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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY

15TH ANNUAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 8, 1984

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

RADICAL FEMINISM IN RETREAT:

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE '84 VOTE

by

FAITH RYAN WHITTLESEY  
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT  
FOR PUBLIC LIAISON

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN MAKING A VERY VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL DEBATE BECAUSE DR. HOXIE HAS ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD THAT IN POLITICS, THERE IS NOTHING MORE POWERFUL THAN IDEAS.

IN ADDITION TO DR. HOXIE, FOUNDER OF THE CENTER, THIS FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH ABOUT THE POWER OF IDEAS IS UNDERSTOOD BY RONALD REAGAN, BUT IT IS NOT WIDELY UNDERSTOOD, AND IT IS WHAT MAKES THE COMMENTS OF MANY PUNDITS SEEM SO TRIVIAL AS THEY CHASE "WHO'S AHEAD?" STORIES IN ELECTION YEARS. WE SAW THIS MINDSET GREATLY IN EVIDENCE FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S RESOUNDING LANDSLIDE. THE POST-MORTEM WHICH ROLLED OFF THE TYPEWRITERS OF THE PRESTIGE PRESS ALL SANG THE SAME CHORUS: THE VICTORY DEMONSTRATED A PREFERENCE FOR RONALD REAGAN'S PLEASING PERSONALITY. THE VOTERS, WE WERE URGED TO BELIEVE, AGREED WITH MONDALE ON THE ISSUES, BUT WERE BEGUILED BY A SUNNY DISPOSITION, MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA AND EFFECTIVE STAGING OF THE PRESIDENT'S APPEARANCES.

IT IS FAIRLY CLEAR WHY THIS HAS BECOME THE POPULAR INTERPRETATION OF WHAT HAPPENED ON NOVEMBER 6. ANY OTHER ANALYSIS WOULD HAVE TO CONFRONT THE FACT THAT IDEAS AND LEADERSHIP MOVE NATIONS. PRESIDENT REAGAN IS A VERY CHARMING MAN -- BUT OUR HISTORY BOOKS ARE FULL OF CHARMING CANDIDATES WHO DID NOT CARRY FORTY-NINE OF FIFTY STATES. HIS VICTORY REPRESENTED THE TRIUMPH OF HIS RECORD, AND ABOVE ALL, HIS IDEAS WHICH DRAMATICALLY ALTERED THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE.

I HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY INTRIGUED AT THE COTTAGE INDUSTRY WHICH HAS SPRUNG UP IN THE WAKE OF THE ELECTION IN INTERPRETING THE WOMEN'S VOTE AND SO-CALLED "WOMEN'S ISSUES." ANALYSTS HAVE INFORMED US THAT THE "WOMEN'S AGENDA" SUFFERED A SETBACK. QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AS TO WHETHER GERALDINE FERRARO'S CANDIDACY HURT OR HELPED WOMEN. BUT OF COURSE, IF YOU ASK THE WRONG QUESTION, YOU WILL GET THE WRONG ANSWER. WOMEN ARE TOO SOPHISTICATED TO BE SWAYED BY GENDER ALONE AND THEY ARE CERTAINLY NOT A MONOLITHIC VOTING BLOC. WOMEN WHO HAVE

DIFFERENT TASTES IN CLOTHING AND MAKE-UP ALSO HAVE DIFFERENT TASTES IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. MRS. FERRARO REPRESENTS A POLITICAL OUTLOOK FAR TO THE LEFT OF THE MAJORITY OF AMERICAN VOTERS -- MEN AND WOMEN. TO ASK WHETHER HER CANDIDACY HURT WOMEN IS TO DEMEAN THE INTELLIGENCE AND INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN VOTERS. AND WHEN PUNDITS INTONE THAT THE "WOMEN'S AGENDA" HAS BEEN STYMIED BY THE ELECTION RESULTS, WE ARE FORCED TO ASK: WHO IS DEFINING THE WOMEN'S AGENDA? IT WOULD SEEM THAT THEY ARE EQUATING THE AGENDA OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS WITH THE WOMEN'S AGENDA.

IN POINT OF FACT, FEMINISM IS ONLY ONE THREAD IN THE MULTI-COLORED TAPESTRY OF WOMEN'S OPINIONS IN AMERICA -- AND THE MODERN DAY INTERPRETATION OF FEMINISM IS BY NO MEANS THE MAJORITY VIEW. IT IS ILLUMINATING, FOR EXAMPLE, TO LOOK AT THE MEMBERSHIP FIGURES FOR THE VARIOUS WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA TODAY. IF ONE WERE TO JUDGE BY THE WEIGHT AND ATTENTION GIVEN IN THE MEDIA TO THE LEADERSHIP PRONOUNCEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL

ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN, (N.O.W.) OR THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS, ONE MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT THEY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF MOST AMERICAN WOMEN. IN FACT, THE N. O. W. HAS A MEMBERSHIP OF ONLY 250,000 AND THE CAUCUS HAS A BARE 75,000 MEMBERS. COMPARE THAT WITH THE CONCERNED WOMEN OF AMERICA, AN EVANGELICAL WOMEN'S GROUP WHICH GOT STARTED ONLY A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO, BUT ALREADY COUNTS 500,000, MEMBERS AS DOES THE MUCH OLDER GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMENS CLUBS. OR THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY AND THE MORMON WOMEN'S RELIEF SOCIETY, BOTH OF WHICH HAVE OVER ONE MILLION MEMBERS. THE GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA WEIGHS IN WITH 2,880,000, AMONG THEM ALMOST 800,000 ADULT MEMBERS.

THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN AMERICAN POLITICS WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL DECISIONS OF INCREASINGLY WELL-EDUCATED INDIVIDUAL WOMEN. IN THE ELECTION OF 1984, 58% OF FEMALE VOTERS CHOSE THE VISION OF AMERICA PRESENTED BY PRESIDENT REAGAN: CONTINUED ECONOMIC GROWTH, LOW INFLATION, STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE, CUTBACKS IN THE GROWTH OF REGULATIONS AND DOMESTIC SPENDING, SUPPORT FOR FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD, REAFFIRMATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES, AND EMPHASIS ON ENTREPRENUERSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM. THOSE WHO PREDICTED THAT RONALD REAGAN WOULD LOSE THE WOMEN'S VOTE WERE DEAD WRONG. THE PRESIDENT DID SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER WITH WOMEN IN 1984 THAN HE DID IN 1980.

WOMEN DID NOT MAKE THE DECISION TO SUPPORT RONALD REAGAN AT THE EXPENSE OF "WOMEN'S ISSUES." ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PEACE WITH FREEDOM ARE WOMEN'S CONCERNS EVERY BIT AS MUCH AS THEY ARE MEN'S. IT IS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE, AS THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS ATTEMPT TO DO IN THEIR BALKANIZING OF AMERICA, WHAT'S GOOD FOR WOMEN FROM WHAT'S GOOD FOR MEN. MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT COMPETITORS OR ENEMIES, AND FRANKLY, I BELIEVE THAT THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS ARE MAKING A TACTICAL AS MUCH AS A SUBSTANTIVE ERROR WHEN THEY CONTINUALLY STRESS A SEPARATE WOMEN'S AGENDA. IN DOING SO, THEY ARE ACTUALLY RELEGATING THEMSELVES TO A SECOND-PLACE STATUS ON MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES OF THE DAY. WOMEN NEED TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE MAINSTREAM OF POLICY-MAKING ON MACRO-ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. THAT IS THE ROUTE TO BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY. A DIVISIVE EMPHASIS ON A NARROW, PAROCHIAL WOMEN'S AGENDA (WHICH MAY BE PERCEIVED AS ANTITHETICAL TO THE NATIONAL AGENDA), ONLY PIGEONHOLES WOMEN IN A LESSER STATUS ARGUING AMONG THEMSELVES ABOUT SO-CALLED WOMEN'S ISSUES WHILE MEN CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE OTHER AREAS.

ON AUGUST 26, 1984, PRESIDENT REAGAN ISSUED A PROCLAMATION IN WHICH HE SAID, "THERE ARE NO LONGER ANY MEN'S ISSUES OR WOMEN'S ISSUES -- JUST ISSUES THAT CONCERN EACH OF US AMERICANS." BRINGING OUR ABUNDANCE OF CAPABLE WOMEN INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION WOMEN'S GROUPS COULD MAKE TO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF WOMEN AND OF THE NATION GENERALLY. SADLY, MANY OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS SEEM ONLY TO SEEK TO EXCHANGE DEPENDENCE ON HUSBANDS AND FATHERS FOR A DEPENDENCE ON GOVERNMENT. BUT HAPPILY MOST WOMEN DO NOT SHARE THE STATIST INCLINATIONS OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS.

MANY POLITICAL GURUS WHO BELIEVED THERE WOULD BE A "HIDDEN WOMEN'S VOTE" IN THIS PAST ELECTION WERE RIGHT. THE VOTE CERTAINLY WAS WELL "HIDDEN". SOME RADICAL FEMINIST LEADERS DON'T EVEN GIVE WOMEN CREDIT FOR HAVING BEEN ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN BEST INTERESTS



IN THAT ELECTION. LISTEN TO WHAT BELLA ABZUG AND MIM KELBER WROTE IN THE NOVEMBER 23 NEW YORK TIMES IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "WHY DID A MAJORITY OF WOMEN SUPPORT THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL TICKET?" HERE IS BELLA ABZUG'S AND MIM KELBER'S EXPLANATION:

"IN A BRILLIANTLY MANIPULATED NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN THAT LED VOTERS TO CHOOSE PERSONALITY OVER POLICIES, AN UPBEAT MOOD OVER CASSANDRA-LIKE WARNINGS, THE APPEARANCE OF TRUTH RATHER THAN TRUTH ITSELF, AND THE STATUS QUO OVER A HAZY DEMOCRATIC FUTURE IN WHICH ONLY MR. MONDALE'S PROMISED TAX INCREASE SEEMED A CERTAINTY, WOMEN WERE DRAWN TO MR. REAGAN BY HIS REASSURING THEMES OF PEACE, PROSPERITY, AND PATRIOTISM."

