

Lipstick liberation

Anniversary of Seneca Falls celebrates progress of women

At a time when feminism seems to most often be associated with debates about "Ally McBeal" or contentious abortion rights arguments, it may serve women well to take a look back to the time when women did not even have a voice in American society, to take stock of how far women have come.



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columnist

Several weeks ago, the 150th anniversary of women's rights was celebrated, commemorating the event in Seneca Falls, New York that pioneered the feminist movement. At the Seneca Falls convention in July of 1848, the first national public call for women's citizenship and equality was issued through the Declaration of Sentiments. What 150 years has shown is over a century of progress and considerable gains by women in both the public and private domains. This is not to say women are unequivocally equal in today's society. It does indicate, though, that the past 150 years has nudged women closer and closer to that goal — that in and of itself is worth celebrating.

Instead of lamenting the appearance of skinny, gorgeous models on the cover of fashion magazines and bemoaning men's poor treatment of women in romantic relationships, women should acknowledge the great strides that have been made. History has many more important examples of women being treated as objects than those of trivial concerns.

In 1848, women could not vote or own land. They typically did not have access to quality education. For the majority of women, the life plan was marriage and children, period. For those who did not follow that route, the only career options available up until the 1960s and 1970s, were secretary, teacher or nurse.

Today, of course, is a completely different ball game. Women are doctors, lawyers, and engineers. They are successful in business. Sixty million more jobs are held by women now than in 1964, according to the U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau. If women continue to make gains as they are doing now, the "glass ceiling" should hopefully be broken through by the 200th anniversary

of the women's rights' movement. One problem remains — a wage gap still exists between men and women.

Women only earned 74 cents for every dollar that a man earned in 1996. However, in 1966, women earned only 58 cents for every dollar. Women are slowly but surely closing the gap.

A college education, the ticket to a successful career, is no longer a rarity for women. Just as many women attend college as do men. Since Texas A&M officially admitted women in 1963, female students have grown increasingly important to the University's success. A&M would not be able to vie for Top 10 status with other public universities if it was still an all-male military institution.

The Class of '00 was the first class to admit more women than men. Women have assumed numerous leadership roles on campus, the most notable being that of Brooke Leslie, the first female student body president and Laurie Nickel, the new student body president for 1998-1999.

On a national scale, some of the nation's most prominent political leaders are women. Among these are Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison, New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman and Secretary of State Madeline Albright. First Lady and Yale Law School grad Hillary Rodham Clinton and American Red Cross president Elizabeth Dole also are examples of women who have achieved success.

In the past decade, domestic issues concerning women who were formerly dismissed as family problems have become important social issues. The Clarence Thomas Senate confirmation hearings alerted national consciousness to the issue of sexual harassment

in the workplace, despite the fact that he was cleared of the allegations. Women do deserve a working environment that is not sexually charged, and that is now an expectation rather than a hope for women.

