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*I would like to dedicate this book to pregnant women, that they may find the strength, love, and support to carry their children to term; to unborn children, who are the most vulnerable among us; to all children who need loving homes; to the adoptive parents who provide those homes; and to those who continue to peacefully fight for what they believe is right.*



## Acknowledgments

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My mentor and first vice president of DFLA, Bill Pierce, dedicated his life to promoting adoption as an alternative to abortion and bringing the Democratic Party back to Life. I continue this work in his memory.

The DFLA Board, both past and present, is an incredible group of the brightest minds and the biggest hearts, and they all truly believe in protecting life at all stages and also truly believe in the big tent of the Democratic Party. Their support on this project is greatly appreciated.

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## Prologue



**I have been asked many times how** the Democratic Party could become entrenched as the party of abortion on demand, given their long history of fighting for the weak and vulnerable. They ask, “Isn’t a baby in a mother’s womb the best example of the most vulnerable in society?”

I have been asked more times than I can remember why I, someone that considers herself pro-life, remain in the Democratic Party when my party has pushed the abortion agenda for three decades. Conservatives encourage me to cast away my Democratic Party ideals and join the Republican Party, based entirely on one issue. By contrast, I am sometimes met with distrust from my friends on the Democratic side who think that I am not a real Democrat or a DINO (Democrat In Name Only).

These two questions led me to write this book. The history of the party is fascinating, particularly when we look at pro-life Democrats and why some left the party, why some stayed, and why some changed their position on abortion while others remained pro-life.

Few political debates are as heated and divisive as that of legalized abortion. This hot-topic issue is fraught with emotion on both sides of the divide. Pro-lifers are defending an innocent baby, who can do nothing to save him- or herself. Pro-choicers believe they are protecting the lives of women by keeping a medical procedure available for all women, even the poorest in the nation. These two vastly different positions have been adopted by each party, leaving very little middle ground for the average voter who believes that Republicans are pro-life and oppose abortion and Democrats are pro-choice and support abortion on demand.

Political parties listen to their constituencies, and the loudest voices form the party positions and platforms. Because the loudest voices set the agenda, sometimes the majority opinion is not represented. This is the case with the abortion issue. The Republican Party has embraced protecting the unborn and the Democrats have accepted the notion that abortion is a basic human right for women.

However, there is a growing realization that a majority of the population would like to see fewer abortions. In fact, a majority of Americans fall somewhere in between the rhetoric of the party platforms and don't fall clearly into either the pro-life or pro-choice categories. These simple terms can be used to describe less than half the population's views on a rather complex issue.

This great divide on abortion has been building for the last 30 years, and the biggest question is this: How did we get here? How did a party that fights for the underdog not lead the fight for the most innocent? Some say the party didn't even notice until 1992.

## Silencing the Troops



“If we were truly the party of tolerance and inclusion as the conventions speakers claimed — just a great big circle of friends — what was the problem?” — Governor Bob Casey

**Pro-life Democratic Governor Bob Casey** of Pennsylvania was given the opportunity to speak at the Cooper Union School at a forum co-sponsored by the Village Voice on October 2, 1992. He was scheduled to give a speech titled “Can a Liberal Be Pro-life?”

The Cooper Union School had been founded by Peter Cooper, who grew up to be one of America’s richest men. Never forgetting his roots and the barriers he faced in accessing education, he founded the Cooper Union School so immigrants and the working class could receive a proper education. The auditorium provided a place for discussions on political and social reform. Free lectures were provided on science, government, and important issues of the day. Presidents, including Grant, Cleveland, Taft, and Theodore

Roosevelt, had spoken in this historic place. Additionally, it was there that Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous anti-slavery speech, the “Right Makes Might” oratory, which opened the door for his presidency in 1860.<sup>1</sup>

When Casey walked up to the podium, pro-choice protesters attempted to silence him by shouting, “Murderers have no right to speak.”<sup>2</sup> Nat Hentoff, who introduced Casey, urged the protesters to be silent and give the governor a chance to speak. The protesters continued their chant. Nat Hentoff then encouraged the governor to let him call the police to come and silence the protesters. Casey gallantly refused. He felt strongly about the importance of protecting the constitutional right to free speech.

After many unsuccessful attempts to silence the crowd, Casey conceded to the crowd. He said, “The Democratic Convention suspended the First Amendment and tonight you did the same thing,” and stepped off the stage.

