

**REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE**  
& The Men Who Want To Take It Away!

Men have a long history of controlling women and their bodies. The men who wrote the Bible mostly treated women as property, though there were a few exceptions when women were ruling the nations serving as Judges or Queens. In earlier history there were a few periods when women were the customary rulers. In many parts of history women were healers, though in the middle ages in Europe and even in the early years of colonial America, those healers were called witches and millions were drowned or burned. Men have often feared the power of women, especially the power they wield over the life or death of children, the sick and those injured. When women actually gain economic and political power, the men in control have often risen up to keep women down. In the last century, as often before, many men have cast this as a religious quest, finding justifications in the writings of other men in the Bible and other sacred scriptures.

Even if the current group of wealthy white men holding power succeeds in overturning *Roe v. Wade*, there will still be abortions of unwanted children, but women getting abortions will die in far greater numbers in back alley clinics. Yes, there are more options for birth control at this time, but many of those will become unavailable to poor women if those same wealthy white men succeed in taking away funding to Planned Parenthood. There will also be more unwanted children and children who though loved may make it harder for poor families to survive. I haven't heard anyone making much of an effort to better fund health services or add to safety net or adoption resources for the working poor or those families who have no adequate income. As usual, the poor are blamed for being poor, no matter what limitations their abilities, education, and circumstances may place upon them. And wealthy women will always be able to access whatever services they might need. They may not hold much power, but they will be able to access abortions, contraception, or whatever forms of birth prevention or control may be available. So this is not just a battle between women and men, it is a war against the poor. And part of the struggle is aimed at keeping the poor, especially Blacks and Latinos in their places.

Reproductive Choice is a significant issue on its own, but it can not really be separated from the other issues between men and women, Black and White, and rich and poor. The recent election and the early days of the Trump era have continued to exacerbate and perhaps take advantage of those divisions. Where American life had swung more toward cooperation and collaboration under President Obama, each division has been widened already under Trump. Racism, Sexism, Nationalism, and the still-increasing chasm between rich and poor continue to grow under the policies of the Donald. And this is just the first half of the first 100 days. Things are not looking good for liberals, feminists, Muslims, women, or persons of color.

As Feminists have long known, the decision in *Roe v. Wade* was a watershed moment in the freedom of women from domestic slavery. In that decision, women gained legal control of their own bodies for the first time. Other amendments, laws and decisions around women's voting and property rights, rights to freedom from harassment in work settings, and against marital rape have also helped women to have a more secure place in society, but every gain has come at great cost and every gain has resulted in a backlash and an effort by many of those men in power to restrict or limit the applicability of those rights. This administration, elected on the basis of lies about what it would do and about what Hillary had done, poses the greatest risk to women's rights and to the future of humanity that we have faced since the end of the Cold War.

That same group of powerful wealthy white men currently in control of our nation has also attempted to cast feminism itself as something bad, evil and destructive; but what is feminism other than the belief that women are equal to men and ought to have the same rights and privileges? Other than some size differences and differences in reproductive organs, women are certainly the intellectual equals or betters of men. Men and women have been socialized, educated, and selectively bred for somewhat different roles historically, but the capabilities of women and men to succeed in this era are certainly equivalent. Those of us who believe in the abilities, rights, and value of women must not waver in this moment when the men in power would take back the gains women have made in the last century!

Reproductive Choice remains a key battle in the war for Women's Equality. Women must retain the right to control of their own bodies as well as their minds. Men, even husbands and fathers, have no moral or ethical right to make decisions that so intimately affect the bodies of women. Yes, men have responsibilities for their offspring, and rights in regard to children who have been born, but the bodies of women must be held sacred, for they are far more than incubators for babies. No woman should be forced to bear the fetus of a man who has raped or abused her. No woman should be forced to bear a child when she is not physically, emotionally, and financially ready. And no woman should have to choose between her own life and that of her child.

I believe that it has become a relative rarity that abortion is used as a contraceptive technique with the ready availability of other contraceptives, but I saw enough abused and neglected children in the years I worked in Child Protective Service to know that some people should not be parents. Children brought into this world into families that end up abusing or killing them within their early years might be better off not being born.

