The Real ACLU†

Mary Ellen Gale†† and Nadine Strossen†††

INTRODUCTION

Andrea Dworkin's polemic against the American Civil Liberties Union is appropriately entitled "Bait and Switch." While ostensibly attacking the ACLU as anti-feminist and inimical to the rights and needs of women and other disadvantaged groups, Dworkin in fact seeks to discredit an organization that doesn't exist. The real ACLU is and has been for many years something quite different from the white-male-dominated monolith she first imagines and then condemns, primarily for its alleged monomaniacal devotion to disembodied principles in callous disregard of real harms to real people. The real ACLU—the one with which the authors of this essay have been associated for more than fifteen years—was infiltrated and transformed by women, feminists, and feminist ideas, long ago. The real ACLU celebrates and defends the importance of first amendment values, especially unfettered speech, but it also proclaims, nurtures, and struggles to secure for women and historically disempowered minorities

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†† Professor of Law, Whittier College School of Law. A.B. 1962, Radcliffe-Harvard College; J.D. 1971, Yale Law School. Professor Gale, a member of the ACLU National Board of Directors and of its Executive Committee, was President of the ACLU of Southern California from 1985 to 1988. She was Executive Editor of The Southern Courier, a weekly newspaper that reported on the civil rights movement in Alabama and Mississippi, from 1965 to 1968. She served as an ACLU staff attorney in Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles from 1973 to 1976. She has litigated cases and written articles advocating civil rights and women's rights.
††† Professor of Law, New York Law School. A.B. 1972, Harvard-Radcliffe College; J.D. 1975, Harvard Law School. Professor Strossen is General Counsel to the ACLU, a member of the ACLU National Board of Directors and of its Executive Committee, and a member of the National Advisory Board of the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project. She also has been active in several women's rights organizations and has chaired the Hennepin County, Minnesota chapter of the National Women's Political Caucus.

1. Dworkin, The ACLU: Bait and Switch, 1 YALE J.L. & FEMINISM 37 (1989). We might have subtitled this article "A Reply to Andrea Dworkin," but we believe it goes beyond that.
2. Id. at 38. Dworkin focuses on male rather than white male domination. However, since she criticizes ACLU representation of groups organized to further white as well as male supremacy, id. at 38–39, adding the racial adjective seems true to her purpose.
3. Id. at 39.
4. See generally Policy Guide of the American Civil Liberties Union, Policy No. 1-40, at 1–84 (rev. ed. 1989) [hereinafter National ACLU Policy Guide]. The word "unfettered" is used to avoid any confusion about the connotation of the word "free." Cf. Dworkin, supra note 1, at 37 ("Speech is what I do; it ain't free; it costs a lot.") (italics deleted).
5. We generally use the term "minorities" rather than "people of color" because the groups we intend to signify include those differentiated by characteristics other than race or ethnicity, such as religion, sexual orientation, or physical disability. We recognize, however, that the term may "impl[y]
the fourteenth amendment's enduring promises of equality and nondiscrimination.⁶

In trying to illuminate the real ACLU—and to dispel some of the shadows that Dworkin purports to cast over it—we have not organized this article on a purely linear basis. Some of it provides facts about the ACLU. Some of it is written as an explicit or implicit, imagined dialogue with Dworkin. Sometimes our answers go beyond her arguments. Our purpose throughout is to provide a feminist perspective on the ACLU, to explain why we consider it a feminist (though not exclusively feminist) organization, to examine our doubts and differences, and to construct a (perhaps imperfect and incomplete) resolution. Part I provides a feminist history of the ACLU. Part II refutes some of Dworkin's assertions of fact and theory. Part III explores and explains the ACLU’s continued pursuit of both freedom of speech and equality of rights.

I. A FEMINIST HISTORY OF THE ACLU

The real ACLU works to defend and extend civil liberties and civil rights in the real world, in places and times (such as here and now) of trouble, complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction. We try to transcend the limitations of our era and of our collective wisdom, but sometimes we fail. The sexism that has pervaded and distorted American democracy and law for two hundred years has not passed us by.

The ACLU was created in 1920 to combat the repression of civil liberties in the industrial struggle after World War I.⁷ Its primary founder was Roger Baldwin, an astute visionary who remained the ACLU’s national director for nearly thirty years.⁸ Baldwin was an outspoken liberal and a friend and colleague of the political radical Emma Goldman.⁹ He strongly empathized with the powerless and the despised. He believed fiercely that free speech provides the matrix for all other rights and liberties. He insisted on the evenhanded application of civil liberties to all groups, no matter how powerful or pernicious, though he did not always live up to his own ideal of impartiality.¹⁰ He stressed political nonpar-
sanship as an organizational imperative. These basic tenets still shape the
ACLU today. Nonetheless, Baldwin could also be described as a white
male elitist who controlled the organization for many years and stamped
his image upon its program and its structure. Although he encouraged
others to join the civil libertarian cause, he trusted no one but himself to
lead the way. While he appreciated the contribution of women to the
ACLU, his praise sometimes sounded like condescension. The ACLU
has come a long way since then, but from a feminist perspective, we know
that we still have some distance to go.