LATER IN THE SAME ARTICLE, THEY WRITE,

"EVEN THOUGH THE ATTITUDES ON PUBLIC POLICIES OF A MAJORITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN ARE GENERALLY MORE PROGRESSIVE THAN MEN'S, IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED THAT WOMEN ARE MOTIVATED IN ELECTIONS BY A COHESIVE IDEOLOGY THAT ARMS THEM AGAINST DEMAGOGUERY OR APPEALS BASED ON PERSONALITY AND STYLE. THE WOMEN'S VOTE HAS TO BE EDUCATED, CULTIVATED, AND ACTIVELY SOUGHT."

ACCORDING TO THE ABZUB/KELBER STANDARD, ANY VOTE BY WOMEN WHICH DOES NOT ENDORSE LIBERAL OR "PROGRESSIVE" POLICIES IS NOT A TRUE WOMEN'S VOTE AT ALL, BUT MUST HAVE BEEN THE RESULT OF SKILLFUL MASS BRAINWASHING. AND WHEN THEY URGE THAT THE WOMEN'S VOTE, IF INSUFFICIENTLY LIBERAL, MUST BE "EDUCATED," IT'S CLEAR THAT THEY ARE NOT INTERESTED IN SEEING WOMEN'S WISHES VINDICATED AT THE POLLS, BUT RATHER IN DOING SOME BRAINWASHING OF THEIR OWN.

THE LACK OF SUPPORT AMONG FEMINIST LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN LIKE JEANNE KIRKPATRICK, SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR, AND MARGARET THATCHER (WOMEN WHO ARE REALLY MAKING HISTORY) FURTHER CONFIRMS THE SUSPICION THAT THE GOAL OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS IS NOT SO MUCH TO SEE WOMEN ADVANCE AND PROSPER AS IT IS TO PROMOTE BIG GOVERNMENT GOALS AND THEIR OWN HIDDEN ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA WHICH THEY DO NOT DARE TO ADVOCATE PUBLICLY BECAUSE OF ITS UNPOPULARITY AND WHICH IS FOR THE MOST PART DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO THE POLICIES OF THIS PRESIDENT.

WOMEN WERE NOT SLEEPWALKING THROUGH THE LAST ELECTION. THEY WERE A LOT SMARTER AND MORE ABLE TO DISCERN HIDDEN AGENDAS THAN BELLA ABZUG GIVES THEM CREDIT FOR. I SUBMIT THAT WOMEN KNEW EXACTLY WHAT THEY WERE DOING ON NOVEMBER 6. THEY WERE ENDORSING THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION RECORD OF LIMITED GOVERNMENT, OPPORTUNITY, PEACE WITH FREEDOM AND TRADITIONAL VALUES AND REJECTING THE RADICAL FEMINIST AGENDA WHOLESALE. A CLOSER ANALYSIS OF THE RETURNS IS ILLUMINATING BECAUSE VERY LITTLE OF THESE RESULTS HAVE RECEIVED ANY COVERAGE IN THE NATIONAL MEDIA. THE RESULTS ARE SIMPLY TOO OVERWHELMING TO BE ANALYZED AWAY. ONLY 11 PERCENT OF THOSE QUESTIONED AS THEY LEFT THE POLLS IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS FEMINISTS WHO STRONGLY ENDORSED THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT AND SIGNIFICANTLY, GERALDINE FERRARO, IN HER DEBATE WITH VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, NEVER ONCE RAISED THE ISSUE OF THE E.R.A. NOR DID SHE RAISE THE ISSUE OF COMPARABLE WORTH THOUGH SHE CERTAINLY HAD EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO. NOR WAS HER CANDIDACY ITSELF AN ASSET TO THE DEMOCRATIC TICKET. ACCORDING TO ABC, ONLY 11 PERCENT OF VOTERS CONSIDERED "THE FERRARO FACTOR" IMPORTANT -- AND 44 PERCENT OF THESE VOTED FOR PRESIDENT REAGAN.

FURTHERMORE, ALL OF THE FEMINIST CHALLENGERS FOR NATIONAL OFFICE WERE DEFEATED -- INCLUDING THE FORMER VICE PRESIDENT OF N.O.W. JANE WELLS-SCHOOLEY, WHO LOST TO DON RITTER IN MY HOME STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA DESPITE A WELL-SUPPORTED CAMPAIGN. EVEN IN MINNESOTA, THE ONLY STATE WHICH WENT FOR MONDALE, THE FEMINIST CHALLENGER TO SENATOR RUDY BOSCHWITZ, JOAN GROWE, RECEIVED ONLY 42 PERCENT OF THE VOTE COMPARED TO BOSCHWITZ'S 58 PERCENT. IN THE COLORADO SENATE RACE, THE RESULTS WERE EVEN MORE CRUSHING. NANCY DICK, THE FEMINIST CHALLENGER TO SENATOR BILL ARMSTRONG, RECEIVED ONLY 35 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, THE SMALLEST PERCENTAGE OF ANY DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE IN THE HISTORY OF COLORADO. AGAIN, IN MY OWN STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA, NANCY KULP, OF BEVERLY HILL-BILLY FAME, LOST A WELL-FUNDED AND MEDIA-INTENSE CAMPAIGN AGAINST BUD SHUSTER TAKING ONLY 34 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. ONLY TWO NEW WOMEN WON ELECTION TO THE CONGRESS THIS TERM AND BOTH ARE REPUBLICANS. FINALLY, IN MAINE, A STATE WITH A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR, THE STATE ERA WAS VOTED DOWN BY A RESOUNDING 65 PERCENT MARGIN.

I SAW AN AMUSING AND POIGNANT STORY IN THE WASHINGTON POST THE MORNING AFTER THE ELECTION. AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS ON ELECTION NIGHT, THE POLITICOS HAD GATHERED AROUND THE USUAL THREE TELEVISION SCREENS WITH YELLOW LEGAL PADS IN THEIR LAPS TO WATCH THE FATE OF THE SIXTY CANDIDATES THE CAUCUS HAD ENDORSED. THE SOUND HAD BEEN TURNED OFF ON TWO OUT OF THE THREE SETS. SUDDENLY A WOMAN'S FACE APPEARED ON ONE OF THE SILENT SCREENS AND THE WORD "WINNER" FLASHED OVER HER HEAD. EVERYONE IN THE ROOM WAS GALVANIZED. "WINNER, WINNER" THEY SHOUTED TO EACH OTHER. "WHO IS SHE? IS SHE ONE OF OURS?" THEY LEAPED TO TURN UP THE VOLUME, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THE WOMAN WAS THE WINNER OF THE LOTTERY.

WOMEN, LIKE MEN, UNDERSTAND THAT THE BEST GUARANTEE OF INCREASING OPPORTUNITY IS LOW INFLATION AND AN EXPANDING ECONOMY -- NOT WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION OR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENGINEERING BY ELITES. RETURNING FOR A MOMENT TO MRS. ABZUG'S ARTICLE, SHE ASSERTS THAT WOMEN ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT "FAIRNESS TO THE POOR" THAN ARE MEN. NOW, LEAVING ASIDE THAT THIS IS AN ABSURDLY LOADED EXPRESSION AND AN ASSERTION

ABOUT WHICH I AM IN ANY CASE EXTREMELY SKEPTICAL, A BELIEF IN FAIRNESS TO THE POOR IS NOT DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE WITH AN OVERWHELMING VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE PRESIDENT. IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE GOAL OF THIS ADMINISTRATION NOT TO KEEP THE POOR IN RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE POVERTY, BUT RATHER TO CREATE THE KIND OF SOCIETY WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO RISE OUT OF POVERTY AND INTO A BETTER LIFE FOREVER.

IN THE WAKE OF THESE CLEAR SIGNALS FROM WOMEN, IT FOLLOWS TO ASK: IF RADICAL FEMINISM HAS BEEN REJECTED, WHAT CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO FOR WOMEN IN THE FUTURE? I THINK THE ANSWER IS CHOICE. I EXPECT -- AND WILL WELCOME -- A FUTURE IN WHICH WOMEN ARE TRULY FREE TO FOLLOW THEIR TALENTS AND DESIRES IN WHATEVER DIRECTION THEY MAY LEAD AND I KNOW THE PRESIDENT IS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO PROVIDING WOMEN WITH THE BROADEST RANGE OF OPTIONS IN EXERCISING THEIR CHOICE. ACTUALLY, EMPHASIS ON CHOICE WITH RESPONSIBILITY WAS ONCE A FEMINIST THEME. EARLY FEMINIST LEADERS WANTED TO EXPAND POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN. BUT THE 1984 INTERPRETATIONS OF FEMINISM TURNED OUT TO BE A HOLLOW PROMISE FOR MANY WOMEN. IN FACT, MODERN DAY FEMINISM

HAS PROVIDED A NEW DESIGN OF THE STRAIGHT JACKET FOR A LARGE SEGMENT OF OUR FEMALE POPULATION. IN THAT SYMBOLIC STRAIGHT-JACKET MANY WOMEN WERE MADE TO FEEL THAT UNLESS THEY PURSUED A CAREER IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED FIELD, THEY COULDN'T HOLD THEIR HEADS UP. THEY BECAME APOLOGETIC AND MEEK ABOUT TRADITIONAL ROLES. IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE THE WORD "HOUSEWIFE" NEVER MADE A PUBLIC APPEARANCE WITHOUT ITS MODIFIER "JUST A" AND A SECRETARY HAD A DECREASING SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM ABOUT HER WORK. DESPITE THE SURFACE RHETORIC IN SUPPORT OF FAMILIES, THE ROLE OF WIFE AND MOTHER, HALLOWED AND REVERED FOR CENTURIES, WAS BY SUBTLE MESSAGES Demeaned AND DEVALUED TO THE POINT THAT MANY YOUNG WOMEN TODAY HAVE REJECTED MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD. THIS MAY WELL BE THE MOST SERIOUS DISSERVICE THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT DID TO WOMEN, AND TO OUR CULTURE GENERALLY. YOU SUPPLANT THE CENTRALITY OF FAMILY LIFE ONLY AT GRAVE PERIL TO THE SOCIAL FABRIC AND TO PERSONAL FULFILLMENT.



