Dissent

THE HISTORY OF AN AMERICAN IDEA

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CHAPTER 22

Mobilization and Backlash

Feminism is the radical notion that women are people.
—Marie Shear, 1986

When did you ever see a fag fight back? . . . Now, times are a-changin'. Tuesday night was the last night for bullshit. . . . Predominantly, the theme [w]as, "this shit has got to stop!"
—anonymous participant in the Stonewall riot, 1969

In the name of all Indians, therefore, we reclaim this island for our Indian nations, for all these reasons. We feel this claim is just and proper, and that this land should rightfully be granted to us for as long as the rivers run and the sun shall shine. We hold the rock!
—"A Proclamation: To the Great White Father and All His People on the Takeover of Alcatraz Island," 1969

The 1960s produced irreversible change in the United States. The civil rights movement sent currents of inspiration so deeply throughout the land that there was no going back to the days when any American would settle for less than full constitutional rights. But still, during the 1970s and 1980s, even as American society continued to evolve, as more and more people from every conceivable ethnic and racial background demanded their rights, there was a powerful backlash against what many conservatives viewed as the excesses of the immoral, licentious sixties. Dissenting values of the 1960s set off another chapter in the culture wars.

The most significant movement to come out of this period was second-wave feminism. Winning the right to vote in 1920 was a political victory for women, but women's status did not really change much. As early as 1923 the feminist leader Alice Paul initiated the fight for economic equality by introducing the Equal Rights Amendment to

Congress. It was ignored. Forty years later women were still experiencing second-class status and what Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name." Friedan was interviewing her classmates from Smith College fifteen years after graduation when it became apparent to her that even though most of the women were living successful lives, married to successful men, raising successful children, they themselves felt inexplicably unfulfilled. They were victims of the "feminine mystique," the belief that women's source of satisfaction came from being homemakers. It is foolish, Friedan insisted, to expect that women achieve orgiastic bliss from waxing the kitchen floor. Women needed an outlet for their creative energies, a way of experiencing their full potential. And the only way for that was to overthrow the outmoded male-dominated ways of thinking. Friedan called for a reevaluation of gender assumptions and demanded equal educational and career opportunities for women as well as equal pay for equal work. The publication of her book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 inaugurated a new era in the struggle for women's rights. "The problem lay buried," Friedan wrote, "unspoken, for many years in the minds of American women. . . . As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night—she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question—'Is this all?' "[1]

The book resonated for untold thousands of American women, and they began openly questioning the expectations that society exacted on them. A Presidential Commission on the Status of Women issued a report on the extent of discrimination against women in education and salaries. President Kennedy signed the Equal Pay Act and an executive order prohibiting discrimination in the civil service.

In 1966 Friedan, along with Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, the Reverend Pauli Murray, and twenty-five other women and men, founded the National Organization for Women (NOW) in order "to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men." NOW issued a "Statement of Purpose" delineating its goals: "We believe the time has come . . . to confront, with concrete action, the conditions that now prevent women from enjoying the equality of opportunity and freedom of choice which is their right, as individual Americans, and as human beings." Women,

the statement read, were "first and foremost" human beings and thus deserved exactly the same opportunities available for men.[2]

NOW pushed for enforcement of equal pay for equal work and demanded that the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission enforce Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibited discrimination in the workplace on account of sex. It pressured colleges and universities to open up professional programs to women and to include women's studies courses in their curriculum. It pushed the government and private business to provide day-care centers for children. And perhaps most importantly, certainly most controversially, NOW lobbied vigorously for women's reproductive rights and to decriminalize abortion.

The women reading *The Feminine Mystique* and joining NOW were one of three factions propelling second-wave feminism. Many members of NOW were professional women with connections, looking for equality and self-determination. Another group, influenced by the general milieu of 1960s dissent, were housewives who were frustrated by the constraints of the 1950s and looking to gain greater opportunity and possibilities in a world that was not structured by rigid gender lines and subordination to men/husbands. The third faction consisted of radical women looking to rethink the meaning and practice of gender and gender relations. Involvement in the civil rights movement, antiwar protests, and the counterculture had deepened these women's political consciousness, made them keenly aware of the limitations placed on them in the social structure, and radicalized them. They studied the works of radical political philosophers from Marx and Lenin to Marcuse and Fanon and consequently began examining their own lives through the prism of leftist analysis. More and more they argued for the restructuring of gender relationships in postcapitalist society. But paradoxically their radicalization came about only partly because of their engagement in New Left ideology; it was also brought about because they discovered that even within left-wing organizations like SDS sexism ran rampant. At the national SDS convention in 1965 women staged a walkout to protest the expectation that after an evening of intellectual discourse they were expected to make coffee and sandwiches, to clean up, and to be available for sex. Radical men, it seems, were just as chauvinistic as the rest of American men. The gender attitudes of New Left males, as much as dialectical materialism, radicalized the women's movement.