It was the Village Voice’s first time sponsoring an event like this, and according to publisher David Schneiderman, it would be the last. He said of the event, “I had, in retrospect, this naïve faith that people would listen to another point of view.”<sup>3</sup>

Historically, the Democratic Party has advanced the principles so eloquently spoken by Hubert Humphrey. *“The moral test of government is how it treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the aged; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped.”* The party has led the way to protect the weak and defenseless, to fight for civil rights and affordable health care, to provide a livable wage and safe communities,

and to support the elderly and the disenfranchised. While every other class of underdog has enjoyed the advocacy and protection of the Democratic Party, the unborn children have been excluded. The Republican Party proudly took on the banner of protection for the unborn. Democrats abandoned the most defenseless of us all.

The Democratic Party didn't suddenly become the party that would fight for the right to abortion nor did all Democrats buy into the notion that we should fight for that right. Since the *Roe v. Wade* decision, various leaders, Democratic voters, and party activists have sent strong warnings that abortion should not be included in the party platform. They cautioned that the big tent must be open to those with opposing views or it would result in the eventual deterioration of the Democratic Party. The gradual transformation to advocate for abortion rights, which began shortly after *Roe*, reached its pinnacle at the 1992 Democratic Convention when Governor Bob Casey was silenced. While many Democrats had left the party during the Reagan years, pro-life Democrats left in droves after 1992.

A 1992 Gallup poll indicated that a majority of respondents (53 percent) believe that abortion should be legal in only certain circumstances. This trend has remained constant since the question was first asked in 1975. A 1992 CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll found that only one-third of the respondents thought that abortion should always be legal.<sup>4</sup> That number dropped to 23 percent in a 1998 poll. Today, the number who believe that abortion should be legal in all circumstances is even lower.

In 1992, Democrats controlled of the House and Senate but felt frustrated by 12 years of Republican presidents.

The Democrats saw that they were losing ground and some strongly believed that abortion had polarized the party and should no longer be ignored. Surely, a respectful discussion of abortion led by a proven loyal Democratic governor would be allowed. It would display to pro-life Democrats across the nation that the party of the big tent welcomed those with differing views. The party needed to do something to reinvigorate itself, and Governor Casey was a strong enough leader and loyal enough Democrat to lead the effort to bring pro-life Democrats back into the party.

Governor Casey had just been re-elected as Pennsylvania's governor by more than a one million-vote margin, defeating a pro-choice Republican. He won 66 of 67 counties, a feat that has not been matched by any other statewide candidate.<sup>5</sup> While the media portrayed Governor Casey as a conservative Democrat, his record portrayed a more liberal progressive agenda. He had an impressive reputation of advocating and caring for the weak, the poor, and the disenfranchised. He stood for and advocated all the principles that the Democratic Party has historically championed.

His record in support of women included having appointed more women to his cabinet than any other Democratic governor and support for nutrition programs so low-income families would have access to nutritious meals.

After his initial attempts to pass universal health care in Pennsylvania, he proposed the Children's Health Care Act to establish the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). CHIP provided uninsured children under the age of 12 guaranteed health care coverage and would expand by one every year to reach the goal of covering all children from 0 to 19.

Casey said of the bill, “This is no bare-bones program. It is a generous program. Any decent society should be generous to its sons and daughters.”<sup>6</sup>

He advocated economic opportunity programs for women, children, and families and advocated programs to fight abuse of women, including funding domestic abuse and rape-crisis programs. He championed women’s rights and, in 1988, appointed the first black woman, Juanita Kidd Stout, to a State Supreme Court. Stout was a strong leader and advocate for success. She sought swift justice for gang members and received threatening letters during trials. She shared her outrage, not because of the threats, but because the letters contained many grammatical and spelling errors.<sup>7</sup>

As governor, Bob Casey rebuilt and reinvigorated the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania.

On the federal level, he raised money for the Democratic Party, including a key race where Democrat Harris Wofford defeated Republican Dick Thornburgh. Thornburgh, who served as the governor of Pennsylvania, also served as the Attorney General of the United States under Presidents Reagan and Bush. Paul Begala, who helped Casey win the governor’s race in 1986, said of the race, “Save for Bob Casey, Harris Wofford would have lost. Casey rebuilt the party from ashes, and made it a better organization than the Republicans.”<sup>8</sup>

Tragically, Senator John Heinz had died in a plane crash and the winner would serve out the remaining three years of his term. The heavy favorite in the November 5 special election was Thornburgh. Wofford’s was a tremendous victory for Democrats, and Governor Casey played a crucial role in reclaiming the Democratic Senate seat. In any other situation

he would have been considered a hero and would have been invited to speak at the 1992 Convention because of the victory reclaiming the Senate seat, his loyalty to the party, and his popularity in the fourth-largest state in the nation.

