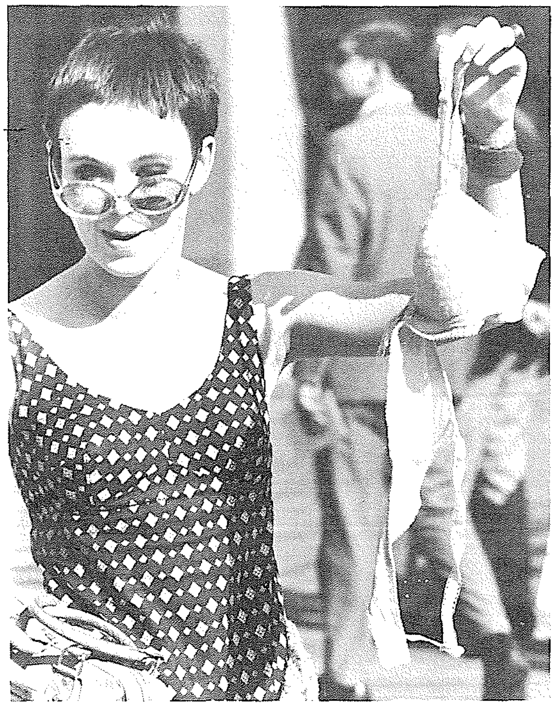

The myth of the "bra burners" was born at the Miss America contest on September 7, 1968. Feminist protesters threw bras, lipstick, and other symbols of women's "degradation" into a "freedom trashcan," and one newsman mistakenly reported that the offending objects were set afire.

Yet, amid unprecedented national affluence, the ideal American woman was to discover that she was not happy. The news came from a Smith-educated mother of three, wife of a Madison Avenue adman, and freelance writer named Betty Friedan.

One April morning in 1959, Friedan wrote, she was chatting over coffee with five mothers in a well-to-do New York suburb when one of the women began talking "in a tone of quiet desperation" about "the problem." "Suddenly," Friedan recalled, "they realized they all shared the same problem, the problem that has no name. They began, hesitantly, to talk about it."

"The problem," which Friedan raised in coffee klatches with friends, neighbors, and housewives whom she interviewed across the country, was boredom and a sense of "emptiness." Friedan named the problem in the title of her book, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). Hailed by one reviewer as "the most important book of the 20th century," it became a best seller.

The novelty of *The Feminine Mystique* was that Friedan portrayed the laments of her middle-class subjects not as individual frustrations, but as angst common to all women in America. Justified or not, this thesis touched a nerve. It was to evolve into the leitmotif of 1960s feminism: The personal is political.

"Our culture," Friedan contended, "does not permit women to accept or gratify their basic need to grow and fulfill their potentialities as human beings." Society was to blame. The privileged housewives she had interviewed had been tricked, Friedan argued, by a conspiracy of "popularizers [of Freudian theory], sociologists, educators, ad-agency manipulators, magazine writers, child experts, marriage counselors, ministers, [and] cocktail party authorities" into accepting the "mystique" that domesticity was the key to feminine fulfillment.

In reality, Friedan charged in an often-quoted phrase, the suburban home with its husband and children was nothing but a "comfortable concentration camp."

The Feminine Mystique is usually cited as the spark that reignited the feminist movement in America. That may or may not be true. But the grievances it articulated were those of white, Northeastern, college-educated women. And their special visions of true sexual equality would thereafter dominate most feminist political thought and action.

Events might have taken a different turn without two assists that the federal government inadvertently provided to Friedan and the nation's small corps of active feminists.

In 1961, when Friedan was still writing her book, Esther Peterson, soon to be an assistant secretary of labor in the new Kennedy administration, had an idea. A social feminist of the Eleanor Roosevelt school who viewed the ERA as a "headache," Peterson was worried by the persistent high-level lobbying for the amendment by the tiny National Woman's Party (NWP) and the elite Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs. Why not appoint a presidential Commission on the Status of Women, she wrote, "to substitute constructive recommendations for the present troublesome and futile agitation" for the ERA?

Equality, Now!

President Kennedy agreed. In 1963, his Commission's Equal Pay Act, the first federal statute requiring "equal pay for equal work," breezed through Congress; it addressed a tangible injustice done to women. Kennedy also established two permanent government committees; state commissions on the status of women sprang up to complement them. A seedbed for feminism was now in place. Betty Friedan joined the New York commission.

Ironically, the most important piece of legislation that now affects the lives of American women also came *before* feminism became politically visible and vocal.