The most important phase of the radicalization process took place in the women's caucuses that developed in response to sexism. These were consciousness-raising sessions in which women sat in a circle, opening up and discussing what had always been taboo: their thoughts and feelings about sexuality, lesbianism, masturbation, menopause, unwanted pregnancy, and the illegal abortions that many of them had experienced. They encouraged each other to see through and cast aside the artificial existence and role-playing imposed on them by a male-dominated society. The sense of solidarity, of sisterhood, that these sessions generated strengthened the women's movement and gave women the daring to become more militant.

Feminist groups promoted these consciousness-raising workshops and urged their members to participate. One of them was the left-wing organization Redstockings, which was founded in New York City by Shulamith Firestone and Ellen Willis in early 1969. "Women are an oppressed class," the Redstockings Manifesto declared. "Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings, whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives. Our humanity is denied." Arguing that relationships between men and women are class relationships, Redstockings identifies "the agents of [women's] oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy; men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest." Relationships between "men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively." The sooner women recognize this, the sooner they will be liberated.[3]

By the end of the 1960s radical feminist groups were proliferating throughout the nation, and their members were eager to experiment with all sorts of in-your-face tactics. Taking a cue, perhaps, from the type of street theater practiced by activists such as Abbie Hoffman, hundreds of women on September 7, 1968, shortly after the Chicago demonstrations and riots, protested the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City. They dressed a sheep in a bikini and "Miss America" sash and paraded her up and down the boardwalk, announcing that she was a prime piece of American meat. Demonstrators carried signs that read, "Let's Judge Ourselves as People" and "Welcome to the Miss America

Cattle Auction," while inside the convention hall activists unfurled a huge banner from the balcony proclaiming, "Women's Liberation." With dozens of male hecklers surrounding them, they threw their bras, girdles, curlers, high-heel shoes, makeup, and other symbols of male oppression into a "Freedom Trash Can." They had planned to set the contents of the trash can on fire, but they were unable to obtain a fire permit from city officials. Even so, the episode was inaccurately characterized in newspapers as a "bra-burning," a clever association of the feminists with the antiwar activists who were publicly burning their draft cards.

A month later, on Halloween night, another widely covered piece of radical feminist street theater took place: a Witches' Dance in front of the New York Stock Exchange. Women from W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) dressed up as witches, danced on Wall Street, and put a hex on the stock market. Later in the year they protested the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and in 1969, wearing black veils, they held another guerrilla-style protest at a Bridal Fair at Madison Square Garden. As the women's liberation movement grew and became more threatening to conservatives, such radical actions, although they were obviously humorous, tongue-in-cheek attempts to raise consciousness, only served to provoke a powerful antifeminist backlash. Antifeminists portrayed feminists as male-bashing, antisexual, humorless shrews. The word *feminist* became, in their lexicon, a pejorative term, a joke even, and for many Americans this association has endured despite numerous gains that feminists have won for women.

Still, the essential arguments put forth by feminists resonated—with men as well as women—and set in motion a growing impulse to reconsider age-old labels and stereotypes. What does it mean to be a man or a woman in a society that imposes strict roles on individuals on the basis of gender? Women's liberation sought to free women from oppressive stereotyping that denied their individuality and hindered them from pursuing their full creative potential. What many men began to realize was that women's liberation also freed men from the roles and expectations that constricted their own individuality. "'Women's liberation,'" as the feminist activist Gloria Steinem wrote in a *Washington Post* oped piece in 1970, "aims to free men, too." The movement is not really a "feminist" movement; it is a "humanist" movement. "The first problem

