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Charlene A. Obernauer

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THE RIGHT TO RUN:
DECODING SEXISM AGAINST WOMEN POLITICIANS
AND FIGHTING FOR A NEW PARADIGM FOR
INTERSECTIONAL LEFT FEMINISTS

by

CHARLENE OBERNAUER

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal
Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The Right to Run:
Decoding Sexism against Women Politicians and Fighting for a New
Paradigm for Intersectional Left Feminists

by

Charlene Obernauer

Advisor: James Wilson, Ph. D

My thesis argues that the left engage in electoral politics and run left candidates, while also fighting benevolent and malicious sexism in politics. The introduction sets the stage for my thesis by defining key terms. The first chapter argues for an intersectional feminist left that reclaims electoral politics. The chapter analyzes the historic women's suffrage campaign, which relied on reformist strategies and direct action-based tactics to prove the effectiveness of electoral engagement. The second chapter argues that sexism in politics can be measured by media coverage of women candidates. I show this by analyzing archival research from *The New York Times* on three significant women candidates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Shirley Chisholm. The third chapter argues that the left establish a Hillary Test, whereby biases for and against candidates based on gender or identity politics—isolated from political ideology—can be named and dismissed. The chapter turns to archival *New York Times* research of historical articles about Hillary Rodham Clinton paired with Clinton's own autobiographies to examine the sexism that Clinton experienced. In doing so, I highlight the media's pivotal role in creating a misogynist environment for Clinton, while also showing that the left's principled attacks against the candidate were justified. The fourth chapter will argue that

feminist leftists can overcome sexism with campaigns that embrace their identities and leftist ideologies. This section is centered by an in-depth analysis of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's successful strategies in her run for Congress as a 28-year old Latina Democratic Socialist.

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I've been endlessly inspired by many movements and people who have given their souls to making our world a more equitable place and who struggle for justice without abandon. To name them all would be a tedious task and ultimately create an inadequate list, but suffice it to say that the grounding of my education and work is based in social movements, not in the academy. This thesis is the result of nearly fifteen years as an organizer, educator, and student in various left movements. That said, the ability to write concisely, to make articulate arguments, and to support my creative flourish has been entirely due to the faculty of the Graduate Center.

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INTRODUCTION

On November 9, 2016, more than half of the United States—feminists, leftists, and Democrats alike—woke up and were horrified. A political cartoon by David Rowe captured the shock and awe comically: a shirtless Donald J. Trump in bed side-eyeing a shocked, frightened lady Liberty lying next to him. That was me, alongside more than half the country. How could this man who pandered to racists and chest-beating white men, bragged about sexual assault on tape, called Mexicans rapists, and challenged the birthplace of President Barack Obama win the Presidency? Trump’s victory and the 2016 Democratic Primary that preceded it led to deep soul-searching among the left and the most marginalized among us. For women, people of color, the queer community and working class leftists, the question of how to build political power became more urgent than ever. The Trump Presidency has confirmed for many of us how high the risks are in U.S. elections. And it’s made us want to take charge; to show that intersectional, feminist, leftist women must be in positions of political power.

My thesis argues that the left must engage in electoral politics and run their own candidates, while also fighting benevolent and malicious sexism in politics. First, I define a series of terms utilized throughout my thesis, starting with sexism, feminism, and intersectionalism, as these are imperative to my central argument. Sexism is a term that people utter as second nature today, which was largely undefined in American society until well into the 1970s when the term was popularized. Betty Friedan’s history-making *The Feminine Mystique* famously called discrimination against women “the problem that has no name” in 1963 because sexism literally was an unnamed, often unspoken phenomenon (57). Sexism is a system of oppression that results in disadvantages and discrimination against all women, and disproportionately impacts queer and trans women, black women, and women of color. Caroline

Bird is the first person attributed with using the term in a speech at her Episcopalian Congregation in 1968, when she stated that “sexism is judging people by their sex when sex doesn’t matter” (qtd in Gayle 8). Later, the term became frequently called upon during the second wave feminist movement of the 1970s, defined and redefined by feminists of various leftist ideologies. In the past 50 years, sexism has made its way into the everyday vocabulary in the U.S., where the word is uttered in the workplace, in academia, and even at the dinner table.

Feminism has been a colloquial term for far longer, or more than a century—its roots imbedded in the suffrage movement. In an article on birth control in Margaret Sanger’s *The Birth Control Review* in 1918, Chrystal Eastman writes, “Feminism means different things to different people.” She continues, “To women with a taste for politics and reform it means the right to vote and hold office,” writing that for athletic women, it’s the right to compete; for feminine women, it’s the right to have sex; and so on. Similarly, Rose Young, the suffragist and influential thinker in the late 19th and early 20th centuries insists that feminism is a “larger term” that embraces the struggle for higher education, economic opportunity, individualism, property, and suffrage and is principled on policy (Young 679). Christine Stansell agrees, “The newcomers to the suffrage fight were as likely to be gripped by issues of labor, poverty, and class as they were to be engrossed by the woman question. Many saw votes for women as an end to other causes” (150). The suffrage movement was just an entryway to a whole world of issues that women faced.

Some feminists are leftists and some leftists are feminists, but the two ideologies are not explicitly linked. Understanding the left is central to my thesis’s claim that the left should join the fight against sexism in politics. The left is a loose ideological spectrum that is defined by a shared belief that the capitalist system is deficient and needs to be replaced with more equitable societal structures. Leftists are made up of all anti-capitalists and include a hodgepodge of

anarchist, socialist, and communist ideologies. Some leftists identify explicitly within a subcategory (i.e. socialist or anarchist) and others do not, incorporating a variety of leftist ideas into their thought and practice. The story goes that “the left” as a term was developed based on where people sat in the French National Assembly in 1789. Supporters of the King were on the right and supporters of revolution on the left (Norman). Thus, the idea that “the left” were those against the sitting government was born, though as leftist governments have come into power, this has changed. Vastly differing ideologies reside between and within left identities, but all are united by anti-capitalist thought. Emma Goldman writes that anarchism is:

The philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by manmade law; the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary. (Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays*, 50)

Anarchists—like all leftists—are anti-capitalists, but they believe that all forms of government should not exist. Unlike anarchists, communists and socialists believe in workers taking *over* political power. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels write in *The Communist Manifesto* that the “immediate aim of the Communist” is “... formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat” (11). These differing anti-capitalist ideologies make up the ragtag assortment of leftist thought.

The left has molded feminism throughout history, particularly by marginalized leftist women who saw how intersecting forms of oppression impacted them. Sojourner Truth famously asked “Ain’t I a Woman?” in 1851 to speak to black women’s strength and capability. Later, in 1868 Truth asserted that “if you bait the suffrage-hook with a woman, you will certainly catch a black man” and was one of the few black women who persistently advocated for suffrage for black men *and* black women (qtd in Davis, 83). Arguments like Truth’s and ideologies of

black theorists throughout feminist history have been instrumental in building what would become the intersectional feminist lexicon. Claudia Jones, a little-known Marxist feminist activist and writer during the Cold War published the article “An End to the Neglect of the Problems of the Negro Woman” in 1949. Jones coined the neglect theory for working class black women to highlight the ways that working class black women were neglected by white elites. Carole Boyce Davies wrote, “The concept rests solidly on Claudia’s observation that black women—‘as workers, as Negroes, as women’—were ‘the most oppressed stratum of the whole population’” (40-41). Claudia Jones’s theory links race, class, and gender to identify “superexploitation” faced by working class black women. Jones was a visionary whose ideas about intersectionality were before her time, and ultimately resulted in the FBI deporting her—a Trinidadian immigrant—during the Red Scare. Jones’s work, despite the government censorship, was contagious. She inspired other black leftist feminists like the Combahee River Collective, who expanded Jones’s theory by adding heterosexism as a form of oppression. Jones and the Combahee River Collective built a platform of black Marxist feminist literature upon which Angela Davis stood her legacy of work in the 1980s.

While the groundwork of intersectional feminism had been laid since the 1850s by women like Sojourner Truth, specific calls for an inclusive, intersectional feminism emerged in the 1980s and 90s. Intersectional feminism as a theory was developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in her 1989 essay, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Crenshaw analyzes a number of legal cases in which black women lost because the legal system did not recognize the intersecting oppression of race and gender. In the 1974 case of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, the Court decided that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act did not account for creating

“new classes of protected minorities” (Crenshaw). As a result, the black women suing General Motors for race and sex discrimination lost their case. Crenshaw argues for a feminism that meets at the intersection, stating:

If any real efforts are to be made to free Black people of the constraints and conditions that characterize racial subordination, then theories and strategies purporting to reflect the Black community's needs must include an analysis of sexism and patriarchy. Similarly, feminism must include an analysis of race if it hopes to express the aspirations of non-white women.

Crenshaw’s piece introduced intersectional theory and articulated what many other feminists had been writing about for decades: she demanded the left be explicit about race in its feminist activism.

In my thesis, I call for a new kind of intersectional politics, rooted in this rich history of intersectional feminism, which reclaims electoral tactics to put leftist women in positions of power. Further, that sexism in politics as measured by media coverage shows the unfair and often impossible road women travel to win elections. Finally, that to build an intersectional feminist left movement for political power, we establish what I call a “Hillary Test,” whereby biases for and against candidates based on gender or identity politics—isolated from political ideology—can be named and dismissed.

Socialism, like feminism, has been defined and redefined over the past century and a half, but is sewn with the same thread. Socialism is a system that provides for all, equitably. Michael Newman writes:

the most fundamental characteristic of socialism is its commitment to the creation of an egalitarian society. In particular, socialists have maintained that, under capitalism, vast

privileges and opportunities are derived from the hereditary ownership of capital and wealth at one end of the social scale, while a cycle of deprivation limits opportunities and influence at the other end. (2)

This inequality was brilliantly emphasized by the left (anarchists, communists, and socialists alike) during the Occupy Wall Street movement. By chanting, “We Are the 99%!” the left suggests that workers—not the billionaire class—should control society. In socialism, referred to by Marx as a transitional state that occurs in between capitalism and communism, the state (not workers) holds the means of production to provide for every person’s basic needs.

Capitalist societies already have socialist policies like universal healthcare in Canada or social security in the United States, and a few socialists are already in power. Bernie Sanders, U.S. Senator and Democratic candidate for U.S. President in 2016, is probably the most famous socialist politician in the country. He stated that democratic socialism “... builds on what Martin Luther King, Jr. said in 1968 when he stated that ‘this country has socialism for the rich, and rugged individualism for the poor’” (qtd in Stuart). Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, feminist, rising democratic socialist star, and U.S. Congresswoman from the Bronx, similarly defined democratic socialism in economic terms and said that “in a modern, moral, and wealthy society, no person in America should be too poor to live” (qtd in Russonello). Further, socialist feminists focus on how “power has been denied women because of their class position” and includes concrete ideas on how socialist feminist policies like childcare and an end to sexism would advance the socialist project (Hyde Park Chapter Chicago Women’s Liberation Union). While there are many deviations of socialist thought, the concept that socialism is an anti-capitalist movement to equitably provide for all people is at the core of the socialist project.

“Liberals” often associate themselves with the left as if the two are in the same category, but this is inaccurate. Leftists do not believe in capitalism, whereas liberals generally believe that the free market needs to be undisturbed and untethered. However, the key components of liberal ideology are relatively vague. Edmund Fawcett writes in *Liberalism: The Life of An Idea*:

No one version of the liberal outlook ever became canonical. Liberalism had no accredited doctrinalists, no Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, no Marx-Engels Standard Edition Given such variety of common terms and suggested vindications, liberalism’s outlook was bound to be loose fitting, open to interpretation and unsettled argument. (4)

“Liberal” does not have one defined meaning, but generally is an umbrella term used to define those who support the capitalist system, but also believe that a country’s citizens should be provided for. Liberals are not leftists, as they believe that capitalism is a part of the solution, and leftists believe that capitalism is the root of the problem.

The left is also distinct from the “progressives” that manifest New York State and City politics. Progressivism has a hairy history that has ironically been adopted by many of today’s liberals. Susan Bordo writes:

Progressive. It’s a term with a long, twisty history. In the nineteenth century, it was associated with those who argued for the moral “cleansing” of the nation... [It is] not very useful descriptively—one can be progressive in some ways and not so progressive in others, and no politician I know of has ever struck every “progressive” chord. (79-80)

The term arose from “a growing, if temporary, consensus among Americans that major changes in the late nineteenth century had produced unwelcome, un-American imbalances in their society” (Nugent 2). Out of progressivism in the 1900s came many policies that would

appropriately be labeled socialist, such as social security; but there was also an undercurrent of racism that sour the movement's contributions. Progressives included ideologies of "immigration restriction" and many "did not believe in racial equality" (Nugent 5). Progressivism's past is murky and casts a wide net of regressive and progressive views in coexistence. Its present and future similarly lacks cohesion and definition.

Today, many liberals call themselves "progressive" but they do not support anti-immigrant or Jim Crow laws. But what do they support? New York State in 2018 has no shortage of political leaders who call themselves "progressives," but their ideologies are so vastly different that it's anyone's guess where they will stand on a given issue. Some political leaders call themselves progressive but do not support women's reproductive rights and others have their own personal histories of sexual abuse against women. Can you be a sexist progressive? Or is sexism antithetical to progressive values? A July 2018 article in *The New York Times* on New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio asks, "Bill de Blasio Is Progressive. But Is He Progressive Enough?" (Goodman and Neuman). The authors quote activists who criticize what they believe are Mayor de Blasio's half-measures on progressive policies and say "progressive" as if there was some kind of convention that none of us knew about; as if the people of New York democratically drafted a platform, someone banged a ceremonial gavel and proclaimed, "Here we have the policies of the progressives of New York." But no such convention occurred. No such "progressive" platform exists.

Data has shown that women are more likely to identify with the broad "progressive" spectrum of ideas and have consistently been more likely to identify as Democrats. This trend has only continued in recent years. For example, data published before and after Donald Trump's

election in 2016 shows that more women have become Democrats in the past five years and “the gap” between men and women’s voting pattern continues to grow:

In the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES), the gap grows by five points from 2016 to 2017--the largest year-to-year movement in that time series. Amid wild year-to-year swings, Gallup sees its largest gender gap growth (19-point increase) moving from 2016 to 2017 over this time span. (Agadjanian)

Further, recent polling conducted by Data for Progress and YouGov Blue asked women and men their position on a series of issues such as increasing taxes on high income earners, reducing the racial wage gap, and providing more government-subsidized health care (Rentsch). The data found that women were consistently much more likely than men to support progressive policy positions, and that this gender gap was largely driven by the conservative-leaning political views of white men in particular (Rentsch). As this paper analyzes the left and politics, it is important to note that statistically, more women identify with the left than men.

Any political identity that has too broad a definition risks losing its core values. Michael Newman writes about the hazy meaning of socialism and that there are “dangers in defining socialism so broadly that the subject cannot be analysed meaningfully” (2). Just as progressives have a dirty little secret—their racist past—so do socialists, with societies proclaiming to be socialist when they were really totalitarian. Adolf Hitler himself claimed to be a socialist. Further, socialism is also layered with any number of sexist and misogynists socialists whose treatment of women or beliefs about women in leadership would be quite at home in any conservative family. Like progressives, socialists have some explaining—and defining—to do.