After Kennedy's assassination, Congress approved the landmark 1964 Civil Rights Act. Almost by accident, the lawmakers included women under Title VII of the act, which banned discrimination in employment and pay on the basis of "race, color, religion, sex, or national origin." Representative Howard W. "Judge" Smith (D.-Va.) had deliberately inserted "sex" into the language of Title VII hoping to torpedo the act. But Title VII passed anyway, without much debate. Now federal law required not only equal pay for equal work, but equal access to jobs from which women, by custom, were usually excluded—carpenter, investment banker, sports reporter, corporation lawyer, fire fighter.*

Lyndon Johnson's Great Society kindled the hopes of the feminists, but, as in the years after the Civil War, many liberals believed that "this hour belongs to the Negro." So did the press and the television networks. Women's rights were eclipsed by a nationwide focus on the drama of Martin Luther King's struggle to make white America live up to its own fresh promises to blacks. In 1966, at a Washington assembly of the states' new women's commissions, Friedan complained that Washington was dragging its feet. Over lunch, she and 27 other activists (including two men) formed the National Organization for Women (NOW). It was the first significant feminist organization to appear since the NWP was formed in 1913.

Portents

Initially, Friedan and her colleagues pressed Johnson to strengthen the new Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), a federal agency created to help enforce the 1964 Civil Rights Act. They asked him to prod the EEOC's male commissioners "to combat sex discrimination as vigorously as they seek to combat racial discrimination." In a letter to the White House, they called on LBJ for a "comprehensive effort" to "include women in your Great Society program for the underprivileged and excluded."

The phrasing was no accident. Echoing the liberal rhetoric of the day, the founders of NOW saw women as a kind of "oppressed majority." Although few white women suffered the kinds of indignities and injuries that blacks did—indeed, feminists often complained that men put women "on a pedestal"—NOW's founders perceived their cause as a heroic counterpart to the black civil rights movement. "Sexism," variously defined, was akin to racism. NOW, they said, would be "an NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peo-

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*In 1964, state and federal laws still sanctioned many forms of discrimination. Some co-educational state colleges, for example, imposed informal quotas on their admissions of women; women's opportunities in interscholastic sports (and their access to athletic scholarships) were limited. Credit cards and home mortgages were largely unavailable to single women, and, in some states, laws also limited single women's access (as well as single men's) to contraceptives. Because women, on average, live longer than men, their monthly pensions during retirement were often smaller than men's. Since 1964, new laws and court decisions have remedied many such inequities. But others remain. A divorced woman who spent many of her married years as a homemaker, for example, will find that her monthly Social Security check is worth only half as much as her ex-husband's.

Feminist leaders gather for a 1972 meeting of the National Women's Political Caucus. From left: Gloria Steinem, representatives Bella Abzug (standing) and Shirley Chisholm, and Betty Friedan.

ple] of women's rights."*

Lyndon Johnson accepted their argument. In his now-famous Executive Order 11375, issued in 1967, he included women along with blacks and other minorities among the groups to be favored under federal affirmative action programs.

NOW, still a tiny organization of only 1,000 women and men, soon broadened its agenda—the first of several such expansions. Its 1967 Bill of Rights called for maternity leave for working mothers, tax deductions for child care, federally supported day care facilities, and equal education and job training opportunities for men and women. Two further demands, passage of the ERA and the repeal of all state anti-abortion laws, were added after a brief but jarring debate. The debate was a portent of future difficulties.

NOW's embrace of the ERA temporarily cost it the support of female labor union officials who saw absolute equality as a threat to hard-won workplace protections for women. Its tentative endorsement of "reproductive freedom" alienated a number of mainstream feminists, who broke away to form the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL). A veteran radical, NWP leader Alice Paul, now almost 90, was dismayed by the link to abortion. "As far as I can see," Paul said, "the ERA has nothing whatsoever to do with abortion." The issue got little attention in the media.

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*Even radical black and Hispanic women have never flocked to the feminist cause. "In class and color," writes Barbara Deckard, "movement women looked too much like 'Miss Ann,' the employer and oppressor of the black woman domestic." The white militants were far more interested in sexual equality than were many black and Hispanic women, who stressed special protection in the marketplace (e.g., day care). And many feared that white women would compete with blacks for jobs, especially under affirmative action quotas. Aileen Hernandez, the black woman who succeeded Betty Friedan as NOW's president in 1970, noted that "some black sisters are not sure that the feminist movement will meet their current needs," which another black woman defined as "for black men to get ahead."

However, as the 1960s ended, NOW was joined by dozens of new groups, such as the National Abortion Rights League, Federally Employed Women, and COYOTE (Cut Out Your Old Tired Ethics), a union of prostitutes. Even the conservative Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) created a National Women's Resource Center "to expand society's limiting concept of women" and to "raise women's awareness of their restricted options."