Feminist protest during the bicentennial in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, July 4, 1976. (Image © Leif Skoogfors; courtesy Leif Skoogfors, Corbis)

for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn." We must examine and question the antiquated assumptions that dominate our thinking. "Patriotism means obedience, age means wisdom, woman means submission, black means inferior: these are preconceptions imbedded so deeply in our thinking that we honestly may not know that they are there." If we can recognize these erroneous assumptions and get beyond them, we will all be free to experience *who* we are in our unique individuality. Men will not have to prove their masculinity,

women will not have to prove their submissiveness, men will be permitted to give their feminine side free rein, and women, their masculine side, for in truth we are all yin and yang, black and white, masculine and feminine. Denying one side of ourselves limits us. There are enough limitations in life; why impose artificial limitations on ourselves? Women's liberation frees everyone. "No more alimony. Fewer boring wives. Fewer childlike wives. No more so-called 'Jewish mothers,' who are simply normally ambitious human beings with all their ambitiousness confined to the house. No more wives who fall apart with the first wrinkle because they've been taught that their total identity depends on their outsides. No more responsibility for another adult human being who has never been told she is responsible for her own life." What both women and men need is a revolution in consciousness.[4]

Despite alarmists' warnings that feminism would destroy marriage and family life, the primary focus of second-wave feminism was simply to bring about a revolution in attitudes and consciousness. Even to this day individuals are transforming their lives each time they question basic gender assumptions about their relationships with other individuals.

The most controversial accomplishment of the movement was the successful campaign to legalize abortion. After years of debate and lobbying, organizations such as NOW and the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws stepped up the pressure by coordinating demonstrations and rallies demanding the decriminalization of abortion. Redstockings organized a series of "abortion speakouts" in New York and other cities, giving women a public platform to openly discuss the illegal and risky abortions that so many of them had undergone as a means of raising consciousness about the issue. Finally, a case on abortion rights that had slowly moved its way through the court system made it to the Supreme Court, and on January 22, 1973, the justices, in a 7–2 decision, decriminalized abortion. Writing the majority opinion in *Roe v. Wade*, Associate Justice Harry Blackmun (a Nixon appointee) declared that the "right of privacy, whether it be founded in the Fourteenth Amendment's concept of personal liberty and restrictions upon state action, as we feel it is, or, as the district court determined, in the Ninth Amendment's reservation of rights to the people, is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy."[5] The broader question of "women's rights" was not an

issue in the case; the Court was more concerned with physicians' rights to perform abortions legally and with women's privacy rights. Regardless of the rationale behind the decision, women rejoiced that they were freed from governmental interference in a difficult and emotional personal decision. Women's reproductive rights were recognized and affirmed by the federal government.

Activists for women's reproductive rights had company—the movement for gay and lesbian rights. On June 28, 1969, the police raided the Stonewall Inn, a well-known gay bar in New York's Greenwich Village. This was not an unusual occurrence. Gay bars were habitually raided, with patrons apprehended and then released. It was an attempt to intimidate and humiliate homosexuals, who for the most part lived secret lives, fearful for their jobs, parental disapproval, and societal condemnation. Some bars, such as the Stonewall Inn, were operated by the Mafia; the owners paid off the police and served watered-down, overpriced drinks to people seeking a welcoming place where they could meet, dance, hook up, and be openly themselves. There were organizations in the 1950s, such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, that created a supportive community for gays and lesbians. And over the years there were protests and demonstrations and even a riot (in 1966) when police tried to arrest several drag queens and transvestites at a cafeteria in San Francisco, but for the most part the gay and lesbian world stayed below the radar. By 1969 the social and political unrest of the times, the example of civil rights and antiwar protestors, and the do-your-own-thing values of the counterculture emboldened homosexuals. On that June night in 1969 when the police raided the Stonewall Inn, the clientele fought back. Some refused to leave, and they forced six officers back into the bar as hundreds of gay men in the neighborhood gathered on Christopher Street outside the bar. For several days protestors and police clashed in the streets, while activists distributed flyers urging others to join the demonstrations and take to the streets of Greenwich Village. "Get the mafia and the cops out of gay bars," demanded one of the flyers. "The nights of Friday, June 27, 1969 and Saturday, June 28, 1969," it went on to explain to the public, "will go down in history as the first time that thousands of Homosexual men and women went out into the streets to protest the intolerable situation which has existed in New York City for many years—namely, the Mafia (or syndicate) control of this city's Gay bars in collusion with

certain elements in the Police Dept. of the City of New York." Calling themselves HYMN (the Homophile Youth Movement) and taking a page from the philosophy of the Black Power movement, the writers of the flyer made clear that "the only way this monopoly can be broken is through the action of Homosexual men and women themselves." They demanded the boycotting of Mafia-owned establishments and that "Gay businessmen step forward and open Gay bars that will be run legally with competitive pricing and a healthy social atmosphere." And they also appealed to Mayor John Lindsay to open "a thorough investigation and effective action to correct this intolerable situation."[6]