Without meaningful definitions of political identities, ideologies become meaningless notions. If a candidate has no ideals to begin with, no principles on which to stand on, what can

the electorate hold them to? For example, if a prominent socialist candidate has a history of sexual assault against women, the feminist left must work to stifle their support. A politician “self identifying” as a socialist or feminist or progressive is simply not enough, as these identities are manipulated by politicians trying to win voters. This thesis argues that more leftists can get involved in electoral politics to create these feminist left national and local standards, hold elected officials accountable and endorse and run left women candidates.

“The Right to Run” is an intersectional feminist and leftist call for just that: a system that supports left candidates—marginalized women in particular—and fights against sexism towards all who run. “The Right to Run” has been a battle that leftists throughout history, from abolitionists to women’s suffragists, have fought—as this thesis will elucidate. Despite the legal ability to run for office, women still are not given equal opportunities and a true right to run. The double oppression that women leftists experience, and triple/quadruple oppression that marginalized women leftists face, creates a greater need for the intersectional feminist left to demand the right to run. All women will continue to be met with and sometimes blockaded by sexism in their run for office. Tracing sexism in politics by analyzing the media shows that sexism is alive and well, even in New York in 2018; and *overcoming* this sexism against leftist women candidates is an essential project of the left. This thesis argues that battling sexism against women candidates and running strategic campaigns to place leftist women into office would build significant political power among the left.

Finally, this thesis looks primarily at media from *The New York Times* due to the paper’s history, size, scope, influence, and liberal leanings. *The Times* has been a mainstay in the mainstream media since its establishment in 1851. The paper covers political news on a national and global scale, with particular focus on New York. Since the women discussed in this paper

are New York politicians, *The Times* is fitting. *The Times* has a distribution of 130 million people (Tran) and is heavily influential, particularly among liberal circles. A Pew Research Center study rated the “average ideological placement” of subscribers of major media publications. The study used a 10-point scale and found *The New York Times* was a -5, along with *NPR*, *The Daily Show*, and *Al Jazeera*; the right’s equivalent media included *Breitbart* and the *Sean Hannity Show* (Blake). *The Times*’s distribution numbers and liberal leanings speak to its significance and make it a worthy reference point to examine sexism in the media.

To articulate my argument, my thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter One, “Changing the World,” argues for an intersectional feminist left movement that reclaims electoral politics. The chapter accomplishes this by conducting a historical analysis of the radical campaign for women’s suffrage, which relied on reformist strategies and direct action-based tactics to prove the effectiveness of electoral engagement. The chapter juxtaposes anarchist arguments against suffrage with socialist arguments for it to foreshadow debates within the left about electoral work in the 21st century. Chapter Two, “How Far We Haven’t Come: The Right to Vote, Not Run,” argues that sexism in politics can be measured by the media’s coverage of women candidates. I prove this by analyzing archival research from *The New York Times* on three significant women candidates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Shirley Chisholm. Chapter Three, “The Hillary Test,” argues that the left should establish a tool as a means to combat sexism against women politicians. The chapter turns to archival *New York Times* research of historical articles about Hillary Rodham Clinton paired with Clinton’s own autobiographies to investigate the sexism that Clinton experienced. In doing so, I highlight the mainstream media’s pivotal role in creating a misogynist environment for Clinton, while also showing that the left’s principled attacks against the candidate were justified. Chapter Four,

“Elections as Movements: The Future of Intersectional Left Politics,” argues in that feminist leftists can overcome the media’s sexism and win campaigns that embrace their identities and leftist ideologies. This section is centered around an in-depth analysis of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s successful strategies in her run for Congress as a 28-year old Latina Democratic Socialist.

My thesis fills an important gap in academic scholarship because it both identifies the key problem of sexism in politics, but also presents a historical analysis of suffrage and women’s political campaigns to gesture towards potential solutions. I do not merely state that sexism in politics continues to be a problem in 2018 in the United States and in New York in particular, but that the left can work to dismantle sexism in politics by implementing new tools to build a stronger intersectional feminist left. The intent of my thesis is ultimately to encourage readers to move beyond analysis and towards action.

The left is already gaining more and more popularity in the United States, as support for capitalism wanes. An August 2018 Gallup study suggests that Democrats view socialism more positively than capitalism; 57% and 47% respectively (Newport). The favorability percentages for capitalism, according to the study, dropped nine points in just two years, from 2016 to 2018. How could socialism be more popular than capitalism among *Democrats*, the party that has spent the past several decades rolling out the red carpet for Wall Street and pushing through capitalist (not so) Free Trade? Simply put, Democrats are no longer being represented by the vast majority of their “representatives.” Socialism’s increased popularity presents real opportunities to bring intersectional feminist leftists into office. If 57% of Democrats are socialists and only 47% capitalists, socialists are set up to win Democratic primaries and actually *take over* the party. Some already have.

People in power create change just as the *power of the people* creates change. These days in the United States, the people in power are creating change for the worse. And that's putting it lightly. Every regressive Supreme Court decision, every heartless piece of state legislation, every immigrant who is deported, shows what happens when the left loses. From community boards to council seats to the state capitols, taking over power is a strategy this thesis promotes: leftists must embrace political work in order to fight for an equitable society and must embrace a feminist agenda as central to this political work. That doesn't mean that leftists should abandon other organizing projects or dedicate all of their time to political campaigning. The left simply needs to do both, and "The Right to Run" shows how to do just that.

CHAPTER ONE: CHANGING THE WORLD

Democracy does not beckon. It does not come politely knocking on the doors of society, asking to be let in. Rather, like a stray dog, we need to lure it inside. The 2016 election ignited a movement among leftists and feminists with the potential to radically transform the country, but we're often too divided to know it. The enraged populace—fueled by the fury of women—re-energized the push for radical policy positions and for leftist candidates. And yet, many leftists still hesitate to embrace these reformist strategies towards radical change. We've seen the corporate buy-out of our democracy. We've seen what happens when the movement puts its faith into insufficiently left Democrats with an insufficiently left movement to hold them accountable. And we think, "Democracy is not welcome... Democracy is not possible here." Instead of dreaming of and fighting for a democratic society, we've let our (justified) cynicisms take over and our dreams die. But the risk is too high; the failure too great. We need to lure in our democracy, lure in our stray dog, and build a movement that charts the way home.

This chapter argues that to create a democratic society and an equitable country for women, leftists must commit to reformist-based strategies to create radical change, including engaging in the electoral process. To build this argument, this chapter provides a thorough analysis of the women's suffrage movement, which was a reformist political campaign that united leftists, progressive, and liberals. In analyzing the suffrage movement, I intend to show that reformist strategies can create revolutionary changes in people's everyday lives. I also look at the political campaign of suffragist organizer Jeannette Rankin, the first woman Congressman elected to office in the United States. Her campaign serves as an example of embracing electoral politics to make room for movement candidates to win. This analysis provides the historical background necessary to argue, as my thesis does in later chapters, that

left women can embrace electoral strategies to build stronger left movements and win significant political victories.

The left in the 19th and 20th centuries, like today, was not monolithic, but captured the intricate beauty of many leftists's imaginations. The left is a quest to the impossible as much as it is a strategic campaign towards concrete victories. Julia Dietrich writes that the left can be analyzed "not only as a revolutionary challenge to capitalism but also as a complex expression of people's hopes ... as the encounter between revolutionary theory and obdurate reality; and as one of a spectrum of Left political agendas" (7). Sometimes a campaign is so inspiring that its strategy and tactics capture our hopes for the world to come.

The suffrage campaign, aimed towards a greater movement for women's true equality, was one such inspirational project. To better understand the rise of intersectional feminism in the late 20th century, we first need to understand the origins of feminism in the 20th century, which began with the suffrage movement. The campaign challenged the capitalist system built by property-owning white men, but also represented "people's hopes" for what democracy could be. Suffragists ignited many feminists in a campaign to create a new world—a world where their political opinions and actions were rewarded and respected with full citizenship and the right to vote.

Suffrage won the support of leftists because women's right to vote was a radical, left notion at a time when women's insubordinate role in society was clearly established and relatively uncontested. The suffrage resolution that emerged in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848 shocked established society to its core with notions of women's equality that included political power for women. Angela Davis wrote in *Women, Race, and Class* that when Stanton proposed to co-conventioner Lucretia Mott that they introduce a women's suffrage resolution,

Mott thought that the resolution “would be interpreted as absurd and outrageous ... and would consequently undermine the importance of the meeting” (50). Stanton pushed for the resolution anyway. Frederick Douglass agreed to second Stanton’s motion—ironically given Stanton’s later racist arguments for women’s suffrage (Davis 50-52). At the Convention, Douglass advocated for equal rights and political power for women, *beyond* the right to vote; for a kind of intersectionalism that included race and gender beyond the dichotomy of fighting for either women’s suffrage or abolition. At Seneca Falls, Douglass was likely the only black man in the room—no black women attended (Davis 56). After several white men spoke against women’s right to vote and to even enter life outside of the domestic sphere, Douglass argued, “If you will galvanize [women] into civil liberty ... place her in equal power, you will find her capable of not abusing it!” (*Woman’s Rights Conventions* 7). Douglass’s phrasing was deliberate: he stated “place her in equal power” instead of “allow her the right to vote,” arguing for the women movement’s grand goal of equal political power. Leftists signed onto the reformist strategy of women’s suffrage because it was radical for the time, meaning that it “got to the root”—as Davis would say—of women’s oppression during the mid 19th century.

From the convening at Seneca Falls in 1848, the founding suffragists saw first-hand how controversial the radical notion of women’s political power was for U.S. society at the time. Men who had traveled on horse and buggy for days to attend a convention in support of women’s *rights* found themselves opposing the radical notion of women’s *suffrage*. Sara Hunter Graham writes, “So radical was the concept of woman suffrage that many of the delegates to the convention refused to sign Stanton’s declaration or later removed their signatures” (5). Graham notes that women’s political power, or less political power for men, was the only women’s rights

resolution that did not pass unanimously. Notes from the Convention showcases some examples of sexist opposition:

Hon. William C. Bloss next spoke. He seemed disposed to allow all the privileges asked for by the women, except the elective franchise He inquired if there was not a natural disqualification? did not boys and girls exhibit dissimilar taste in the choice of playthings? the one preferring the noisy hammer, or the hoop, while the other, the darling doll at home? he doubted if the ladies would use the right, if it were conferred upon them Milo D. Godding also objected to that part of the Declaration which advocated woman's right to the elective franchise. He thought it sufficient for woman to vote through her father, brothers, or husband. (*Woman's Rights Convention*)

Opponents of suffrage, who were also so-called supporters of women's rights attended the convention, foreshadowing just how difficult the suffrage campaign would be. Open hostility and opposition to suffrage shaped the strategic and pragmatic legislative focus of the campaign.

This strategic and pragmatic focus ultimately led the suffragist leaders to succumb to racism and compromise the movement. What had been a radical campaign to revolutionize all women's lives became a campaign among elite white women to win more power for themselves. The 1848 Convention occurred before the Civil War began in 1861. Many white women supported an abolitionist strategy before the War, but as the likelihood increased that black men would be granted the right to vote before white women, white women's racism became more overt. Susan B. Anthony was a political strategist who focused on the "practicalities of reform," whereas Elizabeth Cady Stanton "grappled with the concept of a social revolution that would amalgamate women's rights with other causes" (Graham 5). Anthony was ruthlessly focused on winning legislative victories. Her shrewd political calculations led her to focus on how to win

suffrage in a way that capitulated to the racism of white society. As Anthony made her way all over the country in the suffrage fight, Davis writes, Anthony “pushed Douglass aside for the sake or recruiting white Southern women into the movement for woman suffrage” (111). Anthony’s work ostracized her and Stanton-Anthony’s National American Women’s Suffrage Association (NAWSA) further from much of the left, creating a dividing line between those who would compromise their values for the sake of a specific political goal and those who had a more rigorous set of principles to uphold. Suffrage may have been radical for the time period, but prominent suffragist leaders embraced racism in the name of pragmatism that ultimately compromised their values, legacy, and the movement. And there was nothing radical about that.

Like any movement, the public faces of the campaign were just icons, or the fruits of a tree. There were many others who made up the roots, the leaves, and the branches. In the 1900s, the movement was ripe for new left leaders whose so-called proto-intersectional strategies and tactics would lead the campaign to victory. Noted suffragists of the Seneca Falls Convention died before women’s right to vote was secured, including Stanton and Anthony, who died in 1902 and 1906, respectively. While some women were peacefully petitioning, women in the U.S. and the U.K. decided that they had tried to be peaceful long enough. They took on direct action-based tactics, starting with what Jane Marcus calls “the real violence of militancy” (9) or the “interruption of male political discourse” (8). Marcus writes:

Trained in silence and good behaviour to modestly listen to the men, to a role, whatever her class ... women [who learned] ... not only to speak in her own voice for her own cause, but to split asunder patriarchal cultural hegemony by interrupting men’s discourse with each other, were taking one of the most important steps in the history of women. How difficult it was to break down women’s learned silence. (8)

The suffrage campaign broke down that “learned silence” with direct action. Militant suffragists quickly saw the futility of petition drives and began to picket outside the White House, often getting arrested for causing a vocal disturbance. They then began their famed hunger strikes and captured the hearts and minds of much of the public.

The suffrage movement also embraced a new tactic: to support suffragist candidates for political office. Women ran in a number of local and state-based elections, and as individual states granted women the right to vote in federal elections, women ran for national office. In 1916, women embraced electoral politics to get suffragists on the ballot and to prove that women were politically engaged. In the *New York Times* article, “Women May Swing Vote in Two States,” the author wrote that in the 1916 election “women’s vote ... will be large enough to set at rest the charge that women are indifferent to politics.” The first such woman to run was noted suffragist Jeannette Rankin. Her credentials mostly included her role as a suffragist—she was an activist candidate that the suffragist leaders encouraged to run for office in a long-shot race. Women did not yet have the right to vote, but Jeanette Rankin decided to run anyway. Despite the reductive sexism the media offered Rankin, like *The New York Times’s* obsession with her “red hair” (“House is Beautiful”), and “handsome” (“Women May Swing Vote in Two States”) “good looks” (“Women Voters Fail to Follow Leaders”), Rankin surprised the world when she won her election in 1916. Rankin was the first woman Congressman to be elected in the history of the United States, and she won with suffrage as core to her agenda.

Electing Rankin was part one of the strategy to win suffrage, and part two was to get her into office to actually push for the suffrage amendment. The strategy worked. Norma Smith wrote, “Immediately upon being sworn in Jeannette had drafted a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment for woman’s suffrage” (120). Rankin “persuaded the house to set up a

special suffrage committee” as the Judiciary Committee in which the suffrage bill resided would not move the bill (Smith 122). Rankin was successful in the House, where the suffrage bill passed with the required 2/3 majority in 1918. The bill still needed to pass in the Senate, where there was no Jeannette Rankin-equivalent to help propel it forward. The suffragists campaigned in the 1918 elections against Senate candidates who opposed suffrage and eventually convinced four more Senators to support the measure, narrowly reaching the 2/3 majority necessary to win the vote (Smith 126). Suffragists out-organized the opposition. Rankin was just one piece of the puzzle in the campaign for women’s suffrage, but her role was significant and shows that suffragists’s vision for women’s political power included women running for office.