Off Our Backs

On the Left, meanwhile, militants led by the likes of Robin Morgan (who had once played the little sister in the sentimental 1950s TV series "I Remember Mama") and Ti-Grace Atkinson quit NOW to organize more radical groups such as the New York Radical Women (later called the Feminists), and WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell).

These young urban activists, far more visible on TV and in the national press than they were numerous, had a different agenda and style from the older, legalistic reformers of NOW. Most had entered politics through the student New Left. While NOW welcomed like-minded men to its ranks, the militants were separatists—lesbians, Marxists, socialists, utopians. Beginning during the late 1960s, they formed women's health collectives, communes, businesses, and banks, and started magazines—some of them literary, like *Aphra*, some of them angry, like *Off Our Backs* and *Up from Under*. In the summer of 1969, the Feminists agreed that no more than a third of their members would consist of women who lived with men.

To the radicals, "founding mother" Betty Friedan's plea for the removal of barriers that kept women at home and out of the "man's world" seemed bourgeois and conservative. They insisted on nothing less than a "cultural revolution" that would "restructure society" and "abolish gender roles," freeing women from "the tyranny of their reproductive biology." Shulamith Firestone announced that pregnancy was "a temporary deformation of the woman's body for the sake of the species."

"Ultimately," wrote Boston militant Roxanne Dunbar, "we want to destroy the three pillars of class and caste society—the family, private property, and the state."

Such sentiments aside, the radicals contributed two elements that were to have a considerable effect on the women's movement. The first was a "women-are-not-just-equal-but-*superior*" ideological strand, oddly reminiscent of the 19th-century suffragists, which would eventually color much feminist rhetoric.

The radicals' second contribution was "consciousness-raising," often combining a form of *agit-prop* with growing American middle-class penchants for group therapy, "self-awareness," and the "human potential" movement.

First on college campuses and then in the suburbs, small groups of women gathered not so much to voice general discontents, Friedan-style, as to discuss their unhappy experiences with men: husbands, ex-husbands, fathers, boyfriends, employers, doctors, bankers, lawyers. Individual problems soon appeared to be "common problems," as feminist writer Jo Freeman put it, "with social causes and political solutions."

"Three months of this sort of thing," Firestone declared, "is enough to make a feminist of any woman."

Joining the Crusade

Imitating the anti–Vietnam War protesters, both radical and mainstream feminists learned how to attract the attention of the news media. NOW and other liberal groups picketed the EEOC and buttonholed newspaper editors. On August 26, 1970, the 50th anniversary of woman suffrage, 50,000 women marched past a thicket of TV cameras on Fifth Avenue during NOW's Women's Strike for Equality. "Don't Cook Dinner—Starve A Rat Today!" one placard urged. Radical feminists occupied the Philadelphia offices of the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1970, browbeating the editors into publishing a special supplement on women's liberation. Kate Millet, the so-called Mao Zedong of the movement, earned a spot on the cover of *Time* with the publication of *Sexual Politics* (1970), her furious indictment of patriarchal society.

In 1971, five Manhattan professional women created *Ms.* magazine, giving feminists an important voice all their own, and journalist Gloria Steinem became its chief editor. (By 1973, the circulation of *Ms.* had climbed to 200,000.) With television always eager for confrontation stories, the radicals staged attention-grabbing "happenings." WITCH "covens" ceremoniously hexed the New York Stock Exchange (the Dow Jones Index dipped) and the New York Radical Women crowned a sheep Miss America outside the Atlantic City hotel where the pageant was being held.

Diverse as they were, all of the splinter groups and sects of the feminist movement—radicals, lesbians, legalists, liberals, moderates—were loosely held together by the urgency they attached to winning ratification of the ERA, and, to a lesser degree, repeal of state laws regulating abortion. Indeed, many long-time foes of the ERA—the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, the AFL-CIO—reversed their positions on the amendment once Congress approved it. Even WEAL, despite its break with NOW over abortion, eagerly joined NOW as a junior partner in the ERA crusade.

None of the groups could agree on exactly what the ERA would mean—that would have to be worked out, case by case, in the courts. Recalling Carrie Chapman Catt's attitude toward suffrage, they only knew that they wanted it.

But ERA faced a peculiar liability: To many sympathetic Americans of both sexes its value now seemed mostly symbolic. During the tumultuous years after the 1964 Civil Rights Act, most obvious barriers to sexual equality seemed to start to fall almost as quickly as they could be named. Feminists issued stern summonses to the "struggle for women's rights," but, helped by the media, they won a receptive audience and secured their initial demands in a remarkably short time. And there was no overt male "backlash."