IN ADDITION, THE WHOLE IMAGE OF WOMEN'S HISTORY WHICH MODERN-DAY FEMINISTS PROMOTED AND WHICH WAS WIDELY ACCEPTED DURING THE SEVENTIES STRIKES ME AS HISTORICALLY FLAWED. WE WERE TOLD THAT FEMALES HAD BEEN SUBJUGATED AND EXPLOITED BY MEN DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, EXCLUDED FROM REMUNERATIVE WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME, AND RELEGATED TO MENIAL CHORES UNTIL THE MOVEMENT CAME ALONG AND LIBERATED THEM. BUT IF I MAY ENGAGE IN A LITTLE POST-REVISIONIST HISTORY, THERE ARE TWO FLAWS WITH THAT PERSPECTIVE. IN THE FIRST PLACE IT FAILS TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW. FOR EXAMPLE, NINETEENTH CENTURY REFORMERS (MANY OF WHOM WERE WOMEN) CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST APPALLING DEPREDATIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO HAVE BEEN THE FACT THAT IT TOOK WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM THE HOME AND PLACED THEM IN FACTORIES. IT WAS HAILED AS A GREAT VICTORY FOR WOMEN WHEN LABOR LAWS WERE ENACTED WHICH FORBADE THAT KIND OF EXPLOITATION AND PROVIDED SPECIAL RULES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE. IN FACT, THE WOMAN AT HOME CARING FOR A HUSBAND AND CHILDREN -- THE ROLE WHICH WAS REGARDED AS SO CONFINING TO 1970'S FEMINISTS -- HAD BEEN THE GOAL OF THE PREVIOUS CENTURY'S REFORMERS. THIS IS CERTAINLY NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE HOME IS THE ONLY PROPER PLACE FOR A WOMAN, BUT ONLY THAT A FAILURE TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW OF HISTORY CAN GIVE ONE AN UNNECESSARY AND UNJUSTIFIED CHIP ON THE SHOULDER.



THE SECOND FLAW WITH THE MODERN FEMINIST VIEW OF HISTORY IS THAT IT MISPERCEIVES WOMEN'S WISHES. WHEN THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN LOOK AT HISTORY, THEY DO NOT SEE WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF MALE OPPRESSION. SOME MEN WERE PATRONIZING, AND WORKPLACE REFORMS WERE CERTAINLY NECESSARY. BUT IT UNDERESTIMATES WOMEN TO SUGGEST THAT THEY WERE TRAPPED IN ROLES THEY FOUND UNSATISFYING. THE VAST MAJORITY OF WOMEN UNEQUIVOCALLY PLACE FAMILY LIFE ABOVE ALL OTHER PURSUITS. AND MANY OF THOSE WHO MUST PUT CAREER FIRST OUT OF ECONOMIC NECESSITY, MYSELF INCLUDED, WISH THEY DID NOT HAVE TO DO SO. I THINK THAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON WOMEN'S ROLES EVOLVED AS THEY DID: THEY SUITED WOMEN'S INTERESTS.

TODAY, WOMEN'S INTERESTS HAVE OBVIOUSLY EXPANDED AND THE GREAT CHALLENGE CONFRONTING US IS HOW TO RECONCILE OUR FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES (AND REWARDS) WITH LARGER ROLES OUTSIDE THE HOME AS BOTH CAREERISTS AND VOLUNTEERS. CLEARLY TRANSFERRING GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S CHILDREN TO THE STATE IS NOT THE ANSWER. WE ARE NOW SEEING WIDESPREAD

SOUL-SEARCHING AMONG THE GENERATION OF WOMEN WHO CREATED THE MODERN FEMINIST REVOLUTION TWENTY YEARS AGO. THIS TOO IS A HEALTHY PHENOMENON IN OUR NATIONAL DEBATE. MANY THINKING AMERICAN WOMEN ARE ASKING THEMSELVES FREUD'S ANCIENT QUESTION: "WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?" FOR THOSE WHO FORESWORE CHILDREN, THERE IS FREQUENTLY AN ACHING REGRET. AND THERE IS A CORRESPONDING AND MOUNTING SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE REWARDS OF THE BUSINESS WORLD AND THE PRUDENCE OF ATTEMPTING TO BE SUPER-MOMS.

THIS REAPPRAISAL WILL CONTINUE. THE POINT IS NOT THAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD DO THE SAME THINGS. WE ARE AS VARIED IN OUR SKILLS AND DESIRES AS MEN ARE. RATHER, WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE MADE TO FEEL THAT SELF-RESPECT AND THE REGARD OF ONE'S PEERS LIE IN ONE DIRECTION, WHILE HAPPINESS LIES IN ANOTHER. NEITHER MOTHERHOOD NOR MASTER'S DEGREES ARE FOR EVERYONE. AND OUR CHILDREN NEED TO BE SHIELDED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM CAUSED BY THESE UPHEAVALS AS WE SORT OUT THESE PROBLEMS IN OUR OWN LIVES AND IN OUR SOCIETY OVERALL. OUR GREAT CHALLENGE NOW AS AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IS TO DISCOVER WAYS IN OUR FAMOUS CREATIVE AMERICAN STYLE TO ACCOMMODATE THE DESIRE TO MAINTAIN HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES, AND WELL-ADJUSTED CHILDREN, TO FULFILL OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS CITIZENS, TO USE OUR TALENTS . . . AND KEEP OUR SANITY.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY

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IN ADDITION TO DR. HOXIE, FOUNDER OF THE CENTER, THIS FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH ABOUT THE POWER OF IDEAS IS UNDERSTOOD BY RONALD REAGAN, BUT IT IS NOT WIDELY UNDERSTOOD, AND IT IS WHAT MAKES THE COMMENTS OF MANY PUNDITS SEEM SO TRIVIAL AS THEY CHASE "WHO'S AHEAD?" STORIES IN ELECTION YEARS. WE SAW THIS MINDSET GREATLY IN EVIDENCE FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S RESOUNDING LANDSLIDE. THE POST-MORTEMs WHICH ROLLED OFF THE TYPEWRITERS OF THE PRESTIGE PRESS ALL SANG THE SAME CHORUS: THE VICTORY DEMONSTRATED A PREFERENCE FOR RONALD REAGAN'S PLEASING PERSONALITY. THE VOTERS, WE WERE URGED TO BELIEVE, AGREED WITH MONDALE ON THE ISSUES, BUT WERE BEGUILED BY A SUNNY DISPOSITION, MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA AND EFFECTIVE STAGING OF THE PRESIDENT'S APPEARANCES.

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LATER IN THE SAME ARTICLE, THEY WRITE,

"EVEN THOUGH THE ATTITUDES ON PUBLIC POLICIES OF A MAJORITY OF AMERICAN WOMEN ARE GENERALLY MORE PROGRESSIVE THAN MEN'S, IT SHOULD NOT BE ASSUMED THAT WOMEN ARE MOTIVATED IN ELECTIONS BY A COHESIVE IDEOLOGY THAT ARMS THEM AGAINST DEMAGOGUERY OR APPEALS BASED ON PERSONALITY AND STYLE. THE WOMEN'S VOTE HAS TO BE EDUCATED, CULTIVATED, AND ACTIVELY SOUGHT."

ACCORDING TO THE ABZUB/KELBER STANDARD, ANY VOTE BY WOMEN WHICH DOES NOT ENDORSE LIBERAL OR "PROGRESSIVE" POLICIES IS NOT A TRUE WOMEN'S VOTE AT ALL, BUT MUST HAVE BEEN THE RESULT OF SKILLFUL MASS BRAINWASHING. AND WHEN THEY URGE THAT THE WOMEN'S VOTE, IF INSUFFICIENTLY LIBERAL, MUST BE "EDUCATED," IT'S CLEAR THAT THEY ARE NOT INTERESTED IN SEEING WOMEN'S WISHES VINDICATED AT THE POLLS, BUT RATHER IN DOING SOME BRAINWASHING OF THEIR OWN.

THE LACK OF SUPPORT AMONG FEMINIST LEADERSHIP FOR WOMEN LIKE JEANNE KIRKPATRICK, SANDRA DAY O'CONNOR, AND MARGARET THATCHER (WOMEN WHO ARE REALLY MAKING HISTORY) FURTHER CONFIRMS THE SUSPICION THAT THE GOAL OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS IS NOT SO MUCH TO SEE WOMEN ADVANCE AND PROSPER AS IT IS TO PROMOTE BIG GOVERNMENT GOALS AND THEIR OWN HIDDEN ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA WHICH THEY DO NOT DARE TO ADVOCATE PUBLICLY BECAUSE OF ITS UNPOPULARITY AND WHICH IS FOR THE MOST PART DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO THE POLICIES OF THIS PRESIDENT.

WOMEN WERE NOT SLEEPWALKING THROUGH THE LAST ELECTION. THEY WERE A LOT SMARTER AND MORE ABLE TO DISCERN HIDDEN AGENDAS THAN BELLA ABZUG GIVES THEM CREDIT FOR. I SUBMIT THAT WOMEN KNEW EXACTLY WHAT THEY WERE DOING ON NOVEMBER 6. THEY WERE ENDORSING THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION RECORD OF LIMITED GOVERNMENT, OPPORTUNITY, PEACE WITH FREEDOM AND TRADITIONAL VALUES AND REJECTING THE RADICAL FEMINIST AGENDA WHOLESALE. A CLOSER ANALYSIS OF THE RETURNS IS ILLUMINATING BECAUSE VERY LITTLE OF THESE RESULTS HAVE RECEIVED ANY COVERAGE IN THE NATIONAL MEDIA. THE RESULTS ARE SIMPLY TOO OVERWHELMING TO BE ANALYZED AWAY. ONLY 11 PERCENT OF THOSE QUESTIONED AS THEY LEFT THE POLLS IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS FEMINISTS WHO STRONGLY ENDORSED THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT AND SIGNIFICANTLY, GERALDINE FERRARO, IN HER DEBATE WITH VICE PRESIDENT BUSH, NEVER ONCE RAISED THE ISSUE OF THE E.R.A. NOR DID SHE RAISE THE ISSUE OF COMPARABLE WORTH THOUGH SHE CERTAINLY HAD EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO. NOR WAS HER CANDIDACY ITSELF AN ASSET TO THE DEMOCRATIC TICKET. ACCORDING TO ABC, ONLY 11 PERCENT OF VOTERS CONSIDERED "THE FERRARO FACTOR" IMPORTANT -- AND 44 PERCENT OF THESE VOTED FOR PRESIDENT REAGAN.