And yet women and women's issues have always played a bigger role in
the ACLU than Dworkin surmises. The ACLU's founders and early
leaders included prominent feminists such as Jane Addams, Sophonisba
Breckenridge, Mary Ware Dennett, Crystal Eastman, Elizabeth Gurley
Flynn, and Jeannette Rankin. The ACLU took on feminist cases and
cases as early as the 1930's. It opposed laws that forced pregnant school-
teachers out of their jobs and kept them out even after childbirth. It was
an early advocate of equal pay for equal work. Perhaps most crucial, the
ACLU acknowledged the direct link between open discussion of contra-
ception, actual control over reproduction, and full autonomy for women. It
lobbied against federal and state laws banning birth control information
and contraceptives. It defended pioneers like Dennett, who was prosecuted
for distributing information about sex education, and Margaret Sanger,
whose speeches were banned not only in Boston but also in New York
and other cities. In the 1940's the ACLU established a Committee on
Women's Rights to guide its efforts. In the 1950's it lobbied for tax de-
ductions for child care. In a combined assault on sex and race discrimina-

11. Interview with Norman Dorsen, president of the national ACLU, Nov. 3, 1989. Other Bald-
win legacies include a stress on lay (as opposed to staff) leadership, a recognition of the need for local
ACLU affiliates throughout the country (despite his preference for centralized authority), and a de-
ployment of multiple strategies, including political action and public persuasion as well as litigation.
Id. See also S. Walker, supra note 7, at 47 (Baldwin originally preferred militant, direct action to
litigation); National ACLU Policy Guide, supra note 4, Policy No. 1, at 1 (ACLU opposes "any
official determination that deprives any form of expression of the protection of the First Amend-
ment."); id., Policy No. 519, at 505 (ACLU "does not endorse or oppose candidates for elective or
appointive office" except nominees for United States Supreme Court whose appointment would "fun-
damentally jeopardize the Court's historic and critical role in protecting civil liberties").

12. See P. Lamson, supra note 8, at 136, 265; S. Walker, supra note 7, at 204, 267.


14. See ACLU, WOMEN'S RIGHTS PROJECT, ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS REPORT 2 (Spring
1980). Baldwin affirms that in building the ACLU, "Women played a very active and useful role all
over the country, mostly on our local committees...[It was for the most part women who raised the
money, organized the affiliates and staffed the committees. They did the day-to-day, nuts and bolts
work to build the ACLU"). Id. at 11.

15. The information in this and the following paragraph is drawn in part from ACLU, WOMEN'S
RIGHTS PROJECT, WITH LIBERTY AND JUSTICE FOR WOMEN (1989) and ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS
REPORT, supra note 14. See also P. Lamson, supra note 8, at 127-31; S. Walker, supra note 7, at
84.

tion, the ACLU successfully challenged state laws making it a crime for a white woman to bear a child she had conceived with a black father.

During this era the ACLU, along with almost every major feminist organization,17 opposed the Equal Rights Amendment on the basis that it would nullify protective labor legislation for women workers. In this stance the ACLU was true to its roots in the social reform and labor movements of the early 1900's. But the rise of a new feminist consciousness in the 1960's transformed the ACLU's approach to women's issues. Women lawyers, scholars, and activists within and without the ACLU explored new issues as well as new perspectives on old issues.18 In 1970, with almost no dissent, the ACLU National Board reversed its stand on the ERA, criticizing the Supreme Court of the United States for failing to apply the fourteenth amendment to sex discrimination.19 Since then the ACLU has opposed protective laws applicable only to women because they lead to "the denial of desirable employment, the promotion of occupational segregation, the furtherance of women's economic dependence, and perpetuation of the notion that childbearing and childrearing are women's most important roles."20

In the 1960's the ACLU was the first organization to argue in the Supreme Court for the abortion rights of all women. In the early 1970's the ACLU declared women's rights its top priority and created both the Women's Rights Project to seek constitutional equality through litigation and the Reproductive Freedom Project to enforce and expand contraception and abortion rights it had helped secure through such major decisions as Griswold v. Connecticut21 and Doe v. Bolton,22 the companion case to

17. The primary exception was Alice Paul's National Woman's Party, comprised mostly of professional and upper-middle-class women, which originally proposed the ERA. See J. Mansbridge, Why We Lost the ERA 8 (1986); S. Walker, supra note 7, at 166–67. However, beginning in the 1930's with the National Association of Women Lawyers and the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs, support for the ERA widened; by the 1950's, leaders of both major political parties supported the ERA. J. Mansbridge, supra, at 9. By 1970, when the ACLU reversed its position, the invalidation of women-only protective labor laws by judicial interpretation of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, 42 U.S.C. § 2000e et seq. (1982), had largely mooted union opposition to the ERA. J. Mansbridge, supra, at 10. See also Rights of Passage: The Past and Future of the ERA 3–35 (J. Hoff-Wilson ed. 1986)(discussing origins of and early disagreement over the ERA).