The white males who ran America's institutions had wives and sisters and daughters; male politicians had little to lose and much to gain by placating women (who voted). And as time went on, public opinion polls showed that men generally favored the ERA and abortion-law reform by wider margins than women did. By 1973, every item in NOW's six-year-old Bill of Rights had been at least partially satisfied, and feminists had become part of the national political scene, notably in the faction-torn Democratic Party.

Nominating McGovern

The news media had almost completely ignored NOW's creation in 1966, but it was front-page news in 1971 when a group of New York Democrats, including Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and U.S. representatives Bella Abzug and Shirley Chisholm, formed the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC). Now feminists were in partisan politics. Their goal was to organize support for candidates in favor of "women's" demands—broadly defined as an end to the Vietnam War, repeal of anti-abortion laws, passage of the ERA, tax law reform, and an end to various forms of discrimination.

That very year, Rep. Martha Griffiths managed to extract the ERA from the House Judiciary Committee, where it had been bottled up for 19 years by the chairman, 82-year-old Representative Emmanuel Celler, a Brooklyn Democrat. (Celler described the ERA as a "blunderbuss amendment" that ignored the fact that there is "as much difference between a male and a female as between a horse chestnut and a chestnut horse.") Celler subsequently lost his congres-

Running sprints at Yale. Under the federal Education Amendments of 1972, schools and universities are required to spend as much (per capita) on women's athletic programs and scholarships as on men's.

sional seat to Elizabeth Holtzman, an ardent young Democratic feminist and antiwar militant.*

In early 1972, passed by the House, the ERA swept through the Senate. At the Democratic Party Convention in Miami that summer, a "democratization" of party rules enabled women to take nearly 40 percent of the seats. Presidential candidate and senator George McGovern (D.-S.D.), who had engineered the rules changes, would pay a price for his own egalitarianism.

"If you let Barnum & Bailey interpret a plot by Stendhal," Gloria Steinem later wrote, "it might come out to be something like the 1972 Democratic Convention." Introduced to the Woman's Caucus by a feminist supporter with the words, "We are all here because of him," McGovern joked that "the credit for that has to go to Adam"—prompting a chorus of jeers and hisses. "George the pig!" cried one backbencher.

On the convention floor, Shirley Chisholm challenged McGovern for the nomination; to oppose McGovern's anointed running mate,

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*In the early 1970s unprecedented numbers of women began to appear on the ballots of both major parties. Texas sent a black woman, Democrat Barbara Jordan, to Congress in 1972. In 1974, Connecticut elected a woman governor, Ella Grasso. Yet nomination did not mean election. Twenty-five women now hold seats in the U.S. Senate and House, only seven more than in 1955. For all the Democratic Party's feminist rhetoric, a majority of the congressional women (including both senators) are Republicans. Among female voters, however, Democrats outnumber Republicans by about 5 to 4.

Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri, activist women pushed a former Texas state legislator named Frances "Sissy" Farenthold. On the convention floor, they clamored for a "reproductive freedom" plank in the party platform and cheered the homosexuals and lesbians who demanded the party's endorsement of gay rights. As the TV cameras rolled, Bella Abzug, her trademark hat bobbing, assailed actress Shirley MacLaine for opposing the "pro-choice" plank: "A sister never goes against a sister!" she boomed.

For all that, Abzug and the NWPC succeeded in winning the Democratic Party's endorsement not only of the ERA but of government-funded day care. They also helped to nominate George McGovern—and, by their eccentricities, aired on national television, probably helped Richard Nixon to defeat him.

Miss, Mrs., or Ms.?

The political events in Miami were an augury of things to come. By 1972, even the mainstream feminists of NOW were shifting Left, away from the preoccupations and politics of most American women, working or not. Midge Decter, author of *The New Chastity and Other Arguments against Women's Liberation* (1972), observed that the movement "does not belong to the history of feminism but to the history of radicalism."

During the early 1970s, for example, NOW denounced women's traditional volunteer work in hospitals and social welfare agencies as the equivalent of housework—or "****work," as feminists called it. NOW sought the legalization of prostitution and took up the cudgels for the rights of lesbians—the victims, NOW declared, of "double oppression."

Such radical sentiment had begun to alarm some of the pioneers. In 1972, for example, Friedan felt compelled to take Abzug and Steinem to task for "female sexism" in the pages of *McCall's*. She scored Steinem in particular for denouncing marriage as a form of prostitution and for asserting, as Friedan put it, that "no woman would ever want to go to bed with a man if she didn't need to sell her body for bread or a mink coat."

