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On the Issues

Feminism and Freedom

By Christina Hoff Sommers

Few contemporary feminist historians want the true story of women's struggle for equality to be told. As the examples in this essay show, this is because it is classical, and not radical, feminism that offers a tried-and-true roadmap to equality and freedom. It is time to reclaim true feminism, restore its lost history, and make the movement attractive again for American women and for women everywhere who have yet to taste the liberty Western women have won.

On February 10, 2001, eighteen thousand women filled Madison Square Garden for one of the more notable feminist gatherings of our time. The event—"Take Back the Garden"—centered on a performance of Eve Ensler's raunchy play, *The Vagina Monologues*. The "Vulva Choir" sang; self-described "Vagina Warriors"—including Gloria Steinem, Jane Fonda, and Donna Hanover (Rudolph Giuliani's ex-wife)—recited pet names for vaginas: Mimi, Gladys. Glenn Close led the crowd in spelling out an obscene word for women's intimate anatomy: "Give me a C. . . !!!" A huge banner declared the Garden to be a "RAPE FREE ZONE." The mood grew solemn when Oprah Winfrey came forward to read a new monologue called "Under the Burqa," which described the plight of Afghan women living under the Taliban. At its climax, an actual Afghan woman named Zoya, who represented the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), appeared on stage covered from head to toe in a burqa. Oprah approached her and, with a dramatic sweep of her arm, lifted and removed it. The crowd roared in delight.

Later, an exposé in the progressive *American Prospect* would reveal that RAWA is a Maoist organization whose fanatical members are so feared by Afghan women that one human rights activist has dubbed them the "Talibabes." According to the *Prospect*, when *Ms.* magazine tried to distance itself from RAWA in 2002, a RAWA spokeswoman denounced *Ms.* as the "mouthpiece of hegemonic, U.S.-centric corporate feminism." But on that magical February night at the Garden, few knew or cared about Zoya's political views or affiliations.

The evening was a near-perfect distillation of contemporary feminism. Pick up a women's studies textbook, visit a college women's center, or look at the websites of leading feminist organizations, and you will likely find the same fixation on intimate anatomy combined with left-wing politics and a poisonous antipathy to men. (Campus feminists were among the most vocal and zealous accusers of the young men on the Duke University lacrosse team who were falsely indicted for rape in 2006.) Contemporary feminism routinely depicts American society as a dangerous patriarchy in which women are under siege—that is the message of the "RAPE FREE ZONE" banner in the Garden. It therefore presents itself as a movement of "liberation," defying the patriarchal oppressor and offering women everywhere the opportunity to make contact with their "real selves."

But modern "women's liberation" has little to do with liberty. It aims not to free women to pursue their own interests and inclinations, but rather

Christina Hoff Sommers is a resident scholar at AEI. A version of this article appeared in the July/August 2008 issue of *The American Spectator*.

to reeducate them to attitudes often profoundly contrary to their natures. In *Professing Feminism: Education and Indoctrination in Women's Studies* (2003), two once-committed women's studies professors, Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, describe how the feminist classroom transforms idealistic female students into "relentless grievance collectors."

In 1991, the culture critic and dissident feminist Camille Paglia put the matter even more bluntly. She described women's studies as

> a jumble of vulgarians, bunglers, whiners, French faddicts, apparatchiks, dough-faced party-liners, pie-in-the-sky utopians and bullying sanctimonious sermonizers. Reasonable, moderate feminists hang back and keep silent in the face of fascism.

The embarrassing spectacle at Madison Square Garden, the erratic state of women's studies, and the outbreak of feminist vigilantism at Duke University may tempt some to conclude that the women's movement in the United States is in a state of hopeless, hapless, and permanent disarray. Perhaps American feminism has become hysterical because it has ceased to be useful. After all, women in this country have their freedom; they have achieved parity with men in most of the ways that count. Why not let the feminist movement fade from the scene? The sooner the better. Good riddance.

That is an understandable but unwarranted reaction. Women in the West *did* form a movement and *did* liberate themselves in ways of vital importance to the evolution of liberal society. Feminism in its classical phase was a critical chapter in the history of freedom. For most of the world's women, that history has just begun; for them, classical feminism offers a tried-and-true roadmap to equality and freedom. And even in the West, there are unresolved equity issues, and the work of feminism is not over. Who needs feminism? We do. The world does. Women everywhere need the liberty to be what they are—not, as contemporary feminism insists, liberation *from* what they are. This we can see if we look back at the history of women's liberation—not as it is taught in women's studies departments, but as it truly was.

