

3-20-1990

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Recommended Citation

Driscoll, Dawn-Marie (1990) "The Third Stage: An Economic Strategy," *New England Journal of Public Policy*: Vol. 6: Iss. 1, Article 19.
Available at: <http://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol6/iss1/19>

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The Third Stage

An Economic Strategy

Dawn-Marie Driscoll

If the first stage of the women's movement raised consciousness, changed statutes, and proposed the Equal Rights Amendment, and the second stage broadened the debate to include family, workplace, and societal issues, the third stage may focus simply on giving women economic power and independence. Issues for women in the 1990s will center on economics; this article suggests strategies for achieving these goals.

This is a personal article with a personal viewpoint about the issues for women in the next decade. My views are no doubt shaped by my having been a participant in the business community for many years, watching the intersection of economic issues and public policy objectives occur many times.

Policymakers in the public sector today focus on private sector achievements, competitiveness, and economics at all levels, local to global. Few now believe that the simple application of more public funds to a social problem will solve it. In fact, we are trying to provide services with fewer public funds. Similarly, we know that statutes, regulations, and ordinances defining behavior are not necessarily the best way to achieve our public policy objectives. Lawmakers, community activists, and advocates of social change, having learned well the lessons of the 1980s, now focus on private sector initiatives and concepts. Leverage, return on investment, and cost-benefit analyses are the new slogans.

Women realize this too. We are in a time of change, and I believe, entering a new stage of the women's movement as well.

A Time of Change

Changes in public policy and private behavior come at various speeds. Sometimes they are slow in the making and slow to catch on: they evolve over time. For example, health concerns about smoking have been discussed for years. A decade ago smoking was prevalent. Suddenly, it seems, fewer people smoke. All meetings are smoke free, and No Smoking signs are not only acceptable, but frequently unnecessary. A sudden revolution? No, a gradual change.

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Then there are fast changes. Those of us who lived through the sixties remember the Vietnam War being constantly on television and solemnly reported in *Life* magazine. After years of involvement in Vietnam, with public acquiescence if not support, it seemed that the widespread antiwar eruption was sudden, possibly because of Kent State, or the first prominent person who questioned it aloud. The momentum of the antiwar movement, which had been building for some time, finally culminated in a sudden avalanche shaping public opinion and then public policy.

The emergence of women in the work force has been harder to characterize. Female workers were prevalent during World War II, but after the war retreated to their homes. Now sociologists and trend watchers are divided about the women's movement. Is it still here, evolving? Or as the daughters of the feminists of the sixties pound the pavement deliberately in their Reeboks and serious suits, claiming their rightful place in society, do they even think there is a women's movement? If we are in a time of "post-feminism," what does that mean?

In the post-Reagan years, what further public policy goals are women seeking? Young women today seem caught between wanting it all and looking over their shoulder, wondering if the mores of the old fifties sitcoms aren't more to their liking. Women who were involved in breaking down statutory inequities and access barriers in the sixties fear that their efforts will be wasted if a retreat occurs. As the abortion debate grows louder and *Roe v. Wade* more fragile, older women bemoan the fact that today's young women don't know what life was like pre-*Roe*, when a woman who wanted an abortion had to go furtively to an unknown address in New York City rather than visit a health center in her own town. Unaware of the history, these women have to be told the symbolism of the coat hanger.

The Issue: Economics

Few politicians today talk about the Equal Rights Amendment. Perhaps they assume that society no longer needs it because most legislatures have erased all those distasteful sex-segregation laws from the books.¹ If "wife" has become "spouse" everywhere, perhaps there is no problem.

Yet women are uneasy. They know, as Sarah Conn explains in her article in this volume, that there is an intimate connection between our personal power and our world view. Women are reminded that an increasing percentage of professional school graduates are female, yet few women have penetrated the partnership ranks or the upper levels of professions at which decisions are made.² Marion Wright Edelman at the Children's Defense Fund forcefully states that we as a nation do not yet value our children or the women who raise them by providing the social and health services and support that other Western nations do.

Policies on arms control, distribution of wealth, and corporate takeovers are often made by males in power, and women are not sure they like the results. The effect of these choices just may ensure that most of the poor in our country are women and children and that as the rich get richer, the poor become poorer.³ Even those women who work and care for their children in a stable family setting are afraid that they are but one husband away from poverty.

There are no pat slogans or initials to define the status or public policy goals of women as they approach the decade of the nineties. There are nineties words and approaches,

however. Simply, it is all economics. Today there is not a movement, but a strategy. This economic strategy is the third, and I hope last, stage of the women's movement.