Still, judging by the number of women who copied the "Gloria Steinem look"—streaked hair and oversize aviator glasses—feminism had its chic aspects. And, among other cultural phenomena, the women's movement imposed a new etiquette on middle-class American males, at least outside the chivalrous South. If it was sometimes awkward for a man to decide whether to address a woman ("lady" having been banned from the approved lexicon) as Miss or Mrs. or Ms., or chairperson, or whether to hold a restaurant door open for his dinner companion, it was, as George McGovern had learned, no laughing matter.

'COMPARABLE WORTH'

When Eleanor Holmes Norton took over the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission under President Jimmy Carter in 1977, she called the concept of comparable worth a "magic opportunity" for sexual equality.

Indeed, with the demise of the Equal Rights Amendment, comparable worth is emerging as the "feminist battle of the 1980s."

What feminists—and their union allies—seek is the expansion of U.S. civil rights laws to require that not only men and women holding the *same* jobs but those holding dissimilar jobs of comparable worth get the same pay. Thus (female) clerk-typists might earn the same as (male) warehouse workers, (female) librarians the same as firemen.

The political push comes from a simple, much-publicized statistic: The average working woman makes only 64 percent of the average man's income.

Groups such as the National Organization for Women and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) contend that the pay gap mostly stems not from the marketplace and women's job choices and aspirations but from discrimination. Neither the 1963 Equal Pay Act nor the 1964 Civil Rights Act has ended the disparity.

No one argues that no gaps (and no discrimination) exist. But economists contend that the 64 percent figure is *too* simple. Debate over the other earnings data continues.

Massive job studies are the key to comparable worth. However, fixing a specific job's "worth"—usually by giving points for various elements such as "effort," education required, working conditions, skills—is inherently subjective. Business economists say it ignores costs, complexity, the give-and-take of union labor contracts, and the ever-changing job market. Conceded one evaluator, Alvin O. Bellak: "Could we prove to a legal certainty that job X is inherently, absolutely, unequivocally worth as much [in pay] as job Y? The answer is no."

In 1983, the AFSCME sued the state of Washington, noting that the state had ignored a study showing that its women employees were paid 20 percent less than men in "comparable" jobs. A U.S. district court judge in Seattle sided with the union, ordering the state to pay $1 billion in restitution. But the state was upheld on appeal last year. Said the 9th Circuit Court: "Neither law nor logic deems the free market a suspect enterprise." Now the U.S. Supreme Court may deal with the issue.

President Reagan opposes comparable worth; Congress has yet to approve it. But, pressured by feminists and unions, state governments have ordered job studies (24 states) or revised pay scales (12 states) for their employees with comparable worth in mind. Worried but still untouched is the private sector, which fears any federal wage-setting. Even so, a few companies (e.g. Textronix, BankAmerica) have begun to re-examine, and sometimes end, certain disparities in pay, under some variation of comparable worth.

Helping the feminist cause was the sheer presence of more and more women (38 percent of the work force in 1970) in professional schools, secretarial pools, and newsrooms as the U.S. economy grew. And, often to the bewilderment of their parents and menfolk, younger women were breaking the old rules and exploiting new opportunities: In increasing numbers, they were going to college, taking nontraditional jobs, delaying marriage, living with men outside marriage, getting divorced, seeking careers. By 1974, 40 percent of all women between the ages of 20 and 24 remained unmarried, up from the 1960 level of 29 percent. Women accounted for 45 percent of the nation's 6.8 million college students. Women also comprised 20 percent of the enrollment of U.S. medical and law schools, and half of the enrollment of graduate schools. Visible and vocal, these young women were in no mood to accept "separate spheres" or old constraints on future possibilities.

In 1973, with ratification of the ERA seemingly assured, the militant feminists scored what they saw as a triumph. The Supreme Court struck down 46 state laws restricting access to abortion in its *Roe* v. *Wade* decision. NOW, never before a leader of "prochoice" forces, hailed the ruling for removing control over abortion from a "celibate [Roman Catholic] male religious hierarchy... male-dominated legislatures and a male-dominated medical profession... opposed to the full recognition of women as persons."

Nobody guessed it at the time, but that profeminist decision by seven of the nine male Justices of the Supreme Court marked the apogee of post–World War II political feminism in the United States. The reaction to it helped kill the ERA.

West Point's First Women

Like so many other reforms urged by feminists, *Roe* was imposed from above. But this time reform stirred deep opposition. Phyllis Schlafly, a conservative political organizer from Illinois who headed STOP-ERA, had been fighting the amendment without great success. "Every change [that ERA] requires," she warned, "will deprive women of a right, benefit, or exemption that they now enjoy." And within months of the Court's decision, a powerful grassroots Right to Life movement, strong among Catholics and Protestant fundamentalists and composed mostly of women, sprang up in every state. They sought not only to roll back *Roe*, but to defeat the ERA.