The theme of the 1992 Democratic Convention would be “unity and inclusion.” Democrats had an incredible opportunity to stand up and lead on the most important civil rights issue of this decade. Democrats could finally have a dialogue within the party about abortion and lead the charge to protect an unprotected class. As they had led so many times before, this was their chance to change the direction the party was headed on abortion. However, “unity and inclusion” was not the message sent to pro-life Democrats, and instead the Democratic leadership sent a message that pro-life Democrats were not welcome in the big tent of the Democratic Party. They silenced their own troops, and took advantage of the distraction facing Republicans, who were not concerned about the Democratic Party in the 1992 presidential race.

Bush was ahead in the polls and more concerned about fighting off a challenge from third-party candidate Ross Perot. Republicans did not consider Democrats a viable threat because of their weakened status. This gave Democrats the opportunity to focus on their own issues without interference from the Bush campaign, which was worried about the growing popularity of Perot.

Although the party was weakened, the Clinton campaign generated electricity. Clinton showed a strong connection to the working people by focusing on his poor childhood and having been raised by a single mother. Clinton resonated with

the American people. He spoke to key Democratic values including reforming health care, retraining the workforce, and working toward a better America. The party was moving toward the center, and Clinton was a new kind of Democrat. His “Putting People First Campaign” energized Democrats. Ironically, his more centrist platform called for cutting off welfare benefits after two years, the need for economic growth, support for the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA), and allowing the states to enact death penalty statutes. It also included support for a “woman’s right to choose.”<sup>9</sup>

Pro-life Democrats learned at the 1992 Convention that they, too, could be in this new energized Democratic Party as long as they stayed silent. The party was looking to a bright, united future led by Clinton and Gore, and the party did not want or need dissenters.

The Clinton campaign was building strength and Clinton appeared to be uniting the party.

Pro-life Democrats were encouraged by the opportunity to reclaim the White House, but was the price too high? We supported the party that advocated for the working men and women of this country, the party that consistently fought for the underdog and all the injustices of the world. However, the party had a disconnect with the pro-life members of the party because they were advocating a woman’s right to choose abortion for any reason at any time.

In 1992, pro-life Democrats learned that people who disagreed with the party would be ostracized even if they were loyal to the party. The pro-life position was a non-starter. So, many left the Democratic Party, unwillingly and regretfully. The party leaders did not realize they were alienating

the very voters they would need to maintain control of the House 24 months later.

Governor Casey wanted the opportunity to represent and speak for those who believed that abortion was wrong at the 1992 Convention. In his book *Fighting For Life* he said, “I wasn’t looking to stir up rancor. All I wanted was a chance to speak to offer a strong dissent based on the party’s historic commitment to protecting the powerless.”<sup>10</sup>

At a platform hearing in Cleveland, he requested the opportunity to speak at the Convention. He urged his fellow Democrats to identify those who agreed with the pro-life position and bring them back to the party. He was not asking for the party to change its position on abortion, only that the party consider a more centrist position.<sup>11</sup>

A Casey aide proposed that the platform include language to make abortion rare. The language stated, “Democrats do not support abortion on demand and believe that the number of abortions should be reduced.” She, too, was cut off and treated with disrespect from other platform committee members. She needed 15 supporters to have a debate on the issue but only received 5 votes, so the issues were never even debated. Casey felt so passionately about speaking on behalf of pro-life Democrats that he continued his quest even after the defeat at the hearing.

Governor Casey wrote a letter to Democratic National Party Chairman Ron Brown, asking to represent the pro-life position at the convention. In his July 2, 1992, letter he wrote, “The Platform Committee draft has the effect of placing the national party even more squarely with the abortion-on-demand camp. I believe this is a serious mistake

for the party and would like the opportunity to present this point of view, shared by many Democrats, to the convention.” He thought this was a reasonable request. His request went unanswered.

He attended the convention and hand-delivered a letter to Texas Governor Anne Richards, chairperson of the convention. She, too, ignored his request. He finally received an answer in the form of a carbon copy of his letter, from the parliamentarian of the convention, saying his request was out of order and denied.

Yet Kathy Taylor, a pro-choice Republican woman who had worked to defeat Casey and supported his pro-choice Republican opponent, Barbara Hafer, was invited to speak along with five other pro-choice Republican women. The pro-choice Republicans were considered honored guests by the Democratic Party, while the popular governor from Pennsylvania was seated in the section farthest from the podium.

Taylor criticized President Bush’s abortion record and said he had made an “unholy alliance with the most extreme anti-choice interest groups in America.”