Toward a Third Stage

Today's strategy is well beyond what many call the first stage of the women's movement of the late sixties and early seventies, the stage in which Betty Friedan revolutionized the way women spoke about their lives⁴ and burning bras and consciousness-raising groups were the norm. Many modern young women think that era is about as irrelevant and embarrassing as prohibition. Worse, many of them don't even know about it. They take for granted the fact that they can be Rhodes scholars, astronauts, and Episcopal bishops. They can't imagine that many women were refused the right to vote under their own names or to establish their own credit history. These young women wouldn't dream of looking for jobs under the "female" help wanted column. After all, they played Little League with boys; why shouldn't they work with them?

As the first stage of the women's movement opened historic doors and brought more women into the work force, women were divided: Phyllis Schlafly spoke for those who did not want change: some minority women felt that white women had ignored their issues; and some women who supported the ERA still had trouble deciding whether abortion and military service should be part of the debate.

In the early seventies activist women were also involved in the Vietnam War, civil rights, and the national government and economic crises. Some grew tired from their efforts in these arenas and retreated to pottery making, caring for their young children, and confronting issues of balancing family and work. Yet the mood had been set for what Friedan described as the second stage of the women's movement.⁵ In fact, some hesitated to call this hiatus period a "movement" any longer, preferring instead to talk about issues of family responsibility and the workplace. In this second stage, so characteristic of the eighties, the emphasis was on life values and balancing conflicting demands.

Popular movies portrayed sensitive men, sometimes single parents themselves, taking care of young babies. Sitcom heroes were the Huxtables — blacks — a doctor and lawyer who display a sense of humor as they struggle through modern life. Professional schools were full of bright young women who never questioned how they got in, but who planned to have it all. Magazine articles focused on issues of managing family and work and whether the "mommy track" was positive or negative.⁶ Yet women fully expected to sit in the corporate boardroom and join prestigious private clubs in their own right, not as a widow of a late member.

In the eighties era of Wall Street and Masters of the Universe,⁷ when earning money became a valued objective if not a necessity, many women, as well as men, concentrated on themselves and their careers. Working ninety-hour weeks, they watched the VCR instead of going out and rarely looked beyond what was happening in their own neighborhood. These working women were tired, and if in the sixties women marched to save the world, in the eighties they just hoped that in spite of a succession of child-care providers, the family would turn out all right.

But what lies ahead for the next decade?

Even the busy working women of today need no reminders of what still must be achieved. The statistics and visions keep coming from all sources — including other articles in this volume. Women — poor, young, pregnant in increasing numbers, perhaps

illiterate — are repeating cycles of welfare dependence. Their children are abused, abandoned, and tossed about, our societal systems incapable of catching them. Elected officials are still predominantly white males. Workplaces are unbalanced. And with a disturbing rise in frequency, another high-ranking corporate woman drops out as she hits the glass ceiling, that invisible but seemingly immutable barrier through which women can see but not penetrate to top executive positions.

There is no denying that in 1990 the simple term “sixty-five cents,” representing the percentage of each male wage dollar earned by women, tells a story of economic inequality. It has not improved greatly.⁸

Women are moving from the second to the third and next stage of the women’s movement, and the question is not how to achieve equal rights, but how to achieve a life of independent choices. This time the answer is unnervingly simple: full economic empowerment for every woman.

The Issue: Again Economics

As we approach the year 2000, there can be no retreat for women. They will be in the labor force; indeed they will *be* the labor force, creating economic prosperity and generating tax revenues.⁹

To achieve economic empowerment, every “woman’s issue” must be an economic one. Child care is an economic issue. The reality that many day-care workers, of whom most are women, earn less than the minimum wage is an economic issue. Affordable housing and enforcing child support are economic issues. It takes two to produce a child, yet statistics about poverty often emphasize only women and children. There is little public discussion about men and their children. Sexual segregation in the union halls and professions is an economic issue. Education and training are economic issues.

The objectives of this third and final stage are, quite simply, power and money. For women to be full participants in society, they need the power to shape the debate and influence public policy. And every woman must have sufficient money in her hands so that she can choose her own destiny.

Getting there is not simple. But these are times of business plans and strategies, models for action, return on investment, time frames, action points, and campaigns. The popular books of the eighties told every constituency there was much to learn from the business world, and if the goal is an economic one, the path is quantifiable. Following a business school model, it is possible to learn from case histories and to break the problem down into its parts.