The Stonewall Riots lasted for only six days, but the movement was gaining momentum. In July gay activists called for strategy meetings and more demonstrations. "Do you think homosexuals are revolting?" one widely distributed placard asked. "You bet your sweet ass we are. We're going to make a place for ourselves in the revolutionary movement. We challenge the myths that are screwing up this society." And they announced a planning meeting for July 24, 1969. Another handout from the summer of '69 that was pasted on walls, nailed to trees, and slipped under parked cars' windshield wipers read,

> Homosexuals Are Coming Together at Last
> To examine how we are oppressed and how we oppress ourselves. To fight for gay control of gay businesses. To publish our own newspaper. To these and other radical ends.[7]

In the ensuing months several gay rights organizations were founded, among them the Gay Liberation Front (equating itself with the Vietnamese National Liberation Front) and the Gay Activists Alliance. And this was only the start. From these beginnings scores of organizations were formed throughout the 1970s and 1980s (and indeed in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century) that increasingly demanded equal rights for gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender persons.

As the gay rights movement grew, people's attitudes and public policy slowly began to evolve. In cities with large gay populations, such as New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco, politicians gradually began endorsing proposals and passing statutes that modestly improved the standing of gays. For example, in California, State Assemblyman

George Moscone openly supported gay rights and was instrumental in pushing the legislature to repeal the state's sodomy law. Later, when he was mayor of San Francisco, he continued his support for gay rights and backed candidate Harvey Milk for election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. Milk, a vocal leader of San Francisco's gay community, had run for political office several times in the past, but his election as a supervisor in 1977 was his first victory. It was the first time that an openly gay man was elected to political office in the United States. Milk was hoping to make a difference through the conventional political process, and his major achievement was a civil rights bill that banned discrimination against anyone for sexual orientation. However, after only eleven months in office Milk (along with Mayor Moscone) was assassinated. His assassination and the enormous outpouring of grief by the citizens (gay and straight) of San Francisco focused attention on the gay rights movement at a critical moment and went a long way toward expanding Americans' consciousness in the same way that violence against Freedom Riders did for the civil rights movement.

During the 1980s and 1990s gays were even more in the public eye. By the mid-1980s Gay Pride festivals and parades celebrating the anniversary of Stonewall were held around the country, and scores of cities boasted gay softball leagues, with the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance (NAGAA) sponsoring tournaments and an annual "Gay World Series." And more and more politicians saw the political wisdom of embracing these events. For example, in Philadelphia, Mayor (and later Governor) Ed Rendell regularly threw out the ceremonial first ball of the season for the City of Brotherly Love Softball League. (Consequently the gay community always threw its full support behind him at election time.)

Civil rights demonstrations and antiwar activism inspired others to organize and to demand their rights. In California Mexican American (Chicano) migrant workers banded together and, using civil rights tactics, protested against the fruit and vegetable growers that routinely exploited them by paying far less than minimum wage for long hours of backbreaking work. One of these workers, César Chávez, organized the National Farm Workers Association (NFWA) to stand up to the growers. From 1965 to 1970 the NFWA (changing its name in 1966 to the United Farm Workers, or UFW) coordinated a grape strike that

focused national attention on the plight of California migrant workers. Throughout the strike (*La Huelga*) Chávez adopted the nonviolent tactics of Martin Luther King and even took a page out of Gandhi's book by carrying out a twenty-five-day hunger strike in 1968 that garnered much-needed publicity for the workers' cause. By 1970 the nationwide grape boycott pressured growers to recognize and negotiate with the union. The UFW's success inspired other Latinos around the country to fight against discrimination. In 1969 activists formed La Raza Unida to engage in political battles on a local level with the goal of organizing Latinos as a bloc to elect state and national representatives committed to passing legislation to end discrimination. La Raza Unida and Chávez's UFW formed the basis of what evolved into a growing and significant movement to apply pressure on federal, state, and local governments to guarantee equal rights for Spanish-speaking Americans.