FURTHERMORE, ALL OF THE FEMINIST CHALLENGERS FOR NATIONAL OFFICE WERE DEFEATED -- INCLUDING THE FORMER VICE PRESIDENT OF N.O.W. JANE WELLS-SCHOOLEY, WHO LOST TO DON RITTER IN MY HOME STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA DESPITE A WELL-SUPPORTED CAMPAIGN. EVEN IN MINNESOTA, THE ONLY STATE WHICH WENT FOR MONDALE, THE FEMINIST CHALLENGER TO SENATOR RUDY BOSCHWITZ, JOAN GROWE, RECEIVED ONLY 42 PERCENT OF THE VOTE COMPARED TO BOSCHWITZ'S 58 PERCENT. IN THE COLORADO SENATE RACE, THE RESULTS WERE EVEN MORE CRUSHING. NANCY DICK, THE FEMINIST CHALLENGER TO SENATOR BILL ARMSTRONG, RECEIVED ONLY 35 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, THE SMALLEST PERCENTAGE OF ANY DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE IN THE HISTORY OF COLORADO. AGAIN, IN MY OWN STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA, NANCY KULP, OF BEVERLY HILL-BILLY FAME, LOST A WELL-FUNDED AND MEDIA-INTENSE CAMPAIGN AGAINST BUD SHUSTER TAKING ONLY 34 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. ONLY TWO NEW WOMEN WON ELECTION TO THE CONGRESS THIS TERM AND BOTH ARE REPUBLICANS. FINALLY, IN MAINE, A STATE WITH A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR, THE STATE ERA WAS VOTED DOWN BY A RESOUNDING 65 PERCENT MARGIN.

I SAW AN AMUSING AND POIGNANT STORY IN THE WASHINGTON POST THE MORNING AFTER THE ELECTION. AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS ON ELECTION NIGHT, THE POLITICOS HAD GATHERED AROUND THE USUAL THREE TELEVISION SCREENS WITH YELLOW LEGAL PADS IN THEIR LAPS TO WATCH THE FATE OF THE SIXTY CANDIDATES THE CAUCUS HAD ENDORSED. THE SOUND HAD BEEN TURNED OFF ON TWO OUT OF THE THREE SETS. SUDDENLY A WOMAN'S FACE APPEARED ON ONE OF THE SILENT SCREENS AND THE WORD "WINNER" FLASHED OVER HER HEAD. EVERYONE IN THE ROOM WAS GALVANIZED. "WINNER, WINNER" THEY SHOUTED TO EACH OTHER. "WHO IS SHE? IS SHE ONE OF OURS?" THEY LEAPED TO TURN UP THE VOLUME, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THE WOMAN WAS THE WINNER OF THE LOTTERY.

WOMEN, LIKE MEN, UNDERSTAND THAT THE BEST GUARANTEE OF INCREASING OPPORTUNITY IS LOW INFLATION AND AN EXPANDING ECONOMY -- NOT WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION OR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENGINEERING BY ELITES. RETURNING FOR A MOMENT TO MRS. ABZUG'S ARTICLE, SHE ASSERTS THAT WOMEN ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT "FAIRNESS TO THE POOR" THAN ARE MEN. NOW, LEAVING ASIDE THAT THIS IS AN ABSURDLY LOADED EXPRESSION AND AN ASSERTION

ABOUT WHICH I AM IN ANY CASE EXTREMELY SKEPTICAL, A BELIEF IN FAIRNESS TO THE POOR IS NOT DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE WITH AN OVERWHELMING VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE PRESIDENT. IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE GOAL OF THIS ADMINISTRATION NOT TO KEEP THE POOR IN RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE POVERTY, BUT RATHER TO CREATE THE KIND OF SOCIETY WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO RISE OUT OF POVERTY AND INTO A BETTER LIFE FOREVER.

IN THE WAKE OF THESE CLEAR SIGNALS FROM WOMEN, IT FOLLOWS TO ASK: IF RADICAL FEMINISM HAS BEEN REJECTED, WHAT CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO FOR WOMEN IN THE FUTURE? I THINK THE ANSWER IS CHOICE. I EXPECT -- AND WILL WELCOME -- A FUTURE IN WHICH WOMEN ARE TRULY FREE TO FOLLOW THEIR TALENTS AND DESIRES IN WHATEVER DIRECTION THEY MAY LEAD AND I KNOW THE PRESIDENT IS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO PROVIDING WOMEN WITH THE BROADEST RANGE OF OPTIONS IN EXERCISING THEIR CHOICE. ACTUALLY, EMPHASIS ON CHOICE WITH RESPONSIBILITY WAS ONCE A FEMINIST THEME. EARLY FEMINIST LEADERS WANTED TO EXPAND POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN. BUT THE 1984 INTERPRETATIONS OF FEMINISM TURNED OUT TO BE A HOLLOW PROMISE FOR MANY WOMEN. IN FACT, MODERN DAY FEMINISM

HAS PROVIDED A NEW DESIGN OF THE STRAIGHT JACKET FOR A LARGE SEGMENT OF OUR FEMALE POPULATION. IN THAT SYMBOLIC STRAIGHT-JACKET MANY WOMEN WERE MADE TO FEEL THAT UNLESS THEY PURSUED A CAREER IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED FIELD, THEY COULDN'T HOLD THEIR HEADS UP. THEY BECAME APOLOGETIC AND MEEK ABOUT TRADITIONAL ROLES. IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE THE WORD "HOUSEWIFE" NEVER MADE A PUBLIC APPEARANCE WITHOUT ITS MODIFIER "JUST A" AND A SECRETARY HAD A DECREASING SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM ABOUT HER WORK. DESPITE THE SURFACE RHETORIC IN SUPPORT OF FAMILIES, THE ROLE OF WIFE AND MOTHER, HALLOWED AND REVERED FOR CENTURIES, WAS BY SUBTLE MESSAGES Demeaned AND DEVALUED TO THE POINT THAT MANY YOUNG WOMEN TODAY HAVE REJECTED MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD. THIS MAY WELL BE THE MOST SERIOUS DISSERVICE THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT DID TO WOMEN, AND TO OUR CULTURE GENERALLY. YOU SUPPLANT THE CENTRALITY OF FAMILY LIFE ONLY AT GRAVE PERIL TO THE SOCIAL FABRIC AND TO PERSONAL FULFILLMENT.



IN ADDITION, THE WHOLE IMAGE OF WOMEN'S HISTORY WHICH MODERN-DAY FEMINISTS PROMOTED AND WHICH WAS WIDELY ACCEPTED DURING THE SEVENTIES STRIKES ME AS HISTORICALLY FLAWED. WE WERE TOLD THAT FEMALES HAD BEEN SUBJUGATED AND EXPLOITED BY MEN DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, EXCLUDED FROM REMUNERATIVE WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME, AND RELEGATED TO MENIAL CHORES UNTIL THE MOVEMENT CAME ALONG AND LIBERATED THEM. BUT IF I MAY ENGAGE IN A LITTLE POST-REVISIONIST HISTORY, THERE ARE TWO FLAWS WITH THAT PERSPECTIVE. IN THE FIRST PLACE IT FAILS TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW. FOR EXAMPLE, NINETEENTH CENTURY REFORMERS (MANY OF WHOM WERE WOMEN) CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST APPALLING DEPREDACTIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO HAVE BEEN THE FACT THAT IT TOOK WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM THE HOME AND PLACED THEM IN FACTORIES. IT WAS HAILED AS A GREAT VICTORY FOR WOMEN WHEN LABOR LAWS WERE ENACTED WHICH FORBADE THAT KIND OF EXPLOITATION AND PROVIDED SPECIAL RULES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE. IN FACT, THE WOMAN AT HOME CARING FOR A HUSBAND AND CHILDREN -- THE ROLE WHICH WAS REGARDED AS SO CONFINING TO 1970'S FEMINISTS -- HAD BEEN THE GOAL OF THE PREVIOUS CENTURY'S REFORMERS. THIS IS CERTAINLY NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE HOME IS THE ONLY PROPER PLACE FOR A WOMAN, BUT ONLY THAT A FAILURE TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW OF HISTORY CAN GIVE ONE AN UNNECESSARY AND UNJUSTIFIED CHIP ON THE SHOULDER.

THE SECOND FLAW WITH THE MODERN FEMINIST VIEW OF HISTORY IS THAT IT MISPERCEIVES WOMEN'S WISHES. WHEN THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN LOOK AT HISTORY, THEY DO NOT SEE WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF MALE OPPRESSION. SOME MEN WERE PATRONIZING, AND WORKPLACE REFORMS WERE CERTAINLY NECESSARY. BUT IT UNDERESTIMATES WOMEN TO SUGGEST THAT THEY WERE TRAPPED IN ROLES THEY FOUND UNSATISFYING. THE VAST MAJORITY OF WOMEN UNEQUIVOCALLY PLACE FAMILY LIFE ABOVE ALL OTHER PURSUITS. AND MANY OF THOSE WHO MUST PUT CAREER FIRST OUT OF ECONOMIC NECESSITY, MYSELF INCLUDED, WISH THEY DID NOT HAVE TO DO SO. I THINK THAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON WOMEN'S ROLES EVOLVED AS THEY DID: THEY SUITED WOMEN'S INTERESTS.