Taylor had worked to defeat Casey and supported his pro-choice Republican opponent, Barbara Hafer. Millions of Americans were able to hear her views about why abortion was empowering and a women’s right to choose was essential. Adding insult to injury, a camera crew followed Taylor up to the Pennsylvania section to confront Casey about being out of touch with America on abortion. Casey, fortunately, was warned about the pending confrontation. He tactfully departed before the orchestrated and undignified confrontation could occur.

Many said that it was not Governor Casey's abortion stance that prevented him from speaking at the convention, but it was the fact that he did not endorse President Clinton. However, several speakers, including Governor Jerry Brown, spoke at the convention even though they had not yet endorsed Clinton. In fact, Brown supporters tried to silence the DNC chairman when he spoke the first night of the convention. They wanted their candidate to have a prime time speaking slot. The Brown delegates caused so much disruption on the convention floor that the chairman's remarks were barely audible. The state treasurer of California, Kathleen Brown, also had the opportunity to address the convention, even though she also did not endorse Clinton.

The 1992 convention highlighted women. Only one woman, Democratic Senator Barbara Mikulski, currently served in the U.S. Senate. Three others would join her that year — Senators Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein, and Carol Moseley Braun, who at one time was pro-life.

In reality, it was the year of the pro-choice women. Kansas Governor Joan Finney was not included in the year of the women celebrations even though she was the first woman to defeat an incumbent governor in the United States. Dan Rather predicted her chances of winning were that of “a fortune cookie in an Italian restaurant.” Elected in 1991 at the age of 65, she was the state's oldest governor and the state's first Catholic governor. She defeated a pro-choice Republican who outspent her by a margin of \$2 million to \$300,000. The National Organization of Women opposed her campaign because of her pro-life stance. She offered to second Al Gore's nomination but never heard a response.

Finney said of the convention, “They had women up there who had thought about running for office, or who had run, or who were in office. They had everybody up.”

The party did find room for pro-choice Massachusetts State Rep. Barbara A. Hildt who was challenging seven-term pro-life Democrat Congressman Nicholas Mavroules in the Democratic primary. Congressman Mavroules did not attend the convention but was one of the cosigners of the Casey letter to the platform committee calling for moderation on the abortion issue.<sup>12</sup> After Representative Hildt defeated Congressman Mavroules in the primary, Republican Peter G. Torkildsen went on to win the seat that election year.

Leading pro-life Democrats, including Governor Casey, Sargent and Eunice Kennedy Shriver, and Nat Hentoff took out a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times* advocating the pro-life point of view. The “New American Compact: Caring About Women, Caring for the Unborn” called on all Americans to “adopt solutions that reflect the dignity and worth of every human being” and create policies “that are truly pro-women and pro-child.” They further stated that the goal for dealing with crisis pregnancies was by “eliminating the crisis, not the child.”

That same year, a model Democratic Convention was held in Portland, Oregon, for 12,000 students from the Pacific Northwest. High school students were assigned states and researched and represented their state. The convention had a strong presence from Democrats for Life who introduced two abortion planks. The platform contained the standard abortion rights language, but a minority plank was proposed to limit abortion to only rape, incest, and life of the mother.

A compromise nine-point proposal included incentives to reduce the need for abortion. Oregon State Representative Kevin Mannix told the assembly, “We must avoid the extreme positions” on abortion.<sup>13</sup> The student model Democratic Convention was years ahead of the Democratic Party in calling for moderation on the abortion issue.

The next election cycle, Democrats lost 54 seats, including 34 incumbents and, for the first time in 40 years, control of the House of Representatives.<sup>14</sup> The Democrats had held a 256-seat majority to the Republicans’ 178 in 1992. The new Congress would begin with 230 Republicans and 204 Democrats. That same congressional session, Democratic Congressmen Nathan Deal, Greg Laughlin, Mike Parker, Jimmy Hayes, and Billy Tauzin changed parties.<sup>15</sup> All five were pro-life Democrats.

In 11 state legislatures, Republicans gained control of both chambers. Republicans have continued to gain, increasing the number from 6 in 1990 to 18 in 2000. In 2001, Republican state party platforms in all states but two contained planks that supported restrictions on abortion.

The parties weren’t always so defined, but we have to look back at history to understand how the parties arrived at the positions they advocate today. It all started in Seneca Falls, New York.

