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## “Abortion is as American as Apple Pie” — The Culture of Death Finds a Voice

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Abortion is now one of America’s most common surgical procedures performed on adults. As many as one out of three women will have at least one abortion. In some American neighborhoods, the number of abortions far exceeds the number of live births.

Most Americans will pay little attention to the 39th anniversary of the infamous *Roe v. Wade* decision. In 1973, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that a woman has a constitutional right to arrange the killing of the unborn life within her. Since that decision was handed down, more than 50 million babies have been aborted, at a rate of over 3,000 each day.



One of the most chilling aspects of all this is the sense of normalcy in American life. Abortion statistics pile up from year to year, and each report gets filed. Moral sentiment on the issue of abortion has shifted discernibly in recent years, as ultrasound images and other technologies deliver unquestionable proof that the unborn child is just that — a child. Nevertheless, the larger picture of abortion in America is basically unchanged.

With predictable regularity, cultural authorities call for the emergence of a moderating position between the pro-life and pro-abortion positions. But efforts to achieve a stable compromise on the abortion issue are doomed to failure. The two positions hold irreconcilable views of reality. The pro-life movement holds that the central issue is the unborn child's right to live. Abortion activists have staked their entire case on the claim that the only determinative issue is the woman's unrestricted right to choose.

A middle position would require pro-lifers to accept that the deaths of some unborn children are acceptable, and abortion rights activists to accept that some decisions for abortion are wrong. Given the logic of their positions, there is no means of compromise.

In recent years, some on the pro-choice side of the controversy have called for abortion proponents to use language indicating that abortion is a painful and wrenching, but sometimes necessary procedure, and to accept that some reasons for abortion are just not sufficient. Nevertheless, this is received as a call for treason within the abortion rights movement, and these voices are regularly sidelined.

At the same time, there has been an effort to protect abortion with euphemism and evasion. Abortion rights activists speak of being pro-choice, not pro-abortion. The unborn child is reduced to a fetus, or a bundle of cells. Abortion clinics are described as women's health centers.

There are some abortion activists who will not join that bandwagon. With chilling candor, they defend abortion as abortion, they defend the decision to abort as a morally superior decision, and they lament the evasiveness of their colleagues in the abortion rights movement.

Just recently, Merle Hoffman, a major voice in the abortion rights movement and founder of Choices, a major center for abortions in New York City, has written a memoir, *Intimate Wars*. In telling her story, Hoffman calls for her colleagues in the abortion industrial complex to defend abortion as a moral choice.

Abortion is the ultimate act of empowering women, she argues. "The act of abortion positions women at their most powerful, and that is why it is so strongly opposed by many in society," she asserts.

A central portion of her memoir deals with the abortion rights movement's attempt to defend abortion in the face of pro-life arguments that the fetus has a right to life.

"The pro-choice movement had to find a way to navigate these narratives," she explains. "The simplest option was to negate the claims of the opposition. And so many pro-choice advocates claimed that the fetus was not alive, and that abortion was not the act

of terminating it. They chose to de-personalize the fetus, to see it as amorphous residue, to say that it was only ‘blood and tissue.’”

As she explains, the pro-life movement thought that, if women really knew what abortion was — the killing of an unborn human being — they would decide to keep their babies. She rejects the argument.

Hoffman argues that women *do* know what an abortion is. Abortion does stop a beating heart and that it is not “just like an appendectomy.” Her conclusion is that women know that abortion is “the termination of potential life.”

She then makes this statement:

“They knew it, but my patients who made the choice to have an abortion also knew they were making the right one, a decision so vital it was worth stopping that heart. Sometimes they felt a great sense of loss of possibility. In the majority of cases, they felt a great sense of relief and the power that comes from taking responsibility for one’s own life.”

Rarely do we see abortion defended in such unvarnished terms — “a decision so vital it was worth stopping that heart.” Merle Hoffman goes on to explain how she can speak of abortion so directly. She has, she tells us, no conception that life is sacred.

“Abortion is as American as apple pie.” Hoffman made that statement in a recent interview about her book. She laments that abortion is the cause of shame in some women and that shame attaches itself to abortion in the larger culture, even now. In her view, if women would start talking more honestly and directly about their abortions, the shame would be removed and women would discuss their abortions like they speak of “a bikini wax.”

Is Merle Hoffman right? Is abortion “as American as apple pie?” To our great shame, she has a right to make that claim. How can it be refuted when abortion on demand has been legal in this country for almost forty years, when one out of three American women will have an abortion, when within some communities far more babies die by abortion than are born?

In Merle Hoffman, the Culture of Death has found a new voice. Almost forty years after *Roe v. Wade*, abortion remains a central part of the nation’s moral landscape. Over 50 million unborn children have been aborted within the span of just one generation.

A titanic clash of absolutes is taking place in full view, and this clash indicates just how much work remains to be done in the great effort to protect the dignity of every single human life. As those who contend for the sanctity and dignity of each human life try to reach

the hearts and minds of our fellow citizens, others are at work as well. If they have their way, Americans will one day openly speak of abortion as nothing more shameful than a bikini wax.

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NOTE: I revised the first sentence of the article on advice of medical authorities. Without doubt, abortion has been the most common surgical procedure performed on American adults in some years. This fact was cited in Congressional testimony during the debate over the Obama Administration's health care proposal. More recently, other surgical procedures may have surpassed abortion in number in some years. The data is drawn from the Guttmacher Institute.

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Merle Hoffman, *Intimate Wars: The Life and Times of the Woman Who Brought Abortion from the Back Alley to the Boardroom* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2012).

Irin Carmon, "[Abortion Pioneer: Defend Rights or Lose Them](#)," *Salon.com*, Monday, January 2, 2012.

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