

THE WAR ON WOMEN IS PART OF A LARGER WAR

Convocation presented by Marge Piercy as part of "A Revolutionary Moment: Women's Liberation in the late 1960s and early 1970s," a conference organized by the Women's, Gender, & Sexuality Studies Program at Boston University, March 27-29, 2014.

The war on women is very real and aimed at taking our freedom and our control of our health away. Who does not control her body? A slave.

Behind the war on women

**Who does not control her own body?
A slave. Aging white men addicted
to power cannot stand girls and women
choosing for themselves. They dream**

**of bringing back those patriarchal days
when women in pearls like tiny teeth
rustling in taffeta brought platters
of Betty Crocker cakes, salads**

**of raisins, carrots and celery
in orange Jello to men who barely
needed to acknowledge their labor
because God willed it so. They want**

**the others crushed back into their
places, smiles glued on, costumes
intact, ready to serve as the punch-
lines of jokes shared over cigars.**

**Those were the days! And nights
of subservience only available now
if they pay for it. Their anger swells
until solidified into punitive laws**

that will strip women of choice,
of their uppity freedoms, of life itself
to bring back those glorious father
knows best chastity belt years.

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I've spent a lot of time and energy in my life trying to make sure
no girl or woman ever has to go through what I did when I was
18 and had to abort myself and almost bled to death or the
terrors and pain I shared with other women when I was helping
them get abortions during the times it was illegal. We are losing
this battle. We are not countering the guilt-based propaganda of
the anti-choice people with a defense that moves women.

Ethics for Republicans

An embryo is precious;
a woman is a vessel.

A fertilized egg is a person;
a woman is indentured to it.

An embryo is sacred until birth.
After that, he/she is on their own

Abortion is murder. Rape,
incest are means to an end:

that precious fertilized egg
housed in an expendable body.

Let us make babies and babies
and babies; children are something

else, probably future criminals,
probably welfare cheats whose

education hikes taxes. You
can freely dispose of them.

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Somehow we need to recapture that sense of enthusiasm and
the exhilaration of being active in history, capture it in some new
form. But one of the reasons that it is hard to keep any
movement going now is the economy. In the 60s I could work
part time and have a great deal of time for politics. Only the 5%
or so has that freedom now. People work two jobs to survive in
poverty or near it.

MOVING ON UP

Moving on up

My great grandmother had two choices:
eat grass or die even more quickly
of starvation. My grandmother had
two choices: get raped and killed
in a pogrom or escape Lithuania
illegally, under a load of straw
to bear eleven children with never
enough of anything except babies.

**My mother had three choices:
marry some guy with a job, go
on being a chambermaid fighting
off grabby hands of salesmen,
become a prostitute. She married
three times to workingmen who
abused her till death. She could not
imagine life beyond the female ghetto.**

**I had several choices: to repeat
my mother's except work in an office
instead of a cheap hotel, put myself
through college over my parents'
objections since they expected me
to crouch in their home spitting out
weekly tiny paychecks. I could
choose sex rather than marriage;
I could live off my own labor
lifelong and explore my freedom:
guess what I chose.**

**Granddaughters of my brain
and labor, before you, a myriad
of doors. Don't fuss to be skinny.**

**Don't open the door to the tiger
of repression. Take the one
with sunshine behind it. The hot
one. Feed, strengthen your body.
Make love to your freedom;
marry it. Then leave your own
daughters a whole world of choice.**

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But we must also understand that the attempt to take away a woman's control over her body is part of a larger attempt to take away any real control over the lives of most of the population. Now corporations and the very wealthy 1% control elections. Now the media are propaganda machines and the only investigative reporting is on Comedy Central or the web. The powers that be have granted certain social rather than economic gains. We'll have legalized marijuana and gay marriage in every state while unions are being crushed and the safety net of the New Deal and the Johnson era are being abolished one law at a time. We have some social gains and many economic losses. The real earning power of working people diminishes every year. We are losing the power battle.

CLASS WARFARE?

Class warfare

Class warfare, the Republicrats bellowed when the protests and occupations began. But haven't you noticed, this war has been going on since before we tore off from England.

Cut health care to those who most need it. Let infant deaths soar among mothers who can't pay for doctor visits. Cut the real wages and raise

rents and gas prices.

Foreclose on mortgages, letting
whole neighborhoods rot so those
still in their houses live next to meth
labs while abandoned pets starve
under bushes gone wild.

Chain those who can manage to get
into college to debts the size of
elephants to drag behind them
into middle age. Make drugs so costly
folks can't afford to live.

Class warfare? We were born
into it. We eat it for breakfast, we
slurp it for lunch, we dine on it
and sleep in it and die of it years
earlier than the rich.

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Who has little, let them have less

The hatred of the poor, is it guilt
gone rancid? That the rich have
so much and still conspire to steal
a baby's medicine, a woman's
life, a man's heart and kidney.

When those Congressmen talk
of people who are counting
their last change for gas or eggs
choosing between cold and hunger
they snarl. How dare we exist?

If they could push a button,
if they could war on the poor
here at home at they do abroad

directly with bombs instead of
legislation, think they'd hesitate?

The righteous anger fermenting
in them boils over in cuts to what-
ever keeps people alive. They punish
those who have little with less:
a vast legal bus to run us over.

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