TODAY, WOMEN'S INTERESTS HAVE OBVIOUSLY EXPANDED AND THE GREAT CHALLENGE CONFRONTING US IS HOW TO RECONCILE OUR FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES (AND REWARDS) WITH LARGER ROLES OUTSIDE THE HOME AS BOTH CAREERISTS AND VOLUNTEERS. CLEARLY TRANSFERRING GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S CHILDREN TO THE STATE IS NOT THE ANSWER. WE ARE NOW SEEING WIDESPREAD

SOUL-SEARCHING AMONG THE GENERATION OF WOMEN WHO CREATED THE MODERN FEMINIST REVOLUTION TWENTY YEARS AGO. THIS TOO IS A HEALTHY PHENOMENON IN OUR NATIONAL DEBATE. MANY THINKING AMERICAN WOMEN ARE ASKING THEMSELVES FREUD'S ANCIENT QUESTION: "WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?" FOR THOSE WHO FORESWORE CHILDREN, THERE IS FREQUENTLY AN ACHING REGRET. AND THERE IS A CORRESPONDING AND MOUNTING SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE REWARDS OF THE BUSINESS WORLD AND THE PRUDENCE OF ATTEMPTING TO BE SUPER-MOMS.

THIS REAPPRAISAL WILL CONTINUE. THE POINT IS NOT THAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD DO THE SAME THINGS. WE ARE AS VARIED IN OUR SKILLS AND DESIRES AS MEN ARE. RATHER, WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE MADE TO FEEL THAT SELF-RESPECT AND THE REGARD OF ONE'S PEERS LIE IN ONE DIRECTION, WHILE HAPPINESS LIES IN ANOTHER. NEITHER MOTHERHOOD NOR MASTER'S DEGREES ARE FOR EVERYONE. AND OUR CHILDREN NEED TO BE SHIELDED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM CAUSED BY THESE UPHEAVALS AS WE SORT OUT THESE PROBLEMS IN OUR OWN LIVES AND IN OUR SOCIETY OVERALL. OUR GREAT CHALLENGE NOW AS AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IS TO DISCOVER WAYS IN OUR FAMOUS CREATIVE AMERICAN STYLE TO ACCOMMODATE THE DESIRE TO MAINTAIN HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES, AND WELL-ADJUSTED CHILDREN, TO FULFILL OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS CITIZENS, TO USE OUR TALENTS . . . AND KEEP OUR SANITY.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY

15TH ANNUAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 8, 1984

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

RADICAL FEMINISM IN RETREAT:

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE '84 VOTE

by

FAITH RYAN WHITTLESEY  
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT  
FOR PUBLIC LIAISON

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN MAKING A VERY VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL DEBATE BECAUSE DR. HOXIE HAS ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD THAT IN POLITICS, THERE IS NOTHING MORE POWERFUL THAN IDEAS.

IN ADDITION TO DR. HOXIE, FOUNDER OF THE CENTER, THIS FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH ABOUT THE POWER OF IDEAS IS UNDERSTOOD BY RONALD REAGAN, BUT IT IS NOT WIDELY UNDERSTOOD, AND IT IS WHAT MAKES THE COMMENTS OF MANY PUNDITS SEEM SO TRIVIAL AS THEY CHASE "WHO'S AHEAD?" STORIES IN ELECTION YEARS. WE SAW THIS MINDSET GREATLY IN EVIDENCE FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S RESOUNDING LANDSLIDE. THE POST-MORTEM WHICH ROLLED OFF THE TYPEWRITERS OF THE PRESTIGE PRESS ALL SANG THE SAME CHORUS: THE VICTORY DEMONSTRATED A PREFERENCE FOR RONALD REAGAN'S PLEASING PERSONALITY. THE VOTERS, WE WERE URGED TO BELIEVE, AGREED WITH MONDALE ON THE ISSUES, BUT WERE BEGUILED BY A SUNNY DISPOSITION, MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA AND EFFECTIVE STAGING OF THE PRESIDENT'S APPEARANCES.

IT IS FAIRLY CLEAR WHY THIS HAS BECOME THE POPULAR INTERPRETATION OF WHAT HAPPENED ON NOVEMBER 6. ANY OTHER ANALYSIS WOULD HAVE TO CONFRONT THE FACT THAT IDEAS AND LEADERSHIP MOVE NATIONS. PRESIDENT REAGAN IS A VERY CHARMING MAN -- BUT OUR HISTORY BOOKS ARE FULL OF CHARMING CANDIDATES WHO DID NOT CARRY FORTY-NINE OF FIFTY STATES. HIS VICTORY REPRESENTED THE TRIUMPH OF HIS RECORD, AND ABOVE ALL, HIS IDEAS WHICH DRAMATICALLY ALTERED THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE.



I HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY INTRIGUED AT THE COTTAGE INDUSTRY WHICH HAS SPRUNG UP IN THE WAKE OF THE ELECTION IN INTERPRETING THE WOMEN'S VOTE AND SO-CALLED "WOMEN'S ISSUES." ANALYSTS HAVE INFORMED US THAT THE "WOMEN'S AGENDA" SUFFERED A SETBACK. QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AS TO WHETHER GERALDINE FERRARO'S CANDIDACY HURT OR HELPED WOMEN. BUT OF COURSE, IF YOU ASK THE WRONG QUESTION, YOU WILL GET THE WRONG ANSWER. WOMEN ARE TOO SOPHISTICATED TO BE SWAYED BY GENDER ALONE AND THEY ARE CERTAINLY NOT A MONOLITHIC VOTING BLOC. WOMEN WHO HAVE DIFFERENT TASTES IN CLOTHING AND MAKE-UP ALSO HAVE DIFFERENT TASTES IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. MRS. FERRARO REPRESENTS A POLITICAL OUTLOOK FAR TO THE LEFT OF THE MAJORITY OF AMERICAN VOTERS -- MEN AND WOMEN. TO ASK WHETHER HER CANDIDACY HURT WOMEN IS TO DEMEAN THE INTELLIGENCE AND INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN VOTERS. AND WHEN PUNDITS INTONE THAT THE "WOMEN'S AGENDA" HAS BEEN STYMIED BY THE ELECTION RESULTS, WE ARE FORCED TO ASK: WHO IS DEFINING THE WOMEN'S AGENDA? IT WOULD SEEM THAT THEY ARE EQUATING THE AGENDA OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS WITH THE WOMEN'S AGENDA.

IN POINT OF FACT, FEMINISM IS ONLY ONE THREAD IN THE MULTI-COLORED TAPESTRY OF WOMEN'S OPINIONS IN AMERICA -- AND THE MODERN DAY INTERPRETATION OF FEMINISM IS BY NO MEANS THE MAJORITY VIEW. IT IS ILLUMINATING, FOR EXAMPLE, TO LOOK AT THE MEMBERSHIP FIGURES FOR THE VARIOUS WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA TODAY. IF ONE WERE TO JUDGE BY THE WEIGHT AND ATTENTION GIVEN IN THE MEDIA TO THE LEADERSHIP PRONOUNCEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN, (N.O.W.) OR THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS, ONE MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT THEY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF MOST AMERICAN WOMEN. IN FACT, THE N. O. W. HAS A MEMBERSHIP OF ONLY 250,000 AND THE CAUCUS HAS A BARE 75,000 MEMBERS. COMPARE THAT WITH THE CONCERNED WOMEN OF AMERICA, AN EVANGELICAL WOMEN'S GROUP WHICH GOT STARTED ONLY A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO, BUT ALREADY COUNTS 500,000, MEMBERS AS DOES THE MUCH OLDER GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMENS CLUBS. OR THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY AND THE MORMON WOMEN'S RELIEF SOCIETY, BOTH OF WHICH HAVE OVER ONE MILLION MEMBERS. THE GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA WEIGHS IN WITH 2,880,000, AMONG THEM ALMOST 800,000 ADULT MEMBERS.

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WOMEN, LIKE MEN, UNDERSTAND THAT THE BEST GUARANTEE OF INCREASING OPPORTUNITY IS LOW INFLATION AND AN EXPANDING ECONOMY -- NOT WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION OR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENGINEERING BY ELITES. RETURNING FOR A MOMENT TO MRS. ABZUG'S ARTICLE, SHE ASSERTS THAT WOMEN ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT "FAIRNESS TO THE POOR" THAN ARE MEN. NOW, LEAVING ASIDE THAT THIS IS AN ABSURDLY LOADED EXPRESSION AND AN ASSERTION ABOUT WHICH I AM IN ANY CASE EXTREMELY SKEPTICAL, A BELIEF IN FAIRNESS TO THE POOR IS NOT DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE WITH AN OVERWHELMING VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE PRESIDENT. IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE GOAL OF THIS ADMINISTRATION NOT TO KEEP THE POOR IN RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE POVERTY, BUT RATHER TO CREATE THE KIND OF SOCIETY WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO RISE OUT OF POVERTY AND INTO A BETTER LIFE FOREVER.

IN THE WAKE OF THESE CLEAR SIGNALS FROM WOMEN, IT FOLLOWS TO ASK: IF RADICAL FEMINISM HAS BEEN REJECTED, WHAT CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO FOR WOMEN IN THE FUTURE? I THINK THE ANSWER IS CHOICE. I EXPECT -- AND WILL WELCOME -- A FUTURE IN WHICH WOMEN ARE TRULY FREE TO FOLLOW THEIR TALENTS AND DESIRES IN WHATEVER DIRECTION THEY MAY LEAD AND I KNOW THE PRESIDENT IS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO PROVIDING WOMEN WITH THE BROADEST RANGE OF OPTIONS IN EXERCISING THEIR CHOICE. ACTUALLY, EMPHASIS ON CHOICE WITH RESPONSIBILITY WAS ONCE A FEMINIST THEME. EARLY FEMINIST LEADERS WANTED TO EXPAND POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN. BUT THE 1984 INTERPRETATIONS OF FEMINISM TURNED OUT TO BE A HOLLOW PROMISE FOR MANY WOMEN. IN FACT, MODERN DAY FEMINISM HAS PROVIDED A NEW DESIGN OF THE STRAIGHT JACKET FOR A LARGE SEGMENT OF OUR FEMALE POPULATION. IN THAT SYMBOLIC STRAIGHT-JACKET MANY WOMEN WERE MADE TO FEEL THAT UNLESS THEY PURSUED A CAREER IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED FIELD, THEY COULDN'T HOLD THEIR HEADS UP. THEY BECAME APOLOGETIC AND MEEK ABOUT TRADITIONAL ROLES. IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE THE WORD "HOUSEWIFE" NEVER MADE A PUBLIC APPEARANCE WITHOUT ITS MODIFIER "JUST A" AND A SECRETARY HAD A DECREASING SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM ABOUT HER WORK. DESPITE THE SURFACE RHETORIC IN SUPPORT OF FAMILIES, THE ROLE OF WIFE AND MOTHER, HALLOWED AND REVERED FOR CENTURIES, WAS BY SUBTLE MESSAGES Demeaned AND DEVALUED TO THE POINT THAT MANY YOUNG WOMEN TODAY HAVE REJECTED MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD. THIS MAY WELL BE THE MOST SERIOUS DISSERVICE THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT DID TO WOMEN, AND TO OUR CULTURE GENERALLY. YOU SUPPLANT THE CENTRALITY OF FAMILY LIFE ONLY AT GRAVE PERIL TO THE SOCIAL FABRIC AND TO PERSONAL FULFILLMENT.