## Endnotes

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## The Beginning



“The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.” — The Declaration of Sentiments, 1848<sup>1</sup>

**The Seneca Falls Convention and the** Declaration of Sentiments forever changed the direction for women’s rights. In 1848, women had limited rights. In most states, they were not allowed to vote, own property, or keep their own wages. Divorce and custody laws favored men, allowing the husbands to maintain control over the property and retain custody of the children. Professions such as medicine and law were closed to women because they were expected to become wives and mothers. Women from wealthy families were allowed an education, but it usually consisted of courses that would help them to become good homemakers.

As a very young girl, Elizabeth Cady Stanton overheard a conversation between her father, a judge, and an employee

who was recently widowed. The widow had purchased a farm with her own money yet the property belonged to her late husband who willed it to their son, an irresponsible drunk. The law clearly stated that the property belonged to her husband and the will could not be overturned. In her innocence, Elizabeth thought if she ripped the pages out of the law book, it would make things right.<sup>2</sup> Later in her maturity she found the tools to achieve equality for women.

Prior to organizing for securing women's rights, Lucretia Mott traveled around the country, often without her husband, talking about the evils of slavery. She refused to use cotton and other "slavery-produced" goods. Mott attended the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, but she and other women delegates were refused seats by the male organizers of the meetings. The women, including Susan B. Anthony, were seated in segregated quarters at the convention and left with a new goal. They vowed to fight for equality for women.

Not until eight years later would the women gather to fight for women's rights. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the Declaration of Sentiments, which was modeled after the Declaration of Rights.

The Declaration of Sentiments stated, "All men and women are created equal." It further called for women's rights to own property, to vote, and to enjoy an equal stance in society. Two hundred women and 40 men attended the conference on women's rights on July 19, 1848. Though seeking equal rights and equal responsibility for women, they followed the conventions of the times. Lucretia Mott's husband, James, chaired the meeting because it was not a woman's role to conduct political discourse.<sup>3</sup>

The women who wrote and signed the Declaration of Sentiments took great risks to gain equal treatment under the law. Opponents criticized the Declaration of Sentiments and chastised the women and men who supported the cause. The *Lowell Courier Editorial* read:

“Progress” is the grand bubble which is now blown up to balloon bulk by the windy philosophers of the age. The women folks have just held a Convention up in New York State, and passed a sort of “bill of rights,” affirming it their right to vote, to become teachers, legislators, lawyers, divines, and do all and sundries the “lords” may, and of right now do. They should have resolved at the same time, that it was obligatory also upon the “lords” aforesaid, to wash dishes, scour up, be put to the tub, handle the broom, darn stockings, patch breeches, scold the servants, dress in the latest fashion, wear trinkets, look beautiful, and be as fascinating as those blessed morsels of humanity whom God gave to preserve that rough animal man, in something like a reasonable civilization. “Progress!” Progress, forever!<sup>4</sup>

Several co-signers of the Declaration withdrew their support because they were embarrassed by negative response from the public.

Women’s rights conventions were held around the country to gain support. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Sojourner Truth, and other pioneers for women’s rights traveled the country defending

the importance of all the components that made up the Declaration of Sentiments.

In 1854, they submitted 10,000 petitions to the New York legislature calling for suffrage and property rights for women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton addressed the New York legislature stating, “We ask no better laws than those you have made for yourselves. We need no other protection than that which your present laws secure to you.”<sup>5</sup>

Eventually, gaining the right to vote became the central message of the group. That right would empower women by providing them with the opportunity to challenge and change other laws. It seemed logical that voting rights would be the means to achieve empowerment for women.

Abortion was not viewed as a woman’s right in 1850. The consensus in society was that life began at conception, and the medical community advocated defining human life as beginning from conception. Eight years later, the American Medical Association opposed legislation that defined life as from the quickening.

The Civil War halted progress on women’s rights, but women regrouped in 1867 when Stanton and Anthony launched a national campaign for women’s rights. In 1868, they published the first issue of a weekly newspaper, *Revolution*, which advocated suffrage.<sup>6</sup> Their letterhead read, “Men, their rights, and nothing more; women, their rights, and nothing less.”<sup>7</sup> The leaders of the fight for equality considered abortion evil and recognized that it was, in fact, harmful to women.

An 1869 version of the *Revolution* stated, “*No matter what the motive, love of ease, or a desire to save from suffering the unborn innocent, the woman is awfully guilty who commits*

*the deed. It will burden her conscience in life, it will burden her soul in death; But oh thrice guilty is he who drives her to the desperation which impelled her to the crime.*”<sup>8</sup>

The women’s rights movement celebrated its first major victory in 1878 when the first federal resolution to provide suffrage for women was introduced by California Senator Aaron Augustus Sargent. Thirty years had passed since the Seneca Falls Convention. The bill was stuck in committee for nine years and when it finally came before the Senate for a vote, it failed by a vote of 16 to 34.

