



Revving Up for the Next Twenty-Five Years

Gloria Steinem

We who like the children of Israel have been wandering in the wilderness of prejudice and ridicule . . . feel a peculiar tenderness for the young women on whose shoulders we are about to leave our burdens . . . they will have more courage to take the rights which belong to them.

—Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Feminism isn't called the longest revolution for nothing. I hope this more realistic perspective is something the second wave has gained in the last twenty-five years, because we certainly didn't begin with it. We had come out of various movement stages that were focused on immediate goals: the anti-Vietnam war movement to stop the body bags arriving home every day; the reenergized and more militant civil rights movement's efforts to desegregate and fight for voting rights; and a male-led intellectual Left that sometimes practiced what Robin Morgan humorously called "ejaculatory politics"—*revolution tomorrow, or I'm going home to my father's business*.

We also lacked women's studies, black studies—all the courses that might better be called remedial studies—to teach us that suffragists and abolitionists had struggled for more than a century to gain a legal *identity* for women of all races and men of color, so we had better be prepared for at least a century of struggle to gain a legal and social *equality*. (Not to mention the newly demanded human right of reproductive freedom, which attacks the very foundation of patriarchy.)

I don't regret one moment of those early firecracker days when explosions of consciousness lit up the sky. Somewhere, women go through them again every day when they discover how much of female experience is political, not inevitable. Even we golden oldies reexperience this excitement when new perceptions and issues arise. But bursts of light tend to flatten out the subtlety of differences between and among women, and a movement fueled only by adrenaline burns out its members—as many of us can testify.

On the other hand, younger women and newer activists checked into a world that already has a degree of feminist consciousness. They have higher expectations and an acute awareness of the backlash to the growing power of the women's movement. They generate a steadier light that exposes the tangled patterns of race, class, sexuality, and physical ability in women's lives. Where my generation externalized almost everything and used this energy to confront injustice, younger and later activists admit how much of that injustice has been internalized, and use this energy to dig deeper into individual

psyches and family patterns. Where we risked repeating the same behavior because we hadn't dug out its personal and family roots, they risk re-creating a social pattern because they neglected its politics.

Thanks to feminist parents as well as to women's studies and a popular culture that occasionally pays tribute to a feminist worldview, this new generation has a better idea of the complexity involved in making lasting change. But now that's countered by a sound-bite culture, and the resistance to equality that is ever ready with terms like "postfeminism," which makes no more sense than "postdemocracy."

Without the excitement and mutual support of early, small-group feminism, I fear this and future generations won't have the personal rewards and fireworks that hooked us for a lifetime. On the other hand, without large organizations to turn out the vote and raise money to keep generations of struggle going, suffragists and abolitionists couldn't have won—and we can't either.

That's why old or young, experienced or brand-new, we have to achieve balance in the next quarter-century: between present and future, external and internal, spontaneity and long-term planning. We have to get beyond *either/or* to *and*; beyond ranking to linking; beyond such artificial labels as "equality feminists" versus "difference feminists," and into a full circle of tactics that surround the goal instead of approaching it from one direction. We need *both* excitement and steadiness, small feminist support groups and national organizations, bursts of new consciousness that are rewards in themselves, and the satisfaction of repeating what has been planned and perfected.

To accomplish this, we're going to need crazy women marching in the street who make women working inside seem reasonable *and* inside negotiators who turn street demands into practical alternatives; radical feminists who confront the roots of injustice *and* liberal feminists who build bridges for reforms that are radical in the long term; feminists who focus on the shared origins of sexism, racism, and homophobia *and* feminists who work in intimate depth within their own communities; feminist economists who take on the System of National Accounts plus the structural readjustment of poorer nations' debt *and* women who expose their own childhood sexual abuse in order to end abusive cycles that have made generations of women believe "I'm good for nothing else."

Your part in this next quarter-century depends on the groups, issues, and styles that make you feel supported, angry, inspired, or energized. I'll briefly list some new or neglected ideas here—each one of which demands balance and deserves a bibliography of its own. My hope is that one or more might incite, invite, enrage, and tantalize you into becoming a long-distance runner. So here's to the year 2022:

Making Men Equal

In the last twenty-five years, we've convinced ourselves and a majority of the country that women can do what men can do. Now we have to convince the majority of the country—and ourselves—that men can do what women can do. If we don't, the double burden of working inside and outside the home—always a reality for poor women, and now one for middle-class women, too—will continue to be the problem most shared by American women nationwide. Let's face it: until men are fully equal inside the home, women will never be really equal outside it.

This journey has even more importance in the long term. Children who grow up seeing nurturing men (and women) and achieving women (and men) will no longer have to divide their human qualities into "masculine" or "feminine." Gender will no longer be the dominant/passive model for race and class.

It's a journey that can start with women who make the presence of nurturing men a condition for bearing children—whether the men are biological fathers, friends and

relatives, or workers in child care centers. It can start with boys who are raised to raise children, and with young men who ask the same question that young women do: "How can I combine career and family?" It's a journey we have begun by the demands for parental leave, shorter workdays or workweeks, and other structural changes needed to make both work and parenthood possible—for both men and women.

We'll know we're getting there when an article like this tries to convince readers that women were once more responsible for child care and family than men were, and younger readers say, "Give me a break."