18. Among the most important advocates of change within the ACLU were Ruth Bader Ginsburg, now Judge of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, who served as ACLU general counsel, argued several women's rights cases before the Supreme Court, and was a primary founder of the Women's Rights Project; and feminist lawyers and leaders Dorothy Kenyon, Pauli Murray, and Harriet Pilpel, all of whom served for many years on the ACLU National Board and led committees working to establish women's rights. See S. Walker, supra note 7, at 301–02, 304–05. Kenyon was the first ACLU activist to support abortion rights. Id. at 167. Pilpel, general counsel for both the ACLU and Planned Parenthood, prodded the ACLU to take an early stand against laws criminalizing abortion and homosexual relationships. Id. at 301–02.


21. 381 U.S. 479 (1965) (constitutionally protected "zone of privacy" forbids state punishment of married couple for using contraceptives). ACLU involvement is documented in ACLU Women's
Roe v. Wade. After Congress restricted federal funding of abortions for indigents, the ACLU National Board resolved in 1977 that a primary goal was to establish abortion rights for all women. In recent years the ACLU has litigated extensively to protect women's reproductive self-determination, participating in almost every major Supreme Court case and handling eighty percent of all such cases nationwide. Two of the

RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 14, at 3.

22. 410 U.S. 179 (1973) (state may not require all abortions to be performed in hospitals or only after approval of a doctor or committee other than the woman's physician). ACLU involvement is documented in ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 14, at 6.

23. 410 U.S. 113 (1973) (constitutional right of privacy encompasses woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy).

24. According to Reproductive Freedom Project dockets and annual reports (sources available with authors), among the major Supreme Court abortion cases in which the ACLU provided direct representation for women and/or abortion providers are: Webster v. Reproductive Health Services, 109 S.Ct. 3040 (1989) (state may ban use of public employees, facilities, and resources to aid abortions and may require medical tests of fetal viability); Thornburgh v. American College of Obstetricians & Gynecologists, 476 U.S. 747 (1986) (state statute requiring doctor to use abortion technique that maximizes chance of fetal survival except where it poses significantly greater risk to life or health of pregnant woman is unconstitutional); Akre v. Akron Center for Reproductive Health, 462 U.S. 416 (1983) (state may require abortion providers to inform pregnant women of details of fetal development, risks of abortion, or available social services nor impose 24-hour waiting period after patient signs consent form; mature minor or one who can show abortion is in her best interests must have opportunity to obtain it through judicial proceeding as well as through parental consent); H.L. v. Matheson, 450 U.S. 398 (1981) (state may require doctor to notify, if possible, parents of immature minor seeking abortion who has made no showing that abortion or waiver of notice would serve her best interests); Harris v. McRae, 448 U.S. 297 (1980) (government may refuse to pay for indigent women's medically necessary abortions even though it pays for medical costs of childbirth); Bellotti v. Baird, 443 U.S. 622 (1979) (state may protect immature minors by requiring some parental involvement in abortion decision); Colautti v. Franklin, 439 U.S. 379 (1979) (state may not require doctor to maximize fetal survival chances at cost of greater risk to woman's life and health); Maher v. Roe, 432 U.S. 464 (1977) (government may refuse to pay for indigent women's elective abortions even though it pays for medical costs of childbirth); Planned Parenthood v. Danforth, 428 U.S. 52 (1976) (state may not ban medically safe abortion techniques, require burdensome or privacy-invasive recordkeeping on abortions, or give husband or parents absolute veto over abortion, but may require woman's written informed consent); Bigelow v. Virginia, 421 U.S. 809 (1975) (state may not ban advertising by abortion clinics); Doe v. Bolton, 410 U.S. 179 (1973) (state may not require all abortions to be performed in hospitals); United States v. Vuitch, 402 U.S. 62 (1971) (law criminalizing doctor's performance of abortion unless necessary to preserve pregnant woman's life or health requires prosecution to prove abortion physically and psychologically unnecessary).

25. The percentage figure is based on a nationwide study conducted by the ACLU's Reproductive Freedom Project in 1989.

three abortion cases originally scheduled for hearing by the Supreme Court during the 1989-90 Term are ACLU cases. 26

The first Women's Rights Project case to reach the Supreme Court was Reed v. Reed, 27 a landmark that established gender discrimination as a violation of the fourteenth amendment's equal protection clause. In Frontiero v. Richardson 28 in 1973, the ACLU persuaded four Justices to declare sex a suspect classification comparable to race 29—as close as the Court has yet come to acknowledging the true power and intransigence of sex discrimination in our society. The ACLU also has won Supreme Court decisions prohibiting the systematic exclusion of women from juries, 30 equalizing social security benefits for women workers, 31 rejecting sex-segregated higher education, 32 protecting equal employment rights and opportunties for women, 33 and ensuring women's equal access to business and professional organizations that traditionally were exclusively male. 34 A study published in 1983 concluded that the ACLU was the single most effective representative of women's rights in the courts nation-

26. They are Hodgson v. Minnesota, 853 F.2d 1452 (8th Cir. 1988) (upholding as constitutional a state statute requiring a minor seeking an abortion either to obtain a court order or to notify both of her biological parents, even if they are absent, divorced, or never married), cert. granted, 109 S. Ct. 3240 (1989) (Nos. 88-1125, 88-1309); and Turnock v. Ragsdale, 841 F.2d 1358 (7th Cir. 1988) (invalidating as unconstitutional state statutes requiring doctors to perform all abortions in hospitals or stringenty regulated surgical centers instead of outpatient clinics or doctors' offices), cert. granted, 109 S. Ct. 3239 (1989) (No. 88-790). As this article was prepared for publication, Ragsdale apparently was settled, subject to Court approval. L.A. Times, Nov. 23, 1989, at A1, col. 5. ACLU involvement is documented in ACLU, REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM PROJECT 6-8 (Annual Report 1988).