The classical feminism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries embodied two distinct schools of thought and social activism. The first, egalitarian feminism, was progressive (in the view of many contemporaries of both sexes, radical), and it centered on women as independent agents rather than wives and mothers. It held that men and women are, in their essential nature, the same, and it sought to liberate women through abstract appeals to social justice and universal rights. The second school, conservative feminism, was traditionalist and family-centered. It embraced rather than rejected women's established roles as homemakers, caregivers, and providers of domestic tranquility—and it promoted women's rights by redefining, strengthening, and expanding these roles. Conservative feminists argued that a practical, responsible femininity could be a force for good in the world beyond the family, through charitable works and more enlightened politics and government.

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Of the two schools, conservative feminism was much more influential. Unlike its more radical sister, conservative feminism has always had great appeal to large majorities of women. By contrast, egalitarian feminists often appeared strange and frightening, with their salons and little journals. It is not, however, my purpose to denigrate egalitarian feminism—quite the contrary. Historically, proponents of the two schools were forthright and sometimes fierce competitors, but their competition sharpened the arguments on both sides, and they often cooperated on practical causes to great effect. The two movements were (and will remain) rivals in principle but complementary in practice. Thanks to egalitarian feminism, women now have the same rights and opportunities as men. But, as conservative feminists have always insisted, free women seldom aspire to be just like men but rather employ their freedom in distinctive ways and for distinctive purposes.

Egalitarian feminism had its historical beginnings in the writings of the British philosopher Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–97). Wollstonecraft, a rebel and free thinker, believed that women were as intelligent as men and as worthy of respect. Her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* became an instant sensation. She wrote it in the spirit of

the European Enlightenment—whose primary principle was the essential dignity and moral equality of all rational beings. Wollstonecraft's insistence that women, too, are rational and deserving of the same rights as men, however, was then a contentious thesis.

> Reason, Mary Wollstonecraft said, demanded that women be granted the same rights as men. She wanted nothing less than total political and moral equality. Wollstonecraft was perhaps the first woman in history to insist that biology is not destiny.

Wollstonecraft's demand was a dramatic break with the past. In 1776, Abigail Adams famously wrote a letter to her husband, John, urging him and his colleagues in the Continental Congress to "remember the ladies . . . and to be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors." Adams was appealing to a tradition of chivalry and gallantry that enjoined male protectiveness toward women. Sixteen years later, in her *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft was doing something markedly different. She was not urging legislators in France and England to "remember the ladies" or appealing to their generous or protective impulses. Reason, she said, demanded that women be granted the same rights as men. She wanted nothing less than total political and moral equality. Wollstonecraft was perhaps the first woman in history to insist that biology is not destiny: "I view with indignation the mistaken notions that enslave my sex."

For Wollstonecraft, education was the key to female liberation: "Strengthen the female mind by enlarging it, and there will be an end to blind obedience." She was a proponent of coeducation and insisted that women be educated on a par with men—with all fields and disciplines open to them. In the opening lines of *Vindication*, she expresses her "profound conviction that the neglected education of [women] is the grand source of the misery I deplore."

Wollstonecraft led one of the most daring, dramatic, and consequential lives of the eighteenth century. She was a lower-middle-class, semieducated "nobody" (as one British historian has described her) who was to become the first woman to enter the Western canon of political philosophy. Her friends included Thomas Paine, William Wordsworth, and William Blake. She carried on a famous debate with Edmund Burke about the merits of the French Revolution. Soon after she published her *Vindication*, she ran off to Paris to write about the revolution.