Daughter of "The Personal Is Political"

In the last twenty-five years, we've learned that patriarchy and racism politicize almost every facet of life, from who does the dishes to the definition of a war crime. Now we need to begin rescuing whole areas of human experience from being devalued by association with women—to the detriment of everyone. The personal/private sphere has been divided from the political/public sphere; the "feminine" from the "masculine." As a result, the importance of the first has been lost, and its impact on the second has been ignored.

Nowhere is this more disastrous than in the failure to link child-rearing methods to political structures; to connect democracy (or the lack of it) in the family to democracy (or the lack of it) in the nation. Except for works like Alice Miller's *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty in Child-Rearing and the Roots of Violence*, or Philip Greven's *Spare the Child: The Religious Roots of Punishment and the Psychological Impact of Physical Abuse*, there have been few studies of, say, German child-rearing methods as a source of Germany's political history, or the link between child abuse in the U.S. and the apocalyptic thinking now found in fundamentalism and the militias.

We need political science courses that include child-rearing changes in the study of the decline of totalitarianism in the former Soviet Union, plus the absence of abusive child-rearing methods in many of the indigenous cultures that govern through reciprocity and consensus. So far, we rarely even have psychology courses that routinely explore the link between the abusive intertwining of pain and love in child-rearing and traditions of sado-masochism in sex. We need the personal is political—but writ much larger.

Beyond Reproductive Freedom

Opposition to women's control of reproduction isn't going to end in the next quarter-century. Patriarchal, racist, classbound, and other birth-based hierarchies must exert some control over women's bodies as the most basic means of production—the means of reproduction—if they are to perpetuate themselves. That's the deepest reason for women's oppression.

But while we fight for reproductive freedom, we can expand this demand into the larger right of bodily integrity, a principle that includes freedom from involuntary testing, unwanted medical treatments, unchosen life-prolonging methods, capital punishment, pressures to provide organs, eggs, sperm, blood, other body products, and more. Not only will we gain new allies for reproductive freedom, but we will eventually benefit from a new legal principle: the power of the state stops at our skin.

How We Use Our Money

For the last twenty-five years, we've fought for equal pay, pensions, and benefits—to equalize the amount of money we earn—all of which must continue. For the next twen-

ty-five years, however, we need to add a focus on how we spend.

Think about other liberation movements, from Gandhi's refusal to buy British-made products to African American efforts to support black-owned businesses. There has been some of that in the women's movement—boycotting states that failed to ratify the ERA, the Nestlé boycott, and more—but in general, we've assumed that earning more was progress in itself.

In fact, the question should not only be "How much do we spend?" but "How do we spend it?" Are we spending more on our outsides (clothing and appearance) than our insides (health and learning)? More on Hollywood movies than feminist political candidates? More on instant satisfaction than long-term security? Are we tithing to patriarchal religions but not to feminist groups? Supporting women-owned businesses? Seeking out companies with fair hiring and environmental policies? Saving for our own independence? In other words, are we using our dollars as consciously as we would our votes?

Welfare That Deserves the Name

I'm proud of the women's movement for opposing two welfare reform bills that were even more punishing than the current one. I'm proud of the National Organization for Women for staging a hunger strike outside the White House in a vain attempt to elicit a third veto from President Clinton. But many people on welfare don't support the original national system or the punishing state-based one that has succeeded it. You can't beat something with nothing. We need a positive alternative.

How about legislation that attaches a minimum income to every child? It would declare the minimum necessary for a child's shelter, nutrition, and health care—and then provide it. We know that investment in childhood saves money later. We also know that a floor income for every child would end the cruel and crazy inequities that now exist: foster care payments that are higher than welfare payments—thus punishing kids who remain with their biological parents—and welfare that provides health care that employed single mothers can rarely afford.

Yes, such a bill would require a broad coalition to design, but similar models in Europe could keep us from reinventing the wheel. Yes, it would require a national mobilization and years to pass, but the political climate is probably more open to aiding kids than single mothers—and definitely more open to providing health care for children than for adults. At a minimum, we would have a positive goal to support instead of only a danger to oppose. At a maximum, we would have a New Deal for children.

Economics—With Values Added

Once we understand the secret that economics is only a system of values, we begin to question: Why don't we attribute value to the roughly 50 percent of productive labor in this country that is done in the home? Some economists predict that the gross national product would go up by about 26 percent if homemakers' labor were included at only its replacement cost. There are also many kinds of economic planning that are rendered impossible by keeping this huge segment of the economy invisible.

Why don't we attribute value to the environment? If a tree has no value when it's standing there giving us oxygen—not to mention serving as a home for many species—and only acquires a value when it is cut down, then the entire force of economic motive is on the side of environmental destruction.

From the work of Vandana Shiva in India to Marilyn Waring in New Zealand and Hazel Henderson in the U.S., feminist scientists and economists are asking these questions, demystifying national and international finance, and attacking such pillars of the

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current system as the Census (which decides what is visible) and the System of National Accounts (which decides what is valuable). We've been learning how to play the game. Now we have to change the rules.

There are so many more magnets to draw you into the future. I hope to be with you—dreaming, fighting, planning, laughing, and transforming all the way. But as Elizabeth Cady Stanton understood at 72, with no chance of living to see victory: If any of us make it, we all will.