But it was not only the Right to Lifers who were beginning to question the feminist agenda. Already, the initial burst of enthusiasm for the ERA had been exhausted. In January 1973, 10 months after Congress gave a green light, the executive director of the National Women's Political Caucus conceded, "The momentum for passage of the amendment has sort of worn out."

The urban career women leading NOW, and their allies in academe and elsewhere, may have been dead certain of the need for full sexual equality, a kind of America the Androgynous, but many other women were beginning to have second thoughts. America had gone far on the road to equality, and the ERA's intimations of *full* equality, never carefully considered, were beginning to look worrisome.

In 1975, the women's movement was dealt its first series of political setbacks. In New York and New Jersey, voters declined to add ERAs to their state constitutions. A national one-day strike by housewives, organized by NOW to dramatize the value of housework, fizzled. (Nevertheless, as the campaign for the ERA entered its desperation phase, NOW's claimed membership climbed from 40,000 in 1974 to some 200,000 during the early 1980s, before dropping to 130,000 in 1985.) The next year, Congress cut off Medicaid payments for abortion, thus ending all controversial government funding of the procedure.

During the presidential election of 1976, feminists backed Jimmy Carter. He appointed two women to Cabinet posts—but did not put ERA and abortion high on his agenda. In 1978, after women's groups lobbied Congress for an extension of the ERA deadline, unprecedented in the history of the amendment process, they won with only a slim majority of votes. (The amendment was then three states short of the 38 needed for ratification, and it had been two years since the last state, Indiana, had given its approval.) Not a single additional state legislature thereafter could be persuaded to vote Yes. The ERA's demise was soon to follow.

As the ERA debate went on, women continued to find they could demand and gain "access"—Congress forbade sex discrimination in schools and universities that receive federal aid in 1972, a federal court ordered the American Telephone and Telegraph Company to hire women for traditionally male jobs in 1973, and West Point admitted its first female cadets in 1976. But, it was one thing for women *voluntarily* to try new roles, quite another to force them to do so in the name of egalitarian doctrines.

The Return of the Flappers

For years, Schlafly had warned that, if conscription were resumed, the "ERA will require mothers to be drafted on exactly the same basis" as fathers and sent into combat. It had seemed an abstract issue, since the draft had come to an end in January 1973. Many feminists seemed to assume, like their ideological forebears, that the threat of war would vanish once women held their fair share of political power.

But after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, President Carter asked Congress to resume draft registration—and, in a bow to the feminists, requested that women as well as men be required to carry draft cards. In the debate that followed, NOW's leadership and other equal-rights feminists were forced by the logic of their position to endorse Carter's proposal.

But the nation was not ready to face the prospect of conscripting young women and possibly sending them to suffer mutilation or death in battle. Without noticeable objections from the White House, Congress rejected the registration of women—but not of men—by an overwhelming margin.* Said Schlafly: "I think this decision put the nail in the coffin of ERA."

The ERA was officially laid to rest on June 30, 1982. As a final jolt to feminist political hopes, President Ronald Reagan confounded predictions that a "gender gap" in voting patterns would cost him reelection in 1984. He defeated Walter Mondale and his female running mate, Representative Geraldine Ferraro (D.-N.Y.), by a landslide; he received a majority of women's votes.

'No Fault' Is No Good

But President Reagan, a foe of the ERA, had also named Sandra Day O'Connor to the U.S. Supreme Court, another first for women. O'Connor's appointment illustrated, again, that while the women's *movement* was losing battles on the political and ideological front, doors were still opening to women in the world of work. There was steady, if highly uneven, progress. At home, wives made their own difficult adjustments to the dual tasks of child-rearing and working, largely without relying on feminist dogma. In 1982, a young feminist noted with dismay in the *New York Times Magazine* that the upwardly mobile career women she had interviewed, like the flappers of the 1920s, ungratefully viewed feminists as "bored," "unhappy," "bitter" women. Even Betty Friedan's daughter—before being converted in medical school—told her, "I'm not a feminist, I'm a person; it's not necessary to fight for women anymore."

Although many inequities remained, the feminists' evolving vision of a gender-blind society steadily found fewer sympathizers. Some of its key features were no longer matters of abstract theory, but unpleasant realities. New opportunities brought new burdens. The political had become personal.

Most notable among those questioning whether women could really "have it all" was Betty Friedan, the pioneer. In 1981, she came out with her revisionist *Second Stage*, suggesting that it was time to transcend "the male model [sic] of equity" and "come to new terms with family and with work."