Put Women Where They Count

The first action in implementing this economic strategy is to place women in positions that enable them to influence decisions in the economic arena. This is a proven effective strategy; there is a history for how it works, even though the numbers are few.

For example, in the early seventies New England women were fortunate to have elected officials like state senator Lois Pines speaking about women and credit long before the federal government decided it was an issue. In 1973 Pines, then a state representative, proposed and fought for legislation making it illegal to refuse to grant a woman credit in her own name.¹⁰ For women seeking their own credit histories, or fighting for the right to

prevent previous credit histories from disappearing when they married and changed names, this was critical legislation.

Appointed officials also make a difference. Dolores Mitchell is the powerful head of the Group Insurance Commission for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, which administers the health insurance plans for all state workers. She has an extensive background in public policymaking and knows how to push the right buttons.¹¹ When she reviews the proposals from major insurance companies seeking the commonwealth's health insurance business, she starts by asking, "How many women sit on your board of directors?" Eventually insurance companies get the message. Mitchell has also been a quiet but strong advocate inside the State House. She correctly pointed out that it was unconscionable for the commonwealth to cover the cost of chiropractor visits for injured male athletes but not mammograms for women.

In this era of public-private partnerships, the emphasis is often more on the "private." Powerful women in key positions in the private sector can also make a difference. They often use their power strategically and collaboratively to affect social changes. Many of the authors represented in this volume have done so — Carol Goldberg, with her advocacy of child care, Margaret Marshall, seeking female judicial candidates, and Margaret McKenna, raising the professional status of those working in early childhood education, to name a few. These women may be uniquely situated, but other business and professional women can have an impact on the economic policy arena as well.

Many women belong to professional organizations, from small-business-owner associations and bar associations to the Society of CPAs to automobile dealer associations to chambers of commerce. When they join, they should find out whether women are well represented by the legislative or policy committees or boards of directors of these organizations. It is these associations and their lobbyists who are taking positions on behalf of employers and the majority of the business community. They often fight parental leave, access to universal health insurance, increased funds for elder-care and child-care programs.

Belonging to all-female organizations is fine, but women must also infiltrate traditional business organizations. For example, Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM) is a prominent business organization that takes the lead for the business community on many public policy issues. At its annual dinner its entire board of directors sat at the dais, a sea of male faces. The two honored guests were the Senate and House chairmen of the Joint Legislative Committee on Commerce and Labor — both women. AIM's sophisticated president understood that the profile of his board needed to change if he was to work in a legislative power structure that was becoming diverse faster than the private sector.

Many women who make decisions for themselves or their corporations or employers about business memberships reject requests for participation in organizations that do not include women in prominent policymaking roles — or at least suggest themselves and other women for board and committee positions once they join. I encourage other women to do this as well. It is a simple way of exercising power and eventually making a difference in the leadership of our business community.

The strategy then is to identify those key positions, up and down the economic spectrum, in which economic decisions are made that affect our citizens, particularly those affecting women. Then we must make sure that women who are sensitive to those concerns are placed in these key positions.

It may well be that this exercise is easier said than done. There is certainly nothing

magic about it. But constant pressure, combined with the nomination of several qualified female candidates for each opening, will make a difference over the long run. This is a relatively simple exercise for most professional women's organizations, and certainly for a coalition of them.¹²

Give Them the Business

Secondly, all women in positions to make economic decisions should strategically give their business to women. Many women have female doctors; some have female dentists or accountants. But how many have female lawyers or dry cleaners? How many patronize restaurants owned by women, buy cars from a female-owned car dealership, or a female car salesperson? Women may hire female caterers for their parties, but do they know which are the female-owned liquor stores in town?

From deciding where to place personal business dollars, women can move to the more substantive piece of the strategy. When women are in positions to determine how to spend their employers' money, they should strategically direct it to women. Women increasingly are heads of agencies and nonprofit institutions, as well as small and large businesses. All these institutions purchase supplies, print materials, hire law firms, engage accounting agencies, rent facilities for parties, lease cars, and develop software with consultants. Admittedly, a law firm may not be "owned" by a woman, but legal business could just as easily be given to a female partner who will receive credit for it as to another vice president's old law school roommate at a firm down the street. Similarly, the office Christmas party could be arranged through the female sales manager of a local hotel rather than through a competing establishment's male sales manager.

This is not always easy to do, but there are enough female networks in most communities, whether they be the powerful Women's Economic Forum or the local chapter of the American Association of University Women, through which women can be found. Once the movement of business starts toward women, the competent female entrepreneurs will become well known and prosper.