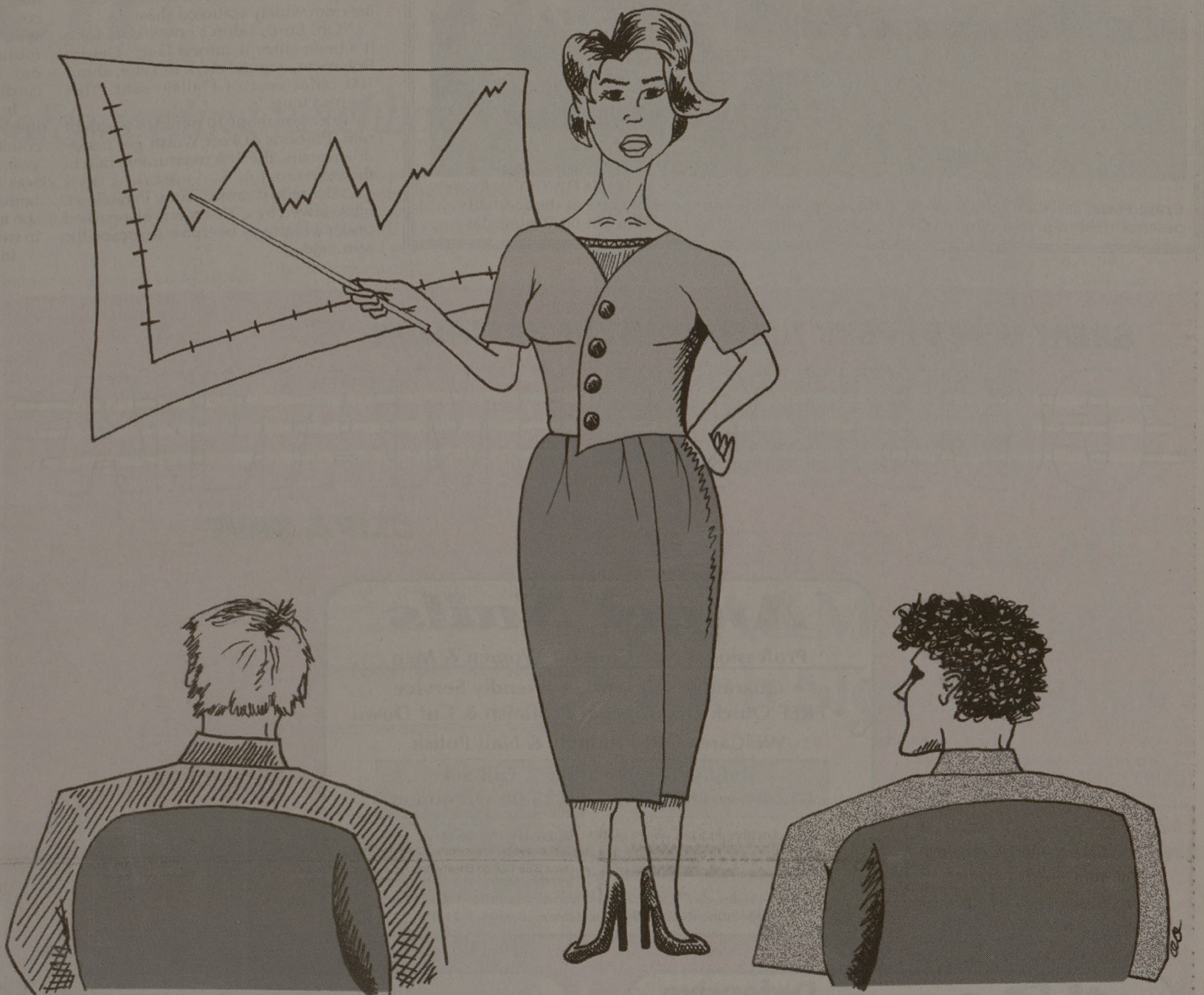
Domestic violence also was brought into the national spotlight after the O.J. Simpson trial revealed frantic 9-1-1 calls from Nicole Brown

Simpson, fearing for her life at the hands of her husband. While it is tragic that it apparently took her death to demonstrate the horrors of domestic violence, it is important the issue is recognized.

Overall, the last 150 years have seen an increase in equality for women, through the workplace, in politics and in social issues. This

should be the focus, rather than a continued emphasis on the supposed unfairness that comes with being a woman in today's society. Although there are gains to be made, 150 years of progress is definitely something to celebrate.

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GRAPHIC BY QUATRO OAKLEY/THE BATTALION

Drug epidemic hits suburbia

Twenty-nine Plano youths, most of them in their early 20s, were charged with conspiring to distribute cocaine and heroin to youths and adults. If convicted, they could face a stiff sentence of 20 years to life in prison.

The investigation was conducted not just as a drug case, but also as an attempted homicide. From now on, this is how all drug investigations should be treated.

The selling of drugs is premeditated and everyone involved knows the eventual repercussions: death. In addition, to profit from some one else's suffering is despicable. "This is definitely a new twist from dealing with an overdose death as 'too bad so sad, you should not have been doing drugs' to treating it as almost a homicide and running a full-blown homicide investigation," Paul Villaescusa, a spokesperson for the DEA, said in an AP report.

These arrests come after a 15-month investigation and 20 overdoses, of which 17 were fatal, since 1994. Twenty-four of the accused are charged with the deaths of four people ranging in ages from 16 to 20.

These arrests, as well as the severity of the sentences, is a result

of changing attitudes toward drug dealers that is past due. The victims of these alleged drug dealers paid the ultimate price for shortsightedness and if convicted, so should the pushers.

Until now, many people have seen deaths from overdoses as the price a person pays for taking drugs. This attitude was generally accepted until kids in upper middle-class neighborhoods started experimenting with heroin.

The public never really seemed to care much about the drug problem when it seemed to be confined to the poor. The "just say no" campaigns and the anti-drug after school specials seemed to be enough, almost always portraying the drug dealers as villains from the wrong side of the tracks. However, these drug dealers from Plano are not young juvenile delinquents but honor students and athletes.

Also, many addicts are portrayed as deranged fiends. But, the addicts in Plano were hardly that. Nobody had any idea, not parents, not teachers, no one. The arrests in Plano show just how bad the drug epidemic is in America.

Yet, some people would go so far as to say the pushers also are victims in this crime. To lock up these young, well-to-do kids for mistakes that they made in their youth is a great tragedy.

These kids have a future in front of them, and their lives also are being thrown away if severely sentenced. Perhaps these kids are just effigies in another wave of getting tough on crime and drugs.