After enduring centuries of injustice, prejudice, brutality, and outright murder, American Indians too were propelled to action by the radical currents of the times. By 1968 thousands of Native Americans adopted 1960s-style militancy and protest as the means to fight for equality and the basic civil rights they had been denied. African Americans' demand for "Black Power" especially resonated with Native Americans. Using the phrase "Red Power" as their rallying cry, Indian activists formed the American Indian Movement (AIM) in 1968 and organized protests and acts of civil disobedience to force the federal government to redress their grievances. Over the next few years Dennis Banks, Russell Means, and Leonard Peltier emerged as three of AIM's most prominent militants, and they became national figures in the struggle for Native American rights. In November 1969 AIM and about six hundred Indians from fifty tribes occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. For more than a year they stayed put, fending off federal authorities and demanding that they be allowed to keep the island (since the federal government had closed Alcatraz Prison), where they hoped to set up an Indian university, museum, and cultural center. "We are a proud people!" they proclaimed. "We have observed and rejected much of what so-called civilization offers. We are Indians! We will preserve our traditions and ways of life by educating our own children. We are Indians! We will join hands in a unity never before put into practice. We are Indians! Our Earth Mother awaits our voices. . . .

WE HOLD THE ROCK!"[8] Though the occupation created publicity for the deplorable conditions Indians were subjected to, it ended in June 1971 without their demands being met when President Nixon ordered federal marshals and the FBI to retake the island and evict the protestors. Undaunted, AIM and members of other Indian organizations next organized a march on Washington. Calling it the "Trail of Broken Treaties," hundreds of activists drove in a caravan to the nation's capital, arriving in DC just before the 1972 presidential election. When members of Congress refused to meet with them, they occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs and issued a proclamation of twenty demands. Among their demands was the insistence that the United States honor all the treaties it has broken, that those that have not been ratified be submitted to the Senate, that Congress "relinquish their control over Indian Affairs," that 110 million acres be restored to the Indians, that Indians' civil rights be restored, and that all crimes against Native Americans be treated as federal crimes.[9] In essence they demanded Indian Power, Red Power.

In 1973 some members of AIM seized the Wounded Knee battlefield site (where more than 140 Miniconjou Sioux had been massacred by the U.S. Army in 1890) and demanded that the United States honor the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868 guaranteeing the Black Hills to the Lakota in perpetuity. The Wounded Knee siege was the most notorious of the American Indian Movement's encounters with the federal government; it led to a seventy-one-day confrontation between AIM and federal marshals, during which a federal officer and two Lakota were killed. In the end, however, as with the Alcatraz standoff, the protestors were removed, and their demands went unmet.

Even groups with the least power of all, prison inmates, were motivated by the radical activism of the time to launch their own rebellions. Prisoners in New Jersey, California, Massachusetts, and most notoriously Attica Prison in New York mutinied against the inhumane conditions to which they were subjected. Employing the rhetoric of Marx, the Black Panthers, and other revolutionary groups, they issued a series of political demands. But inmates' rebellions were invariably crushed. Indeed, although the uprisings called attention to their legitimate grievances and although there was some governmental response at least to evaluate and study their grievances, the inmates achieved only limited

success. Still, public consciousness was expanding. Americans were realizing that there were problems that needed to be addressed.