27. 404 U.S. 71 (1971) (state may not provide mandatory preference for male over female applicants to administer decedent's estate). ACLU involvement is documented in ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 14, at 5.

28. 411 U.S. 677 (1973) (fifth amendment due process clause forbids federal government to provide automatic dependent's benefits to spouses of male members of the armed services while denying such benefits to spouses of female members unless the male spouses actually received over half their support from their military wives). ACLU involvement is documented in ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 14, at 7.

29. Id. at 682 (plurality opinion).

30. Duren v. Missouri, 439 U.S. 357 (1979) (invalidating state law that provided automatic jury exemption for women who so requested); Taylor v. Louisiana, 419 U.S. 522 (1975) (invalidating, under sixth amendment, jury selection system that operated to exclude women). ACLU involvement is documented respectively in ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 14, at 9, 7.

31. Califano v. Goldfarb, 430 U.S. 199 (1977) (invalidating social security provision awarding automatic widow's benefits but denying widower's benefits unless the male spouse received at least half his support from his deceased wife); Weinberger v. Wiesenfeld, 420 U.S. 636 (1975) (invalidating social security provision awarding benefits to widows but not widowers responsible for dependent children). ACLU involvement is documented in ACLU WOMEN'S RIGHTS REPORT, supra note 14, at 8.


34. Board of Directors of Rotary Int'l v. Rotary Club, 481 U.S. 537 (1987) (men's business and professional club cannot assert first amendment rights of association to avoid compliance with California statute banning discrimination against women).
wide, and credited the ACLU for much of the "high success rate" of sex discrimination cases in the Supreme Court.35

Within the ACLU, power is no longer concentrated in the hands and minds of white males. In 1970, the national ACLU adopted an affirmative action policy "to increase significantly the representation of women on all policy-making bodies and committees of the organization" and "to open up to women all executive and policy-making staff positions." In 1980, it established a goal of twenty percent racial or ethnic minorities and fifty percent women at every level of staff employment. Shortly thereafter the same percentage goals were set for membership on the ACLU National Board.36 Women and racial minorities now act in leadership roles throughout the organization. Women occupy more than a third of the positions on the national board of directors.37 Two of the four lawyers who serve as national general counsel are women; another is a black male.38 Although national ACLU presidents and executive directors to date have all been white males, two of the five top national ACLU staff members are women; two, including the legal director, are black (one male, one female). Women direct six of the ACLU's eleven major national projects, those concerned with children's rights, gay and lesbian rights, national security litigation, reproductive freedom, women's rights, and the civil liberties of persons with AIDS. Women and minorities have also played increasingly prominent roles within the ACLU affiliates.39


37. As of April 1989, the 31 ACLU national board members who had been elected at-large included 14 women (45%) and seven minorities (23%). The 51 national board members who represented ACLU affiliates (generally state-wide organizations, although California has three separate affiliates) included 16 women (31%) and four minorities (8%). ACLU Nominating Committee Memorandum at 3, 7, (June 4, 1989). In 1970, when the ACLU first endorsed internal affirmative action, only five (8%) of its 66 national board members were women. S. Walker, supra note 7, at 305.

38. They are Professor Strossen, Professor Vivian Berger of Columbia Law School, and Professor Leroy Clark of Catholic University School of Law.

39. For example, since 1977 the presidents of the Southern California ACLU affiliate have been three women and two minorities (both Latino males). Women have served as executive directors of the Southern California affiliate since 1972, the Northern California affiliate since 1978, and the San Diego affiliate since it was created in 1988. The Southern California affiliate's affirmative action policy for staff employment sets minimum goals of one-half women and one-third racial or ethnic minorities. Policy Guide of the ACLU of Southern California, Policy No. 526, at 106-16 (rev. ed. 1987). The affiliate's bylaws require that of its 45 directors elected at-large, at least one-half shall be women and one-third shall be racial or ethnic minorities. Bylaws of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, art. ix, § 6, at 19-20 (1988).
II. SOME REFUTATIONS OF DWORKIN'S CRITICISMS

Of course, such examples of good works and good will do not prove that the ACLU is a feminist organization as Dworkin defines that term. She accuses the ACLU of “working both sides of the street” because it promotes freedom of speech for everyone, regardless of content or form, regardless of politics or ideology, and even (in some circumstances) regardless of the harms that may follow. By thus easing the way for racist and misogynist hate groups, Dworkin charges, the ACLU forfeits any claim to respect as a champion of equal rights for the people those groups condemn. Her arguments deserve a genuine reply. But her attack bristles with inaccuracies, distortions, quarter-truths, and intemperate language that combine to skew the framework for discussion. They must be answered first, to provide a context that is closer to the complex and multifaceted truth.