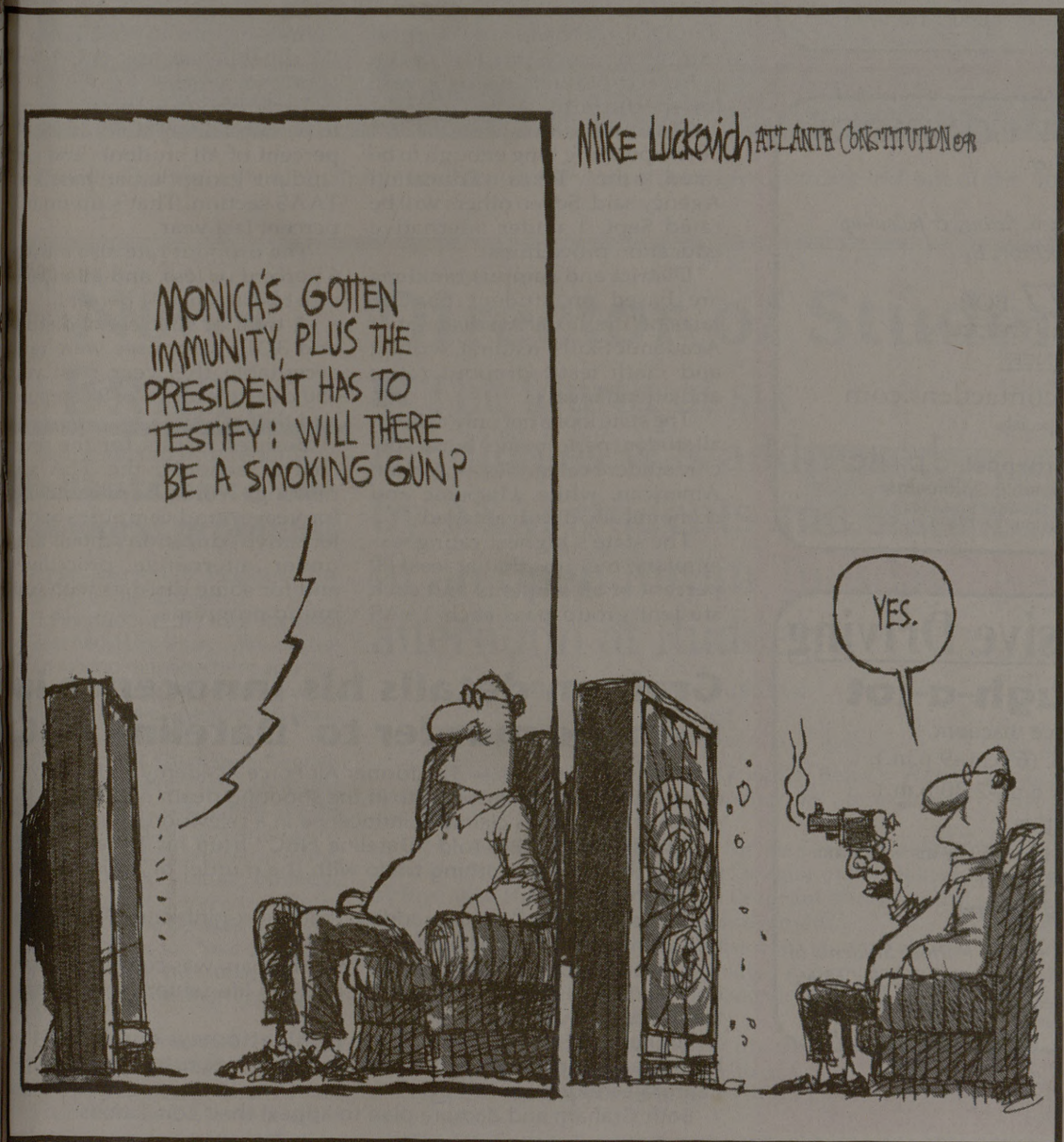
Moreover, if convicted of the the drug conspiracy charges, these kids also suffer from another problem: greed. There was no economic pressure forcing these kids to sell drugs in their comfortable middle class neighborhoods — and economic conditions are never an excuse for selling drugs, anyway.

According to the investigation, the heroin these dealers were distributing was 37 to 70 percent pure. This is almost five to 10 times the level of potency of common street heroin. The heroin was probably not cheap for the dealers to buy or for their clients to purchase. To the dealers, money meant more than human life.

Stricter penalties on dealers are much needed and past due. However, to make this policy work completely there needs to be a way for those who are addicted to seek help without fear of legal repercussions. Otherwise, the repercussions of these laws could result in a crack-down on those who need help, not those who are the actual problem.

It is a tragedy what happened in Plano. The fact that it took lives of 17 youths for America to realize the severity of the drug problem is pathetic. What is sad is these deaths had to occur in a nice, middle-class neighborhood in order for drug enforcement officials to change their mentality toward arresting and convicting these criminals.

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