

STATE OF ILLINOIS
82ND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TRANSCRIPTION DEBATE

128th Legislative Day

June 22, 1982

whatever your problem might be, that you'll say you're equal under the Constitution. You're equal under the laws, and you don't want to strip the power of the Illinois General Assembly to implement laws or other states to implement laws to protect you and to help you. And I know that every Member here, whether they vote 'no' or 'yes', are for the concept of equal opportunity and equal protection for all. Thank you."

Speaker Ryan: "Representative Stewart. The Lady from Cook, Representative Stewart."

Stewart: "Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Members of the House. One hundred years before I was born, 'Sojourn Atrouth' stood before a convention in New York City and declared...to speak on behalf of women's right. She recognized the irony of this situation, because she was speaking for colored women who she said had been thrown down so low that nobody ever thought we'd get up again. We've been..But we've been downtrodden long enough. We will come up again, and so I am here. Thus, Ladies and Gentlemen, here it is one hundred and thirty years later that I am here in this House, and I rise on behalf of Black American women who are the descendants of slaves. I rise with 'Sojourn Atrouth', Harriet Tubman, for the 'Sally Hemmings', for Marie Stewart, for Zora Neale Hurston, for 'Fanny Lou Hamer', for 'Flo Clemmons', for these and hundreds and thousands of nameless, faceless women that most of you, who are in this White, male-dominated, privileged chamber have never recognized and certainly don't remember. I rise on behalf of women of color who have always had to fight for some modicum of self respect. I rise on behalf of Hispanic women who don't have a voice in this chamber. I rise on behalf of native American women who don't have a voice in this chamber. I rise on behalf of women who have never,

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ever been part of this protected class that some of the opponents speak so eloquently about, because I, Ladies and Gentlemen, am the product of slavery. I represent nothing that most of you have ever had to respect, namely the color of my skin and my gender. But I don't stand here to petition your 'yes' vote, because what is your Constitution to me? The Declaration of Independence was drafted by a man who, yes, was a founding father, who, yes, was a great economist, but yes, he was a slaveholder and yes, for 37 years he went into the bed of his slave who he thought was the perfect woman. Why? Because she was a slave. And so, Gentlemen, what is your Constitution to me? I don't come here begging you for your 'yes' vote, because those of us who are the lowest of the low find it very easy to accept that the men of this chamber, that is the White privileged men of this chamber, would deny women equal rights. For they..they would seek ...that same tradition would seek to deny me culture. It would seek to deny me intelligence. It would seek to deny me beauty. It seeks to deny me humanity. And I say, quite frankly, what I say I cannot say here, but enough is enough. I could give less than a damn what you think about me, my femininity, my humanity, my culture and my intelligence, because it is. It follows logically. So I stand only to present a truth, and that is you can vote this Amendment up or down. Quite frankly, it doesn't make any difference to me. I think that you are acting as people of your class and tradition have always acted. And you know what? It won't matter, because we've survived much worse than this, and back when I was in school, we had a saying that if things didn't go according to the way you'd like in the classroom, we'd meet you outside at 3:15. And so, White males of the world, it is now 3:15. I represent the majority of people on this

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planet who are women, the majority of people of this planet who are of color, and you cannot have your sovereignty any longer. Why? Because I say so. Thank you."

Speaker Ryan: "Have all voted who wish? Have all voted who wish? The Gentleman from Cook, Representative Griffin."

Griffin: "Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is one of the most painful decisions of my life. I come from a community in which our village president is a woman. Our village clerk is a woman. Our village trustee is a woman, and the heads of many of our organizations, foundations, corporations are women. It's a community that has prospered a great deal under the democracy that this society has enjoyed. But I also come from a community which has a great tradition of families, and churches and a concern about a way of life out of which we've produced Frank Lloyd Wright, Ernest Hemingway and many of the great writers and architects of our society. I'd like to just put on record for now that the...any allegation that anybody who opposes this Amendment is in any way opposed to women, opposed to equal rights among human beings, is doing a great disservice to people, like myself, who have spent our entire lives, our entire adult lives, fighting for these rights. I would like to say that the Equal Rights Amendment does not have to equate with women's rights or equal rights for other human beings, for all of us. It is one approach, and it's an approach that's been brought out that eleven years ago would have worked. It would have had the support of Phyllis Schlafly and Gloria Steinem. It would have had a united front that would have advanced the cause of women's rights far more than what's happened in the last eleven years. The polarization, the emotion, the anger, the rhetoric that we have heard, I believe, is a direct result of a failure in the democratic process in our