Dworkin incorrectly contends that in 1975 the ACLU “rope[d] in feminists” to pretend that it was a “strong feminist organization” when it was not. Yet by then both the Women’s Rights Project and the Reproductive Freedom Project were actively lobbying and litigating on behalf of a wide variety of feminist causes. The feminists who supported the ACLU then and who support it now have never been deceived. They chose and choose to support its program because they recognize that it benefits women.

In addition, Dworkin asserts that “[t]he ACLU is immune to criticism because virtually none gets published—none on the Left.” She thus imagines the ACLU as an integral link in a liberal power structure that chains and gags dissent, especially female dissent, though she inconsistently personifies the ACLU as a single-minded, strong-armed, strident-voiced (and presumably male) bully for the first amendment. But the facts don’t fit her theory. Over the years the ACLU has repeatedly and publicly been censured by rightists, centrists, and leftists. Its outspoken critics include conservative scholar William A. Donohue, President George Bush, and former Attorney General Edwin Meese III, Harvard law professor Alan M. Dershowitz, liberal activists and columnists, prominent

40. Dworkin, supra note 1, at 39.
41. Id. at 37.
42. Id. at 37.
43. See id. at 39 (an example of using strong language to distort the facts and to distract the reader’s attention from the distortion: “The symbol of free speech ACLU-style might well be a woman tied, chained, strung up, and gagged.”).
44. See generally W. DONOHUE, THE POLITICS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION (1985) (charging that the ACLU has a left-wing agenda).
46. See Dershowitz, ACLU Takes a Wrong Turn, in A. DERSHOWITZ, TAKING LIBERTIES: A DECADE OF HARD CASES, BAD LAWS, AND BUM RAPS 139-41 (1988). Dershowitz launches an attack almost exactly opposite to Dworkin’s, contending that “[t]he ACLU and many of its local affiliates have increasingly become the captive of feminists and leftists in recent years. Women’s issues,
members of the National Lawyers Guild (who condemned the ACLU for “poisonous evenhandedness” in defending the free speech rights of groups that oppose free speech), and Victor S. Navasky, editor of The Nation magazine. The authors of three profiles of the ACLU, published in 1966, 1978, and 1989 in The New York Times Magazine, discovered and rediscovered, and quoted at length, detractors whose dissatisfaction with the ACLU prefigured (though in different rhetorical style) the charges that Dworkin makes.

In arguing that “[t]he ACLU, in philosophy and practice, makes no distinction between Right and Left,” and that the ACLU’s “fight is not against the Right in any form,” Dworkin takes a quarter-truth and bends it to mislead. In reality, the ACLU makes no distinction between the constitutional rights and liberties (free speech, due process, privacy, equal protection) of the political right and left; but ACLU policies recognize, and its programs act to remedy, the differences between historically dominant and oppressed groups. The ACLU endorses affirmative action to redress racial, sexual, and sexual-orientation discrimination in employment, education, and housing. It asserts the rights of privacy and intimate association on behalf of gays and lesbians. It advocates governmental neutrality on religious matters.

particularly the right to have an abortion, have dominated the agenda.” See, supra note 40.

Professor Dershowitz’s nationally syndicated column has frequently criticized the ACLU for straying from his view of civil liberties. See, e.g., A. DERSHOWITZ supra, at 90–91, 96, 141–43, 264–65 (reprinting columns).


49. See V. NAVASKY, NAMING NAMES 48–51 (1980) (criticizing ACLU leaders for compromising civil liberties by actions during 1940’s and ‘50’s including expulsion of Communists, refusal to represent Communists, and secret collaboration with FBI).

50. Leeds, supra note 45; Lukas, supra note 48; Samuels, The Fight for Civil Liberties Never Stays Won, N.Y. Times, June 19, 1966, § 6, at 14, 66. Internal and external criticism of the ACLU’s defense of free speech for Nazis extends back at least to 1934. See S. WALKER, supra note 7, at 116.

51. Dworkin, supra note 1, at 38.

52. Id. at 38–39.


55. Id., Policy No. 80–84, at 159–66. In the Scopes trial of 1925, perhaps the ACLU’s most famous trial court loss, Clarence Darrow argued for evolutionary theory and academic freedom against the religious right. See, e.g., S. WALKER, supra note 7, at 72–75. The ACLU defended religious neutrality—this time successfully—again six decades later in response to Louisiana and Arkansas statutes that required public schools to teach biblical “creation science” as well as evolution. See Edwards v. Aguillard, 482 U.S. 578 (1987) (statute violates first amendment prohibition on establishment of religion); McLean v. Arkansas Bd. of Educ., 529 F. Supp. 1255 (E.D. Ark. 1982) (same); S. WALKER, supra note 7, at 342–43, 439. ACLU cases challenging the display of religious symbols on
compulsory draft registration, and supports conscientious objection to military service. All of these ACLU positions—in addition to its support for women's reproductive freedom and equal rights—have long been associated with the political left. All of them have time and again brought the ACLU into conflict with the conservative and reactionary right.