After her death, her husband, William Godwin, wrote what he thought was an adulatory biography. He talked honestly about her unorthodox lifestyle that included love affairs, an out-of-wedlock child, and two suicide attempts over her faithless American lover. He even praised her—completely inaccurately—for having rejected Christianity. Godwin all but destroyed her reputation for the next hundred years. The public reacted to his disclosures with fascination, horror, and repulsion. Former friends denounced her. Feminists distanced themselves. Political enemies called her a whore. Today, however, her reputation is secure. In an essay published in 1932, Virginia Woolf wrote, "One form of immortality is hers undoubtedly: she is alive and active, she argues and experiments, we hear her voice and trace her influence even now among the living." Woolf summarizes Wollstonecraft's egalitarian teachings in one sentence: "The staple of her doctrine was that nothing matters save independence." Another way of putting it is to say that what Wollstonecraft wanted for women was the full liberty of citizenship.

At the time Wollstonecraft was writing, Hannah More (1745–1833)—novelist, poet, pamphleteer, political activist, evangelical reformer, and abolitionist—was waging a very different campaign to improve the status of women. More is well known to scholars who specialize in eighteenth-century culture. The late UCLA literary historian Mitzi Myers called her a "female crusader infinitely more successful than Wollstonecraft or any other competitor," but More is rarely given the credit she deserves. The story of what she initiated and how she did it is integral to the story of women's quest for freedom. But few contemporary feminist historians have wanted that story to be told.

Virginia Woolf once said that if she were in charge of assigning names to critical historical epochs, along with the Crusades or the War of the Roses, she would give a special name to that world-transforming period at the end of the eighteenth century in England when, in her words, "the middleclass woman began to write." One disparaging historian called this unprecedented cohort of writing women (borrowing a phrase from sixteenth-century religious reformer John Knox) "a monstrous regiment." It was a regiment that was destined to win decisive battles in women's struggle for freedom and

opportunity. Its three most important members were Mary Wollstonecraft, Jane Austen, and Hannah More.

If Wollstonecraft was the founder of egalitarian feminism, More was the founder of conservative feminism. Like Wollstonecraft, More was a religiously inspired, self-made woman who became an intellectual peer of several of the most accomplished men of her age. But whereas Wollstonecraft befriended Paine and debated Burke, More was a friend and admirer of Burke; a close friend of Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole; and an indispensable ally and confidante to William Wilberforce, a father of British abolitionism. Concerning the French Revolution, which Wollstonecraft initially championed, More wrote, "From liberty, equality, and the rights of man, good Lord deliver us." And she was surely the most prominent woman of her age. As one biographer notes, "In her time she was better known than Mary Wollstonecraft and her books outsold Jane Austen's many times over." Her various pamphlets sold in the millions and her tract against the French Revolution enjoyed a greater circulation than Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* or Paine's *Rights of Man*. Some historians credit her political writings with saving England from the kind of brutal revolutionary upheaval that traumatized France.

More (who never married) was active in the Bluestocking society, a group of intellectual women (and men) who would meet to discuss politics, literature, science, and philosophy. The group was started in 1750 by intelligent but education-starved upper- and middle-class women who yearned for serious conversation rather than the customary chatter and gossip typical of elite gatherings. "I was educated at random," More would say, and women's education became one of her most passionate causes.

More is hard to classify politically. It is possible to find passages in her novels, pamphlets, and letters that make her look like an arch conservative; others show her as a progressive reformer. Through selective citation, she can be made to seem like an insufferable prude—Lord Byron dismissed her as "Morality's prim personification"—but it is doubtful that a "prim personification" would have attracted the devotion and respect of men like Johnson, Walpole, and Wilberforce.

More was a British patriot, a champion of constitutional monarchy, and a friend and admirer of Burke, but she was no defender of the status quo. She called for revolutionary change—not in politics, but in morals. In her novels and pamphlets, she sharply reproached members of the upper classes for their amorality, hedonism, indifference to the poor, and tolerance of the crime of slavery. In the many Sunday schools she established, she encouraged the poor to be sober, thrifty, hardworking, and religious. More shared Adam Smith's enthusiasm for the free market as a force for good. But for the market to thrive, she believed England's poor and rich would need to develop good moral habits and virtuous characters.

Historians have referred to her as a "bourgeois progressivist," a "Christian capitalist," "Burke for beginners," and the "first Victorian." She could also be called the first conservative feminist. Unlike Wollstonecraft, More believed the sexes were significantly different in their propensities, aptitudes, and life preferences. She envisioned a society in which women's characteristic virtues and graces could be developed, refined, and freely expressed. She was persuaded that these virtues could be realized only when women were given more freedom and a serious education:

> [T]ill women shall be more reasonably educated, and until the native growth of their mind shall cease to be stilted and cramped, we shall have no juster ground for pronouncing that their understanding has already reached its highest attainable perfection, than the Chinese would have for affirming that their women have attained to the greatest possible perfection in walking, while their first care is, during their infancy, to cripple their feet.