IN ADDITION, THE WHOLE IMAGE OF WOMEN'S HISTORY WHICH MODERN-DAY FEMINISTS PROMOTED AND WHICH WAS WIDELY ACCEPTED DURING THE SEVENTIES STRIKES ME AS HISTORICALLY FLAWED. WE WERE TOLD THAT FEMALES HAD BEEN SUBJUGATED AND EXPLOITED BY MEN DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, EXCLUDED FROM REMUNERATIVE WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME, AND RELEGATED TO MENIAL CHORES UNTIL THE MOVEMENT CAME ALONG AND LIBERATED THEM. BUT IF I MAY ENGAGE IN A LITTLE POST-REVISIONIST HISTORY, THERE ARE TWO FLAWS WITH THAT PERSPECTIVE. IN THE FIRST PLACE IT FAILS TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW. FOR EXAMPLE, NINETEENTH CENTURY REFORMERS (MANY OF WHOM WERE WOMEN) CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST APPALLING DEPREDATIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO HAVE BEEN THE FACT THAT IT TOOK WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM THE HOME AND PLACED THEM IN FACTORIES. IT WAS HAILED AS A GREAT VICTORY FOR WOMEN WHEN LABOR LAWS WERE ENACTED WHICH FORBADE THAT KIND OF EXPLOITATION AND PROVIDED SPECIAL RULES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE. IN FACT, THE WOMAN AT HOME CARING FOR A HUSBAND AND CHILDREN -- THE ROLE WHICH WAS REGARDED AS SO CONFINING TO 1970'S FEMINISTS -- HAD BEEN THE GOAL OF THE PREVIOUS CENTURY'S REFORMERS. THIS IS CERTAINLY NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE HOME IS THE ONLY PROPER PLACE FOR A WOMAN, BUT ONLY THAT A FAILURE TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW OF HISTORY CAN GIVE ONE AN UNNECESSARY AND UNJUSTIFIED CHIP ON THE SHOULDER.

THE SECOND FLAW WITH THE MODERN FEMINIST VIEW OF HISTORY IS THAT IT MISPERCEIVES WOMEN'S WISHES. WHEN THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN LOOK AT HISTORY, THEY DO NOT SEE WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF MALE OPPRESSION. SOME MEN WERE PATRONIZING, AND WORKPLACE REFORMS WERE CERTAINLY NECESSARY. BUT IT UNDERESTIMATES WOMEN TO SUGGEST THAT THEY WERE TRAPPED IN ROLES THEY FOUND UNSATISFYING. THE VAST MAJORITY OF WOMEN UNEQUIVOCALLY PLACE FAMILY LIFE ABOVE ALL OTHER PURSUITS. AND MANY OF THOSE WHO MUST PUT CAREER FIRST OUT OF ECONOMIC NECESSITY, MYSELF INCLUDED, WISH THEY DID NOT HAVE TO DO SO. I THINK THAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON WOMEN'S ROLES EVOLVED AS THEY DID: THEY SUITED WOMEN'S INTERESTS.

TODAY, WOMEN'S INTERESTS HAVE OBVIOUSLY EXPANDED AND THE GREAT CHALLENGE CONFRONTING US IS HOW TO RECONCILE OUR FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES (AND REWARDS) WITH LARGER ROLES OUTSIDE THE HOME AS BOTH CAREERISTS AND VOLUNTEERS. CLEARLY TRANSFERRING GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S CHILDREN TO THE STATE IS NOT THE ANSWER. WE ARE NOW SEEING WIDESPREAD SOUL-SEARCHING AMONG THE GENERATION OF WOMEN WHO CREATED THE MODERN FEMINIST REVOLUTION TWENTY YEARS AGO. THIS TOO IS A HEALTHY PHENOMENON IN OUR NATIONAL DEBATE. MANY THINKING AMERICAN WOMEN ARE ASKING THEMSELVES FREUD'S ANCIENT QUESTION: "WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?" FOR THOSE WHO FORESWORE CHILDREN, THERE IS FREQUENTLY AN ACHING REGRET. AND THERE IS A CORRESPONDING AND MOUNTING SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE REWARDS OF THE BUSINESS WORLD AND THE PRUDENCE OF ATTEMPTING TO BE SUPER-MOMS.

THIS REAPPRAISAL WILL CONTINUE. THE POINT IS NOT THAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD DO THE SAME THINGS. WE ARE AS VARIED IN OUR SKILLS AND DESIRES AS MEN ARE. RATHER, WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE MADE TO FEEL THAT SELF-RESPECT AND THE REGARD OF ONE'S PEERS LIE IN ONE DIRECTION, WHILE HAPPINESS LIES IN ANOTHER. NEITHER MOTHERHOOD NOR MASTER'S DEGREES ARE FOR EVERYONE. AND OUR CHILDREN NEED TO BE SHIELDED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM CAUSED BY THESE UPHEAVALS AS WE SORT OUT THESE PROBLEMS IN OUR OWN LIVES AND IN OUR SOCIETY OVERALL. OUR GREAT CHALLENGE NOW AS AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IS TO DISCOVER WAYS IN OUR FAMOUS CREATIVE AMERICAN STYLE TO ACCOMMODATE THE DESIRE TO MAINTAIN HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES, AND WELL-ADJUSTED CHILDREN, TO FULFILL OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS CITIZENS, TO USE OUR TALENTS . . . AND KEEP OUR SANITY.

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY

15TH ANNUAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

DECEMBER 8, 1984

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI

RADICAL FEMINISM IN RETREAT:

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE '84 VOTE

by

FAITH RYAN WHITTLESEY  
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT  
FOR PUBLIC LIAISON

THE CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF THE PRESIDENCY HAS BEEN MAKING A VERY VALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE NATIONAL DEBATE BECAUSE DR. HOXIE HAS ALWAYS UNDERSTOOD THAT IN POLITICS, THERE IS NOTHING MORE POWERFUL THAN IDEAS.

IN ADDITION TO DR. HOXIE, FOUNDER OF THE CENTER, THIS FUNDAMENTAL TRUTH ABOUT THE POWER OF IDEAS IS UNDERSTOOD BY RONALD REAGAN, BUT IT IS NOT WIDELY UNDERSTOOD, AND IT IS WHAT MAKES THE COMMENTS OF MANY PUNDITS SEEM SO TRIVIAL AS THEY CHASE "WHO'S AHEAD?" STORIES IN ELECTION YEARS. WE SAW THIS MINDSET GREATLY IN EVIDENCE FOLLOWING THE PRESIDENT'S RESOUNDING LANDSLIDE. THE POST-MORTEM WHICH ROLLED OFF THE TYPEWRITERS OF THE PRESTIGE PRESS ALL SANG THE SAME CHORUS: THE VICTORY DEMONSTRATED A PREFERENCE FOR RONALD REAGAN'S PLEASING PERSONALITY. THE VOTERS, WE WERE URGED TO BELIEVE, AGREED WITH MONDALE ON THE ISSUES, BUT WERE BEGUILED BY A SUNNY DISPOSITION, MANIPULATION OF THE MEDIA AND EFFECTIVE STAGING OF THE PRESIDENT'S APPEARANCES.

IT IS FAIRLY CLEAR WHY THIS HAS BECOME THE POPULAR INTERPRETATION OF WHAT HAPPENED ON NOVEMBER 6. ANY OTHER ANALYSIS WOULD HAVE TO CONFRONT THE FACT THAT IDEAS AND LEADERSHIP MOVE NATIONS. PRESIDENT REAGAN IS A VERY CHARMING MAN -- BUT OUR HISTORY BOOKS ARE FULL OF CHARMING CANDIDATES WHO DID NOT CARRY FORTY-NINE OF FIFTY STATES. HIS VICTORY REPRESENTED THE TRIUMPH OF HIS RECORD, AND ABOVE ALL, HIS IDEAS WHICH DRAMATICALLY ALTERED THE FRAMEWORK OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE.

I HAVE BEEN ESPECIALLY INTRIGUED AT THE COTTAGE INDUSTRY WHICH HAS SPRUNG UP IN THE WAKE OF THE ELECTION IN INTERPRETING THE WOMEN'S VOTE AND SO-CALLED "WOMEN'S ISSUES." ANALYSTS HAVE INFORMED US THAT THE "WOMEN'S AGENDA" SUFFERED A SETBACK. QUESTIONS WERE ASKED AS TO WHETHER GERALDINE FERRARO'S CANDIDACY HURT OR HELPED WOMEN. BUT OF COURSE, IF YOU ASK THE WRONG QUESTION, YOU WILL GET THE WRONG ANSWER. WOMEN ARE TOO SOPHISTICATED TO BE SWAYED BY GENDER ALONE AND THEY ARE CERTAINLY NOT A MONOLITHIC VOTING BLOC. WOMEN WHO HAVE DIFFERENT TASTES IN CLOTHING AND MAKE-UP ALSO HAVE DIFFERENT TASTES IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY. MRS. FERRARO REPRESENTS A POLITICAL OUTLOOK FAR TO THE LEFT OF THE MAJORITY OF AMERICAN VOTERS -- MEN AND WOMEN. TO ASK WHETHER HER CANDIDACY HURT WOMEN IS TO DEMEAN THE INTELLIGENCE AND INDEPENDENCE OF WOMEN VOTERS. AND WHEN PUNDITS INTONE THAT THE "WOMEN'S AGENDA" HAS BEEN STYMIED BY THE ELECTION RESULTS, WE ARE FORCED TO ASK: WHO IS DEFINING THE WOMEN'S AGENDA? IT WOULD SEEM THAT THEY ARE EQUATING THE AGENDA OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS WITH THE WOMEN'S AGENDA.