One of the long-term movements that emerged from the 1960s was the environmental movement. As early as the nineteenth century environmentalists such as John Muir and John Burroughs toiled to raise awareness of the fragility of the environment. By the 1960s, after the publication of Rachel Carson's influential book *Silent Spring*, thousands of Americans, concerned about water and air pollution and the rapid destruction of natural resources, began organizing in a serious way to "save the planet." Implementing the slogan "think globally, act locally," environmentalists argued that doing something in their own neighborhoods, their own cities, to reverse the negative human impact on the environment was the best way to find a solution for a global problem. The longtime dissenter and folk singer Pete Seeger, who had been involved in the struggle for workers' rights as well as the civil rights and antiwar movements, began a campaign in 1968 to clean up the Hudson River. He raised money to build a replica of a nineteenth-century sloop, and then he and his crew sailed the sloop *Clearwater* up and down the river, performing concerts at towns along the way, raising political awareness about the devastating effects of the PCBs and other pollutants dumped into the river by such companies as General Electric. By 1978 the concerts had evolved into an annual two-day folk festival that has been going on for more than forty years and has been a major factor in cleaning up the Hudson River. In fact the efforts to decontaminate the river were successful enough that sturgeon reappeared in the Hudson after an absence of a century. Beginning in 1970, environmentalists also inaugurated "Earth Day," which has become an annual environmental awareness rally in cities around the nation. Also founded in the early 1970s was the militant organization Greenpeace, which continues to confront companies and countries that endanger the Earth's ecology. Greenpeace has interfered with Japanese and Norwegian whaling ships, American military tests, and French vessels carrying nuclear waste. But nonviolent efforts, civil disobedience, or even disruptive tactics to purify the atmosphere, rivers, and oceans; to protect endangered species; and to fight against the proliferation of nuclear power is a very slow process. It might take years, if not decades, before the hard work pays off.

Many of these movements are still unfolding, still evolving. Women, gays, Hispanics, and undocumented immigrants continue to press for their rights. And environmentalists, in an age of increasingly devastating climate change and dwindling resources, still fight on. Such movements will continue to expand, and so too will the discourse as dissenters push to broaden and deepen the dialogue.

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By the end of the 1970s a full-fledged backlash exploded against the radical 1960s. Frightened by the radicalism of, and angry at the attention paid to, African Americans, women, Hispanics and gays, many whites, especially those of modest income, felt victimized. They resented a government that ignored their struggles while giving preferential treatment to minorities; they felt Congress was giving handouts to people who did not deserve it; they felt cheated. And they hated the challenges posed to traditional American mores, religion, and ethical values. And they began to revolt. This conservative backlash to 1960s radicalism fostered new dissent movements that sought to overturn the gains made by African Americans, women, gays, and radicals.

One of the most conspicuous manifestations of this backlash was the "prolife" movement. As soon as *Roe v. Wade* established a new norm expanding women's rights, a new dissent movement—the antiabortion movement—was born. Hundreds of thousands of Americans formed organizations and political action groups with the specific goal of overturning *Roe*. One of the leading organizations spearheading the backlash was the National Right to Life Committee, which argued on moral grounds that a fetus's right to life trumps a woman's right to choose. Antiabortion activists lobbied politicians and held demonstrations on a regular basis, they picketed Planned Parenthood clinics and the offices of physicians who perform abortions, they organized demonstrations on college campuses, and every year on the anniversary of the *Roe* decision, they held a protest rally at the Supreme Court. The movement quickly gained the backing of fundamentalists, the Roman Catholic Church, and after the 1980s, the Republican Party. In fact, since the 1980s, prolife has become so central to Republican ideology that it is regarded as a litmus test for would-be Republican political candidates. What feminists regarded as a personal issue is now a public political

issue. As prolife rallies and demonstrations mounted in the 1980s and 1990s, NOW and other feminist groups fought against the backlash by organizing prochoice rallies supporting *Roe* and abortion rights.

By the 1990s protests at Planned Parenthood clinics and other abortion facilities escalated to the point that several abortion-provider physicians and clinical workers were murdered by zealots who justified such acts as necessary to save the lives of the innocent, the unborn. The majority of prolife advocates deplored such murderous deeds, but such actions underscored the raw emotions that were unleashed on both sides of the issue. The issue, of course, is far more complicated than the reductive terms of "prolife" and "prochoice," which give the false impression that there are two, mutually exclusive points of view.

Conservative activists targeted other progressive accomplishments of the 1960s. After the Supreme Court upheld busing as a tool to integrate de facto segregated school districts (busing African American students to school districts where most of the students were white, and vice versa), a number of cities experimented with the policy. The hope was that mixing students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds would reduce prejudice and racial strife and produce more equal education opportunities. But white lower- and lower-middle-class Americans who could not afford to send their children to private schools were enraged and took to the streets in dozens of protests. Boston was not the only city that witnessed such protests, but it became the most notorious with the publication of a Pulitzer Prize–winning photograph of a white protestor attempting to impale an African American lawyer on the pole of the American flag he was wielding. This image of unrestrained rage being expressed in the streets of the city that launched the American Revolution left an unforgettable and paradoxical impression on Americans' minds. Clearly, overcoming centuries of racism was not going to be an easy task.

