

Why I'm skeptical of the women's movement

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Some years ago, during a bout of political awareness, I began noticing the peculiar actions of certain women (mostly white, mostly middle-class). They were gathering, excitedly, in knots, marching about with banners, and shouting all the relative importance of women's rights.

What followed then was a most astonishing display of female behavior, far beyond my (Tlingit lady) comprehension. They proceeded to burn their underwear and to wage war amongst them-

selves and with everyone else about equal toilets. After some time and great difficulty, it finally dawned on me that they were using symbols to make a social statement about women's rights. That type of symbolism, however, was always lost on me because I grew up without an abundance of anything and our toilet was out back, shared by everyone. Needless to say, I did not identify with the women's rights movement back then.

The business of underwear and toilets seems to have fallen by the wayside now, but the commotion about women's rights still

rages on. There are still marches, but fewer symbols these days, with lots of provocative issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and abortion. In Alaska, the women's movement folks are not even aware of Native employment rights, subsistence rights, and Alaska Native rights in general. Rather provincial, dare I say.

Not too long ago, I was approached by an activist from the National Organization of Women (NOW), who demanded to know my position on the ERA. Rather than expose my disgraceful self (I don't have a position), I told her with some asperity that the laws in this country are too cluttered and maybe we should try to keep the ERA out of the constitution to prevent further disorder. I thought my response was reasonably intelligent, but she glared at me, called me "mushmouth," and stomped off in a huff. I've been shunned by the NOW

people since.

Now, I'm really embarrassed to reveal my non-position on the abortion issue. I tried to develop one, but the noise being made by the Bible thumpers and the female chauvinists makes it near impossible; they're locked in a no-win battle. Anyway, we should hear more from the behavioral scientists and the medical profession about the expected long-range effects of abortion on women.

Sunday, March 8, was International Women's Day, commemorating the gains made in women's rights; and ostensibly a call to arms for women everywhere to join the ongoing battle for more rights. I spent some time on Sunday reflecting on the matter.

Have we, the Yupik, Inupiat, Tlingit, Haida, Tsimpsian, Athabascan, and Aleut women, actually gained anything from the women's rights movement? As the new wave of Reagan-style conservatism

sweeps this country, will we join our sisters in the struggle to keep those rights that seem to have been won? I guess I'm more worried about the apparent violence against Native women than I am about the ERA.

Some Alaska Native women may join the battle for more women's rights, which promises to escalate something fierce during the coming years.

As for me, I can't even claim the title "feminist," because of my humiliating failure to develop a position on the ERA. I really don't mind being ostracized by the NOW people, and I won't wither away for lack of being called a feminist. Actually, if I'm to be labeled anything, I'd rather be "just your average savage."

The parade for women's rights will go by without me again; this time mainly because I think Native employment rights, subsistence rights, and Alaska Native rights are far more important.