Despite the ultimate success of women’s suffrage, some leftists did not believe that women’s suffrage was a worthy campaign, as it relied too heavily on reformist change. To overthrow the capitalist system, anarchists reasoned, the left needed to focus on organizing for revolution. Anarchists didn’t want suffrage to legitimize capitalism by simply placing more women in the voting booths. Just as the left disagrees today on endorsement strategies during political campaigns, the anarchist and socialist left during the early 1900s engaged in a spirited debate over the effectiveness of suffrage in liberating all working class women. Leftist feminists were enraged at the inequities that women faced, but most feminist anarchists didn’t join the leading campaign aimed at fighting against these disparities. They couldn’t see how votes for women would lead to a pathway towards women’s equality. So, they boycotted women’s suffrage instead of joining the campaign to change women’s second class status. Would suffrage really liberate women, or would it benefit the elite and bring nothing to the working class, black women, and women of color? Were suffragists only concerned with their own political power, or did they have a greater movement in their hearts?

The suffrage campaign housed many different “antis,” as anti-suffragists were then called. Antis on the right thought women were not equal to men and that women’s opinions could be expressed by the voting men they married. Antis on the left believed that extending the right to vote would create insufficient political change towards gender equity. Anarchists like Emma Goldman believed granting women the right to vote would not change anything for working class women’s status. Socialists believed including women in the electoral process was essential to building for revolution. The left debated their differing ideologies through published articles—the 20th century’s version of Twitter wars.

Emma Goldman fervidly argued that universal suffrage should not be a tactic of the left. She stated in her 1911 essay “Woman Suffrage” that she did not argue against universal suffrage on the “conventional ground that [woman] is not equal to it,” but rather because “all existing systems of political power are absurd, and are completely inadequate to meet the pressing issues of life” (199). Goldman believed that representative democracy in the United States was a “swamp,” rife with labor exploitation and corruption; and that American women “ignorantly” believe that they are morally superior to men and therefore would be better than men in governance (Goldman, 1911, 202). Goldman argued that only through individualistic self-determination and collective direct action for equality would women create an equitable political system. Goldman was against women’s suffrage because her anarchist theory dismissed any tactic that legitimized the American political system, including voting.

Socialists, however, weaved their way through the suffrage campaign like embroidery, making up the fabric of the movement and ensuring that the campaign stuck to its revolutionary goal: to win suffrage for all women and change women’s role in society. Sara Hunter Graham wrote in *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy*, “nearly all Socialists were in favor of women

suffrage” (57). For example, *The Masses* was a popular magazine operated by a collective of young socialists in Greenwich Village that promoted revolutionary ideas like women’s suffrage in everyday language to reach wide audiences. *The Masses*, according to the mission embedded within, was “a revolutionary and not a reform magazine” founded in 1911 (*The Masses*). Despite considering itself “revolutionary,” *The Masses* supported the oft-critiqued “reformist” suffrage movement. Suffrage was reformist because, anarchists like Goldman argued, changing laws through electoral means legitimized the electoral system itself. However, *The Masses* believed that “the combination of political power (through the ballot) and self-determination (through economic democracy) would be required to liberate women” (Jones 27). In a sense, the suffrage movement was revolutionary in direct action-based *tactics* like hunger strikes and reformist in the *strategy* of winning the ballot. To the collective behind *The Masses*, liberation for women was core to a leftist agenda. They believed that embracing revolutionary tactics towards a reformist strategy went hand-in-hand with their socialist mission, and was a means towards winning women’s liberation.

Emma Goldman, impassioned and critical, denounced *The Masses*’s support for women’s right to vote and chastised them for being anti-revolutionary. In a letter to the magazine, she wrote, “It is rather disappointing to find *The Masses* devoting an entire edition to ‘Votes for Women.’ Perhaps *Mother Earth* alone has any faith ... that women are capable and are ready to fight for freedom and revolution” (*The Masses*). To Goldman and the other writers at her anarchist magazine, *Mother Earth*, revolutionaries worked to overthrow the government. No half measures like the inclusion of women in the political process would do. *The Masses* promoted socialism through satire; they were like today’s politicized episodes of Saturday Night Live—but in print form, and socialist. When the ever-critical, ever-intellectual Emma Goldman castigated

The Masses in November of 1915, they printed her reprimand in their magazine and asked, tongue-in-cheek, “What is your favorite anti?” Later in the same magazine, they further mocked antis and mused about men who are only philosophers when it comes to women’s suffrage. By publicizing Goldman’s commentary but softening her harshness with satire, *The Masses* encouraged readers to read Goldman’s words and to judge for themselves.

In elections today, Goldman’s quote, “If voting changed anything it would be illegal” is still plastered on the walls of local anarchist spaces, shared on social media during election season by those who place their faith outside of a broken system. To Goldman, revolutionaries worked to overthrow the government to win power for all working people, regardless of whether women could vote or were occupying the halls of Congress. Anarchists like Goldman must have been further dismayed by suffragists’s attempts to run for office, like the successful political campaign of Jeannette Rankin in 1916. Goldman’s words ring true for many people who see their elected officials bring them no real gains and a steady parade of corporate Democrats ushered in by the outdated politics of the party establishment. Her words ring true for leftists who, time and time again, have been intrigued by a candidate’s supposed allegiance to anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist stances; only to be disappointed once the candidate is elected and refuses to stand by their values and honor their commitments. Can the dissonance be made harmonious? Can leftists really fight to bring leftist candidates into office, and can these new politicians be held accountable and carry forth their vision of a more equitable society? Can they acquire enough political power to be successful?

While no equivalent women’s suffrage campaign exists in 2018, the debate around voting and electoral power is a meaningful comparative. “Nearly 40 percent of eligible voters chose not to vote in 2016” (Gay) and though not all of these voters were leftists, if there was a single leftist

who was eligible to vote and instead chose not to, I argue that this was a strategic misstep. In an October 2018 *New York Times* op-ed on the 2018 Congressional elections, Roxane Gay writes a plea to “disillusioned young voters” to vote. She reminded readers:

Given everything that has transpired since President Trump took office, I have no patience for disillusionment. I have no patience for the audacious luxury of choosing not to vote because of that disillusionment, as if not voting is the best choice a person could make. Not voting is, in fact, the worst choice a person could make. (Gay)

Gay goes too far, perhaps—there are surely worse decisions one could make than not voting—but the point is well taken. To some, voting would seem like the only action promoted by mainstream society, like this persistent lie that is sung like a lullaby: if one just votes in [the opposing party], everyone will be happy and free. Voting matters, but movements are about so much more. The history of the suffrage campaign shows that a radical movement can incorporate diverse political strategies, including running left women candidates and pushing for electoral change, to be effective and ultimately radically change society.

This is all to say, leftists are already engaging in reformist politics and leftists have been involved in reformism for centuries. Leftists like women in the suffrage campaign have also seen the importance of running for office to ensure that elected leaders reflect the movements themselves by running candidates who actually *come from* and are held *accountable to* movements. Jeannette Rankin was not just a suffragist, she was a suffragist organizer who got into Congress with a smart political strategy that understood how to win. As proven by the suffrage campaign, when the left mobilized towards tactical wins and embraced a diversity of tactics, they were successful. Engaging strategically in political campaigns can continue to create systematic change.

Women's status in society in 2018, just as it did in 1848, depends on molding a new landscape. We must learn from our history—from the diverse group of suffragists who fought to win the right to vote—to win strategic legislative seats, and to radically transform society. These suffragists won their fight, but the feminist battle towards equity for women continues, and we must take what they taught us if we too are to win.

CHAPTER TWO: HOW FAR WE HAVEN'T COME: THE RIGHT TO VOTE, NOT RUN

“Inexperienced!” “Untrustworthy!” “Unlikeable!” Political opponents, the news media, and the unmerciful Twitter universe hurls disqualifiers like four letter words. We’ve likely heard the story before: the baseless and often empty attacks on women who declare themselves candidates, especially those who run against the establishment. Many more women are in politics today than the 19th and 20th centuries, but sexism is woven into the history of politics in the United States, starting before women won the right to vote and continuing well into the 21st century. The media has quietly catapulted sexism at women candidates for a century and a half, and this barrage of invalidation widens when women are working class and/or women of color. The media couples disqualifiers with neglect of women candidates and creates an imbalance for women who run for elected office.

This chapter conducts an in-depth analysis of New York women candidates for national office, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1866, Victoria Woodhull in 1872, and Shirley Chisholm nearly one hundred years later in 1968. Suffragists would have hoped that nearly one hundred years after women won the right to vote, the U.S. would welcome a woman to break the nation’s tallest glass ceiling; that fifty years after Chisholm ran her historic campaign for the presidency, women would not still have to strive for a seat in the highest office in the land. This chapter analyzes Stanton, Woodhull, and Chisholm because of the historical significance of each of their campaigns for the left and because these races have much to teach women leftists running for office in the 21st century. *The New York Times’s* archives in each race is an example of the media’s disdain for and neglect of women candidates. The archives are paired with biographies, autobiographies, and interviews with the candidates themselves to help to paint a full picture of the sexism (and racism) that impacted these political candidates. This chapter

analyzes these campaigns to show the history of sexism involved in the campaigns of women who ran and lost, like Stanton and Woodhull; and to show how women like Chisholm overcame sexism to run and to win. The chapter continues to build my thesis's argument that left women can strategically embrace electoral politics to build the intersectional feminist left.

Sexism against women in politics began when women first ran for office in the mid-1800s. Suffragists became political candidates themselves to prove the right to run. This chapter analyzes Stanton, Woodhull, and Chisholm's races to show how sexism and the media impacted these political candidates. Elizabeth Cady Stanton is known for her pioneering role in the suffrage movement, but she is lesser known for her 1866 campaign for U.S. Congress. Literature reviews of Stanton's work have shown countless biographies on Stanton and thousands of books that mention her suffrage work, but only a few mention her campaign for Congress, let alone provide a media analysis of her run to contextualize women's political campaigns. Conversely, many biographies of Woodhull have been written about her campaign for President, but analyzing Woodhull's campaign in the context of other political women's media coverage is an important aspect of this study. Further, Woodhull's so-called proto-intersectional theories are analyzed throughout this chapter, which many studies neglect to analyze. Similarly, archival research of *The Times* juxtaposed alongside Chisholm's own words as a tool to examine sexism against her is also a unique project that this research completes.

Stanton's political campaign was based on the rationale that the right to vote was restricted to men, but the right to run? There was technically no law *against* it. Stanton declared that while only men may have had the right to vote, women had the right to run. Stanton believed the women's rights movement was about more than suffrage and was a comprehensive movement for women's equality. "What did women want?" a man asked Stanton when she was

campaigning (qtd in Thomas 40). One can almost hear the mocking tone in the man's voice, asking the kind of question that trivializes and patronizes. Undeterred, Stanton responded, "Everything: all of the same rights as men" (qtd in Thomas 40). Stanton's campaign was the first prominent attempt of a suffragist to win political office, and exemplified exactly the kind of sexism that future candidates would experience.

Stanton's national political campaign in 1866 was the first of such documented and foreshadows the media sexism that would persevere against women for the next century and a half. To prove the right to run, Stanton took "direct action" of her own and campaigned in 1866 as an Independent for U.S. Congress, though many in the media such as *The New York Times* did not treat her as a serious contender. Stanton's speeches and role as a leader in the suffrage movement had received significant *Times* coverage in prior years. A search through *The TimesMachine* archives for Elizabeth Cady Stanton shows that she was first quoted in 1858 and received *Times* coverage on eight other occasions before she ran for Congress. When Stanton announced her candidacy, she was well-known throughout society for her suffragist work. In a pithy 96-word article on October 11, 1866, *The Times* notes that Stanton was running for Congress and mocked her campaign message, which supported "free speech, free press, free trade, and free men" ("For Congress"). "Why she would restrict the freedom she advocates to the opposite sex, she does not explain," the author teased ("For Congress"). Stanton's campaign message was intended to reach *humankind*, but *The Times* mocked Stanton and otherwise ignored the viability of her candidacy, showing that they considered her campaign a joke. Further, *The Times* only covered Stanton's candidacy once before her election, showcasing that sexism is not only about explicit biases against women candidates, but about a failure of the media to cover women's political campaigns.

Once Stanton lost, *The Times* became more supportive of the idea of her candidacy. They published an article to note that out of the 22,000 votes cast in the election, Stanton “received *eight*” (“An Epoch”). The article—oddly, considering the paper’s dismissal of Stanton as candidate—highlighted the bravery of those who cast a vote in her favor:

if there were no social and political etiquette in the way, how satisfactory it would be to call the valiant Eight who have led the way in this movement towards universal enfranchisement by their proper names! (“An Epoch”)

The Times noted the political significance of Stanton’s run and alluded to their respect for Stanton, but the paper did not positively cover Stanton’s campaign prior to the election and only wrote about her campaign *one time*. After the votes were cast and the impact stifled, *The Times* more freely supported Stanton’s run without bucking social and political expectations.

Stanton exemplified that women could legally run for nationwide office, inspiring other suffragists to become candidates, with the goal of disrupting patriarchal society. Victoria Woodhull, working class woman turned New York stock-broker, newspaper editor and publisher, suffragist and feminist, launched her own political campaign for President in 1871. Woodhull saw herself as a “representative woman,” or a trailblazer in traditional men’s spaces, and it was this rationale that led to her Presidential race. She explained:

While others of my sex devoted themselves to a crusade against the laws that shackle the women of the country, I asserted my individual independence; while others prayed for the good time coming, I worked for it; while others argued the equality of woman with man, I proved it. (Woodhull 78)

Woodhull’s career was extraordinary and broke new barriers for women, and she believed it gave her the experience and the right to run for President.

Woodhull's campaign had a radical vision of what can be called proto-intersectionalism and was cognizant of racial and gender inequalities. Woodhull attended the 1869 post-Civil War convention and witnessed the debates between Frederick Douglass and Elizabeth Cady Stanton on the rights of black men compared to the rights of women. When Stanton implored the Convention to "Think of Patrick and Sambo ... who cannot read the Declaration of Independence ... making laws for Lucretia Mott ... and Anna E. Dickinson," Stanton's racism led to a fierce challenge by Frederick Douglass (qtd in Underhill, 54). Douglass argued women's right to vote was "as sacred" as that of men, but the right of black men to vote was an issue of "life and death" (qtd in Underhill, 54). Douglass believed that black men's political power was more urgent, and that women could access political power through their white male relations. Douglass's argument that the black vote was more urgent converted Woodhull. Interviewed on the subject later that year, Woodhull stated that she "believed in women most completely," but "also believed in man just as thoroughly" (Underhill 56). Woodhull made it clear that she was not aligned with Stanton's racism. Rather, Woodhull believed that she could unite a factional women's movement in her campaign for electoral office and tapped Frederick Douglass himself as Vice President. Woodhull was significantly radical for the late 1800s and proto-intersectional, or a pre-cursor to the movement for intersectional feminism in the third wave of the feminist movement. Woodhull's politics even led feminist Gloria Steinem to later call her "the most controversial suffragist of them all" (qtd in Underhill 8). Woodhull believed an expansive, proto-intersectional movement would cast a wide net—wide enough to elect her as the first woman president.