Contrary to Dworkin's contention, the ACLU does not expend significant resources in defending the freedom to denounce racial minorities or to demean women through pornographic stereotypes. Such cases represent a tiny fraction of its docket and its budget. The ACLU does expend significant resources to combat all forms of discrimination against traditionally—or newly—oppressed groups, through projects devoted to furthering the rights not only of women, but also of children, gays and lesbians, workers, immigrants, prisoners, and persons with AIDS. For the past several years, the ACLU's national legal department has focused on civil liberties issues related to race and poverty. The ACLU supported racial equality and backed the civil rights movement in its early years, publishing its own study of legalized racism in 1931 and working with NAACP lawyers to begin planning the attack on segregation. It provided funds and lawyers to defend civil rights activists in the 1960's and has lobbied extensively on behalf of civil rights legislation, including most recently the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987.
ject has helped to empower black voters throughout the southern United States and has facilitated the election of hundreds of black officials. In addition, ACLU affiliates have allocated substantial resources to civil rights cases.

Also contrary to Dworkin’s contention, the ACLU does not justify the defense of racist or sexist speech on the grounds that the speakers present no “real threat” to their chosen victims. We know that they do. We know that free speech poses great personal and societal risks, and that the risks are borne, unfairly and disproportionately, by individuals and groups that any just and humane society would single out instead for respect, compassion, help, and even reparation for past wrongs. But we also know that racism, sexism, and silence have combined too often to form an unholy trinity in the history of oppression in the United States.

III. SOME JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE ACLU’S SUPPORT OF FREE SPEECH IN AN IMPERFECT WORLD

The real ACLU is not the juggernaut that Dworkin’s verbal assault presupposes. Though ACLU activists unite in believing that the political process renews and rejustifies itself only when dissent is encouraged to flourish, we divide—and agonize over our divisions—when the speech we defend furthers the social evils of sexism, racism, prejudice, and despair. Because racial domination and gender oppression have proved stubbornly intransigent, because our nation’s social and political consensus still seems to exclude an active commitment to equal justice, some of us in the ACLU no longer adhere to what we view as the discredited argument that “neutral principles” instead of explicit choices among differing values—will

(Supp. 1989)).


64. Dworkin, supra note 1, at 38.

65. The seminal argument that neutral principles are necessary to legitimize judicial review of legislative acts appears in Wechsler, Toward Neutral Principles of Constitutional Law, 73 Harv. L. Rev. 1 (1959) (focusing on neutrality and generality in application of principles without regard to results generated in particular cases to which the principles apply). See also Bork, Neutral Principles and Some First Amendment Problems, 47 Ind. L. J. 1 (1971) (principles must also be neutral in definition and derivation). For (relatively) early criticism, see Deutsch, Neutrality, Legitimacy, and the Supreme Court: Some Intersections Between Law and Political Science, 20 Stan. L. Rev. 169 (1968). For a thoughtful attempt to reconcile Wechsler and his critics, see Greenawalt, The Enduring Significance of Neutral Principles, 78 Colum. L. Rev. 982 (1978) [hereinafter Greenawalt, Neutral Principles] (neutral principles are necessary but not sufficient; judges still must choose among conflicting values in deciding constitutional cases). Cf. Greenawalt, Free Speech Justifications, 89 Colum. L. Rev. 119, 123 n.11 (1989) [hereinafter Greenawalt, Justifications] ("basic premises of
resolve most important legal and moral questions. For us the tension between equality and liberty is in some circumstances real and perplexing; even the ACLU's traditional focus on impartial protection of free speech can be questioned from the perspective of those who have been traditional targets of its indiscriminate exercise. We wonder whether it is too easy for those individuals and groups who benefit from competitive norms of social and political interaction and from the primacy of procedural fairness in classical liberal theory, to deny or denigrate the perceptions, needs, and rights of those who more often lose than win. But some of us in the ACLU continue to insist that in the end, and in service of the ends we seek, liberty and equality reinforce each other. We contend that the ACLU should remain one of the last strong refuges for the process-oriented, content-impartial norms of traditional liberalism—a philosophy and politics that empowered, and provided a moral foundation for, both the civil rights movement of the 1960's and the feminist revival of the 1970's. Out of such fundamental arguments, which perhaps can never be fully resolved, the ACLU nonetheless renews its own strength, and determines when and how to speak and act on questions of public policy that involve civil rights and civil liberties.

That Dworkin disagrees with some of the ACLU's positions is no surprise. It is more surprising that, despite her opposition to pornography, she invokes apparent sexual imagery in accusing the ACLU of serving as "a handmaiden of the pornographers, the Nazis, and the Ku Klux Klan." To turn her metaphor around, such a characterization is a kind of verbal rape, meant to violate the identity and the integrity of the rhetorical victim. In contending that "the ACLU saw to it that the Nazis marched in Skokie" (although the Nazis didn't) and that it seeks "an liberal democracy" do not include "neutrality among ideas of the good").

Some adherents of legal realism and critical legal studies have argued that there are no neutral principles anyway, that law and adjudication are inevitably indeterminate, personal, contextual, and political, and that history precludes starting over on the basis of abstractions about individual and group equality. See, e.g., Cover, The Origins of Judicial Activism in the Protection of Minorities, 91 Yale L.J. 1287 (1982) (exploring tensions between constitutional protection of political processes and minority rights); Dalton, An Essay in the Deconstruction of Contract Doctrine, 94 Yale L.J. 997 (1985); Kennedy, Form and Substance in Private Law Adjudication, 89 Harv. L. Rev. 1685 (1976); Llewellyn, A Realistic Jurisprudence—The Next Step, 30 Colum. L. Rev. 431 (1930); Tushnet, Following the Rules Laid Down: A Critique of Interpretivism and Neutral Principles, 96 Harv. L. Rev. 781, 804–24 (1983).

