

Feminism, Freedom and History

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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, Monkey-box, and Tamale. 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 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 hostility 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.

In their eye-opening book, *Professing Feminism: Education and Indoctrination in Women's Studies* (2001), two once-committed women's studies professors, Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, describe how the contemporary feminist classroom transforms

idealistic female students into “relentless grievance collectors.” Historian Christine Stolba Rosen, in “Lying in a Room of One’s Own: How Women’s Studies Textbooks Miseducate Students” (2002), carried out content analysis of the five leading women’s studies textbooks. She shows the field to be seriously compromised by ideology, misinformation, and victim politics. Are there some sound and serious scholars working in women’s studies? Yes, even more than one might expect. But Rosen’s overriding verdict is just: “Women’s studies textbooks encourage students to embrace aggrievement, not knowledge.”

The embarrassing spectacle at Madison Square Garden, the erratic state of women’s studies, the outbreak of feminist vigilantism at Duke University—these may suggest that the women’s movement

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in the United States is in a state of hopeless confusion and 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 mistaken reaction. But the style of feminism on parade in Madison Square Garden and in typical women’s studies departments is recent aberrations. Feminism has a long and distinguished history. Women in Western countries *did* form a movement and *did* liberate themselves in ways vital to the evolution of liberal society. Feminism in its classical phase was a momentous chapter in the history of freedom. But for most of the world’s women, that history has barely begun; for them, the classical feminism that succeeded here offers a tried-and-true road map to equality and freedom. The next step is to implement this model for women everywhere. Even in the West, there are still some unresolved equity issues, and the work of feminism is not over. Who needs feminism? We do. The world does.

We cannot allow the movement to languish. Moderates and conservatives are going to have to find a way to rescue the movement from its current malaise. And liberal and radical feminists are going to have to accept their assistance. For inspiration, we need to look back

at the glory days of the struggle for women's emancipation—not as it is now taught in women's studies departments, but as it truly was.

CLASSICAL FEMINISM

THE CLASSICAL FEMINISM of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries embodied two distinct schools of thought and social activism. The first, egalitarian feminism, was progressive, individualistic, and, in the view of many contemporaries of both sexes, radical. It viewed women as independent agents rather than wives and mothers, and held that the sexes were, in their essential nature, the same. It aimed to liberate women through appeals to social justice and universal rights. Today's feminists think of themselves as heirs to this tradition, but their eccentric worldview places them at its radical fringe.

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. It promoted women's rights by redefining, strengthening, and expanding these roles. The 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 political social policies.

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. 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.

For feminism to survive and be useful to contemporary women in the West and in the developing world, the movement is going to have

to find a way to accommodate and make use of the power and resources of its estranged sister—conservative feminism. A brief look at the lives of both egalitarian and conservative feminists of the past will remind us what we have lost and the unity that we must fight to reclaim.

EGALITARIAN FEMINISM

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.

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, semi-educated “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.

But by the early twentieth century, her reputation as a valiant reformer was 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 praised the book as “so true” that it “seems to contain nothing new.” Its originality, she said, “has become our commonplace.”

In the early 1990s, more than 200 years after the publication of Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* the Somali-born Dutch dissident feminist Ayaan Hirsi Ali (and my colleague at the American Enterprise Institute) would find herself struggling to find ways to assert the rights of oppressed Muslim women. She had been reading the contemporary women’s studies literature—the aggrieved variety described by Daphne Patai, Noretta Koertge and Christine Stolba Rosen. None of it made any sense to her; it all seemed irrelevant to the plight of women tyrannized by Islamic Sharia law. But after a copy of *Vindication* fell into her hands, Ali tells of being “inspired by Mary Wollstonecraft, the pioneering feminist thinker who told women they had the same ability to reason as men did and

deserved the same rights.” Wollstonecraft has not been forgotten; she survives in history and young women such as Hirsi Ali find her powerful, inspiring, and vital.

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS

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. I describe her life and work in some detail because this extraordinary woman has been excluded from the women’s studies canon.

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 where Wollstonecraft had 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 having saved 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, 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. Women galvanized by More’s call for good works were later prominent in the movement for women’s suffrage.

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, but looked for ways to give 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 conventionally feminine. Indeed, if More's name and fame had not been brushed out of contemporary 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 Austen's 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.

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. By contrast, 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 "uninvited guest" who "make[s] the process of celebrating our heritage as women more difficult."