She loathed the mindless pastimes that absorbed upper-class women of her day and encouraged middle- and upper-class women to leave their homes and salons to take up serious philanthropic pursuits. According to More, women were more tender-minded than men and were the natural caretakers of the nation. She told women that it was their patriotic duty to apply their natural gifts—nurturing, organizing, and educating—not merely to their own households, but to society at large. "Charity," said one of More's fictional characters, "is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession." More envisioned armies of intelligent, informed, and well-trained women working in hospitals, orphanages, and schools. She appealed to women to exert themselves "with a patriotism at once firm and feminine for the greater good of all." And women listened.

Her didactic 1880 novel, *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, which valorized a new kind of wise, effective, active, and responsible femininity, went into eleven editions in nine months and to thirty by the time of her death. UCLA

literary scholar Anne Mellor comments on the extent of More's influence:

> She urged her women readers to participate actively in the organization of voluntary benevolent societies and in the foundation of hospitals, orphanages, Sunday Schools. . . . And her call was heard: literally thousands of voluntary societies sprang up in the opening decades of the nineteenth century to serve the needs of every imaginable group of sufferers.

It is hard to overstate the positive impact of widespread volunteerism on the fate of women. As women became engaged in charitable works, other parts of the public sphere became accessible. British historian F. K. Prochaska, in his seminal *Women and Philanthropy in Nineteenth-Century England* (1980), wrote, "The charitable experience of women was a lever which they used to open the doors closed to them in other spheres." According to Prochaska, as women began to become active in the outside world and form philanthropic organizations, they became interested in "government, administration and the law." Their volunteer work in charity schools focused their minds on education reform—for women of their own social class and for the poor women they sought to help. Prochaska, who calls More "probably the most influential woman of her day," concludes, "It should not come as a surprise that in 1866 women trained in charitable society were prominent among those who petitioned the House of Commons praying for the enfranchisement of their sex."

It was taken for granted in More's time that women were less intelligent and less serious than men, and thus less worthy as human beings. More flatly rejected these assumptions. She did so without rejecting the idea of a special women's sphere. She embraced that sphere, giving it greater dignity and power. That was her signature Burkean style of feminism. More initiated a humane revolution in the relations of the sexes that was decorous, civilized, and in no way socially divisive. Above all, it was a feminism that women themselves could comfortably embrace: a feminism that granted women the liberty to be themselves without ceasing to be women. Indeed, if More's name and fame had not been brushed out of women's history, many women today might well be identifying with a modernized version of her female-friendly feminism.

Fortunately, her ideals and her style of feminism are well represented in the novels of Jane Austen. We do not know for sure whether Austen read More, but scholars claim to see the unmistakable influence in her writings of both More and Wollstonecraft. Her heroines are paragons of rational, merciful, and responsible womanhood. Austen also honors a style of enlightened and chivalrous manhood. Austen's heroes—men like Mr. Darcy, Captain Wentworth, and Mr. Knightley—esteem female strength, rationality, and intelligence.

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Egalitarian feminists like Wollstonecraft (and, later, John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor) are staple figures in the intellectual history of feminism, but they have never attracted a very large following among the rank and file of women of their time. More succeeded brilliantly with all classes of women. She awakened a nation and changed the way it saw itself. What she achieved was unprecedented. But the feminist scholar Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace speaks for many when she describes More as a case study of "patriarchal complicity" and an "univited guest" who "make[s] the process of celebrating our heritage as women more difficult."

Hannah More is not the only once-famous women's advocate to have vanished from the official "herstorical" record. Ken Burns, the celebrated documentarian, followed his award-winning *Civil War* with a 1999 film about Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) and Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906) and their struggle to win the vote for American women. There is one brief sequence in which the narrator explains that in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Anthony forged coalitions with conservative mainstream groups. The mood darkens, and a pioneer in the field of women's studies—Sally Roesch Wagner—appears on the screen. Wagner informs viewers that Anthony was so determined to win the vote, she established alliances with prosuffrage women who were "enemies of freedom in every other way—Frances Willard

is a case in point." The camera then shows a photo of a menacing-looking Willard.