66. This stance does not preclude recognizing that "[t]he effort to conceive similar settings and develop principles is particularly important when people make moral choices" in order to avoid prejudice, to test our intuitions, to rank and weight competing principles in the context of particular problems, and to develop a coherent moral self. See Greenawalt, Neutral Principles, supra note 65, at 997.

67. Professor Gale tends to take this position, at least on some issues.

68. Professor Strossen supports these views.

69. Dworkin, supra note 1, at 37 (italics deleted). The ACLU has no objection to emotionally powerful words and images; we merely note the inconsistency of Dworkin's objection to them when used by others.

70. Id. at 38.

71. The Nazis canceled their Skokie rally after winning their case in the courts. They demon-
absence of distinctions" between venal and virtuous groups and words,28 Dworkin herself glosses over distinctions that the ACLU has long argued are vital to the ideal of democratic self-government.

We know that free speech never comes cheaply and often is very expensive indeed. Not so long ago, proponents of dissenting views were regularly sent to jail or prison.29 If free speech is to have meaning, it must encompass "freedom for the thought that we hate,"27 freedom for the idea, opinion, or expression that is unpopular, divergent, degraded, derided, dangerous, or even pornographic or obscene.26 The ACLU doesn't see to it that such thoughts are formed or expressed, but rather that they remain unsuppressed—to ensure that the cacophony of democracy will include all voices.

Our position is based partly on the hope that in the "marketplace of ideas" the wisest voices will prevail, and that free expression "will ultimately produce a more capable citizenry and more perfect polity."78 In one of his best-known dissents, Justice Holmes passionately defended this view as the theory of our Constitution:

[W]hen men [sic] have realized that time has upset many fighting faiths, they may come to believe even more than they believe the very foundations of their own conduct that the ultimate good desired is


72. Dworkin, supra note 1, at 39.


74. United States v. Schwimmer, 279 U.S. 644, 655 (1929) (Holmes, J., dissenting). Cf. Communist Party v. Subversive Activities Control Bd., 367 U.S. 1, 137 (1961) (Black, J., dissenting) ("freedoms of speech, press, petition and assembly . . . must be accorded to the ideas we hate or sooner or later they will be denied to the ideas we cherish."); Abrams v. United States, 250 U.S. 616, 630 (1919) (Holmes, J., dissenting) ("we should be eternally vigilant against attempts to check the expression of opinions that we loathe and believe to be fraught with death, unless they so imminently threaten immediate interference with . . . the law that an immediate check is required to save the country.").

75. The ACLU opposes "any restraint on the right to create, publish or distribute materials to adults, or the right of adults to choose the materials they read or view, on the basis of obscenity, pornography, or indecency," National ACLU Policy Guide, supra note 4, Policy No. 4, at 6.

better reached by free trade in ideas—that the best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market, and that truth is the only ground upon which their wishes safely can be carried out. "

Even if we are skeptical about the existence of objective truth, either of facts or of values, we may acknowledge that scientific theories have advanced human understanding, and that free discussion, both rational and imaginative, "can test the coherence of value claims, and can elucidate and clarify the values of a culture and of individuals." Yet history and economics may suggest that the market metaphor is suspect and misplaced. The rich have more access than the poor to the most powerful means and media of communication. The articulate lie may prevail over the stuttering truth. The nonfact that smoothly connects with our unconscious prejudices may be believed, while the awkward fact that would contradict or correct them is rejected. Professor Charles Lawrence has persuasively argued that "[t]he American marketplace of ideas was founded with the idea of the racial inferiority of nonwhites as one of its chief commodities, and ever since the market has opened racism has remained arguably the market’s most active item in trade." 

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79. See Greenawalt, Justifications, supra note 65, at 132. This is not a claim that science has a corner on truths that exist independent of human ability to see and structure them. See generally T. KUHN, THE STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS (2d ed. 1970) (describing possibilities and limits of scientific paradigms and paradigm shifts, or "revolutions").

80. For strong criticism of the market metaphor, see Baker, Scope of the First Amendment Freedom of Speech, 25 UCLA L. REV. 964, 974-83 (1978), and Ingber, supra note 78.

81. See L. TRIBE, AMERICAN CONSTITUTIONAL LAW 786 (2d ed. 1988) (given that the rich have more access to the media than the poor, "how can we be sure that ‘free trade in ideas’ is likely to generate truth?"). But see Greenawalt, Justifications, supra note 65, at 134 (if "an aggregation of economic and social power" overwhelms disfavored ideas, "the government might make available new channels of communication or regulate existing channels to assure more equal access."). However, the ACLU has traditionally opposed governmental regulation of print media, even to promote equality, urging self-regulation instead. For broadcast media, the ACLU "believes that an enforceable right of access is justified because the airwaves belong to the public" and because a broadcast license is "a government-conferred benefit." National ACLU Policy Guide, supra note 4, Policy No. 12, at 28-29.