In 1869, Wyoming became the first state to provide suffrage for women. Several states, including Washington, California, Kansas, Oregon, and Arizona followed. However, the federal legislation stalled in Congress.

The women continued to gain support by building coalitions of different groups. Susan B. Anthony and Stanton knew that the issue transcended party lines and stunned their Republican supporters by working with Democrats to add a plank to their platform in support of women’s rights.

Women worldwide answered the call to action in support of equality for women when the International Women Suffrage Alliance formed and had their first meeting in 1902 with representatives from 11 countries. In 1946, they changed their name to the International Alliance for Women, and continue to fight for “equal rights, equal responsibility” worldwide. Today, they do not specifically mention abortion on their website. They advocate for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has been ratified by 179 countries. The treaty is an international bill of rights

for women. The agreement has not been approved by the United States because it advocates for reproductive rights — which assumes access to abortion.

At home, women were advocating for suffrage in both political parties and achieved their first victory in 1916. Both parties included language in their prospective platforms to extend the right to vote to women. The Democrats encouraged states to expand suffrage while the Republicans favored suffrage, but thought the individual states should decide.

Democrat Platform	Republican Platform
We recommend the extension of the franchise to the women of the country by the States upon the same terms as to men.	The Republican party, reaffirming its faith in government of the people, by the people, for the people, as a measure of justice to one-half the adult people of this country, favors the extension of the suffrage to women, but recognizes the right of each state to settle this question for itself.

President Woodrow Wilson initially opposed suffrage until the state of New York adopted a women’s suffrage resolution.<sup>9</sup> He changed his position, but not until after Alice Paul led the “Silent Sentinels” in a protest in front of the White

House. The Sentinels were arrested and Paul subsequently went on a hunger strike to protest their accommodations. Congress finally took up House Joint Resolution 1 and passed it in the House on May 21, 1919. The Senate passed the bill two weeks later.

Tennessee ratified the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment on August 26, 1920, and finally women achieved the right to vote. Seventy-two years had passed since the Seneca Falls Convention.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Lucretia Mott achieved their goal; however, they did not live to exercise their franchise. Most women were satisfied with this great victory and thought they were done. They believed that the right to vote would mean automatic equality for women and that there was no need to fight further.

Others saw suffrage as only a beginning, but no one was entirely sure where women should go next. The right to vote was a tangible prize. After that was achieved, there wasn't another obvious tangible goal. Alice Paul wrote and proposed an Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution in 1923. The idea fizzled because a majority of the women believed they had already won the war. It would be decades before women began to rise to positions of influence and have the ability to challenge unjust laws and perceptions about women in the workforce.

Movements are characterized by different leaders who step up to promote the ideas that they believe will advance their cause. Personal agendas, not necessarily the best ideas or the strongest leaders of the movement, advance the ideas taken by the group. To make incremental changes in any movement, a thorough spirited discussion and debate is

essential. The feminist movement needed to unite behind a new leader, new idea, and a new debate if they were going to continue to work toward equal rights.

Margaret Sanger, knee-deep in the trenches, emerged as the new leader. She is a confusing and controversial character who advocated for birth control, population control, and eugenics.<sup>10</sup> She was largely influenced by socialists and advocates for free love that she met at the Ferrer School. She was also influenced by years of living in “tamed domesticity” as a wife and mother, her mother’s early death, and the low-income women she met as a nurse.

She closely followed the work of Madeleine Pelletier who made the case in France in 1913 that women and only women should decide on whether or not to carry a child to term. Pelletier was an advocate for population control through birth control or abortion. In fact, Pelletier performed abortions and claimed that they would be a lot safer if they were legal.

Sanger believed that women deserved the right to control their own bodies, the right to choose when to start families, and the right to the sexual freedom that men enjoyed. The combination of these three would mean power and thus equality. Sanger herself had her share of sexual liaisons outside of marriage.

Her early writings earn sympathy for the plight of the women who were continuously pregnant and did not have the money or resources to care for additional children. However, her later embrace of eugenics and her position that birth control was a means to an end to create the perfect race tainted the good she claimed to be doing in the beginning.