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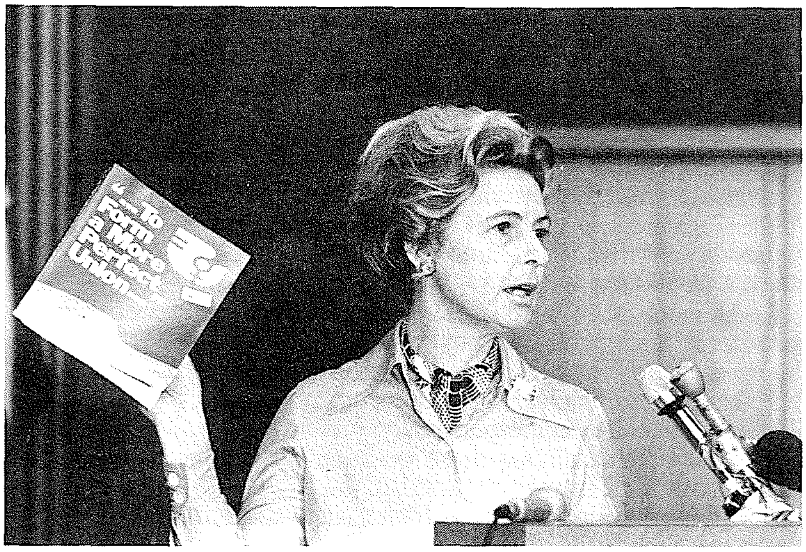
*In 1979, the U.S. Supreme Court had upheld a Massachusetts law granting veterans preference in government hiring, rejecting feminist claims that the law, although nominally gender-blind, unfairly favored men since most war veterans were male.

The feminine mystique, Friedan wrote, had been superceded "by a *feminist* mystique which denied that core of women's personhood that is fulfilled through love, nurture, home." Like Dickens's Miss Havisham, Betty Friedan seemed to be asking herself, "What have I done!"

She was not alone. Susan Brownmiller, who, in *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (1975), had interpreted the relationship between men and women throughout Western history as a kind of organized rape, now accused her sisters of ignoring "profound biological and psychological differences" between the sexes. Andrea Dworkin, a long-time militant, declared that "sexual liberation only made life harder for women."

In *Sexual Suicide* (1973), drawing considerable fire, antifeminist author George F. Gilder had warned that women's "liberation" would relieve "men of the responsibility as head of the family. That makes it easier for a man to walk out."

In fact, the U.S. divorce rate nearly doubled during the 1970s. Moreover, as a result of new egalitarian, feminist-backed "no-fault" divorce laws, divorcées were getting shortchanged. According to Stanford's Lenore Weitzman, a man's standard of living now rose by 42 percent after a divorce, while that of his ex-wife (and, usually, their children) fell by 73 percent.


To Form A More Perfect Union

Anti-ERA activist Phyllis Schlafly demanded to know "how much [federal] money was spent and how it was spent" at the 1977 National Conference of Women in Houston, led by Democratic congresswoman Bella Abzug. Schlafly staged her own conference across town.

The traditional family, long condemned by feminists as a patriarchal trap, took on a new luster. Beginning during the 1960s, poverty had become an affliction concentrated among single mothers and their children, who accounted for more than one-third of the poor by 1984. Two-parent families fared better all around.

The workaday world, where women held 45 percent of the jobs by 1984, proved to be less exciting than advertised. Helen Gurley Brown, editor of *Cosmopolitan* and high priestess to the young working urbanite, maintained that "a job gives a single woman something to be" in a "far more colorful world than the one of PTA, Dr. Spock and the jammed clothes dryer." But Representative Barbara Mikulski (D.-Md.) told an interviewer, "If your husband is a factory worker or a tugboat operator, you don't want his job."

And, in fact, while the working women who were getting all the attention in *Cosmopolitan* and newer women's magazines like *Self* (circ. 1 million) and *Working Woman* (circ. 770,000) were donning sober business suits and taking "assertiveness training" classes, the vast majority of women (like men) held less-than-glamorous jobs. Only about seven percent of employed women had entered careers by 1984 in law, medicine, and other "fast-track" professions. A 60-hour work week, young single professionals complained to *Newsweek*, did not leave much time for some fundamentals: finding a suitable husband and raising children.

The feminists, increasingly dogmatic and in disarray, were not sympathetic. In 1984, for example, NOW filed a legal brief *against* a California woman who was suing her employer for maternity leave. NOW's position: Without equal time off for fathers, such leaves would be a dangerous form of "special protection," which would give employers an incentive to discriminate.

