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# The March for Women's Lives -The Culture War on Display

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Organized by a coalition of feminist groups, the March for Women's Lives drew at least a half-million protesters to Washington's famed Mall. Organizers of the march claimed total attendance at over a million persons, and unofficial U.S. Park Service estimates put the crowd at over 800,000. In any event, the crowd was the most massive gathering of abortion rights supporters since 1992. With President George W. Bush in the White House and with the 2004 presidential election just months away, the protesters openly combined support for abortion rights and calls for the ouster of the Bush administration.

Speakers at the event were a predictable slate of Hollywood actresses and liberal politicians. Speaking on behalf of Hollywood's left wing, actresses Whoopi Goldberg and Susan Sarandon were joined by feminist figures such as Gloria Steinem and Patricia Ireland.

The speakers projected a vision of America at war against women's rights. "We are determined to stop this war on women," said Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority and former president of the National Association for Women. Gloria Steinem, one of the founders of the modern feminist movement, called for a passing of the torch to a younger generation of feminist leaders. Steinem, age seventy, claimed that more than a third of the women who joined the march "are women under twenty-five." The symbolism of a generational transition was affirmed by Kate Michelman, the retiring president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, who spoke accompanied by her granddaughter. "It's your generation that must take the lead," she instructed.

As The New York Times reported, "The march came at a difficult time for the abortion rights movement, after months of legislative setbacks. The movement's leaders hoped to use the march to rouse voters who are sympathetic to their cause, to galvanize younger women and to build support among minorities."

The feminist movement faces the awkward realization that fewer Americans support abortion in 2004 than was the case in 1973, when the U.S. Supreme Court legalized abortion in its Roe v. Wade decision. The political aspect of the march was obvious. "This is, to us, just a beginning," claimed Eleanor Smeal. "We are going to make women's rights, and especially reproductive rights, another third rail of American politics, just like Social Security. This is no longer going to be a political football debated every two or four years." Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton put the issue in historical perspective: "We didn't have to march for twelve long years because we had a government that respected the rights of women. The only way we're going to be able to avoid having to march again and again and again is to elect John Kerry president."

Heather Harrington of Cleveland, Ohio, told USA Today "I'm here because this country cannot afford four more years of this fundamentalist Christian, Taliban regime." That kind of rhetoric was par for the course.

USA Today described marchers as a mixture of older and younger women. The established veterans of the feminist movement said they came because of a fear that the nation would return to the days when abortion was illegal. Younger women, on the other hand, presented a very different front. As the paper reported, “Young women sporting short skirts and tattoos, waved signs during their maiden march for women’s rights. One sign said, ‘If men got pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament’.”

Abortion rights supporters are rightly worried that the younger generation of women is much less committed to abortion rights than first-generation feminists. The children of the 1960s demanded abortion as an absolute right, while their children and grandchildren look around and wonder how many members of their own generation are missing. The sight of aging abortion supporters holding placards and signs, claiming that America is “the worst government on earth,” must have looked rather pathetic.

The march’s organizers continually returned to the theme of war. “My friends—make no mistake. There is a war on choice,” declared Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. “We didn’t start it, but we are going to win it! They’re not just after abortion rights. This is a full-throttle war on your very health—on your access to real sex education, birth control, medical privacy, and life-saving research.”

The event also produced some of the most ludicrous statements of modern political history. Actress Whoopi Goldberg shouted, “This is not a fundamentalist country. The separation of church and state must be maintained. We need to help stop attacks on reproductive rights in the name of religion—not only here but all over the world.” Evidently, Whoopi Goldberg wants evangelicals to leave their convictions at home. At least she recognizes that the question of life is, from the side of its defenders, a matter of passionate conviction. Following the playbook of the abortion movement, she simply dismisses pro-lifers as fundamentalists.

An even more surprising statement came from former Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who served under president Bill Clinton. “Name a problem,” she instructed, “from poverty, to pollution, to terrorism, to crime, to the spread of sexually transmitted disease, and I can bear witness, having traveled everywhere in the world, that family planning and the exercise of reproductive rights are part of the solution.” Really? Access to abortion is the key to solving the problem of world terrorism? Albright’s statements point to the fundamental reality that the division between the pro-abortion and pro-life movements is not merely a question of national policy or politics—it is a divide as deep as human conviction can reach.

Political leaders were prominent on the event’s program. Joining Senator Hillary Clinton in addressing the crowd, Representative Nancy Pelosi—the highest ranking Democrat in the House of Representatives—spoke just after the Vatican had handed down an instruction barring pro-abortion Catholic politicians from receiving communion. “For me this is not just about being a leader in Congress, it is personal. I am a mother of five, a grandmother of five and a devout Roman Catholic and I’m very pleased to see such a strong participation from the religious community here today. And we are here to say that a woman’s right to make her own reproductive decisions is not only pro-choice, it’s pro-children. It’s pro-family.” Rep. Pelosi claims to be “a devout Roman Catholic” while rejecting the teaching of her church, the instruction of its bishops, and the structure of Catholic moral argument. This is—to say the least—a redefinition of the word “devout.” Her claim that a woman’s right to choose an abortion is “pro-children” is obscene.

Evidently, some of the speakers had a hard time with the generational transition. The tattoo-wearing, flesh-bearing younger women caught the attention of the older feminists. “We thought we had to cover up our bodies,” said Gloria Steinem. “They are saying, rightly, that they should be able to be nude and be safe. They understand the price of no comprehensive sex education, of no emergency birth control.” While the links between these issues must exist only in Gloria Steinem’s mind, her comments offered a form of comic relief. The older feminists fought for the freedom not to be sex objects, while the younger feminists showed up in miniskirts with flesh exposed. Steinem’s claim that the younger generation “should be able to be nude and be safe” just takes the feminists logic to its ultimate conclusion. They demand as a fundamental “right” the freedom to have sex without consequences and to define their own lifestyles without any reference to a morality outside themselves.

The March for Women’s Lives was sponsored by a rogues gallery of liberal organizations including the American Civil Liberties Union, NARAL Pro-Choice America, the National Organization for Women, and the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. “Cosponsoring partners” included the Center for Reproductive Rights, the National Family Planning and Reproductive Health Association, and the National Association of Social Workers. That last group deserves special attention, for it is the largest organization of social workers in the nation, and the group is very influential in

defining the norms of the profession. Anyone doubting where the social work field is headed need only look at the official sponsorship of this march by the National Association of Social Workers in order to see the future in clear form.

Other organizers included—most notoriously—the National Education Association. The nation’s largest teachers union revealed its own political and ideological agenda in offering a formal sponsorship of the march. Other sponsoring groups included Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Episcopal Church USA, Hadassah (a major Jewish organization for women), and the People For The American Way Foundation. For the first time in its history, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] sponsored a march for abortion. President Julian Bond told the crowd that the group’s board of directors had unanimously approved the sponsorship, and he claimed that the right to abortion is the equal to a right to sit at an unsegregated lunch counter.

One national news story told of pro-abortion and pro-life protestors meeting face to face. As the abortion supporter marched while carrying a young child, a pro-life protestor shouted, “It’s a good thing you didn’t kill her.” According to USA Today, the woman pointed at the girl, yelling, “Choice, choice.” We can only wonder if the little girl got the point. Even as her mother shouted “choice, choice,” the young girl must have realized that her mother was marching for the right to have made a very different choice.

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