

Letter from an expatriate Feminist

by [Toni](#)

Europeans know about the damage Bush has done to world peace and the environment, but his impact on Americans doesn't get much coverage at home or abroad. Before Bush, US voters elected Bill Clinton who took action on women's issues. When the Right attacked him for his personal stupidity, feminists argued that his sex life was his own, and that his enemies were determined to prevent social change. Clinton had appointed more women and people of color to the courts and public positions than all his predecessors combined ! The attacks on him came from well-funded racists and evangelicals (the conspiracy that Hilary Clinton was then smart enough to publicize). But the media helped to set the stage for an intense backlash led by the neoconservatives. They are now attacking not only Iraq but the American poor as well.

After George Bush and the men who chose him stole his first election, he immediately reinstated the 'gag order' that prevents international family planning organizations from even mentioning the word abortion if they want to receive government funding. His second act in office was to forbid the funding of abortions in US military hospitals around the world. Then he moved on to the rest of the neoconservative economic and fundamentalist social agendas : destroying legal aid, civil rights and affirmative action programs ; opposing gay rights ; cutting public spending on health, welfare and education ; ending spending on public housing and transport, appointing reactionary judges, and sending more of the poor to prison for longer terms. Many of his actions were directed explicitly against the feminist agenda. But all of his programs have been designed to target the poor...the majority of whom are women and their dependent children. His tax cuts for the rich changed federal surplus into deficit which forced each state to cut back on the services most needed by the poor. The disaster in New Orleans was preceded by the destruction of public health and welfare systems, not to mention the emergency planning offices and services. What happened to those abandoned in New Orleans could have happened in any state. The poor, and especially those of colour, are expendable ; all the world got to see that on tv. What was not visible was the power of Bush's neo fascism "lite" ; militarism at home and abroad, suppression of civil liberties, expansion of police power, illegal detention of foreigners and citizens, funding of right wing church organizations, and censorship about all the above. The Bush administration has been catastrophic for women... and for men, at home and abroad.

The Bush administration has taken sides in the so-called 'culture wars' by funding 'faith-based' welfare organisations run by evangelical Christians. As public funding for health, education and welfare decreases, these groups not only provide services but use them to proselytize, adding new church members as well as encouraging voters' registration for those newly converted to conservative causes. This has allowed the religious right to go into battle to oppose evolutionary theory, homosexual rights, and, of course, abortion and contraception. At the same time, conservative judges have discarded previous rulings which made picketing and attacking abortion clinics an offence under the anti-

organized crime statutes (RICO). The latter had successfully stopped direct attacks on clinics, doctors, nurses and patients which have now resumed with the legal threat gone. While one state, South Dakota, has passed an act making abortion illegal, ten other states are ready to do the same. The issue will be fought again in the Supreme Court with its newly appointed conservative justices and in Congress where the Republicans are the majority. Womens' rights groups continue to mobilize as before, writing letters, signing petitions, working state by state in defense of the right to choose abortion. Women are suing pharmacies that refuse to fill prescriptions for contraception, including the morning after pill. They are also arguing with medical schools which no longer teach their students how to perform abortions. But few new strategies have yet emerged for fighting the renewed right wing attack (See the blog [Bush V. Choice](#) and [Feministing.com](#)). For too long, women in the USA have been struggling to defend the rights won earlier and have little energy for expanding the arena to include all women's rights as citizens.