IN POINT OF FACT, FEMINISM IS ONLY ONE THREAD IN THE MULTI-COLORED TAPESTRY OF WOMEN'S OPINIONS IN AMERICA -- AND THE MODERN DAY INTERPRETATION OF FEMINISM IS BY NO MEANS THE MAJORITY VIEW. IT IS ILLUMINATING, FOR EXAMPLE, TO LOOK AT THE MEMBERSHIP FIGURES FOR THE VARIOUS WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN AMERICA TODAY. IF ONE WERE TO JUDGE BY THE WEIGHT AND ATTENTION GIVEN IN THE MEDIA TO THE LEADERSHIP PRONOUNCEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN, (N.O.W.) OR THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS, ONE MIGHT CONCLUDE THAT THEY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF MOST AMERICAN WOMEN. IN FACT, THE N. O. W. HAS A MEMBERSHIP OF ONLY 250,000 AND THE CAUCUS HAS A BARE 75,000 MEMBERS. COMPARE THAT WITH THE CONCERNED WOMEN OF AMERICA, AN EVANGELICAL WOMEN'S GROUP WHICH GOT STARTED ONLY A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO, BUT ALREADY COUNTS 500,000, MEMBERS AS DOES THE MUCH OLDER GENERAL FEDERATION OF WOMENS CLUBS. OR THE AMERICAN LEGION AUXILIARY AND THE MORMON WOMEN'S RELIEF SOCIETY, BOTH OF WHICH HAVE OVER ONE MILLION MEMBERS. THE GIRL SCOUTS OF AMERICA WEIGHS IN WITH 2,880,000, AMONG THEM ALMOST 800,000 ADULT MEMBERS.



THE FUTURE FOR WOMEN IN AMERICAN POLITICS WILL BE DETERMINED BY THE INDIVIDUAL DECISIONS OF INCREASINGLY WELL-EDUCATED INDIVIDUAL WOMEN. IN THE ELECTION OF 1984, 58% OF FEMALE VOTERS CHOSE THE VISION OF AMERICA PRESENTED BY PRESIDENT REAGAN: CONTINUED ECONOMIC GROWTH, LOW INFLATION, STRONG NATIONAL DEFENSE, CUTBACKS IN THE GROWTH OF REGULATIONS AND DOMESTIC SPENDING, SUPPORT FOR FREEDOM AROUND THE WORLD, REAFFIRMATION OF TRADITIONAL VALUES, AND EMPHASIS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND VOLUNTEERISM. THOSE WHO PREDICTED THAT RONALD REAGAN WOULD LOSE THE WOMEN'S VOTE WERE DEAD WRONG. THE PRESIDENT DID SIGNIFICANTLY BETTER WITH WOMEN IN 1984 THAN HE DID IN 1980.

WOMEN DID NOT MAKE THE DECISION TO SUPPORT RONALD REAGAN AT THE EXPENSE OF "WOMEN'S ISSUES." ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PEACE WITH FREEDOM ARE WOMEN'S CONCERNS EVERY BIT AS MUCH AS THEY ARE MEN'S. IT IS SIMPLY IMPOSSIBLE TO SEPARATE, AS THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS ATTEMPT TO DO IN THEIR BALKANIZING OF AMERICA, WHAT'S GOOD FOR WOMEN FROM WHAT'S GOOD FOR MEN. MEN AND WOMEN ARE NOT COMPETITORS OR ENEMIES, AND FRANKLY, I BELIEVE THAT THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS ARE MAKING A TACTICAL AS MUCH AS A SUBSTANTIVE ERROR WHEN THEY CONTINUALLY STRESS A SEPARATE WOMEN'S AGENDA. IN DOING SO, THEY ARE ACTUALLY RELEGATING THEMSELVES TO A SECOND-PLACE STATUS ON MANY OF THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUES OF THE DAY. WOMEN NEED TO BECOME INVOLVED IN THE MAINSTREAM OF POLICY-MAKING ON MACRO-ECONOMIC AND FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. THAT IS THE ROUTE TO BEING TAKEN SERIOUSLY. A DIVISIVE EMPHASIS ON A NARROW, PAROCHIAL WOMEN'S AGENDA (WHICH MAY BE PERCEIVED AS ANTITHETICAL TO THE NATIONAL AGENDA), ONLY PIGEONHOLES WOMEN IN A LESSER STATUS ARGUING AMONG THEMSELVES ABOUT SO-CALLED WOMEN'S ISSUES WHILE MEN CONTINUE TO DOMINATE THE OTHER AREAS.

ON AUGUST 26, 1984, PRESIDENT REAGAN ISSUED A PROCLAMATION IN WHICH HE SAID, "THERE ARE NO LONGER ANY MEN'S ISSUES OR WOMEN'S ISSUES -- JUST ISSUES THAT CONCERN EACH OF US AMERICANS." BRINGING OUR ABUNDANCE OF CAPABLE WOMEN INTO THE MAINSTREAM OF THE NATIONAL DEBATE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION WOMEN'S GROUPS COULD MAKE TO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF WOMEN AND OF THE NATION GENERALLY. SADLY, MANY OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS SEEM ONLY TO SEEK TO EXCHANGE DEPENDENCE ON HUSBANDS AND FATHERS FOR A DEPENDENCE ON GOVERNMENT. BUT HAPPILY MOST WOMEN DO NOT SHARE THE STATIST INCLINATIONS OF THE ORGANIZED FEMINISTS.

MANY POLITICAL GURUS WHO BELIEVED THERE WOULD BE A "HIDDEN WOMEN'S VOTE" IN THIS PAST ELECTION WERE RIGHT. THE VOTE CERTAINLY WAS WELL "HIDDEN". SOME RADICAL FEMINIST LEADERS DON'T EVEN GIVE WOMEN CREDIT FOR HAVING BEEN ABLE TO RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN BEST INTERESTS IN THAT ELECTION. LISTEN TO WHAT BELLA ABZUG AND MIM KELBER WROTE IN THE NOVEMBER 23 NEW YORK TIMES IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "WHY DID A MAJORITY OF WOMEN SUPPORT THE REPUBLICAN PRESIDENTIAL TICKET?" HERE IS BELLA ABZUG'S AND MIM KELBER'S EXPLANATION:

"IN A BRILLIANTLY MANIPULATED NATIONAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN THAT LED VOTERS TO CHOOSE PERSONALITY OVER POLICIES, AN UPBEAT MOOD OVER CASSANDRA-LIKE WARNINGS, THE APPEARANCE OF TRUTH RATHER THAN TRUTH ITSELF, AND THE STATUS QUO OVER A HAZY DEMOCRATIC FUTURE IN WHICH ONLY MR. MONDALE'S PROMISED TAX INCREASE SEEMED A CERTAINTY, WOMEN WERE DRAWN TO MR. REAGAN BY HIS REASSURING THEMES OF PEACE, PROSPERITY, AND PATRIOTISM."

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FURTHERMORE, ALL OF THE FEMINIST CHALLENGERS FOR NATIONAL OFFICE WERE DEFEATED -- INCLUDING THE FORMER VICE PRESIDENT OF N.O.W. JANE WELLS-SCHOOLEY, WHO LOST TO DON RITTER IN MY HOME STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA DESPITE A WELL-SUPPORTED CAMPAIGN. EVEN IN MINNESOTA, THE ONLY STATE WHICH WENT FOR MONDALE, THE FEMINIST CHALLENGER TO SENATOR RUDY BOSCHWITZ, JOAN GROWE, RECEIVED ONLY 42 PERCENT OF THE VOTE COMPARED TO BOSCHWITZ'S 58 PERCENT. IN THE COLORADO SENATE RACE, THE RESULTS WERE EVEN MORE CRUSHING. NANCY DICK, THE FEMINIST CHALLENGER TO SENATOR BILL ARMSTRONG, RECEIVED ONLY 35 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, THE SMALLEST PERCENTAGE OF ANY DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE IN THE HISTORY OF COLORADO. AGAIN, IN MY OWN STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA, NANCY KULP, OF BEVERLY HILL-BILLY FAME, LOST A WELL-FUNDED AND MEDIA-INTENSE CAMPAIGN AGAINST BUD SHUSTER TAKING ONLY 34 PERCENT OF THE VOTE. ONLY TWO NEW WOMEN WON ELECTION TO THE CONGRESS THIS TERM AND BOTH ARE REPUBLICANS. FINALLY, IN MAINE, A STATE WITH A LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC GOVERNOR, THE STATE ERA WAS VOTED DOWN BY A RESOUNDING 65 PERCENT MARGIN.

I SAW AN AMUSING AND POIGNANT STORY IN THE WASHINGTON POST THE MORNING AFTER THE ELECTION. AT THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAUCUS ON ELECTION NIGHT, THE POLITICOS HAD GATHERED AROUND THE USUAL THREE TELEVISION SCREENS WITH YELLOW LEGAL PADS IN THEIR LAPS TO WATCH THE FATE OF THE SIXTY CANDIDATES THE CAUCUS HAD ENDORSED. THE SOUND HAD BEEN TURNED OFF ON TWO OUT OF THE THREE SETS. SUDDENLY A WOMAN'S FACE APPEARED ON ONE OF THE SILENT SCREENS AND THE WORD "WINNER" FLASHED OVER HER HEAD. EVERYONE IN THE ROOM WAS GALVANIZED. "WINNER, WINNER" THEY SHOUTED TO EACH OTHER. "WHO IS SHE? IS SHE ONE OF OURS?" THEY LEAPED TO TURN UP THE VOLUME, ONLY TO DISCOVER THAT THE WOMAN WAS THE WINNER OF THE LOTTERY.