Woodhull was a clear outsider, both because of her proto-intersectional politics on race and gender and her own working class identity. Woodhull's ambiguous class background proved

too much for much of the press to swallow; she was a nobody who came from nothing trying to make a name for herself based on her own merits and accomplishments—a rare feat for a woman in 1871. Unlike Stanton, an elite white woman who had the approval of the women of her class, wealthy suffragists thought that Woodhull’s working class identity was a problem that needed correcting. Her wealthy supporters like Isabella Beecher Hooker attempted to change her behaviors and customs to make her more acceptable to society’s wealthy (Gabriel 89). Hooker urged Woodhull to change very basic aspects of her presentation; her suggestions are so specific, they almost read like a comedy:

I want you to use nice note paper hereafter—plain envelopes.... Those envelopes have been a dreadful eyesore to me for a long time ... and so mannish.... But if you are to be our accepted standard bearer—be perfect—be exquisite in neatness—elegance & decorum. (qtd in Gabriel 90)

Hooker’s note also shows how suffragists wanted women to be their “standard bearer” and placed a lot of faith in her potential influence. Mary Gabriel noted in her biography of Woodhull, “winning acceptance as a radical reformer with working-class roots in a world where even wealthy women were seen and not heard would require more than changing stationary” (90).

Hooker’s concerns preceded attacks on Woodhull by the media and society, many of whom were driven by Woodhull’s gender, left politics, and working class status.

Many members of the mainstream media amplified their critique of Woodhull as she gained more notoriety and publicity due to her Presidential run. *The Herald’s* Theodore Tilton, however, was supportive of Woodhull. He publicized Woodhull’s letter announcing her intention to run and urged women to show their “might” and vote for her (Underhill 81). Tilton’s support was not shared among the majority of the mainstream press, particularly as Woodhull became

more outspoken on suffrage, women's rights, and sexual liberation. When Woodhull made a dynamic speech at the May 1871 National American Woman's Suffrage Association convention in New York City declaring that "the function of government" should be "prohibited from" interfering with individual's happiness, much of the mainstream media really turned against her (qtd in Gabriel 96). Woodhull stated:

the rights of adult individuals to pursue happiness as they may choose ... or with contracts between individuals ... which will place the intercourse of persons with each other upon their individual honor, with no appeal, and the intercourse of the general people upon the principles of common honesty. (qtd in Gabriel 96)

After this speech, the press slammed Woodhull for advocating "free love" (Gabriel 96) furthering their critique of her politics. Woodhull later earned the nickname of "Mrs. Satan" from one cartoonist, Thomas Nast of Harper's Weekly (Underhill 3). Nast's satanic nickname spoke plainly to what much of the press already portrayed. It foreshadowed the demonic portrait that the media would charge to women politicians for centuries to come, particularly Hillary Rodham Clinton, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

In late May 1871, Woodhull's personal affairs were made public by an over-eager media, ready to attack unconventional women at any sign of impropriety, forever impacting Woodhull's candidacy and celebrity. Woodhull's mother had brought a lawsuit against Woodhull's second husband for alleged abuse and neglect (Gabriel 99). Of course, this lawsuit would not be ideal for any politician running for office, but for Woodhull, it was a fatal blow. The play-by-play of the lawsuit, including the fact that Woodhull lived with her ill ex-husband *and* her healthy second husband, was dramatized by the Christian press (Gabriel 99). Popular Christian preacher Henry Ward Beecher published a fictionalized story after the lawsuit about a woman who "smoked"

and “drank” and “took her rights as a man” who was against “Christianity, marriage, the family state” (qtd in Gabriel 105). Beecher’s fictionalized character was an exaggeration of Victoria Woodhull herself and succeeded demonizing her to the press. Woodhull defended herself by submitting a letter on May 20, 1871 to *The Times* which read:

Because I am a woman, and because I conscientiously hold opinions somewhat different from the self-elected orthodoxy which men find their profit in supporting... self-elected orthodoxy assails me, vilifies me, and endeavors to cover my life with ridicule and dishonor. (qtd in Gabriel 111)

However, Woodhull’s defense was meaningless: the public had turned against her, the publicity of her private affairs had turned her into a laughing stock, and her candidacy was soiled.

The Times, worse than not taking Woodhull’s candidacy seriously, spilled much of its ink mocking her and rarely wrote about her as an actual political candidate. They pointed out Woodhull’s financial debt in a sarcastic editorial entitled, “The Woodhull’s Debts: She Is Not Worth a Single Dollar” in August of 1872. Her net worth was irrelevant to her campaign for the Presidency, given that she had never claimed to be wealthy or to be anything other than a woman who worked hard for what she had. However, Woodhull’s working class scent lingered and *The Times* would not let their readers forget it. *The Times* also published articles mocking those who supported her. They stated that Theodore Tilton’s favorable biography of Woodhull caused them to lose “respect” for him, as Tilton fell under the “Woodhull camp, under the banner of free love and the ‘pantarchy’” (“A Greeley ‘Reformer’”). Tilton responded to his critics by stating:

When I know a woman well, and believe her to be honorable and pure, and she is attacked by the “mob of gentlemen who write with ease,” and is reviled by slanderers... I

hope I shall never be coward enough to withhold my poor pen from her defense. (qtd in Gabriel, 122)

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was also dismayed by the attacks the media levied against Woodhull—as they mirrored the neglect and mockery she herself experienced. Stanton wrote Woodhull a letter stating that she was “sad and oppressed with the barbarism, falsehood and hypocrisy of the press of our country” and the “reckless hashing of individual reputations” (qtd in Gabriel 119).

Feminists had a sophisticated understanding of what the men of the press were doing to Woodhull, but were unable to prevent the destruction of her reputation.

The character assassination of Victoria Woodhull was sealed by her unjust, politically-charged arrest and biased reporting just a few weeks before the 1872 Presidential Election. On November 3, 1872, Woodhull and her sister were arrested and charged with publishing an “obscene newspaper” for their paper’s article about preacher Henry Ward Beecher’s affair (“The Claflin Family”). Woodhull’s arrest was the result of Anthony Comstock’s systematic censorship campaign. Comstock was a conservative Christian activist who set up Woodhull and others by calling upon obscure censorship laws from the late 1700s (Horowitz). *The Times* reported that Woodhull and her sister published an “obsence” and “libelous” article, but does not indicate what the article was about, or what was “obsence” or “libelous” about it at all (“The Claflin Family”). Woodhull had published details about Beecher’s affair with Theodore Tilton’s wife to emphasize how men’s sexual infidelities were hidden and women’s were on display. Beecher was also her nemesis who had ruthlessly attacked her many times over. To Woodhull, “Beecher’s wrong” was “not adultery, but hypocrisy” (qtd in Horowitz, 416). Woodhull was imprisoned for thirty days, through the 1872 Presidential Election, preventing her from campaigning.

Woodhull's arrest was political. Charges weren't filed against other publishers who released the information like *The Tribune* and *The New York Sun*, convincing Woodhull that "had she been a male editor of a newspaper, she would not have been arrested" (Horowitz 426-427). Such repression of a well-known U.S. Presidential candidate, one would think, would result in at least a mention from *The Times*, especially given that the paper was keen to report on Woodhull's regular banal activities. But her politically-charged arrest and imprisonment, they failed to note. In fact, *The Times* never again mentioned that Woodhull was a candidate for President for the remainder of her campaign.

Throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s, *The New York Times*'s coverage of Victoria Woodhull was slanderous and served to mock and insult her rather than to cover actual news about her life. As Horowitz's article about sex in the 1870s notes, "The middle-class public could not support Woodhull and oppose Comstock, for if they did, it would seem that they supported the racy" (Horowitz 429). Horowitz's article showed that many did not support Woodhull because it would have been too scandalous to do so for the time period; likely, this was *The Times*'s rationale for slandering her. Though Woodhull was acquitted of the charges against her, it didn't matter, as "her American career was crushed by the battle" (Horowitz 431). *The Times* maintained the position that Woodhull needed to be condemned or ignored. Articles such as "The Dangerous Illness of Victoria Woodhull," published on June 6, 1873, indicated that *The Times* had received reports of Woodhull's death. But, she had not died. An article published the next day announced that she was indeed alive. No further mention was made about Woodhull's health and *The Times* did not report on her again until June 30, 1873, when an article titled "The Woodhull Family" offered that one of Woodhull's sisters had claimed that Victoria Woodhull had beaten her "cruelly and without cause." Woodhull, twenty-four days earlier, was

reportedly in her death bed. But then, in 1873—a time when people were known to die in the U.S. from simple diarrhea—Woodhull miraculously regained enough strength to beat her younger sister? *The Times*, like much of New York, was irresponsible in its reporting and actively campaigned against Woodhull, the person and the candidate.

The Times published a variety of sexist fluff over the next ten-or-so years of Woodhull's life before they stopped writing about her altogether. Even her death in 1927 received no mention. *The Times* was obsessed with the inner workings of Woodhull's family life and treated her like hot gossip. "Victoria Woodhull had so few defenders..." Horowitz wrote, "because she appeared dangerous" (430). *The Times* mentioned Woodhull's death in a 1928 book review of *The Terrible Siren*, a biography on Woodhull's life. R.L. Duffus claimed that the biography was written with "admirable irony and restraint" because:

[The author] exposes facts which prove that Victoria was no model of the feminine virtues ... and yet manages to make the picture of a most dramatic and alluring personality. Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton did more for equal suffrage and equal rights and were more admirable human beings, but Victoria put on a better show.

Duffus's clear disdain for Woodhull's character, even in his book review on her biography—his dislike for her less-than-"feminine virtues"—shows that Woodhull had become an enemy of the patriarchal media establishment and that her demonization was influenced by sexism.

Stanton and Woodhull waged their electoral campaigns in the mid-19th century before women were granted the right to vote in 1919, but truthfully, not much changed afterwards. Sexists dug in their heels against women's political power by insisting that, though women had the right to vote, they did not have the right to run for office. As documented by historian Kristi Anderson, in Missouri in 1920 the Attorney General ruled that women were not qualified to

serve because one must be “a male voter and a voter for two years before the election” (Anderson 122). The Arkansas and Massachusetts Attorney Generals made the same ruling. It wasn’t until 1942 in Oklahoma that women were allowed to run for high state offices (Anderson 123). Imagine the insult, that even after the 19th Amendment, feminists had to organize massive legal and organizing campaigns so that women could run. Women thought they won in 1919, but misogyny held on; white-knuckled and desperate for power, control, and domination. The feminist fight continued and women ran for office against all odds to prove their right to run *and* win.

New York, for all its leadership in the campaign for women’s suffrage and the right to run, did not immediately welcome a leftist woman into office until the election of Shirley Chisholm. In national elections in New York, the first two women to win U.S. Congressional seats were Republicans (“Women Representatives and Senators by Congress, 1917-Present”). A series of moderate Democrats were elected next. Caroline Love Goodwin O’Day was the first Democratic woman to be elected to U.S. Congress in New York in 1934, but she held no notable feminist stances (“Women Representatives and Senators by Congress, 1917-Present”). Edna Flannery Kelly was New York State’s second Democrat for U.S. Congress to be elected in 1949 (“Women Representatives and Senators by Congress, 1917-Present”); she was neither a feminist nor a leftist, and was most known for her staunch career fighting against communism and supporting the House Committee on Un-American Activities (“Kelly, Edna Flannery”). Kelly’s politics became notably to the right of her district, which shifted in 1968 to represent a more racially diverse voter base (“Kelly, Edna Flannery”). Redistricting and the voters’s desire to end the Vietnam War made room for a truly leftist woman: it made way for Shirley Chisholm.

Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm faced sexism and racism common against black women in the 1960s as she built her campaign for national office. First, Chisholm's campaign was ignored: her historic run for U.S. Congress in 1968 received little substantive coverage from *The New York Times*. In the first article announcing her candidacy for the 1968 Democratic Congressional Primary, the headline read: "3 Negroes Weigh House Race in New Brooklyn 12th District" (Caldwell). Chisholm was the only black woman in the race and received no coverage of substance on her candidacy. Later, once Chisholm won the Democratic primary and was set to compete against James Farmer, a black Republican with a national reputation as a civil rights leader, *The Times* headline read, "Farmer and Woman in Lively Bedford-Stuyvesant Race," (Kifner). By marking Chisholm as the unnamed "woman" in the article's title, Kifner counted Chisholm out of the running. However, within the article itself, Kifner wrote in measured tones about each candidate, covering their biographies and the basics of their campaign messaging. The press as a whole seemed to agree that the race was Farmer's to lose. Susan Brownmiller wrote in *The New York Times*:

The Farmer-vs.-Chisholm campaign attracted national coverage, but ... the focus was on James Farmer ... The Chisholm camp found N.B.C.'s weekend special "The Campaign and the Candidates" particularly galling. The half-hour show devoted itself almost exclusively to Farmer. N.B.C. newsfolk still insist that they were justified. Farmer was a "national figure" who made the story "newsworthy." (Brownmiller)

The press believed Farmer would represent the district and saw it fit to give him a heightened degree of coverage, thus cyclically reproducing the advantage that he already had as a man and as a nationally-known figure.

Farmer's campaign strategy emphasized his masculinity while seeking to discredit Chisholm based on gendered stereotyping; a strategy that proved ineffective. In *The Times*, Kifner highlighted her opponent James Farmer's masculine positioning, writing, "While Mr. Farmer does not assail Mrs. Chisholm directly, his printed matter dwells on the need for a 'strong male image' and 'a man's voice' in Washington." Farmer "toured the district with sound trucks manned by young dudes with Afros, beating tom toms: the big, black, male image," wrote Chisholm in her autobiography *Unbought and Unbossed* (87). Farmer's tactics portrayed Chisholm as a "bossy female"; but she had "never thought to use [sex] as an asset" until Farmer forced the strategy on her (Chisholm 87). She became a "woman candidate" because Farmer ran primarily on the basis of being a man. Women voted more than men in the district, 2.5 to 1. When the election results came in, Chisholm won the election against Farmer with the same ratio, 2.5 to 1 (Chisholm 94). Chisholm won women's vote and ultimately won the election.

Farmer's masculinity became a liability in 1968, when the second wave of the feminist movement was full steam ahead, and it was a liability that Chisholm exploited. Chisholm wrote that what Farmer "thought was his strength was his Achilles' heel" (91), or that Farmer's explicit masculinity was what hurt him in the race. Farmer seemed oblivious to the larger feminist movement happening around him and the impact of this movement upon his candidacy. He was running a campaign with 1950s messaging in 1968, a year that would later become known for its civil and women's rights protests all across the country. Chisholm was the perfect candidate for 1968 in Brooklyn, and Farmer's campaign did not seem to notice the feminist movement happening all around him. Chisholm's campaign highlighted the absurdities of Farmer's patriarchal campaign, likely costing him the election.