Supreme Court decisions strengthening separation of church and state by banning prayer in public schools also angered many conservatives, particularly evangelical Christians. The ban, they believed, endangered religious freedom and was an existential threat that would destroy the United States. And so they protested. If they could get the ban overturned, if they could soften the impenetrable barrier separating church and state that had existed from the nation's founding, they believed it would help prevent, or at least slow down, the country's slide

into immorality. Emerging from such religiously motivated protests, a new movement was born. Conservative Christians, led by preachers such as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, launched a political movement with the goal of electing born-again Christians to office. The idea was to work in political campaigns at a local level and then from an empowered local base expand nationally. Jerry Falwell founded the Moral Majority in 1979 as a proevangelical Christian lobby group that would back only candidates who were profamily, prolife, pro-prayer, pro-Israel, and staunchly anticommunist. The Moral Majority threw its support behind Reagan in the 1980 presidential campaign (this, despite the fact that Reagan was not, as his opponent Jimmy Carter professed to be, a "born-again" Christian). Reagan supported the Moral Majority's socially conservative agenda, while the Democrat Carter, in Falwell's eyes, was too liberal, too soft on communism, and a traitor to family and Christian values. A second powerful Christian lobbying group was the Christian Coalition, headed by another evangelical minister, Pat Robertson. Robertson also founded the Christian Broadcasting Network, which became a means to disseminate his sermons and political diatribes. Planned Parenthood, he warned, "is teaching kids to fornicate, teaching people to have adultery, every kind of bestiality, homosexuality, lesbianism—everything the Bible condemns."[10] This sentence succinctly enunciates the Christian Coalition's position and its goal of electing politicians who would put an end to such offenses. Along with this moral stance the Christian Right is a dyed-in-the-wool supporter of Israel. Part of the fundamentalist belief is that the book of Revelations prophesizes the return of Christ and that the onset of the Millennium will occur after the Jews have returned to Jerusalem. This "Christian Zionism" is a central feature of the Christian Right's foreign policy. The United States, in this view, should do everything in its power to fully restore the Holy Land to the Jews, thus hastening Christ's return. Although not all politicians, even some conservative politicians, fully accepted the Christian Right's position on Israel (they did not exactly reject it either), such radical views do impact elections and U.S. policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the height of dissent in the 1960s and 1970s the United States also embarked on a War on Crime that was in no small part a backlash to the civil rights dissent/unrest of that same period. Equating antiwar and civil rights protests with disorder and crime allowed first President

Johnson and then President Nixon to police African American, Latino, and poor neighborhoods much more aggressively. With President Reagan's War on Drugs in the 1980s more aggressive policing was augmented by new laws as well as much harsher sentencing policies, which in turn led to a major incarceration crisis in this country. By the close of the twentieth century the United States had more people incarcerated than any other country in the world, and those people were overwhelmingly and disproportionately African American, Latino, and poor.

With Reagan in the White House the conservative backlash against 1960s–1970s dissent swelled dramatically. The Christian Right acquired considerable power and prestige, right-wing talk-show hosts gained enormous followings on radio and television, and Democrats—not just moderate Democrats—for the most part went along with the backpedaling on social programs and the stepping up of defense spending. Reagan eschewed détente, denounced any easing of tensions with "the evil empire" (as Reagan called the Soviet Union), and heated up Cold War rhetoric. Academics, pundits, and media personalities, such as Paul Weyrich, Edward Feulner, Phyllis Schlafly, Irving Kristol, David Horowitz, and Rush Limbaugh, won considerable followings by vilifying liberalism and the extremists of the 1960s and 1970s. They promoted family values, prolife militancy, antifeminism, homophobia, religion in the public sphere, the sanctity of marriage, and other conservative values, while smearing 1960s radicals, such as Timothy Leary, Abbie Hoffman, Jane Fonda, and H. Rap Brown, as disloyal, as un-American, as traitors.