Sanger, a nurse who worked with low-income pregnant women, struggled with the effects of a non-existent health care system. She witnessed preventable deaths from pregnancy and also the wounds inflicted on women attempting abortion at home. She saw women with 9, 10, or 11 children begging for her help to prevent another pregnancy. Because her mother died of tuberculosis at age 49, Sanger blamed the toll ten pregnancies had taken on her mother's body. Poverty also contributed to her mother's downfall, and Margaret vowed not to be poor. She married twice, to wealth.<sup>11</sup>

Sanger's thinking arose from her mission to help women control their childbearing decisions. Maternal mortality rates were high because most women delivered at home with the assistance of a midwife. According to the most recent Center for Disease Control report on Pregnancy-Related Mortality Surveillance, 850 women per 100,000 (0.85 percent) died as result of pregnancy in 1900. By 1982, the number had dropped to 7.5 women per 100,000 (0.01 percent).<sup>12</sup> The decline can be attributed to the introduction of penicillin and that more women started delivering in hospitals with the assistance of doctors.

The women Sanger met were desperate to prevent future pregnancies but did not know how to and had few options. Women, by convention and law, could not refuse relations with their husbands and were often blamed for resulting pregnancies. Men could not be convicted of raping their wives until 1976 when Nebraska became the first state to allow a wife to file charges against her husband for rape.

In July of 1921, Sanger was called to help save Sadie Sachs, a poor 28-year-old woman who attempted to abort

her fourth child. Illegal abortion, whether self-induced or performed by a doctor, was heavily discouraged for moral reasons. The 1921 Lippincott's nursing manual warned nurses not to associate with doctors who performed abortion, "for you could not afford to associate in private nursing with a criminal or malefactor of this type."<sup>13</sup> She was desperate not to have another child because her family did not have enough money to provide for their three existing children. The woman succeeded in aborting her fourth child and survived, but knew that she would not survive another. She pleaded with Sanger to share the secret of preventing pregnancy. Sanger ignored the pleas from the desperate woman and told her she would check back in a few weeks. The attending physician told the women the solution was easy — "Tell Jake to sleep on the roof." He further stated that "she can't have her cake and eat it, too."

Three months later, Sachs died from another attempted abortion. The story may have been apocryphal, but Sanger took it seriously and it influenced her work.

Sanger realized that the right to vote had not fulfilled its promise of full equality for women, but Sanger believed she knew what would. Sanger took the reigns of the feminist movement with a new mission and message. She wrote, "I was resolved to seek out the root of evil, to do something to change the destiny of mothers whose miseries were as vast as the sky." Her later writings revealed much more about the misery she was referring to as she veered dangerously into eugenics.

In a November 1921 edition of the *Birth Control Review*, she wrote, "More children from the fit, less from the unfit

— this is the chief issue of birth control.” The same edition claimed that the goal of birth control was “to create a race of thoroughbreds.” In 1939, she wrote, “We do not want word to get out that we want to exterminate the Negro population.”<sup>14</sup> In an August 15, 1926, speech before the Institute of Euthenics at Vassar College, she talked about the billions of dollars spent “for the care and maintenance and perpetuation of those undesirables.” Further stating that the “American public is taxed, heavily taxed, to maintain and increase a race of morons.”

In her fight for the right to contraception, she decided that the legislative process was too slow and the only way to advance her goals was through the judicial process. She published the *Women Rebel*, a magazine for working women, in 1914, but the post office refused to mail it, citing a violation of the Comstock Law prohibiting the publishing of obscene material. She was indicted on nine counts by the Department of Justice and faced the possibility of one year in jail. She fled the country to avoid the trial, leaving her children in the care of others. Sanger eventually returned and was convicted of distributing obscene material. However, she was victorious because the trial changed public opinion about birth control.

On October 16, 1916, she opened a clinic to distribute information on contraception and was once again arrested. She told her clients, “Abortion was the wrong way — no matter how early it was performed it was taking a life; that contraception was the better way, the safer way — it took a little time, a little trouble, but was well worthwhile in the long run, because life had not yet begun. . . .”<sup>15</sup> In a meeting with

a Russian doctor, she emphasized that contraception rather than abortion was a better way to handle family planning. Of the Russian abortion issue, she said, “Four hundred thousand abortions a year indicate women do not want to have so many children; in my opinion it is a cruel method of dealing with the problem because abortion, no matter how well done, is a terrific nervous strain and an exhausting physical hardship.”

The 1920s brought about new ideas, and the expansion of capitalism resulted in a prosperous America. The daughters of the women’s rights movements were uninterested in politics and embraced the Roaring Twenties of fun and independence. Women made advancements in sports, education, and employment. The National American Women’s Suffrage Association changed its name to the League of Women Voters and started training women on issues and campaigns. The National Women’s Party turned their attention to passing the Equal Rights Amendment and ending legal discrimination against women.

Women were making gains. Families had jobs and money. Women had the right to vote. However, motherhood and domesticity were the primary career choices for women. Even women who attended college were forced to take courses on marriage and family.