WOMEN, LIKE MEN, UNDERSTAND THAT THE BEST GUARANTEE OF INCREASING OPPORTUNITY IS LOW INFLATION AND AN EXPANDING ECONOMY -- NOT WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION OR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENGINEERING BY ELITES. RETURNING FOR A MOMENT TO MRS. ABZUG'S ARTICLE, SHE ASSERTS THAT WOMEN ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT "FAIRNESS TO THE POOR" THAN ARE MEN. NOW, LEAVING ASIDE THAT THIS IS AN ABSURDLY LOADED EXPRESSION AND AN ASSERTION ABOUT WHICH I AM IN ANY CASE EXTREMELY SKEPTICAL, A BELIEF IN FAIRNESS TO THE POOR IS NOT DIFFICULT TO RECONCILE WITH AN OVERWHELMING VOTE IN FAVOR OF THE PRESIDENT. IT IS, AFTER ALL, THE GOAL OF THIS ADMINISTRATION NOT TO KEEP THE POOR IN RELATIVELY COMFORTABLE POVERTY, BUT RATHER TO CREATE THE KIND OF SOCIETY WHICH ALLOWS THEM TO RISE OUT OF POVERTY AND INTO A BETTER LIFE FOREVER.

IN THE WAKE OF THESE CLEAR SIGNALS FROM WOMEN, IT FOLLOWS TO ASK: IF RADICAL FEMINISM HAS BEEN REJECTED, WHAT CAN WE LOOK FORWARD TO FOR WOMEN IN THE FUTURE? I THINK THE ANSWER IS CHOICE. I EXPECT -- AND WILL WELCOME -- A FUTURE IN WHICH WOMEN ARE TRULY FREE TO FOLLOW THEIR TALENTS AND DESIRES IN WHATEVER DIRECTION THEY MAY LEAD AND I KNOW THE PRESIDENT IS DEEPLY COMMITTED TO PROVIDING WOMEN WITH THE BROADEST RANGE OF OPTIONS IN EXERCISING THEIR CHOICE. ACTUALLY, EMPHASIS ON CHOICE WITH RESPONSIBILITY WAS ONCE A FEMINIST THEME. EARLY FEMINIST LEADERS WANTED TO EXPAND POSSIBILITIES FOR WOMEN. BUT THE 1984 INTERPRETATIONS OF FEMINISM TURNED OUT TO BE A HOLLOW PROMISE FOR MANY WOMEN. IN FACT, MODERN DAY FEMINISM HAS PROVIDED A NEW DESIGN OF THE STRAIGHT JACKET FOR A LARGE SEGMENT OF OUR FEMALE POPULATION. IN THAT SYMBOLIC STRAIGHT-JACKET MANY WOMEN WERE MADE TO FEEL THAT UNLESS THEY PURSUED A CAREER IN A TRADITIONALLY MALE-DOMINATED FIELD, THEY COULDN'T HOLD THEIR HEADS UP. THEY BECAME APOLOGETIC AND MEEK ABOUT TRADITIONAL ROLES. IT GOT TO THE POINT WHERE THE WORD "HOUSEWIFE" NEVER MADE A PUBLIC APPEARANCE WITHOUT ITS MODIFIER "JUST A" AND A SECRETARY HAD A DECREASING SENSE OF SELF-ESTEEM ABOUT HER WORK. DESPITE THE SURFACE RHETORIC IN SUPPORT OF FAMILIES, THE ROLE OF WIFE AND MOTHER, HALLOWED AND REVERED FOR CENTURIES, WAS BY SUBTLE MESSAGES Demeaned AND DEVALUED TO THE POINT THAT MANY YOUNG WOMEN TODAY HAVE REJECTED MARRIAGE AND MOTHERHOOD. THIS MAY WELL BE THE MOST SERIOUS DISSERVICE THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT DID TO WOMEN, AND TO OUR CULTURE GENERALLY. YOU SUPPLANT THE CENTRALITY OF FAMILY LIFE ONLY AT GRAVE PERIL TO THE SOCIAL FABRIC AND TO PERSONAL FULFILLMENT.

IN ADDITION, THE WHOLE IMAGE OF WOMEN'S HISTORY WHICH MODERN-DAY FEMINISTS PROMOTED AND WHICH WAS WIDELY ACCEPTED DURING THE SEVENTIES STRIKES ME AS HISTORICALLY FLAWED. WE WERE TOLD THAT FEMALES HAD BEEN SUBJUGATED AND EXPLOITED BY MEN DOWN THROUGH THE CENTURIES, EXCLUDED FROM REMUNERATIVE WORK OUTSIDE THE HOME, AND RELEGATED TO MENIAL CHORES UNTIL THE MOVEMENT CAME ALONG AND LIBERATED THEM. BUT IF I MAY ENGAGE IN A LITTLE POST-REVISIONIST HISTORY, THERE ARE TWO FLAWS WITH THAT PERSPECTIVE. IN THE FIRST PLACE IT FAILS TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW. FOR EXAMPLE, NINETEENTH CENTURY REFORMERS (MANY OF WHOM WERE WOMEN) CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST APPALLING DEPREDATIONS OF THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION TO HAVE BEEN THE FACT THAT IT TOOK WOMEN AND CHILDREN FROM THE HOME AND PLACED THEM IN FACTORIES. IT WAS HAILED AS A GREAT VICTORY FOR WOMEN WHEN LABOR LAWS WERE ENACTED WHICH FORBADE THAT KIND OF EXPLOITATION AND PROVIDED SPECIAL RULES FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE. IN FACT, THE WOMAN AT HOME CARING FOR A HUSBAND AND CHILDREN -- THE ROLE WHICH WAS REGARDED AS SO CONFINING TO 1970'S FEMINISTS -- HAD BEEN THE GOAL OF THE PREVIOUS CENTURY'S REFORMERS. THIS IS CERTAINLY NOT TO SUGGEST THAT THE HOME IS THE ONLY PROPER PLACE FOR A WOMAN, BUT ONLY THAT A FAILURE TO TAKE THE LONG VIEW OF HISTORY CAN GIVE ONE AN UNNECESSARY AND UNJUSTIFIED CHIP ON THE SHOULDER.



THE SECOND FLAW WITH THE MODERN FEMINIST VIEW OF HISTORY IS THAT IT MISPERCEIVES WOMEN'S WISHES. WHEN THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN LOOK AT HISTORY, THEY DO NOT SEE WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF MALE OPPRESSION. SOME MEN WERE PATRONIZING, AND WORKPLACE REFORMS WERE CERTAINLY NECESSARY. BUT IT UNDERESTIMATES WOMEN TO SUGGEST THAT THEY WERE TRAPPED IN ROLES THEY FOUND UNSATISFYING. THE VAST MAJORITY OF WOMEN UNEQUIVOCALLY PLACE FAMILY LIFE ABOVE ALL OTHER PURSUITS. AND MANY OF THOSE WHO MUST PUT CAREER FIRST OUT OF ECONOMIC NECESSITY, MYSELF INCLUDED, WISH THEY DID NOT HAVE TO DO SO. I THINK THAT IS THE PRIMARY REASON WOMEN'S ROLES EVOLVED AS THEY DID: THEY SUITED WOMEN'S INTERESTS.

TODAY, WOMEN'S INTERESTS HAVE OBVIOUSLY EXPANDED AND THE GREAT CHALLENGE CONFRONTING US IS HOW TO RECONCILE OUR FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES (AND REWARDS) WITH LARGER ROLES OUTSIDE THE HOME AS BOTH CAREERISTS AND VOLUNTEERS. CLEARLY TRANSFERRING GREATER RESPONSIBILITY FOR ONE'S CHILDREN TO THE STATE IS NOT THE ANSWER. WE ARE NOW SEEING WIDESPREAD SOUL-SEARCHING AMONG THE GENERATION OF WOMEN WHO CREATED THE MODERN FEMINIST REVOLUTION TWENTY YEARS AGO. THIS TOO IS A HEALTHY PHENOMENON IN OUR NATIONAL DEBATE. MANY THINKING AMERICAN WOMEN ARE ASKING THEMSELVES FREUD'S ANCIENT QUESTION: "WHAT DO WOMEN WANT?" FOR THOSE WHO FORESWORE CHILDREN, THERE IS FREQUENTLY AN ACHING REGRET. AND THERE IS A CORRESPONDING AND MOUNTING SKEPTICISM ABOUT THE REWARDS OF THE BUSINESS WORLD AND THE PRUDENCE OF ATTEMPTING TO BE SUPER-MOMS.

THIS REAPPRAISAL WILL CONTINUE. THE POINT IS NOT THAT ALL WOMEN SHOULD DO THE SAME THINGS. WE ARE AS VARIED IN OUR SKILLS AND DESIRES AS MEN ARE. RATHER, WOMEN SHOULD NOT BE MADE TO FEEL THAT SELF-RESPECT AND THE REGARD OF ONE'S PEERS LIE IN ONE DIRECTION, WHILE HAPPINESS LIES IN ANOTHER. NEITHER MOTHERHOOD NOR MASTER'S DEGREES ARE FOR EVERYONE. AND OUR CHILDREN NEED TO BE SHIELDED AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE FROM ANY PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM CAUSED BY THESE UPHEAVALS AS WE SORT OUT THESE PROBLEMS IN OUR OWN LIVES AND IN OUR SOCIETY OVERALL. OUR GREAT CHALLENGE NOW AS AMERICAN MEN AND WOMEN TOGETHER IS TO DISCOVER WAYS IN OUR FAMOUS CREATIVE AMERICAN STYLE TO ACCOMMODATE THE DESIRE TO MAINTAIN HAPPY, HEALTHY FAMILIES, AND WELL-ADJUSTED CHILDREN, TO FULFILL OUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS CITIZENS, TO USE OUR TALENTS . . . AND KEEP OUR SANITY.