"Economic independence for women" is a vague slogan. Putting *women's* dollars and *women's* employers' dollars in the hands of working women is concrete action.

Just Say No

The third element of the strategy for full economic equality is to reject business associations whose institutions or individuals do not include women in strategic economic arenas or positions of influence and to make known why they are being rejected. Women control a great deal of wealth, as Sheryl Marshall notes in her article. For example, many women hold mutual fund accounts, and certainly most have bank accounts. Nonetheless, how many women look at the proxy cards they receive from corporations whose stock they own or read the mutual fund prospectus of the fund in which they invest? How many women can identify the directors of their banks or know which banks make an effort to promote female managers? All these financial institutions have boards, but few are sensitive to the fact that generous numbers of women should be included on those boards and in senior management. Their customers can make this point most effectively. If a proxy ballot with its slate of directors does not include female names, women should vote "against" and send it back. And if their mutual funds have no females as directors or in senior management, women should move their accounts to one that does.

Women who receive solicitations from charities, either as individuals or in their corporate capacities, should examine the left-hand side of the letterheads, which usually list the names of the directors, committee members, or supporters. Who sits on the board of a prominent institution seeking money, or who are the members of the dinner committee for a charity event? If their sex is not well represented, women should reject the solicitation and inform the charity of the reason.

Next, women must look beyond the charity board or committee list. Where does the money go? Are girls getting the benefit of programs for youth as often as boys? Does the local United Way publicize its allocation of money among agencies and state which donations benefit women and their children? Does the United Way initiate special task forces to study the issues of child care and child support, elderly women, battered wives, or homeless women and children? In Massachusetts, where the United Way board is chaired by a woman, these task forces are active.

Don't Walk, Run

Fourth, women must encourage other women to run for office as well as to become candidates for appointments to office. The dynamic young mother who volunteers to run an elementary school spring fair may be the next good candidate for school committee if women encourage her and help her raise money. In New England the Massachusetts Women's Political Caucus and other organizations educate and support women of both parties who may want to run for public office by providing programs that teach potential candidates how to achieve success.

Financial support is crucial to effective candidacy, and the expression "Early Money is Like Yeast" says it best. EMILY's List, a Washington-based organization that directs early money to female candidates, has spurred the creation of several local clones, all involved in fund-raising efforts. Massachusetts has the Women's Impact Network, a unique donor system dedicated to raising money for progressive Democratic women candidates.¹³

Every single city and town has town volunteer boards, commissions, task forces, and local offices, all of which are good starting points for female policymakers. At this early level, decisions are made to fund social service, school, and other programs that will help women and children become economically self-sufficient. Local officeholders sensitive to the needs of women may be the best candidates to run for state and, eventually, national office. At these higher government levels, it will then be women who decide whether to spend tax dollars on interest payments for bondholders or on literacy programs, health care, and Up and Out of Poverty assistance in the communities that need it.¹⁴

There are ten million more registered female voters than male voters. It has not yet been determined whether they make a difference in elections, but the best test of whether women can be elected is consistently to give women voters intelligent, caring, honest, and hardworking female candidates to vote into office.

Speak Out

The final part of the strategy is to raise female voices. Sometimes just being heard in a straightforward way is enough to make a change in the economic and political landscape or in work environments where decisions are being made about who will be hired, who will be given a contract, who will sit on the next powerful committee.

Women no longer need permission to speak out. They have an ownership interest in every arena: where they work, where they go to school, where their tax dollars go. Carol Gilligan, associate professor at Harvard University School of Education, has told us what we perhaps knew instinctively all along: women see things differently and solve problems differently from men.¹⁵ The male way may not be the right way, so when women think something is wrong, it probably is. Frequently in the past it has been, and a woman discovered it.

Lois Gibbs discovered the high level of toxic wastes in Love Canal and paved the way for a national consciousness concerning the issue of hazardous waste sites. Candy Lightner finally became angry at male lawyers, male judges, male legislators, and male policymakers, founded Mothers Against Drunk Driving, and changed the national acceptance of drinking while driving. Peggy Charren of Massachusetts organized Action for Children's Television and forced commercial television executives to improve their programs for children.