One would never imagine from Burns's film that Frances Willard (1839–98) was one of the most beloved and respected women of the nineteenth century. When she died, one newspaper wrote, "No woman's name is better known in the English-speaking world than that of Miss Willard, save that of England's great queen." Because of her prodigious good works and kindly nature, Willard was often called the "Saint Frances of American Womanhood."

But Willard, a suffragist and leader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, is another once-esteemed figure in women's history who is today unmentioned and unmentionable. Willard brought mainstream women into the suffrage movement, and some historians credit her with doing far more to win the vote for women than any other suffragist. But her fondness for saying things like "Womanliness first—afterwards what you will" was her ticket to historical obloquy.

Approved feminist founders like Stanton and Anthony promoted women's suffrage through Wollstonecraft-like appeals to universal rights. Their inspirations were John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, and Wollstonecraft herself. Stanton wrote affectingly on "the individuality of each human soul" and on a woman's need to be the "arbiter of her own destiny." She and her sister suffragists brought a feminist Enlightenment to women, but to their abiding disappointment, American women greeted the offer with a mixture of indifference and hostility. Stanton's words were effective with a relatively small coterie of educated women, mostly on the East Coast. When a suffrage amendment failed dismally in the state of Colorado in 1877, one newspaper editorial called the suffragists "carpetbaggers" promoting an elitist "eastern issue." The headline read: "Good-bye to the Female Tramps of Boston."

For many decades, the average American woman simply ignored the cause of suffrage. In a 1902 history of women's suffrage, Anthony and her coauthor wrote, "the indifference and inertia, the apathy of women lies the greatest obstacle to their enfranchisement." Throughout the 1880s and 1890s many women actively organized against it. Stanford historian Carl Degler, in his classic 1980 social history, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present*, notes that in 1890, more than twenty thousand women had joined an antisuffrage group in New York State alone.

To prove once and for all that the majority of women wanted the vote, suffragists organized a referendum in Massachusetts in 1895. Both men and women were allowed to take part. The initiative lost, with 187,000 voting against the franchise and only 110,000 in favor—and of those who voted yes, only 23,000 were women! According to Anthony, "The average man would not vote against granting women the suffrage if all those of his own family brought a strong pressure to bear upon him in its favor." It is the conventional wisdom that men denied women the ballot. But even a cursory look at the historical record suggests that men were not the only problem.

Degler and other historians believe that, because the vote was associated with individualism and personal assertiveness, many women saw it as both selfish and an attack on their unique and valued place in the family. Feminist historians denigrate what they call the "cult of domesticity" that proved so beguiling to nineteenth-century women. But they forget that this "cult" freed many rural women from manual labor, improved the material conditions of women's lives, and coincided with an increase in female life expectancy. Furthermore, as Degler shows, in nineteenth-century America, both the public and private spheres were prized and valued. The companionate marriages described by Jane Austen were the American domestic ideal. Alexis de Tocqueville commented on the essential equality of the male and female spheres in *Democracy in America* (1840). Americans, he said, did not think that men and women should perform the same tasks, "but they show an equal regard for both their respective parts; and though their lot is different, they consider both of them as being of equal value."

Hence, as long as women saw the vote as a threat to their sphere, suffrage was a lost cause. Impassioned feminist rhetoric about freedom, dignity, autonomy, and individual rights fell on deaf ears. If the American women's movement was going to move forward, the suffrage movement needed new arguments and new ways of thinking that were more respectful and protective of women's role. Frances Willard showed the way.

Willard served as president of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union from 1879 until her death in 1898. Under her leadership, it grew to be the largest and most influential women's organization in the nation. Today, we associate temperance with Puritanism. But in the late nineteenth century, most feminists, including Stanton and Anthony, supported it. Temperance advocates

believed that a ban on the sale of alcohol would greatly diminish wife abuse, desertion, destitution, and crime. In other words, temperance was a movement in defense of the home—the female sphere.