In 1921, Sanger founded the American Birth Control League to help women prevent pregnancy. She believed that women could not exercise their right to better jobs, a proper education, or achieve full equality if they were home with children or continuously pregnant.

Planned Parenthood credits Margaret Sanger for establishing “a woman’s right to control her body” as “the

foundation of her human rights” and thus equality with her male counterpart.<sup>16</sup>

Sanger, leading this “second wave” of the feminist movement made the right to choose the main tenet for achieving full empowerment for women. Sanger saw the negative aspects of pregnancy and family and said, “I knew something must be done to rescue those women who were voiceless; someone had to express with white hot intensity the conviction that they must be empowered to decide for themselves when they should fulfill the supreme function of motherhood.” Little thought was given to the unborn child.

While perhaps she thought abortion was the taking of a life, she laid the groundwork for the argument used today that equates the “right to choose” with the right to abortion. The second wave argued that no man should have a say over what women do with their own bodies and that women should have the same sexual freedom (without responsibility) that men do.

The fight centered on what was right for the individual rather than what was morally or ethically right. There was no price too high to pay to advance one’s personal rights. In 1926, author Winifred Holtby wrote about the new feminist movement that had emerged following several years of inaction. She stated, “The New Feminism emphasizes the importance of the ‘women’s point of view,’ the Old Feminism believes in the primary importance of the human being.”<sup>17</sup>

The “old feminists” did not accept that abortion was necessary to advancing women’s rights. Elizabeth Cady Stanton said, “When you consider women have been treated as property, it is degrading to women that we should treat our

children as property to be disposed of as we see fit.” Susan B. Anthony also had strong pro-life views and called abortion child murder. Alice Paul wrote, “Abortion is the ultimate exploitation of women.”

The Great Depression halted the advancement of women’s rights because the stock market crash caused desperation for food and work. Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s New Deal revived the women’s movement and changed the government’s responsibility to include support for single mothers, the poor, the elderly, and the unemployed, and made social welfare a responsibility. The New Deal brought promises of advances for women and blacks. Former actress and Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas (D-GA) championed the New Deal policies and was an ardent supporter of equal rights. Elected in a minority district, she was the first white representative to hire black staff and appoint black students to military academies. In 1945, Douglas introduced legislation to provide equal pay for equal work, which didn’t pass Congress until 1961. Republican Richard Nixon challenged and defeated Congresswoman Douglas in a dirty campaign where he accused her of being pink (Communist) right down to her underwear. She dubbed him “Tricky Dicky” as a result of the campaign tactics.

World War II empowered women as they entered the workforce in great numbers because the men went off to war. Rosie the Riveter posters showed a strong woman and enticed women to enter the workforce. Kay Kyser wrote a song about the women riveters called “That little frail can do/more than a male can do.”

Unborn children started to gain legal rights in 1946. In *Bonbrest v. Kotz*, the court ruled that there were three victims

in the case of a baby injured during delivery. The mother, the father, and the baby all were awarded compensation for the injury.

Women felt empowered, but the Equal Rights Amendment stood still for now and a majority of men and women still thought that a women's place was in the home. And, there was a new war brewing — one over civil rights.

## Endnotes

1. *The Declaration of Sentiments*, Seneca Falls, New York, 1848.
2. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1991).
3. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
4. Editorial on Seneca Falls Convention from the *Lowell Courier*, 1848.
5. Christina Hoff Sommers, *Who Stole Feminism?* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).
6. Suffrage is the civil right to vote or the exercise of that right. In that context, it is also called political franchise or simply “the franchise.”
7. <http://www.susanbanthonyhouse.org/>
8. “America’s Earliest Feminists Opposed Abortion: Pioneering Activists Such as Susan B. Anthony and Alice Paul, Says the Writer, Called Abortion ‘The Ultimate Exploitation of Women,’ ” *Chicago Sun Times*, January 8, 2006, p. B3.
9. U.S. National Archives & Records Administration, The Constitution: The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.
10. Eugenics is a social philosophy which advocates the improvement of human hereditary traits through social intervention. The goals have variously been to create more intelligent people, save society resources, lessen human suffering, and reduce health problems. Proposed means of achieving these goals

most commonly include birth control, selective breeding, and genetic engineering.

11. Mark Herring, *The Pro-life/Pro-choice Debate* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003).
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13. Jimmy Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).
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17. Paul Berry and Alan Bishop, editors, *Testament of a Generation: The Journalism of Vera Brittain & Winifred Holtby* (London: Virago, 1985).