The Old Questions

Liberalized abortion, though still supported by a majority of women and men in public opinion polls, may have freed men far more than it did women. Feminists for Life, a newly formed group, noted that women suffer the trauma of abortion, while men are relieved of responsibility. "If a woman gets pregnant," remarked a former editor of the leftish magazine *Mother Jones*, "the man who 20 years ago might have married her may today feel that he is gallant if he splits the cost of the abortion."

Just who, many women wondered, had been liberated?

The decline in the fortunes of the women's movement after 1973 were partly due to changes in the American political and social climate. Many militant feminists' sentiments simply did not wear well in a nation frayed by a decade of inflation and recession, rising crime, oil crises, and overseas defeats (e.g., the fall of South Vietnam, the

Iran hostage crisis). Enough was enough.

But feminists also had themselves to blame. Like the suffragists before them, the feminists of the 1960s and '70s had united behind a banner, the ERA cause, that obscured the profound differences among them. It enabled them to avoid the difficult, perhaps impossible, task of hammering out a detailed agenda on which all could agree. As the centripetal force of the ERA waned, the old divisive questions returned: Are women morally superior to men or are they equals? Are they equal but *different*? Should the traditional family be strengthened or destroyed?

A New Agenda?

Moreover, as the years went by, feminist celebrities took sides in peripheral controversies (e.g., El Salvador, gay rights, the draft) that cost the ERA movement much public support. By the mid-1980s, so many matters had been defined as "women's issues" that it was impossible to speak of a single, broad-based women's movement. How many women who favored the ERA also supported a nuclear freeze, self-help gynecology, and laws against "marriage rape"?

Such incoherence made itself felt. So did the feminists' shallow political strategy. For all their success in prodding the nation toward the goals announced by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the women of Seneca Falls more than 100 years before, the feminists of NOW and their allies had sought many reforms "from above"—through the courts, the media, federal regulations, and by lobbying in Washington. They never could build or sustain a cohesive grassroots political structure. Their Supreme Court victory in *Roe* v. *Wade*, for example, spurred working-class and religious women to mobilize alongside Phyllis Schlafly against the feminist cause. Other women simply withdrew, deciding that they did not like militant feminism's tendency to polarize the sexes, encourage narcissism, and deprecate individual obligations to others.

Eventually, outside academe, the popular feminist "notion of an already extant universal class—women as such—collapsed," noted scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain. "Not only were women [like men] divided along racial, ethnic, religious, class, regional, and political lines, but feminists, too, were fragmented into many parts."

Today, while few of women's tangible gains seem to be threatened, Americans' second thoughts about the movement's political ideology bar further advance for the moment.

Feminists themselves do not agree on which way to lead. After a bitter contest over the presidency of NOW in 1985, the membership elected "ERA First" advocate Eleanor Smeal over a rival who favored an emphasis on other issues. Meanwhile, a highly acclaimed new book in the social-feminist tradition, Sylvia Ann Hewlett's *A*

Lesser Life: The Myth of Women's Liberation in America (1986), may augur a revival of a long-dormant branch of feminism. While excoriating the "chic, liberal women of NOW" for their obsession with the ERA, Hewlett also argues that U.S. society should make life easier for working mothers. She favors "maternity leave, child care, flextime, and specially tailored career ladders."

This approach—a kind of "bread-and-butter" feminism—is much like that taken by organized women in Western Europe since the early 1960s. Sweden is perhaps the archetype. Swedish feminists, unlike their American sisters, did not focus on a campaign for "equal rights." They sought special benefits and protections for women under the law and in the marketplace. Nor did they form a Swedish equivalent of NOW; they worked within the existing political parties, the churches, the labor unions.

The results have been a steadily increasing share for women of Sweden's already generous social welfare benefits. In connection with childbirth, both parents can share up to a year's leave at 90 percent pay; state-financed day care accommodates 40 percent of all children under age six. Eighty percent of Swedish women have jobs. But, for a variety of reasons, utopia has yet to arrive. Mothers still do most of the housework and child-rearing; 45 percent of working women work part time (versus seven percent of men). Concentrated in "pink-collar" occupations, women earn 62 percent of what men do.

What new proposals will appeal to young women in America during the late 1980s is unclear. In everyday life, all across the nation, the tide of cultural change and reform of the laws has slowed but not ebbed. Unless the economy staggers, today's young college-educated single women can assume that there are a wide range of job opportunities (if not always lucrative *careers*) in their futures. They enjoy unprecedented personal autonomy and financial independence. Their material aspirations are often high. What they apparently find more difficult to count on are those private things that their mothers and Betty Friedan once took for granted—husbands, homes, and children. Those items, essential to a healthy society, are not at the top of any feminist agenda.

E.R.A.
YES!