Sexism against Chisholm didn't end when she won her historic victory into Congress; her husband and the husbands of other Congresswomen received undeserved credit for their wives's successes. Less than a week after Chisholm's election, *The Times* published an article about the husbands of Congresswomen and how they managed to make do without women's work in their homes. "It Takes a Special Kind of Man to Be a Congress woman's Husband," Lisa Hammel's title declared, proclaiming that to make such a marriage work, "the woman must have a strong conviction about her job and a talent for organizing household details." Hammel noted that a hired "part-time cleaning woman" did the housekeeping for all of the Congresswomen and that the men almost always ate food out. One man, Hammel wrote, even "forays into the kitchen to make grilled cheese sandwiches." While Hammel's tone benevolently teased the men's inexperience with household chores, she simultaneously noted the absence of traditional womanhood in their homes, suggesting that problems arise when women dare to work. Hammel bemusedly quoted one husband who stated that since he didn't have a lot of money to donate to campaigns, he would "donate" his wife, U.S. Congresswoman Catherine May. Congresswoman May was, according to her husband, his property to donate and Hammel's article genuinely praised the husband for his support. These men were given gold stars by the press for simply getting out of their wives's way.

Chisholm's husband Conrad was not specifically praised in Hammel's article, but the press and the public regularly put him on a pedestal for supporting his wife's career, as was common for all husbands of Congresswomen. Brownmiller's article "This is Fighting Mrs. Chisholm" featured three paragraphs on Chisholm's "solidly built" husband to highlight his support for his wife, where he "firmly" declared, "I am not threatened by her in any way." Brownmiller deliberately highlighted Conrad Chisholm's masculinity to show that women can

be in politics without reversing traditional gender roles. She softened the “threat” of women politicians by showcasing that Congresswomen can still have gendered marriages and masculine husbands. “Men kept asking me,” Shirley Chisholm wrote, “‘What does your husband think about all of this?’ ... they meant to imply that, after all, ‘a woman’s place...’” (95). Women like Chisholm were only in Congress, according to the implications of the press and much of the public, because their husbands allowed them to be. The press reinforced traditional gender roles and assumptions about masculinity and femininity by exoticizing Congresswomen’s marriages.

Likely all Congresswomen in the 1960s were exoticized, but this exoticization only increased when one was both a woman and black. Shirley Chisholm noted that she was famous because she was the first and only black woman in Congress, which proved how unjust the United States is. She wrote that her gender and race:

makes me a celebrity, a kind of sideshow attraction ... When you put it that way, it sounds like a foolish reason for fame. In a just and free society it would be foolish. That I am a national figure because I was the first person in 192 years to be at once a congressman, black, and a woman proves, I would think, that our society is not yet either just or free. (19)

Chisholm consistently noted that she did not want to be a celebrity for her race and gender, but rather for her accomplishments and independence. “I felt like a monkey in a cage,” she continued in her autobiography (19). Chisholm was exoticized for her race and gender and as a result, it was easy for the media and the public to look past the full content of her character and focus on her personal identity.

Chisholm became a celebrity due to her historic election to Congress, but with intelligence, hard work, and independence she built a national reputation to make her a viable

candidate for the President in 1972. Though Chisholm was a complex and strategic Congresswoman, much of the country saw her only for her race and gender: they saw her as the black woman Congresswoman, and that was that. When Chisholm announced her candidacy, she didn't think the country was ready for a black woman to take the country's highest office, but she rigorously campaigned in battleground states to win delegates and influence the platform of the Democratic National Convention. Chisholm stated that her candidacy was "paving the way for people of other ethnic groups, including blacks, to run and perhaps win the office," because she knew that her election was unlikely (Lynch 26:57-27:24). She saw how the press and the public reacted to her candidacy and likely, being the strategist that she was, did not think she would win against her white male competitors.

Chisholm may have had a steep mountain to climb, but when she announced that she would run on September 18, 1971, the mainstream media largely did not take her seriously whatsoever and mostly ignored her announcement. The day after Chisholm's announcement, *The New York Times* published an opinion piece by Andrew H. Greeley entitled, "For a Black Vice President in 1872," which argued that the country should nominate a black man for Vice President (Greeley). Greeley indicated that this would have to be "a special kind of man" who could "appeal to the white American majority" and then went on to list a number of black candidates—all men and not the *one* black person who had already indicated that she would run—Shirley Chisholm. Another qualified woman in politics was invisibilized by sexist media coverage that simply would not seriously consider a woman candidate for U.S. President.

Sexist men opposed Chisholm's candidacy regardless of whether they were white, black, or men of color: they opposed her because they were sexist and did not believe a woman should or *could* be President. However, *The Times* emphasized sexism within the *black* community

instead of sexism among all races against Chisholm, as if to point the finger away from the sexism of white America and towards the sexism of black men. One unnamed black leader in a 1972 *Times* article entitled, “What Makes Shirley Run” said, “She’s a militant feminist and she rubs us the wrong way” (Lynn). To anonymously quote a black leader for his opinion on Chisholm amounts to nothing more than petty gossip. Another *Times* article featured a prominent—and named—black leader’s claim that there was “widespread dissatisfaction” with Chisholm in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn (Johnson). Yet another by Tom Buckley indicates that “trouble is bubbling” in Chisholm’s home district with black leaders opposing her leadership. Buckley stated that Chisholm was acting “as dramatic as a black Judith Anderson playing Lady MacBeth” in the Presidential race, only to note later that no one dared challenge her because she was “unbeatable.” Chisholm was indeed “unbeatable” and any “dissatisfaction” among black leaders, named or unnamed, was irrelevant to her district; she won every Congressional race in which she ran. So why did Buckley or Johnson or Lynn—or any white man journalist in *The Times*—write these articles of essentially non-news about black men opposed to Chisholm? In another *Times* article, the paper offered more non-news: “Chisholm Appeal Divides Blacks” (Delaney). Here, Paul Delaney wrote about black “disharmony” after the 1972 Democratic Primary candidate was set. Delaney quotes Maynard Jackson, a black man who was Vice Mayor of Atlanta, who said, “Obviously, the convention was further evidence that black people are not monolithic” (Delaney). It took a black man to tell the white men of *The Times* this “obvious” information: black people—like white people, like women, like all *people*, are not the same.

Articles from *The Times*, paired with analyses from Chisholm and other feminists, show that Chisholm’s double oppression due to her race and gender ensured that much of the

mainstream media would not take her seriously as a national candidate. In an interview in the early 2000s when she was reflecting on her Presidential race decades after her run, Chisholm stated:

Oh the media? You want to talk about the media? The media says, you know, Shirley Chisholm is half crazy. Oh, she's smart and everything but she knows she can't be president. (Lynch 45:17-26)

Her reflection was based on her everyday experiences on the campaign trail. For example, when Chisholm lost the California Primary in early June 1972, *Times*'s reporter Wallace Turner reported that Chisholm was "never a serious contender." *The Times* even had to herve to ask Chisholm if she was serious about her campaign while she was on the campaign trail (Narvaez). She retorted, "What do you think I've been doing for the last seven months, crisscrossing the country? Of course, I'm serious" (Narvaez).

The constant dismissal of Chisholm and women politicians in general was noted by many feminists. Casey Miller and Kate Swift in their 1972 article, "One Small Step for Genkind" wrote:

Nowhere are women rendered more invisible by language than in politics. The United States Constitution, in describing the qualifications for Representative, Senator and President, refers to each as he. No wonder Shirley Chisholm ... has found it difficult to be taken seriously.

Chisholm experienced a combination of this invisibility on a day-to-day basis, as did candidates like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Victoria Woodhull. They, like Chisholm, struggled to receive the same coverage as their counterparts who were men. Chisholm even launched a successful lawsuit to grant her equal time during a televised debate among Presidential candidates (Lynch).

Chisholm and Woodhull both raised vital leftist issues on a national platform made only possible by her campaign for President and acquisition of delegates, which molded the Democratic Party platform.

Chisholm may have lost the Democratic Presidential nomination in 1972, but she ran a historic campaign that refused to be ignored, tokenized, and marginalized. She demanded a seat at the table, she pulled up a chair, and she sat down. Chisholm's presence as the first black woman to win delegates at a major party convention, as an independent "militant" who was endorsed by the Black Panthers and Betty Friedan alike, was significant for the left. She lost the nomination, but she—like others before her—proved women's right to run for office. No matter the establishment's refusal to support her, Chisholm proved that a black woman could and *would* be President someday.

Women like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Shirley Chisholm fought historic battles that were essential in the larger fight for women's equity in politics. Stanton and Woodhull's races, combined with the suffrage movement, paved the way so that Chisholm could win—so that leftist women like Chisholm could win well into the future. Woodhull and Chisholm, whose runs for the U.S. Presidency were one hundred years apart, knew that pathways for women needed to be paved, and took it upon themselves to pave them. They didn't run for president because they believed they could win. They ran as an exercise in the radical imagination—to show what would someday be possible. Every piece of media coverage that took their campaigns seriously, every reporter who asked these candidates about their ideas and ideals instead of their gender, built a step for women to run for office in the future. The U.S. still has mountains to climb, perhaps taller mountains than many prior eras in U.S. history. But if Stanton, Woodhull, and Chisholm serve as any indication, women will slip on their climbing

shoes and harnesses and continue to make history.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HILLARY TEST

Sexism against women politicians has taken a dangerous turn in the post-2016 world, fueled by a re-invigorated sexist culture. Throughout the history of women in politics, the media have often played a contributing role in perpetuating sexism with biased reporting. However, for many feminists, post-2016 feels different. For the first time in the history of this country, the President of the United States has bragged about sexual assault on tape; he has been accused of sexual assault by upwards of twelve women. His casual sexism and monstrous misogyny belittles and shames women in politics that disagree with him. This systemic sexism, which disproportionately impacts marginalized and left women, is not new. It's plagued women since they first ran for office in the 1860s and continues into 2018. However, sexists and misogynists in the United States have a new leader: a man who ruthlessly defends himself against allegations of sexual assault and skewers the accusers of his right-wing friends. Women politicians from the spectrum of liberal to left politics are targeted and are gearing up to fight back.

To transform this culture, feminists must commit to fighting sexism against women candidates unilaterally, regardless of their politics. This fight, of course, must take on many different tactics to be effective: direct action, civil disobedience, protests, voting, running for office, and more. This chapter proposes that the public and the media implement a "Hillary Test," or a checklist to weed out gender biases in politics. The Hillary Test can also be used by the media or individual voters to determine if they are relying on stereotypes and sexism towards women candidates or the person's policy positions. Ultimately, the Hillary Test is one small tool to root out biases for and against women in the media and in the public, where women are so often judged for characteristics commonly associated with their gender and not the substance of their policy positions.

The previous chapter highlighted media sexism against women candidates for political office, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Shirley Chisholm. The chapter argued that the media's sexism and neglect of women political candidates creates unfair advantages for male candidates and has cost women their electoral races. Both Stanton and Woodhull lost their elections, as the chapter indicated, and though Chisholm won her campaigns for U.S. Congress, she *lost* her campaign for President. Further, Chapter One argued that the left can radically change society through reformist-based campaigns, like suffrage. These analyses set the stage for analyzing the candidacy of Hillary Rodham Clinton and all together argue that feminists must work to dismantle sexism in politics.

The “likeability” of a political candidate can determine a candidate's success and whether or not they will be elected. As the old saying goes, people vote for the person they'd like to have a beer with. Likeability brings candidates a “mysterious advantage that cannot be quantified and will, in the end, carry the day” (Rothman), but this likeability does not exist in a vacuum, particularly for women politicians. How can a man *like* you when he is a misogynist who hates women, or when his benevolent sexism prevents him from seeing women as leaders? Politicians must balance presenting themselves as genuine while also pandering to the various political interests that get a person elected. For women, being liked is complicated. If a candidate is a woman who does not wear makeup, will a normative populace and an appearance-obsessed media reward her with their votes or support? It's harder for marginalized people to be seen as “likeable,” because the “isms” of the electorate will often impact a person's favorability. The “mysterious advantage” of likeability may not be so “mysterious” after all; it may simply be the edge that white men have when they run for office.

Hillary Rodham Clinton, like Shirley Chisholm, was confronted by the sexism of a nation that prides itself on gender equality but has yet to elect a woman president. There are whole books dedicated to Hillary Clinton's likeability; a case in point is Edward Klein's book *Unlikeable*, which berated Clinton's "self-righteous side" and "ferocious temper" (Klein 3). The conundrum that women face when running for office was coined by Taylor Marsh in her 2014 book *The Hillary Effect*. "Hillary was the first female presidential candidate to come out of the feminist movement. Her candidacy is also the last of its kind" (15), Marsh wrote in 2014, believing that Clinton's Presidential run in 2008 successfully paved the way for other women politicians. Marsh was optimistic. She thought that Clinton's candidacy alone would help dismantle sexism facing women in politics (Marsh 18). But she was wrong. The same misogynist criticisms of Clinton's 2008 candidacy reared their ugly heads again in Clinton's 2016 campaign. Sexism, for Hillary Clinton, was a current that ran through her entire public life and defined the cautious, scripted politician that she eventually became.

Media attacks on Hillary Rodham Clinton first began when she entered the political arena. Her husband, Bill Clinton, ran for Arkansas Governor in 1978. On a local TV Show interview in 1979, Hillary Clinton was interviewed about her so-called "unconventional marriage" with the country's youngest governor at the time (Tavani). She appears in her usual look of the 1970s Hillary Clinton era: large octagonal glasses, a sepia tint darkening the lenses. The frames are a thick plastic—the kind you might find in a free bin at a church fair—and imparted a curious but intelligent intensity. Her hair is tied half-up messily, and she dons a pink blazer and white turtleneck. She wears no earrings or noticeable make-up. She bears little to no resemblance, style-wise, to the Hillary Rodham Clinton of today, and not because styles have changed in the past fifty years, but because Clinton was not adhering to the feminine

expectations of married heterosexual women of the time period. She didn't look like a "Governor's wife." She looked like, in another world, in another time, she herself could be Governor.

After a few minutes of asking about then-Rodham's marriage, the eager host stated, "I should think you must very tired by getting questions by... newsmen like me about your decision not to use your husband's name" (10:00-11:30). He did not ask a leading question, but made a statement—fact instead of opinion. Perhaps deliberately, perhaps ignorantly, the host asked this question of a woman who, in the 1970s, was joined by only 17% of women who also did not take on their husband's names; and who did so to make a deliberate political statement (Tavani). She was Ms. Rodham. The interviewer looked at Clinton's outfit, her poised demeanor, and decided: I'm going to get to the bottom of this Rodham-woman-married-to-the-Governor-who-won't-take-his-name.

Clinton, bearing only slight resemblance to the calculating political mastermind that she was to become, shifts her eyes at first and then focuses back to the interviewer, defiant. She does not smile, but appears lawyerly and firm, tight-lipped and unrehearsed. The question is understandable, she muses, but she made the right decision. The host again questions if her decision cost her husband votes, and questions Clinton's own liberal image as a Governor's wife in the South. Clinton responds:

One cannot live one's life based on what somebody else's image of you might be. I suppose that there have been many wives of politicians who may have had serious problems personally because they were worried about the image that they had and as to whether or not that would hurt their husband. All one can do is live the life God gave you, and you just do the best you can.

But still, the fact remained: in the middle of the conservative South, a 32-year-old woman—wife of the Governor—would not change her name.

The interviewer referenced what had indeed been attacks against Arkansas Gubernatorial candidate Bill Clinton. His wife had embraced the feminist politics of the 1970s and went by Ms. Rodham instead of Mrs. Clinton, and this upset the electorate. Howell Raines wrote in a July 3, 1978 article for *The New York Times*:

Mr. Clinton was the subject in the gubernatorial primary of a generalized attack from what he calls “social ultraconservatives.” They accused him, in effect, of importing liberal ideas on gun control, marijuana laws, capital punishment and women's rights.