Willard was proud of women's role as the "angel in the house." But why, she asked, limit these angels to the home? With the vote, Willard said, women could greatly increase their civilizing and humane influence on society. With the vote, they could protect the homes they so dearly loved. Indeed, Willard referred to the vote as "the home protection ballot." Women were moved by this, and men were disarmed.

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Anthony admired Willard; Stanton, a skeptic in religious matters, was leery. Both were startled by her ability to attract unprecedented numbers of dedicated women to the suffrage cause. The membership figures for the various women's organizations are striking. In 1890, two leading egalitarian suffragist groups merged because they were worried that the cause was dying. They formed the National American Woman Suffrage Association and elected Stanton president. The total membership of these combined groups, according to University of Michigan historian Ruth Bordin, was thirteen thousand. By comparison, Willard had built an organization with more than ten times that number; by 1890, she had 150,000 adult, dues-paying members. Moreover, Willard and her followers began to bring the suffrage movement something new and unfamiliar: victories.

In 1893, the state of Colorado held a second election on women's suffrage. Unlike 1877, when the suffragists lost and the so-called tramps of Boston were sent packing, this time the suffragists won the vote by a 55 percent majority. Many historians agree that Willard's new conservative approach explains the success. She had persuaded large numbers of men and women that it was a mother's sacred duty to vote.

Thomas Carlyle has ascribed the insights of genius to "cooperation with the tendency of the world." Like Hannah More before her, Willard cooperated with the world and discerned novel and effective ways to improve it. Feminists do not honor the memory of these women. Indeed, with the exception of a small group of professional historians and literary critics, almost no one knows who they are. Still, it is interesting to note that today the More/Willard style of conservative feminism is on the verge of a powerful resurgence.

In her 1990 book, *In Search of Islamic Feminism*, University of Texas Middle Eastern studies professor Elizabeth Warnock Fernea described a new style of feminism coming to life throughout the Muslim world. Traveling through Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Turkey, and Iraq, Fernea met great numbers of women's advocates working hard to improve the status of women. There have always been Western-style egalitarian feminists in these countries, but they are small in number and tend to be found among the most educated elites. The "Islamic feminists" Fernea was meeting were different. They were traditional, religious, and family-centered—and they had a following among women from all social classes. They were proud of women's role as mother, wife, and caregiver. Several rejected what they saw as divisiveness in today's American women's movement. As one Iraqi women's advocate, Haifa Abdul Rahman, told her, "We see feminism in America as dividing women from men, separating women from the family. This is bad for everyone." Fernea settled on the term "family feminism" to describe this new movement. Experts on the history of Western feminism will here recognize its affinities with Willard's long-lost teachings. Today, almost twenty years after Fernea's book, conservative feminism is surging in the Muslim world.

When Willard died in 1898, her younger feminist colleague Carrie Chapman Catt remarked, "There has never been a woman leader in this country greater than Frances Willard." But today's feminists remain implacably hostile to Willard's notions of "womanly virtue" and have no sympathy with her family-centered feminism. These are unforgivable defects in their eyes, but they are precisely the traits that make Willard's style of feminism highly relevant to the many millions of women all over the world who are struggling for their rights and freedoms in strongly traditional societies and who do not want to be liberated from their love for family, children, and husband.

Truth be told, there are also great numbers of contemporary American women who would today readily label themselves as feminists were they aware of a conservative

alternative in which liberty, rather than "liberation," is the dominant idea. Today, more than 70 percent of American women reject the label "feminist," largely because the label has been appropriated by those who reject the very idea of a feminine sphere.

Clare Boothe Luce, a conservative feminist who in her heyday in the 1940s was a popular playwright and a member of the U.S. Congress, wrote and spoke about women at a time when feminism's "second wave" was still more than twenty years away. Luce's exemplary remarks on Mother Nature and sex differences are especially relevant today.

> It is time to leave the question of the role of women in society up to Mother Nature—a difficult lady to fool. You have only to give women the same opportunities as men, and you will soon find out what is or is not in their nature. What is in women's nature to do they will do, and you won't be able to stop them. But you will also find, and so will they, that what is not in their nature, even if they are given every opportunity, they will not do, and you won't be able to make them do it.

