Autonomy: The Feminist Ideal

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The conscious struggle for women's rights began in 1792 when Mary Wollstonecraft wrote "A Vindication of the Rights of Women."

In its early years the fight for equality focused on women's suffrage, and the 72-year battle for the right to vote ended victoriously in 1920.

THE WOMEN'S movement itself continued, although its strength was severely diminished. In the 1960s it experienced a sort of rebirth, and today a different kind of women's movement is gaining momentum. Although this new ideology, feminism, evolved from the women's movement, there are major differences between the two.

Feminism can be described as the philosophy which advocates self-definition of an individual's societal role according to personal values as opposed to acceptance of roles imposed by society. Feminism embraces the women's movement and adds another dimension to it by including all people.

There is no doubt in the feminist's mind that women have been and are oppressed in U.S. society—the "land of the free." With this realization comes the understanding the oppressor class exists in an unhealthy state of consciousness.

FEMINISM GOES beyond treating such symptoms as "equal pay for equal work" by recognizing the disease itself can only be overcome by widespread social change. The social illness, including sex-role stereotyping, affects everyone. Massive reorganization of social and personal values can't occur in only half of the population.

The aim of feminism is to eliminate the oldest, most fundamental, most rigid caste system known—the system based on sex. The original division of labor was based upon reproductive function, and evolved into a division of classes. One class has held the opportunities and the control over the lower class. This dehumanizing process has resulted in women becoming members of a subclass of every other class.

FEMINISM SEeks to replace this dominant (male)-submissive (female) class system with a society where people can relate to one another as individuals, not as members of a caste or objects in a manipulative society.

Feminism is neither a war on men, nor a war amongst women. It is a peaceful movement against the system that identifies all of us primarily by sex, toward a society in which the individual defines and identifies herself or himself.

Until a person takes this first step there can be no true liberation of racial, ethnic and other minority, no permanent change for the economically oppressed, no lasting peace—there can be no revolution.