Finally, the attack focused on the fact that Mr. Clinton's wife, a politically active lawyer he met at Yale, has retained her maiden name.

Indeed, critiques of Hillary Clinton for her feminist life—exhibited by her maiden name, her unconventional appearance, and her career—were common attacks against Bill Clinton. She was the express lane in a Bill-bashing highway. Hillary Clinton was not even running for office, and already the public had turned against her because she refused to embrace patriarchal expectations of her role in society as a Governor's wife.

Hillary Clinton's tenacity—her refusal to conform—while persistent, was not infinite. Bill Clinton, the youngest governor to serve in the country when he first won the office, lost his re-election campaign for Governor in 1980. Voters and the press named his wife as a top reason (Raines). Hillary Clinton felt that she had to change her name if her husband was to gain the approval of conservative voters in the state she now called home. “In the end, Hillary decided, with her typical practicality, that keeping her maiden name wasn't worth offending the people she cared about,” wrote Bill Clinton in *My Life* (25). She likely didn't much care for “social

ultraconservatives” who critiqued her name, but she always cared about political power, be it for herself or her husband. “I decided it was more important for Bill to be Governor again than it was for me to keep my maiden name,” she admitted (Clinton, *Living History*, 93). She cynically joked in her autobiography that her friends would quip about staging an “elaborate scenario” where:

Bill would put his foot on my throat, yank me by my hair and say something like, “Woman, you’re going to take my last name and that’s that!” Flags would wave, hymns would be sung, and the name would change. (Clinton, *Living History*, 65)

Hillary Clinton ultimately changed her name for Bill, but he didn’t force her to do it. Clinton’s vision of the bigger picture, of the insignificance of rhetorical battles when there were wars to be won, foreshadowed her practical approach to policy-making in her own political career. Just as she was pragmatic about her last name, she would prove to be about politics.

Sexism against Clinton has continued throughout her career and is so ubiquitous, it has even made even the back of her head unmistakable. Her hair has followed her throughout her campaigns and has become her trademark. Textured and blonde like light maple wood, conservatively cut above her shoulders, tightly styled with mouse or hair spray or whatever the go-to product was at the time. Hair that, average and unremarkable as it may seem, has been the subject of spirited debate and controversy. Hillary haters cried “hairgate!” when Clinton received a six-hundred-dollar haircut (Olen); others attacked newly revealed hairstyles as plain ugly (Drexler). Memes were created. Skits written. Clinton, a woman who has never been much known for her sense of humor, has even jokingly pointed out the absurdities. In her 2018 Twitter biography, she begins, “2016 Democratic Nominee, SecState, Senator, hair icon” (HillaryClinton). “Hair icon” is fourth on Hillary Rodham Clinton’s list of accomplishments,

before she identifies as a “Mom, Wife, Grandma x2, lawyer, advocate, fan of walks in the woods & standing up for our democracy.” Clinton uses feminist satire and her hair as a euphemism, perhaps for all women who run for office and are criticized for their physical appearance. It’s as if she’s acknowledging that as a woman politician she was criticized for everything from her shoes to her hair, but still persevered.

Clinton has met an unreal, obscene, and even comical level of criticism. Before she even ran for office herself, she was criticized for her career and demeanor. Maureen Dowd, *New York Times* columnist who was a beat reporter until 1995, wrote in a 1992 article in *The Times* on Bill Clinton’s Presidential election:

Republicans now regard the outspoken wife of the Arkansas Governor as one more vulnerability in an already vulnerable Clinton campaign.... "Hillary Clinton is exceedingly polarizing," said Roger Stone, a Republican consultant. "It's not that she's an accomplished modern woman. It's just that she's grating, abrasive and boastful..."

One Republican campaign official suggests that it is less her sex than her demeanor, noting that Mrs. Clinton is "a hall monitor" type whose drive and earnestness are offputting.... Now the campaign is keeping Mrs. Clinton on a low-key schedule while strategists try to figure out a way to mend her image problems.

At this point, Hillary Clinton had not even run for office on her own, and merely *existing* as her husband’s equal, having a career and bringing home “more than five times” her husband’s salary—as Dowd eagerly mentioned—was too much for the media to swallow. Dowd further noted that “even in a rush” Clinton still would include “her family name when she signs autographs, Hillary Rodham Clinton.” Maureen Dowd, even as a reporter, could not distance her strong opinions and biases from her writing. In this 1992 article, Dowd displayed sexist reporting

that repeated sexist comments by unnamed sources to shape her story. To note, there are no people—men or women—quoted in Dowd’s article who admire Clinton’s legal accomplishments and strategic mind or who voice any positive support for her. Dowd’s article was nothing more than Dowd’s own opinion masquerading as news—which ultimately is the op-ed writing that she is famous for today—but it had the backing of the reputable *New York Times*. Sexism was a constant for Clinton and in 1992, she was harpooned by the mainstream media for little more than having a career and an atypical personality for the wife of a U.S. Presidential candidate.

The media’s attacks on Hillary Clinton began immediately and simply did not stop. They didn’t stop in 1980 after she took on her husband’s name, in 1993 when she entered the White House as First Lady, in 2008 when she lost the Democratic Presidential primary, or in 2016 when she lost the Presidential election. Clinton, despite these constant and often blatantly sexist criticisms, still tried to improve her relationship with the press. She stated that when she geared up to run again in 2015, “I focused on... drumroll for emphasis—how to improve my relationship with the press” (Clinton, *What Happened*, 66). Clinton, despite her efforts and deliberation, would find that this task proved impossible. Some of the press might never support her, no matter what she did. Susan Bordo in *The Destruction of Hillary Clinton* noted some of the media’s more outlandish claims: that Don Imus called Clinton “Satan” and Chris Matthews labeled her “witchy” and a “she-devil” during the 2016 race (Bordo 51). These 2016 slurs were similar to a Washington newspaper that claimed in the 90s Clinton was “having séances in the White House to communicate directly with Eleanor’s [Roosevelt’s] spirit” (Clinton, *What Happened*, 12). Bordo wrote:

The construction of this cagey Hillary Clinton was so relentless, so embedded in virtually every story about her, that it made no difference whether you were watching Fox News or

MSNBC—unlikeable, untrustworthy, unpopular Hillary was all you were going to get.

(Bordo 54)

Conservatives's description of Clinton as a "devil" was the same insult levied against Presidential candidate Victoria Woodhull's in 1872, nearly one hundred and fifty years prior. It was recycled sexism, plain and simple.

Women candidates are expected to do the impossible: to be pretty, but not to spend too much time or money on their appearance; to work hard but not to look overworked; to be able to take a punch, but not give one in return. To smile at insults. To laugh at jeers. "The moment a woman steps forward and says, 'I'm running for office,' it begins: the analysis of her face, her body, her voice, her demeanor; the diminishment of her stature, her ideas, her accomplishments, her integrity," writes Clinton (*What Happened*, 116). She also notes:

The few times I've gone out in public without makeup, it's made the news. So I sigh and I keep getting back in that chair, and I dream of a future in which women in the public eye don't have to wear makeup if they don't want to and no one cares. (Clinton, *What Happened*, 86)

The relentless critique of Clinton's physique is something that a lot of women relate to. They, too, experience these sexist standards and want to change the sexist system, and intended to overthrow sexism by electing Hillary Clinton as President.

Hillary Rodham Clinton has, in her forty years in politics, come to represent the Democratic establishment and is a controversial figure among progressives. She has been on varying sides of the political spectrum throughout her life. For some movements, Clinton was an activist supporting civil rights and feminist issues, and for many she was the establishment, targeted for her complicity in creating neoliberal and imperialist policies. The list of positive and

negative Hillary Clinton policies could (and have) filled many a book, and will not be reiterated in this chapter—but to paint it with a broad stroke, her political work leans from liberal Democrat on social issues to conservative Democrat on foreign policy. Clinton has been an inconsistent progressive, an unreliable conservative, but a consistent politician.

Many legitimate critiques of Clinton—her support for the Iraq War, her positions on government intervention—were hushed by feminist liberals who were tired of attacks against her. Liberal feminist defensiveness was not directed solely at sexist attacks against Clinton’s gender, which were legitimate defenses, but to all controversial matters of Clinton’s *policies*. For example, Susan Bord—Professor of Feminist Philosophy at the University of Kentucky, a published author, and a Hillary Clinton supporter—pointed out Bernie Sanders’s contributions to sexism against Clinton and noted that Sanders’s painting of Clinton as the “status quo” was “factually incorrect” (84). Bordo then listed all of the ways that Clinton was not a part of the “establishment” and argues that Clinton’s policies were left of the mainstream. Here, Bordo entered into a fantastical world where Clinton is a leftist hero—a fantasy that has no basis in the reality of the imperialist, corporatist, capitalist policies that Clinton championed throughout her career. Most astonishing is Bordo’s claim that Clinton is not a part of the establishment; in fact, it is precisely Clinton’s experience *within* the establishment that many supporters believed would make her a good President. Bottom line: Clinton served as a U.S. Senator in 2000 and U.S. Secretary of State in 2008, helping to create national policies that guided American capitalist imperialism for years. It doesn’t get more establishment than that. Feminist liberals were so desperate to have a woman president that they defended Clinton against principled left concerns.

Sexism against Clinton is vile, but much of the left's critiques of Clinton are firmly rooted in left principles. Roqayah Chamseddine criticized liberal Clinton supporters in *Paste Magazine*:

Joanna Bamberger, author of *Love Her, Love Her Not: The Hillary Paradox*, wrote, "Maybe it's time to admit that likability and perceived perfection aren't the best checklist items on which to judge a presidential candidate" There is no so-called "perfection myth" that haunts the left in regards to Clinton, but instead the guidance of principles, something a number of her most vocal supporters can use.

As Chamseddine indicates, there are plenty of reasons for the left not to support Hillary Clinton, and they all have to do with her politics. The very notion that the left be called anti-feminist for sincerely opposing Clinton's policies is absurd.

With Clinton, some feminists found themselves in a conundrum. Unlike the right-wing misogyny that deemed Clinton unlikeable and Satanic, to some feminist women, Clinton's personality inspired. Brilliant and tough, harsh and confident—feminists who were swept up in Clinton's *cult de personalite*, became obsessed with her as a pantsuit-wearing policy wonk whose election would shatter the nation's highest glass ceiling. But these supporters fell into the same trap that Clinton's misogynist critics had: some saw a candidate's personality and identity as indicative of her politics and policy proposals. As history has proven, being of a marginalized community does not guarantee one will support policies to uplift *all* marginalized communities. The attempt to "silence leftist voices" and "dismiss critics" of Clinton, as Chamseddine noted, disallowed productive discourse between leftists and liberals about Clinton's candidacy. The spectrum of left to right voters in the U.S. should have welcomed critiques of Clinton for her

policy positions and record as an elected official, not her gender, but many among the left and the right proved unable to do so.

To make room for left critiques against some women candidates's policies and to support women in politics against sexist attacks, feminists must create what I call a "Hillary Test," which is modeled after the famed Bechdel Test. The Bechdel Test was coined by Alison Bechdel in her comic with Liz Wallace, *Dykes to Watch Out For*. In this comic strip two characters go to a movie theater and one character tells the other about "the rule," which is that she "only goes to a movie if it follows three basic requirements" (Bechdel and Wallace). To pass the rule, films must have (1) at least two women, (2) the women must "talk to each other" about (3) "something besides a man" (Bechdel and Wallace). The second character replies that this is "pretty strict, but a good idea" and then the two exit the movie theatre, presumably unable to see a single movie that meets their guidelines (Bechdel and Wallace). The Bechdel Test has become a standard for feminist critiques of films, and has likely impacted the way that some directors depict women characters. The Test also inspired a similar idea, The Finkbeiner Test, which includes "seven rules to avoid gratuitous gender profiles of female scientists" and was coined by Christie Aschwanden in honor of her colleague Anna Finkbeiner (Brainard). The Test recommends that reporters adopt a "simple, seven-part test" to ensure that articles about women in science do not mention:

- The fact that she's a woman
- Her husband's job
- Her child-care arrangements
- How she nurtures her underlings
- How she was taken aback by the competitiveness in her field

- How she's such a role model for other women
- How she's the 'first woman to...'

The Finkbeiner Test and the Bechdel Test both allude to a similar idea: that sexist biases or stereotyping in reporting and in film need to be eliminated so that the complexity of women's characters can be fully analyzed or depicted.

The Hillary Test is a method that the public and media should employ before criticizing or supporting a given candidate, which would help determine if their opinions are rooted by a candidate's positions or personality. Clinton herself has alluded to the many ways women in politics will be criticized in the chapter "On Being a Woman in Politics" in her 2017 autobiography, *What Happened*. Clinton writes, "Think how often you've heard these words used about women who lead: angry, strident, feisty, difficult, irritable, bossy, brassy, emotional, abrasive, high-maintenance, ambitious" (119). The Hillary Test is named after Hillary Clinton for three reasons:

- (1) her career exemplifies the nasty sexism and misogyny that women in politics face in general;
- (2) her public life is a strong case study of sexism against women politicians in the media; and
- (3) her policy positions prove that the left must be able to criticize women candidates without accusations of sexism against them.

The Hillary Test acknowledges that defending women in politics against sexism is different than endorsing and voting for the candidate. However, a universal feminist principle is to fight sexism against women. Therefore, left feminists must fight to dismantle sexism against women political

candidates—and yes, that means defending Hillary Clinton against sexism while still being able to critique her on her politics.

The Hillary Test is a method to weed out biases for or against women and can be used by any media outlet, political organization, or lay person. First, the Test demands that women candidates receive equal political coverage and air time as men and are not invisibilized by sexist media outlets throughout their campaigns. This invisibility was evident in the political careers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, and Shirley Chisholm as shown in Chapter Two. The Test would also eliminate the following topics in any form of evaluation, private or public; and would similarly eliminate such coverage from the media:

- Personal appearance, including her perceived age, hair, face, teeth, makeup, or outfits
- “Likeability”
- “Masculinity”
- Sense of humor or perceived lack thereof
- Voice
- Confidence, arrogance, anger, or ego
- Ambition
- Emotions

This list could also be expanded as more feminists evaluate biases towards women candidates.

Regardless of a woman’s characteristics or policies, from Shirley Chisholm to Hillary Clinton, if a candidate is a woman in politics, she will meet sexism. The question is not how women politicians can change their behavior to prevent sexism, but what feminists can do to stop critics in their tracks and decisively declare that women have the right to run.

Much of the Hillary Test is designed to protect women politicians against critiques that they have “masculine” attributes commonly associated with and praised among candidates who are men. When someone says that a woman is “grating, abrasive and boastful,” which Republican consultant Roger Stone declared Clinton (Dowd); or a “militant feminist” who “rubs” him the wrong way, as one critic opined about Shirley Chisholm (Lynn); these criticisms are based in women having so-called aggressive personalities that would be praised in men. The Hillary Test highlights the absurdity of these critiques against women. The same words intended to dismantle women are read as *positive* when attributed to men—if they’re talked about at all. “Likeability” is rarely a problem for men, as confidence, ego, and ambition are usually perceived as masculine and therefore positive. These same attributes, when applied to women are automatically negative when evaluated through a sexist lens that respects the rigidity of gender roles and “woman’s place,” as Shirley Chisholm herself noted in 1972 (95).