But "our history"—if she means the full story of female emancipation—was initiated by both egalitarian and conservative women. Together these two branches of feminism helped liberate women from the narrow spheres that confined them. The complementarity of Wollstonecraft and More was vital to the progress of women in the eighteenth century; but it is still vital today. Wollstonecraft's demand for full equality continues to inspire; but so to does More's notion

of empowered femininity. Many contemporary women, in both the developed and developing world, want their rights and freedoms, but they still choose to be traditional wives and mothers. They continue to prevail in the helping and caring domains celebrated by More. Her vision of domestic heroism still has the power to galvanize millions of women.

“SAINT FRANCES” OF AMERICA

HANNAH MORE is not the only once-famous women’s advocate to have vanished from the women’s history canon. 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 pro-suffrage 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 dour-looking Willard.

One would never imagine from Burns’s film that 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 that is today hardly mentioned. 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 appeals to universal rights. Their inspirations were John Locke, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson. Stanton greatly admired Hannah More, whom she called "one of the great minds of her day," but Stanton's style of feminism was in the egalitarian tradition of Mary Wollstonecraft. 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 anti-suffrage 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. Some 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.

Susan B. Anthony admired Willard; Elizabeth Cady 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. Few, if any, feminist history texts 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 seems to be 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 a 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 that was respectful of the domestic sphere. Today, more than 70 percent of American women reject the label “feminist.”

CAN THIS MOVEMENT BE SAVED?

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.

The cultural critic and dissident feminist 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 remnants 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 egalitarian 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.

Here we come to the central paradox of egalitarian feminism: when women are liberated from the domestic sphere and no longer

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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.

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. Conservative feminism is a lost continent. That must change.

A MONSTROUS REGIMENT

I AM SOMETIMES asked, “Isn't there *anything* you like about contemporary feminists?” At a recent debate at the Yale Political Union, a member of the audience said, “You accuse gender feminists of being very negative about men, about our society—but you are just as negative and fault-finding where the gender feminists are concerned.” Well, first of all, there is nothing wrong with being negative and fault-finding if your criticisms are on point. However, I am happy to say that there are things about contemporary feminists that I do like very much.

Let's consider Eve Ensler once again. There is a lot more to her than her male-averse play and her Madison Square Garden spectacle. Over the years, she has been personally active in promoting women's rights in forsaken places such as Rwanda, Haiti and the Congo. In 2000, at enormous risk to herself, she traveled to Afghanistan and documented the horrors practiced by the Taliban. More recently, in

the fall of 2007, she spent a month in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where thousands of women have been brutally raped and tortured by marauding gangs of soldiers. One frustrated former United Nations official was dismayed by the “appalling and grotesque indifference by the world community” to the fate of the Congolese women. But Enlser is not indifferent. She is now waging a major campaign to raise world awareness and bring support to these women. Her perspective on the United States and American women may be distorted, but her efforts in the Congo are nothing less than heroic.

Or consider the international women’s group Equality Now. That group is aggressively targeting human rights violations such as the sexual trafficking of women and children in India, female genital mutilation in Mali, and the stoning of women in Iran. This is admirable and *necessary* work that both conservative and progressive women of the past and present can applaud.

In her 1995 book *Two Paths to Women’s Equality*, the Brandeis University scholar Janet Zollinger Giele, tells the story of how American women won suffrage only when progressive groups (led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony) formed a coalition with conservative women (led by Frances Willard). Says Giele, “History records defeat where one branch failed to recognize the valid arguments of the other.” She also noted dazzling successes when the two branches cooperated.

Small groups of leftwing feminists, hostile to men and to organized religion, are not going to be able to defeat sexual trafficking, female genital mutilation, rape camps, or stonings. They are not even going to be much help to Western women and the challenges they still face. History will record their defeat. But what if Enslser, the activists in Equality Now, and even the grievance feminists who author the women’s studies textbooks, followed the example of Stanton and Anthony and formed an alliance with moderate and conservative women—including even traditionally religious women? What if they allowed the heirs to both Hannah More and Frances Willard back into the movement?

Contemporary establishment feminism takes a dim view of faith-based, family-centered women. But, as I have tried to show, historically, such women were critically important to liberation

movements—from abolitionism to suffrage. They may hold the key to success in promoting an effective international women’s movement today. For one thing, they are numerous. There are ten million Evangelical women in the United States. Many of them could be galvanized around the righteous and humane causes of Equality Now. Once they are mobilized and allied with progressive forces, and once they are connected to women’s groups throughout the world, history suggests they could prevail.

The 16th century Scottish clergyman John Knox was horrified by the specter of female political power, which he called “a monstrous regiment.” He dreaded it, and so will the male supremacists of the world, should a coalition of radical, moderate, and evangelical women start marching in their direction.

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.

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.

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