Camille Paglia once told me she found these words powerful, persuasive, and even awe-inspiring. So do I. Luce takes the best of both egalitarian and conservative feminism. She is careful to say that women's nature can be made known only in conditions of freedom and opportunity. It is in such conditions of respect and fairness that women can reveal their true preferences. Clearly, Luce does not expect that women will turn out to be interchangeable with men.

When Luce wrote her cautionary words, sex role stereotypes still powerfully limited women's choices and opportunities. Today, women enjoy the equality of opportunity that Luce alluded to. The conventional constraints, confinements, and rigid expectations are largely things of the past. It is now possible to observe "the role of women in society" by taking note of the roles women themselves freely choose. Was Mary Wollstonecraft right to insist that under conditions of freedom the sexes would make similar choices? Or was Hannah More closer to the truth when she suggested that women will always prevail in the private sphere and express themselves as the natural caregivers of the species?

We know from common observation that women are markedly more nurturing and empathetic than men. The female tendency to be empathic and caring shows up very early in life. Female infants, for example, show greater distress and concern than male infants over the plight of others; this difference persists into adulthood. Women do not merely say they want to help others; they enter the helping and caring professions in great numbers. Even today, in an era when equal rights feminism is dominant in education, the media, and the women's movement, women continue to be vastly overrepresented in fields like nursing, social work, pediatrics, veterinary medicine, and early childhood education. The great nineteenth-century psychologist William James said that for men "the world is a theater for heroism." That may be an overstatement, but it finds a lot of support in modern social science—and evidence from everyday life. Women are numerically dominant in the helping professions; men prevail in the saving and rescuing vocations such as policemen, firefighters, and soldiers.

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Here we come to the central paradox of egalitarian feminism: when women are liberated from the domestic sphere and no longer forced into the role of nurturers, when they are granted their full Lockean/Jeffersonian freedoms to pursue happiness in all the multitudinous ways a free society has to offer, many—perhaps most—still give priority to the domestic sphere.

In a 1975 exchange in the *Saturday Review*, the feminist pioneer Betty Friedan and the French philosopher and women's rights advocate Simone de Beauvoir discussed the "problem" of stay-at-home mothers. Friedan told Beauvoir that she believed women should have the choice to stay home to raise their children if that is what they wished to do. Beauvoir candidly disagreed:

> No, we don't believe that any woman should have this choice. No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have that

choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one.

In Beauvoir, we see how starkly the ideology of liberation has come to oppose actual, practical liberty—even "choice." Her intolerance and condescension toward family-centered women is shared by many in today's feminist establishment and has affected the education of American students. Historian Christine Rosen, in a recent survey of women's studies texts, found that every one disparaged traditional marriage, stay-at-home mothers, and the culture of romance. Perhaps there is a sensible women's studies text out there somewhere, but, for the most part, the sphere of life that has the greatest appeal to most women and is inseparable from traditional ideas of feminine fulfillment is rejected in the name of liberation.

Today's feminist establishment in the United States is dominated by the radical wing of the egalitarian tradition. Not only do its members not cooperate with their conservative sisters, but they also often denigrate and vilify them; indeed they have all but eliminated them from the history of American feminism. Revisionist history is never a pretty sight. But feminist revisionists are destructive in special ways. They seek to obliterate not only feminist history but the femininity that made it a success.

Contemporary feminism needs to make peace with Hannah More and Frances Willard and their modern-day heirs or face a complete loss of appeal and effectiveness. Eve Ensler and her most devoted disciple, Jane Fonda, may not be amenable to change, but there is hope for the younger generation. Over the years, I have lectured on more than one hundred college campuses, where I have met both conservative and radical women activists. The former invite me and the latter come to jeer and wrangle—but as a rule we all part as friends. "Why do you like *The Vagina Monologues* so much?" I ask them. Most tell me that, by acting in the play or supporting it, they are both having fun (girls, too, like to push the limits) and serving a good cause (funds raised by the performances support local domestic violence shelters). I have yet to meet a single one who shares the play's misandry.

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These young women can be reasoned with, and many are fully capable of allying themselves with moderate and conservative women to work for common interests. My advice to them: don't bother "taking back the Garden." Take back feminism. Restore its lost history. Make the movement attractive once again to the silent majority of American women who really do not want to be liberated from their womanhood. And then take on the cause of the women who have yet to find the liberty that Western women have won for themselves and that all women everywhere deserve.