Part of the resistance against women in politics is a fear that women would embrace masculinity and step outside of their assigned gender roles, a direct threat to patriarchal society. In *Female Masculinity*, queer theorist Jack Halberstam notes “masculinity” may not have a specific definition but:

as a society we have little trouble in recognizing it, and indeed we spend massive amounts of time and money ratifying and supporting the versions of masculinity that we enjoy and trust; many of these “heroic masculinities” depend absolutely on the subordination of alternative masculinities. (1)

These “alternative masculinities,” for women, are a threat to the “dominant masculinity”—or masculinity plus maleness—on which patriarchal society thrives (Halberstam 16). Dominant masculinity is further threatened when women political candidates exhibit alternative

masculinities, because if they were in positions of power, they could determine policies that threaten patriarchal society.

Homophobia and transphobia contribute to this irrational fear of women in politics. The very fear rooted in sexism, one that has been reiterated time and time again by sexist men, is that feminism is a movement that encourages lesbianism. In an article about Hillary Clinton in 1992, William Safire indicated that Clinton's "natural womanism"—or defending Bill Clinton against women who accused him of sexual misconduct—was less dangerous than feminism. Safire then quotes novelist Sally Quinn, who writes that "militant feminism" is "anti-male, anti-child, anti-family, anti-feminine ... with overtones of lesbianism and man-hating" (qtd in Safire).

According to Safire, only when Clinton defended her husband did she embrace a "natural womanism;" otherwise, she represented a form of feminism with "overtones of lesbianism." Sexists are afraid of women's masculinity, but they're more afraid of the disappearance of gender roles that queerness threatens. Lesbianism is the essence of this threat—the embrace of a new role for women in public life and private life. When masculine behaviors are exhibited by queer women candidates, those who are responsible for writing the very policies that could make life easier for queer, gender non-conforming, and trans people, they are met with even harsher opposition from the mainstream.

Black political candidates, both men and women, experience racism that leads to vicious criticisms that are fueled by their race and not their policies. These attacks aim to create fear among the electorate so that the public will not vote for a black candidate. In Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential campaign, for example, a Political Action Committee that supported John McCain and Sarah Palin attempted to capitalize on the nation's racism by airing a campaign advertisement about Obama's then-infamous relationship with former Weather Underground

member Bill Ayers. McCain-Palin's ad featured images of Obama with his skin darkened to fuel the nation's latent racism that assumes black men are criminals ("New Study Suggests Racism Was a Factor in Anti-Obama Campaigning in 2008"). Racism continues to impact black candidates who run for office and is exploited by their opponents. In another example, Antonio Delgado, graduate of Harvard Law School, top lawyer, and 2018 Democratic Congressional candidate in the Hudson Valley of New York, was the target of a racist ad campaign because of a rap album he released ten years ago (Herndon). *The Times* notes in an editorial that his candidate, incumbent Congressman John Faso was counting on the electorate to be bigots. "How else can we explain Mr. Faso's contention that his Democratic challenger, Antonio Delgado, is unfit for office because he had a career as a rapper a decade ago?" they ask ("John Faso Is Race-Baiting His Opponent"). Ultimately, Antonio Delgado won his 2018 campaign against incumbent John Faso and he is now a U.S. Congressman, proving that racism was not an effective way to win voters in his district in 2018. However, as long as racism can be an effective strategy to win votes in the United States, candidates will exploit their opponent's race to win.

Racism ignites with sexism to oppress black women and women of color who are political candidates. Black women experience both racism and sexism that create greater disadvantages for them in politics. Shirley Chisholm experienced this "superexploitation," as Claudia Jones named the oppression that black women face, or the "intersectionality" of black women's oppression, first articulated by Kimberle Crenshaw. When Shirley Chisholm said that her gender and race made her a "sideshow attraction" because she was "at once a congressman, black, and a woman" (19), she noted that her identity as a black woman in politics doubled her oppression. By fighting against sexism and fighting twice as hard to support black women and women of color who run for office, feminists can seek to dismantle this form of discrimination.

Sexism in politics is thread into the very fabric of the American flag and eliminating such sexism must be a goal of the feminist movement. Women's representation in elected office is abysmal; the U.S. "ranks 89th in the world for percentage of women in its national legislature," writes Steven Hill in *The Nation*. U.S. political culture is so sexist that the media assumes and expects a candidate to be a man, and when a candidate is not, they often do not know how to react. For example, when Sarah Palin was announced as John McCain's running mate in 2008, *Newsweek* had been given an exclusive to reveal the candidate. As revealed by *The New York Times*, *Newsweek* assumed that the candidate would be a man and set up harsh "male" lighting which exposed Palin's imperfections—most notably the hair on her upper lip. Palin was slammed for her facial hair, and the Republican Party even accused *Newsweek* of sabotage for publishing such an unflattering picture (Baird). For an influential media outlet like *Newsweek* to assume that the Republican Vice Presidential nominee would be a man shows how deeply sexism runs in American media. *Newsweek's* gamble wasn't unsubstantiated of course; Palin was the second woman in American history to ever be nominated as a Vice Presidential candidate in either party. The Hillary Test seeks to eliminate this overt sexism among the media, among the public, and to eliminate the coinciding consequences that this has for women in politics.

The Hillary Test is but one tactic among a diversity of tactics that aims to unite feminists in the fight against sexism in politics and open up room for the left to critique candidates based on substance. Given sexism and misogyny in the 2018 political landscape, it is surely not enough to engage in battles of the tongue to thrash sexism. But language does matter, and the combined effort of media and the public's attacks against women in politics can shift political races that define U.S. society for decades. Further, by defending the left's ability to critique candidates's

policies without fear of being mislabeled sexists, the left can more deeply engage in races to support political candidates who share our values, our dreams, and our aspirations for the future.

CHAPTER FOUR: ELECTIONS AS MOVEMENTS: THE FUTURE OF INTERSECTIONAL LEFT POLITICS

It's June, 2018. The dimly lit Bronx bar is flooded with people, hugging, crying, laughing. A buzz of laughter, of joy incarnate crescendos and rises like a tidal wave, ready to overcome everything in its path. The jubilant form a circle like winners of the World Series, surrounding the young woman in the center, the subject of the celebration. Her jaw is slacked open at first and then she smiles brightly, her eyes wide in disbelief. Reporters clamor to capture her immediate reaction, asking her how she feels and if she ever thought this day would come. It's 2018 and it's the start of something new: the start of the unknown. Democratic Socialist Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is slated to become the youngest Congresswoman in U.S. history.

She did the impossible: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won a Democratic Congressional primary race against an incumbent in a campaign that highlighted her socialist politics, her Latina identity, and her community roots. She took what she knew about her neighborhood in the Bronx to run a smart, strategic campaign that much of the Democratic Party mistakenly thought was neither. Feminist leftists like Ocasio-Cortez can overcome sexism and Party politicking when they run campaigns that embrace their identities and leftist ideologies. They create new possibilities when they run as their genuine selves and get support from their community, who want candidates who are their true representatives; who want bold, left policies and politicians who aren't afraid to support them.

This chapter theorizes on how a young leftist Latina successfully won a primary against an incumbent, liberal Democratic Party leader. Throughout my thesis, I have argued that sexism in politics prevents women from winning their political campaigns. From candidate to candidate, I have shown the ways in which sexism has contributed to the defeat of women political

candidates, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, Shirley Chisholm, and Hillary Clinton. In Chapter Two, I argue that Stanton, Woodhull, and Chisholm were both ridiculed or made invisible by a sexist mainstream media who covered them in a sexist manner or did not cover their candidacies at all. In Chapter Three, I show that such biases can be illuminated by what I call the Hillary Test. Throughout my thesis, I argue that feminists need to be united in fighting sexism towards women in politics. But it's a new day for women in the United States. 2018 is different than 2016, and it's not just because Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won a new Congressional seat.

January 20, 2017 marked the first day of office for Donald J. Trump and January 21, 2017 marked what political scientists have called the largest day of protest in U.S. political history. The Women's March, timed for a day after Trump took office, was designed to fight back against the misogyny exhibited by the new Commander in Chief, and in particular his hot mic comment that he is "automatically attracted to beautiful" women and that "when you're a star" you can do anything and "grab 'em by the pussy" (Makela). The March incorporated "pink pussy hats" and signs that read "pussy grabs back" in response to Trump's comments, which seemingly endorsed sexually assaulting women. An estimated 1 out of every 100 people in the United States protested, or between 3.3 to 4.6 million people (Broomfield). These protest numbers may foreshadow a new feminist movement that includes, explicitly and unapologetically, a strategy to get women to run for office and win.

Many feminist theorists have also argued that 2018 represented a new time for women and reinvigorated the women's rights movement. Angela Davis stated in a 2018 talk:

This is an era defined by women. The women's march and the aftermath marked by the inauguration of Trump was an amazing experience.... I think it's important to recognize

that this is a historical conjuncture in which work that has been going on for generations, for decades, and even centuries is now beginning to bear fruit. (Davis, “Abolition Feminism,” 37:15 – 38:00)

Of course, much of the work that Davis refers to includes the intersectional and proto-intersectional feminist movements towards equity for women. The suffrage movement, campaigns among left women to run for office, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez’s political work is all situated within this same movement that is finally bearing fruit: towards a new political era for women.

Women are still fighting for their right to run, to show that regardless of their political connections or gender, in a democratic society, all people have the right to enter into politics. Running as leftists against established Democratic incumbents is not for the faint of heart. As Ayanna Pressley, successful Democratic candidate for 2018 U.S. Congress in Massachusetts said, “I had to spend the first days of this campaign just defending my right to run” (qtd in Chira and Flegenheimer). The Party establishment argue that these left women shouldn’t run, but should wait their turn and get in line (Chira and Flegenheimer). Waiting one’s turn can mean waiting decades for a centrist Democratic incumbent to retire, or working for elected officials and gaining experience until the Party decides “the time is right.” But for many women, their time never comes.

In 2018, women aren’t waiting: they’re running. Ocasio-Cortez is one such woman who shrugged off a lack of support from the Democratic Party, because she didn’t need the Party to run; Ayanna Pressley is another. Heather Cayge of *Politico* suggests it may be Trump’s Presidency or even the momentum of the #metoo movement that is causing record numbers of women to run for office. She writes of the 2018 Midterm elections:

this election cycle, more women are signing up to run for the highest elected offices than ever before — so far, at least 575 women have declared their intention to run for the House, the Senate or governor. (Cayge)

Before Ocasio-Cortez, running and winning as a Democratic Socialist on the Democratic Party line without any endorsement from the Party was mostly a failed hypothesis, but now it's a proven theory.

However, for many leftist women, running for office is not just about replacing patriarchal forms of government, which is significant. Running for office, to left women, is about the larger feminist project to create equity and justice in a world without much of either. As Angela Davis stated:

Women cannot aspire to merely take the place of men, but rather must aspire toward radical transformation. If we simply want to become what white, straight, cis-men in power have been in the past, we're simply replicating the structures that will continue to perpetrate the very violence that we are challenging (Davis, "Abolition Feminism," 39:53 – 40:56).

For Ocasio-Cortez, as this chapter will show, running for office was about a movement to build power among the left and to win elected office as one tactic in a bigger socialist project.

In this chapter, I argue that Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez won her primary against an established incumbent because of several successful political strategies. First, she embraced her identity as a working class Latina, which appealed to voters in her district—many of whom are members of marginalized communities and are working class. Second, she embraced socialist politics and many of the policies that would benefit the working class members of her district, such as universal health care. For this heavily Democratic district, this was a viable strategy.

Third, she battled the mainstream media's sexist tendency to invisibilize her candidacy and deny her campaign equal coverage. She crafted her own message using a combination of traditional door knocking and social media to get the word out. Instead of paying for expensive campaign ads, she spoke to voters directly, either in the district or on social media and attracted young voters in her district with Twitter-savvy messaging that made her campaign go viral.

Ocasio-Cortez was a completely unknown candidate; what *was* known about her was controversial to many, but inspiring to the left and to voters in her district: she was 28, a Democratic socialist, and had never held any elected position in her life. Ocasio-Cortez unseated incumbent Democratic Congressional leader Joe Crowley—potential House Speaker and friend of New York labor unions and progressives, who had more than thirty years in public office. “Women like me aren't supposed to run for office,” Ocasio-Cortez said in one of her campaign videos (qtd in Wang). She had been working as a waitress and bartender at a restaurant in downtown Manhattan until she announced her candidacy, and was running against a career politician: Crowley had the support of labor unions, the Democratic Party establishment, and even the left-leaning Working Families Party. A 28-year old restaurant worker was an unlikely contender for the job, especially against a candidate who, for the most part, was popular among progressives and liberals. But to the left, Ocasio-Cortez was a breath of fresh air.

When Ocasio-Cortez first announced her candidacy, the mainstream mostly ignored her, as the press has done for women political candidates for nearly two centuries. Susan Chira and Matt Flegenheimer were the first reporters in *The New York Times* to write about Ocasio-Cortez's candidacy on May 29, 2018 in an article dedicated to progressive women running for office. The article was published just 28 days before her June 26th election date, not giving voters much time to digest her as a candidate. While other publications had written about Ocasio-

Cortez, *The Times*'s opinion is significant and impactful in New York political circles; their endorsements have been known to shift elections (Dropp and Warsaw). *The Times* article that mentions Ocasio-Cortez was not dedicated solely to her; but was also about Stacey Abrams, Georgia's Democratic Gubernatorial candidate, and other women who "refuse" to "play it safe" (Chira and Flegenheimer). Less than a month before the Primary election involving one of the country's top Democratic Congress members, New York's biggest paper had yet to write a single article about Ocasio-Cortez's candidacy. "Despite no attention, despite no media fanfare, despite the fact that no one wanted for us to get the word out on what was going on, we were able to organize everyday people knocking on our neighbor's doors," Ocasio-Cortez noted in her victory speech ("Ocasio-Cortez Thanks Supporters in Victory Speech," 4:30 – 4:50). The mainstream press closed their doors to Ocasio-Cortez, as if they didn't see her, hear her, or write about her, so she wasn't really there.

Invisibilizing women candidates is nothing new, but is the legacy of sexist media coverage and has continued on into 2018 political campaigns. When one applies Ocasio-Cortez's candidacy through the Hillary Test to analyze sexist media coverage of her campaign, it becomes clear that the media's lack of coverage was a form of sexism against Ocasio-Cortez. It took mainstream media like *The New York Times* far too long to write about her campaign, and even when they did write about her, it was in a story about "women candidates" and not about the spirited political campaign that she was running against Democratic incumbent Congressman Joe Crowley. Ocasio-Cortez applied her own strategy to combat this sexism and to amplify her campaign's message.

Social media and the power of Ocasio-Cortez's Twitter-savvy supporters got traditional media to pay attention to her, despite the sexism that initially invisibilized her campaign. The

media saw Ocasio-Cortez's momentum build after Congressman Joe Crowley sent a Latina surrogate to debate Ocasio-Cortez in his place ("If You Want to Be Speaker"). Ocasio-Cortez dug in. "In a bizzare twist, Rep. Crowley sent a woman with slight resemblance to me as his official surrogate to last night's debate," Ocasio-Cortez vented on Twitter (Ocasio2018). Ocasio-Cortez's Tweet-critique propelled her candidacy forward. *The Times* published the editorial her campaign needed, slamming Crowley for not taking his primary campaign against her seriously. "He'd better hope that voters don't react to his snubs by sending someone else to do the job," they warn ominously ("If You Want to Be Speaker"). Ocasio-Cortez's momentum and Crowley's own oblivious missteps had become impossible to ignore.