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In 1968 it had appeared that an increasingly radicalized United States was on the verge of revolution, and when Richard M. Nixon won the presidency, political commentators believed it was because the Left was fatally split. However, in retrospect we see unmistakably that the 1968 election was an early sign of the rising conservative backlash. Nixon won not because the Left was split (although that did help the Republicans) but mostly because the white middle class, the "silent majority," was fed up with radicalism, disorder, and the defiance of American values. The election was a sign of the potency of a white backlash against the civil rights movement. It was a sign of middle-class abhorrence

(and fear) of the radical challenge to the affluent consumerist society, to Christian values, to the American way of life. Indeed, when one adds the votes cast for the racist third-party candidate George Wallace to Nixon's totals, the conservative vote was a landslide against liberalism. The backlash was immediately evident with the National Guard shooting of unarmed demonstrators at Kent State and with the brutal no-holds-barred suppression of the Attica Prison rebellion. It was visible in the forceful retaking of Alcatraz and Wounded Knee from Indian protestors and in the massive nationwide campaign to prevent the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment. By the 1980s the long-term white backlash set in: the gutting of welfare programs, the defunding of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, the beginnings of mass incarceration. In some ways this was comparable to the backlash against the abolition of slavery during Reconstruction. In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War the Ku Klux Klan and other organizations used violence and terrorism to maintain white supremacy; then, with the end of Reconstruction, long-term backlash against the abolition of slavery set in through legal and political means, with the Republican Party's abandonment of its focus on the freedmen and southern state legislatures' instituting Jim Crow laws, literacy tests, and poll taxes and redefining crime and incarceration in such a way that increased the African American prison population. Some historians have labeled the backlash against the 1960s a "Second Reconstruction."[11]

By the time Reagan became president in 1981, it was clear that the majority of Americans *had* turned their backs on the radical sixties. Still, dissent continued. There were demonstrations and protests in the 1980s, although not on the scale of those of the 1960s and 1970s, against the Reagan administration's pouring money into the Star Wars missile-shield system and the Reagan Doctrine of backing and aiding brutal regimes, most notably in El Salvador, where death squads roamed at will exterminating peasants and leftists who opposed the CIA-supported right-wing dictatorship. When the United States armed and trained the Contras in Nicaragua, thousands of Americans protested. And left-wing activists initiated a series of annual demonstrations at Fort Benning, Georgia, where the Department of Defense's School of the Americas trained (still trains) Latin American dictators and their security forces in the finer points of suppression and torture to eliminate political dissidents.

When the Cold War ended with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the United States was the last superpower standing. Americans, cheering that "we won the Cold War," were filled with optimism that a new era of peace was about to dawn. But such hopes were chimerical, and it soon became clear that American policy was partly to blame for the evaporation of prospects of a peaceful new world order. As the United States transitioned from the last decade of the twentieth century into the new millennium, Americans continued to raise a dissenting voice.

CHAPTER 23

A New Age of Dissent

> It is my belief that the writer, the free-lance author, should be and must be a critic of the society in which he lives. . . . The moral duty of the free writer is to begin his work at home: to be a critic of his own community, his own country, his own culture. If the writer is unwilling to fill this part, then the writer should abandon pretense and find another line of work: become a shoe repairman, a brain surgeon, a janitor, a cowboy, a nuclear physicist, a bus driver.
>
> —Edward Abbey, 1988

When President George H. W. Bush launched Operation Desert Storm with the backing of the UN Security Council to oust Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991, another (albeit small) antiwar movement was born. Even before the war began, some students and Vietnam veterans organized marches in Boston, Boulder, Missoula, Minneapolis, Ann Arbor, and San Francisco protesting the stationing of American troops in the Persian Gulf. They carried signs that read, "No Blood for Oil" and "No More Vietnams." Behind the scenes, in the military, antiwar sentiment was expressed by a surprising number of troops. When Marine Corporal Jeff Paterson's unit was ordered to deploy to Saudi Arabia, Paterson sat down on the tarmac and refused to board the plane. He could have remained quiet and gone with the flow, he said, but he believed it was his duty to resist. "I will not," he said, "be a pawn in America's power plays for profit and oil in the Middle East." Paterson was not the only service member to protest the war. West Point graduate David Wiggins, Marine Glen Motil, Army physician Harlow Ballard, and Army Reserve Medical Corps Captain Yolanda Huet-Vaughn all spoke out against the war, while more than a thousand Army reservists applied for conscientious objector status.

This Gulf War, however, was too brief for a full-fledged antiwar movement to emerge. If it had gone on longer, there is little doubt that