Even in the rarefied atmosphere of law schools and legal treatises, women like Professor Catherine McKinnon at Yale and Martha Minow at Harvard are challenging the way scholars have historically looked at right, wrong, and responsibility. Should a battered woman who assaults her husband be charged with a crime? Should we prosecute drug-addicted women for giving birth to addicted babies? Perhaps all women can't join in these intellectual debates, but all women can agitate for more female judges in their own communities, particularly in the all-important probate courts.¹⁶

The Goal

Economic revolution may seem like a tall order, but it isn't. It can be brought about by a strategy such as the one outlined here so that economic equality, the stability needed for communities and families, and the future that we all desire for our sons and daughters can become a reality. Women are hard workers. There is enough prosperity to go around for all to share in the economic growth that will come when each individual has a stake in it.

This, then, is the final stage: full economic independence for all. When it becomes a reality, perhaps the phrase "women's movement" will no longer be needed. ♀

Notes

1. For an analysis of equal rights amendments on the state level, see Dawn-Marie Driscoll and Barbara J. Rouse, "Through Glass Darkly: A Look at State Equal Rights Amendments," *Suffolk University Law Review* 12, 5 (Fall 1978).
2. See, for example, *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* (1989 U.S. Lexis 2230), decided by the U.S. Supreme Court on May 1, 1989. The Court found that Price Waterhouse had engaged in sex stereotyping in denying Ann Hopkins consideration for partnership. The court said, "It takes no special training to discern sex stereotyping in a description of an aggressive female employee as requiring 'a course at charm school.' Nor, turning to Thomas Beyer's memorable advice to Hopkins, does it require expertise in psychology to know that if an employee's flawed 'interpersonal skills' can be corrected by a soft-hued suit or a new shade of lipstick, perhaps it is the employee's sex and not her interpersonal skills that has drawn the criticism" (p. 19). A further example of women's inability to penetrate partnership ranks in meaningful numbers is the low percentage of female partners in law firms. Women represent about 20 percent of the law profession, yet they comprise only 8 percent of the partnerships in the top 250 firms in the country, according to

- Elaine Weiss, staff director of the American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession. Parenthetically, women make up 33 percent of the associate positions of these firms.
3. Andrew Sum, Neal Fogg, and Neeta Fogg, *Income and Employment Problems of Families in Boston's Low Income Neighborhoods: The Persistence of Family Poverty Amidst Increasing Affluence in Boston and Massachusetts*, Executive Office of Economic Affairs, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, April 1989.
 4. Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1963).
 5. Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage* (New York: Summit Books, 1981).
 6. Felice N. Schwartz, "Management Women and the New Facts of Life," *Harvard Business Review* 89, 1 (January/February). See also the extensive letters to the editor in response to that article in subsequent issues of the *Review*.
 7. As so well portrayed in Tom Wolfe, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1987).
 8. See discussion of the wage gap in Sylvia Ann Hewlett, *A Lesser Life, The Myth of Women's Liberation in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1986). A *Wall Street Journal* report further notes that this widely touted statistic applies only to women and men who work full time. The income gap between the sexes widens for women who work part time or have income but aren't employed. Median income for all women with income is \$8,100 a year, just 46% of the \$17,800 median income for all men with income ("People Patterns," March 27, 1989, B1).
 9. For an in-depth treatment of the new world of workers, see "Human Capital, the Decline of America's Workforce," a special report in *Business Week*, September 19, 1988.
 10. This Massachusetts legislation subsequently became the basis for the federal Equal Credit Opportunity Act, prohibiting sex discrimination in the granting of credit. Congresswoman Margaret Heckler of Massachusetts used the Massachusetts statute and Representative Pines's research to fight for the federal law.
 11. See Dolores Mitchell's article on health insurance issues for women in this volume.
 12. The Women's Bar Association, for example, actively recruits and supports female candidates for the judiciary and other appointed positions.
 13. WIN, as it is called, solicits donors who will commit to giving a specific amount of money to candidates identified by the steering committee. In the 1988 legislative races, WIN focused on Barbara Bird of Dennis, Carol Doherty of Taunton, Nancy Pratt of Medford, and Pam Resor of Acton.
 14. Diane Balsler and the Women's Legislative Network in Massachusetts provide a unique legislative tracking service for a broad spectrum of women's organizations and human service coalitions, identifying those programs and budget line items which deserve support.
 15. Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).
 16. See report of the *Gender Bias Study of the Supreme Judicial Court*, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1989.

Make no little plans. They have no magic to stir men's blood and probably themselves will not be realized. Make big plans; aim high in hope and work, remembering that a noble, logical diagram once recorded will never die, but long after we are gone we will be a living thing, asserting itself with ever-growing insistency. Remember that our sons and grandsons [and daughters and granddaughters] are going to do things that would stagger us. Let your watchword be order and your beacon beauty.

— Daniel Burnham