Ocasio-Cortez embraced a communications strategy that her voters related to. Her force grew as she successfully flipped the narrative of the race: she wasn't an inexperienced ideologue running against a solidly Democratic working class hero. She was the district's culturally and politically appropriate representative running against an establishment Democrat who did not care enough about voters to show up to his own debate. Crowley even sent another Latina to debate for him. Whether Ocasio-Cortez's critique of Crowley is true or not is irrelevant; she successfully took over the narrative. This story, a Latina socialist rising to victory after an establishment Democrat forgot about voters, became what the people ultimately believed. Her messaging resonated: it was a tale they could relate to and Ocasio-Cortez was a person they felt like they *knew*. On the night of her November 6, 2018 election victory party Ocasio-Cortez noted, "In a district that's 70% people of color, half immigrant and overwhelmingly working class, we have elected the first person of color to ever represent the people of New York's 14th Congressional District" ("Ocasio-Cortez Thanks Supporters in Victory Speech" 1:35-1:47). The district had become a majority minority district of mostly working class people, ultimately

making a white man like Crowley who no longer lived in the district less and less relatable. Voters ultimately hired someone *more like them* to represent them.

Ocasio-Cortez's campaign captured the radical imagination and shows how left women can win. Julia Dietrich imagines the left as a "complex expression of people's hopes" (7). Ocasio-Cortez's campaign was not the product of overpaid strategists or carefully curated focus groups. It was the spontaneity of a jazz artist soloing in front of a dynamic live audience, the daring of a painter who introduces a new medium to her canvass. Ocasio-Cortez was not the product of the Democratic Party nor the Democratic Socialists, she was a daughter of the Bronx. A restaurant worker, first time college graduate, and working class millennial. Her realness sprang from her campaign materials, it catapulted into her interviews and radiated from every one of her selfies and tweets. She took what she knew, what she believed, and who she is: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. She lifted her head high, opened up her arms and stood in front of voters, and they embraced her and claimed her for their own.

Running to move the Democratic Party to the left is a strategy embraced by Ocasio-Cortez and other political candidates. Ocasio-Cortez ran not because she thought she would actually win, and in doing so ran a fearless campaign that was perceived as genuine. "Several candidates this year say they will not measure success solely on whether they win in the end," Chira and Flegenheimer note in *The Times*, referencing Ocasio-Cortez, Stacey Abrams, and other left women candidates. Ocasio-Cortez's campaign was similar to other unlikely races, like actress Cynthia Nixon's race for the 2018 Democratic Gubernatorial Primary in New York State. Analysts have said Nixon moved New York State Governor Andrew Cuomo to the left in what became known as "The Cynthia Effect" (Bellafante). Ginia Bellafante wrote in *The Times* a list

of seven key issues where the Governor has either changed his position entirely or moved his position to the left after Nixon entered the race. Bellafante teased:

Ever since her emergence, the governor has seemed — how to say? — terrified out of his bomber jacket, and has been moving to establish New York as the liberal paradise of a certain kind of voter’s imagination: the kind of voter who would vote for Cynthia Nixon.
(Bellafante)

Nixon’s candidacy, as Bellafante and many others have argued, served to push Cuomo further to the left. Running to lose, so to speak, is a political strategy that can help transform centrist Democrats into progressives, at least during campaign season. Further, an upset is always a possibility for the right candidate in the right district. Running to lose can move the Democratic Party to the left, or can help create a campaign so bold that the leftist challenger just might win. If Ocasio-Cortez had only run when pollsters told her she had a shot, she would likely still be waitressing in downtown Manhattan.

The Democratic Party is not apt to roll out a red carpet for left candidates without traditional political experience or connections. The Party’s leadership generally looks out for a viable, or *safe* candidate for the district. Party leaders who take bold risks and endorse unlikely winners may fail, and thus make their own positions within the Party vulnerable. “We’re not trying to ask permission to get in the door,” Ocasio-Cortez noted (qtd in Chira and Flegenheimer). Had she asked for permission, had she knocked on that door, what would have happened? Well, part of the contested district that Ocasio-Cortez wanted to run for was in Queens. Congressman Joe Crowley himself was head of the Queens Democratic Committee. Had she, a Democratic Socialist with no experience in elected office, asked the Party to run against a Congressman as powerful as Joe Crowley—the very person who makes the decision about *who*

to support, what would have happened? The answer would have likely have been a resounding “No.” So, Ocasio-Cortez did what women leftists have been doing for centuries: she didn’t ask for permission. She put out a call for volunteers, recruited people in her district, and got out on the streets to spread her message the only way her (lack of) campaign dollars would allow. Ocasio-Cortez ran the bold, fierce, principled campaign she wanted to run, and then something unusual happened: the voters responded, and they liked what they saw.

In Ocasio-Cortez, voters saw a woman who put herself out there and was not afraid of her identity or background, and did not tip-toe around her politics. Ocasio-Cortez ran as a leftist—a Latina millennial—and put her socialist politics front and center. Her homepage was decorated with a pop-art feel and bright, exciting colors that give her campaign a young and energetic appearance. Her own smiling face was featured prominently, her eyes looking off into the distance, into the future. Her website showed a young woman who was not afraid to be as bold as the bright colors of her campaign literature. The homepage featured the word “socialist” immediately in her biography that read, “I am an educator, organizer, Democratic Socialist, and born-and-raised New Yorker running to champion working families in Congress” (“Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: Democrat for Congress NY-14). “Democratic Socialist” was the third identifier in her biography. Ocasio-Cortez was seen as genuine because she risked running too far to the left than her district was actually ready for. She risked being perceived as too young or too inexperienced, and she didn’t seem to care. In running as the young, inexperienced, left woman that she was, Ocasio-Cortez proved that she was not swayed by what was popular or what would get her elected, but by what she thought was right. Ocasio-Cortez proved that, for left women running in progressive districts, running a bold campaign that prominently features one’s identity and unapologetically left politics can be a winning campaign strategy.

Even when the media tried to tell a different story, Ocasio-Cortez highlighted her Democratic Socialist politics. Much of the media coverage that Ocasio-Cortez received emphasized other aspects of her identity (like her age, race, class, and gender) while either not mentioning or misidentifying her socialist politics. For example, *The Times*'s first article on Ocasio-Cortez's 2018 Congressional Primary race did not mention her socialist politics. Chronologically out of five *Times* articles where Ocasio-Cortez first appeared, the first (Chira and Flegenheimer) and fifth article (Wolfe) named her as an organizer for Bernie Sanders's campaign—no mention of her being a socialist. The second (“If You Want To Be a Speaker, Mr. Crowley, Don't Take Voters for Granted”), the third as a “Democratic insurgent” (Goldmacher and Mays), and the fourth labeled her a “progressive candidate” (Stack). Her clear socialist identity was not even mentioned.

The Times still attempted to muffle Ocasio-Cortez's socialism after she won in a shocking rebuke of mainstream Democratic candidates. The first article that *The Times* wrote of Ocasio-Cortez's victory names her as an “unabashed liberal” while also calling her a “member of the Democratic Socialists of America” (Goldmacher and Mays). Members of the Democratic Socialists of America are not liberals, lest they'd likely be called the Democratic Liberals of America or something of the sort. They're the Democratic *Socialists* and “unabashed liberals” have nothing to do with it. A follow-up article by *The New York Times* Editorial Board, “What Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Victory Means” noted that “the liberal base is fired up” and again that Ocasio-Cortez is part of a generation of “unabashedly liberal Democrats.” *The Times* mentioned nothing of her *socialist* identity, nor what Ocasio-Cortez's victory meant for *socialists* in the United States.

However, to Ocasio-Cortez's voters, it didn't really matter what *The Times* did or did not say about her. She wasn't relying on her voters to necessarily read the papers or listen to the ads: they heard from the candidate directly. Ocasio-Cortez was "told by her family when she was growing up that *The New York Times* was too expensive to buy" (Dowd, "Local Girl Makes Good"). Unlike most candidates who wait with baited breath for a *Times*'s endorsement, Ocasio-Cortez likely knew from her experience growing up in the district that this marker of success was not what her voters really cared about. She met voters where they were at and crafted a campaign that talked to people on the streets, in their homes, in coffee shops, and throughout the neighborhood that she grew up in. *The Times* and other media became irrelevant; Ocasio-Cortez herself told voters everything they needed to know.

Ocasio-Cortez delivered a definitive statement against the mainstream Democratic Party and a conclusive vote for *socialist* candidates. She won her primary challenge against Congressman Joe Crowley by 4,136 votes or 15 percentage points—a decisive victory. "Few things in life are more predictable than the chances of an incumbent member of the U.S. House of Representatives winning reelection," read a page on Center for Responsive Politics's Open Secrets website; in 2016, 96% of incumbents won their reelection and 95% won in 2015 ("Reelection Rates Over the Years"). Ocasio-Cortez ran against one of the best established and best funded Democrats in the House, making her victory even *less* likely. And she didn't just win, she *crushed* the competition. Voters responded to her socialist message, they related to her story, and they thought that she was the best person to represent them, being that she was *representative* of the district.

The campaign of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is inspiring, but as she herself says, her victory is about so much more than her. She knows that movements are not about individual

people, but they are about *the people*. What is so significant about Ocasio-Cortez is—remarkably enough—not Ocasio-Cortez. As she stated herself in her victory speech:

Words cannot express my gratitude to every organizer, every small dollar donor, every working parent, every dreamer who helped make this movement happen. And that’s exactly what this is. Not a campaign or an election day, but a movement, a larger movement, for social, economic, and racial justice in the United States of America.

(“Ocasio-Cortez Thanks Supporters in Victory Speech” 2:38 – 3:01)

The movement, this diversity of voters in her district who want to see change, who were knocking on doors and spreading her message, is what got her elected—not fancy advertising campaigns or political consultants. The movement is the story that her victory tells: the inspiring story of triumph, of the people uniting to elect a Democratic Socialist woman of color in a heavily Democratic district in New York. Her success provides a roadmap for how other marginalized socialists can potentially win races in progressive pockets of New York and likely all across the country. Ocasio-Cortez’s win is proof of the possible.

Political campaigns are just one strategy that the left can embrace to impact society. “Electoral politics is just a tool in a larger toolbox,” she reminds her supporters at her victory speech (“Ocasio-Cortez Thanks Supporters in Victory Speech,” 14:38-14:50). A recent image shared by Communities United for Police Reform during the 2018 Midterm Election captured this idea brilliantly: an iceberg is in the water. Written on the tip of the iceberg is the word “voting,” and beneath the water’s surface is the majority of the ice, where more than a dozen words like “organize,” “fundraise,” and “protest” are written (ChangetheNYPD). It’s time to create a new image, with Ocasio-Cortez at the tip of the iceberg, and socialist women running for office in 21st century politics just beneath the surface.

CONCLUSION

I love political campaigners: door knockers, leaflet-ers, the people who call me on my cell phone when I'm out to dinner. I love the enthusiasm that comes from volunteers who dedicate their time to participate in a political process that we all so desperately want to be a democracy. But mostly, these inspired Democratic campaigners are peddling candidates whose defining characteristic is membership to a party that, more and more in 2018, lacks identity. Most voters will just give a thumbs up if a campaigner approaches from "their party," and will curse to high heavens if someone approaches from the other side. "Vote Blue No Matter Who," the Party tells us as another mediocre male candidate puts his name on the ballot. So, someone votes Democrat down the line, slaps on a sticker, and moves along with their lives. But what does "Democrat" even mean these days? And does this identity help or hinder women candidates who often look for allies in a party that inconsistently defends women candidates against sexism and inconsistently supports women who want to run? This inconsistency among the Party, from corporate centrists to Democratic Socialists to misogynists and closeted sexual assaulters, requires a more complicated analysis before we endorse whatever Democrat comes into play.

Many Democrats and women in particular were excited during the 2018 Midterm Elections for the opportunity to deliver a decisive blow to the Trump Administration, but ultimately, the blow never came. Democrats wanted a tidal wave of blue to flood into Congress, to decisively strike back against conservatism, racism, and misogyny. Get Out the Vote efforts populated each and every state with the promise that if all Democrats voted, the left would "get the country back" and things would return to normal. But "normal" proved to be an unpopular rallying cry, as a return to business as usual before Donald J. Trump was elected president was still wrought with systemic inequalities. Democratic campaign messaging in 2018 often sounded

like Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama's 2016 refrain that "America already is great" (HillaryClinton), with the new messaging added that Trump was getting in the way of the country's greatness. But this message, in 2018 was still hollow to millions of voters who were working but still poor, who struggled each and every day to get by in this Darwinian late-capitalism. It was hollow to many left women who protested in historic numbers against the country's sexual assaulter in Chief. No, at a time where record inequality has become "normal," a return to the status quo would not do.

What if people choose not to vote because the Democratic Party's candidates are not a reflection of the country's ideals—what if women aren't voting because they don't have inspiring candidates? In a country where the majority of Democratic voters support socialism (Newport) and the majority of Democratic candidates fight against it, surely something is off. In the 2016 election, 25% of voters chose not to vote because they didn't like the candidates, according to a Pew Research Center study (Lopez and Florez). Voters want bold candidates with bold ideas and for Democratic-leaning voters, that means left ideas. They want women who scream and shout with principle and sincerity and they want candidates with values that are in line with their own. They want people they *like*, who relate to them and look like them, who are reflective of their communities.

If we want political candidates to run bold, left campaigns, we have to dismantle sexist roadblocks. Sexism in politics, and the combination of sexism with racism, classism, homophobia, and transphobia must be dismantled if we are to win. As long as sexism prevails, women leftists will have a much harder time than men running fierce political campaigns and will be criticized from everything down to a bold lipstick, let alone if they sport socialism on the campaign trail. Sexism makes it that much harder for women to prove that they too are

trustworthy, likeable, honest candidates. Because of this, the left needs to double down to fight sexism in politics against all women candidates. The Hillary Test must be implemented far and wide so that we stop this incessant criticism of women who run, and so that we as leftists don't just jump on the bandwagon of any woman who runs because we are so desperate to get women in positions of power. We need to be principled leftists as we evaluate our candidates, just as we need to be principled leftists in the fight against sexism.

If the left were to put this grand fear of political work behind us and jump head first into campaigning waters, we would cultivate stronger left candidates who would actually win. These genuine candidates, these uncompromising leftist women, are the future of left politics in this country. Leftists—and intersectional feminist leftists in particular—need to use elections to mobilize to win political office, and then to win transformative policy victories. My thesis calls on leftists to imagine something better and imagine what building a leftist government could create. Helping a leftist run for office, become a major party nominee, and helping them win the election is a strategy the left must embrace to transform the Democratic Party and continue to bring socialist candidates to the forefront. Imagine a government that is shamelessly pro-worker and pro-women, that uplifts and welcomes immigrants, and celebrates people of color, black people, and the queer community. If we never stop dreaming and never stop fighting, this new government, this new democracy, might just come through our doors.

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