It is interesting to me that many people who claim to be Pro-Life in regard to abortion still support the Death Penalty. And many Pro-Lifers do not support Medicaid even for children or families, or funding for Children's Services, or Welfare or Food Stamp programs. And only a small number of those Pro-Lifers ever consider adopting the children that they want born. Many Pro-Lifers claim a religious justification for their views, but more frequently addressed teachings around divorce or caring for others do not seem to be nearly so important as opposing abortion and gay rights. So many people seem to be so certain about what God wants today even on issues the Bible doesn't address.

The rich white men currently in power present an interesting cross section of society--that is if you cut across the top 1% of the pyramid of people based on wealth. So many billionaires with such similar views on how the other 99% ought not be allowed to decide much of anything for themselves or to ever get ahead. These billionaires have devoted their lives to making money and they are very good at it.

Few if any of them have any experience in public service or in anything that could be considered serving anything other than their own short-term bottom line. They have shown no interest in working for any common good, and in fact seem to make every effort to stay away from commoners entirely. Why should they have any interest in public schools, or consumer protections? Such a successful group of leaders must know what is best for everyone, mustn't they? It really is pretentious of us mere mortals to question these leaders of industry and commerce! They probably are lying to us for our own good, right? We don't really want to know all the sordid details of how they became so successful, do we? We probably wouldn't understand Trump's tax returns even if he were willing to make them public! Oh yes, and we really just need to give them a chance—how much damage can they do in 4 years anyway?

Even though they have never shown an interest in helping anyone else, this fine group of billionaires along with the millionaires in Congress will surely pick the right man for the Supreme Court just in case they aren't able to outlaw abortion through legislation. Yes, I'm sure they know best! Why, they wouldn't allow financial protections or environmental regulations from getting in the way of making more money. And if the super-rich get even wealthier, some of it will trickle down like it always has, right? And if we aren't better off, it must be our own fault, because look how well they have done with some of them only starting off with a few million from their families.

I didn't used to be this cynical. Some years I have been downright uplifting and hopeful, like during the Clinton and Obama years. There were some reasons to hope for progress in those years. Not that they were perfect. We never made it to single-payer all-inclusive health care that every other developed nation has. We didn't make it to having a living wage for all full-time workers. And we didn't get far enough with environmental and consumer financial protections. But there was reason to hope because things were getting better for most people. So here we are today with billionaires and millionaires running the country and things are not getting better but corporations are doing great!

The ERA Equal Rights Amendment was never passed. Lies were told and people in power opposed it. Some women even opposed it because their men told them to oppose it.

Men in power feared that it would actually succeed in making women equal. Men in power in some churches said it was a religious issue, that God wanted men to be in charge, that women should be home cooking, barefoot and pregnant and ready to take care of their men. And the ERA never got enough votes, and women remained second-class citizens.

And today things are different, but not enough different, and women's ability to make their own decisions about their own bodies are at risk. And powerful white men who own and run corporations are mostly in charge, and this world has problems!

And this is our challenge, to care for those in need, to protect the rights of women and children and minorities, and to do what we can to insure that the progress we have made over recent decades is not all for naught. This is a moral and ethical obligation based in the true core of religions and philosophies of the world, and in our Unitarian Universalist Principles. Equality, Hospitality, Justice and Compassion are at the core of world religions and they are at the core of our Principles. We are called, challenged, and encouraged to live our lives and work to make things better. That is not the direction the current leaders of our nation are taking, and so we are called to oppose them, to resist their actions and policies, to stand firm for the things our nation and our religion were founded upon. We are called to work for justice for all persons, for equality between men and women, white and black, persons of every religion, color, age, and sexual identity, new immigrants and 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> generation immigrants. We are called to take a stand for justice today and every day until our nation and world are at peace with justice, equality, acceptance, and compassion for all persons. May we rise to this challenge and make it our life's work to make it so!

Shalom, Salaam, Blessed Be, Namaste, and Amen!