82. Cf. Greenawalt, Justifications, supra note 65, at 135: "The claim that people are persuaded to believe what is already dominant or what fits their irrational needs is a... serious challenge to the truth-discovery justification for free speech." Partly for that reason, "modest limits on maximum freedom of speech [may] contribute to the promotion of truth." Id. at 138.

83. C. Lawrence, When Racism Dresses in Speech’s Clothing: Reconciling the First and Fourteenth Amendments 27 (1989) (paper prepared for June 1989 ACLU Biennial Conference) (revised version forthcoming in DUKE L.J.) [hereinafter Lawrence, Racist Speech]. Lawrence continues: [Racism] is a disease which infects and skewers or disables the operation of the market (like a computer virus, sick cattle, diseased wheat or junk bonds). Racism is irrational and often unconscious. Our belief in the inferiority of nonwhites trumps good ideas that contend with it in the market, often without our even knowing it. In addition, racism makes the words and ideas of blacks and other despised minorities less saleable (as distinguished from their intrinsic value) in the marketplace of ideas.

Id. at 27-28 (footnotes omitted). See also Lawrence, The Id, the Ego, and Equal Protection: Reckon-
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has not lagged far behind. Despite its undeniable power and appeal, the market metaphor alone might not suffice to justify free speech. But it is not alone.

The ACLU's position is based also on the knowledge that censors have far more often stifled the voices of oppressed persons and groups than the voices of their oppressors, and that no censor has ever succeeded in winnowing out good from evil. Censorship has traditionally been the tool of those who seek to subordinate women and minorities, not of those who seek to liberate them.

Distrust of censorship is based on respect for the diversity of human beings and of their ideas, feelings, and opinions, on the importance of challenging entrenched theories and practices, on the difficulty of avoiding vice without evading virtue, and on the extraordinary and sometimes valuable changes that can occur in the lives of individuals and societies when dissenters successfully appeal to the majority's sense of justice. In our system of government, the appeal may be to the current majority, represented (however imperfectly) by elected legislatures, or to the collective majorities of the last two hundred years, represented (also imperfectly) by federal and state constitutions and by the courts as their designated interpreters, or simply and directly to the people themselves—or perhaps, in different ways, to all three. But no appeal can ever succeed if traditional authority and governmental power combine against it, ensuring that it is never effectively made.

When the censor wields the scissors, the good ideas are too often the first ones to wind up on the cutting room floor. Just ask civil rights protesters how far they would have gone—what they could have said or written, where they could have marched, or sat- or kneeled-in—without the first amendment's implacable indifference to the content of their self-expression and their search for justice. Government officials insistently equated civil rights activists with Communists, subversives, and criminals.

Mounting legislative inquisitions against the NAACP and

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84. See, e.g., L. Levy, supra note 73; Dorsen, supra note 71, at 133.
seeking compulsory disclosure of its membership lists, government officials thus endangered the jobs and lives of NAACP members.\(^7\) Only a broad principle of freedom of association could—and did—protect the challenge to segregation that many white southerners perceived as an assault on their cherished way of life. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his historic letter from a Birmingham jail,\(^8\) but the Civil Rights Act of 1964\(^9\) became law and the Birmingham parade ordinance that King and other demonstrators had violated was eventually declared an unconstitutional invasion of their equal rights to freedom of speech.\(^90\)

Ask also the feminists who first sought to tell women about the new technologies of birth control, to end the tyranny of forced pregnancy, and to inspire women to step beyond their homes and families, if they so chose, into the public world. Historically, anti-feminists have often suppressed speech to suppress women. From 1873 until 1971, the Comstock Act\(^91\) was used to outlaw materials providing information about contraception and abortion.\(^92\) More recently, modern Comstockians have sought to remove the feminist magazine *Ms.* from high school libraries.\(^93\) It is no accident that in the 1920's, Boston Mayor James Michael Curley, with majestic impartiality, banned both Ku Klux Klan leaders and birth control advocate Margaret Sanger from speaking their minds—the former as a criminal conspiracy, the latter as an apologist for murder. The ACLU's equally impartial defense of free speech permitted the Klan—which in the 1920s dominated many state legislatures, played a major role at the 1924 national Democratic convention, and staged a massive march on Washington, D.C.—to diminish its own influence by exposing its vicious plans to public view. This exposure ultimately enabled the message of birth control and reproductive choice to win wide acceptance.\(^94\) Like the economic market, the ideological market sometimes works to improve society.

Perhaps most important, the ACLU's position is based as well on the

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88. M. King, *Letter From Birmingham Jail*, in *Why We Can't Wait* 76 (paperback ed. 1964). For a description of the circumstances in which the letter was written, see T. Branch, *supra* note 86, at 737-44.


belief that freedom of expression is valuable as an end in itself and not merely as a means of self-government. Freedom of thought, the development of our capacity to comprehend our world and to transcend or renew it, depends on the possibility of saying what we think, in everyday conversation or philosophical discourse, in politics or poetry, through science or music or dancing in the street. To express ourselves is to discover who we are and what we know. To listen to the self-expression of others is to discover who they are and what they know. Free speech allows us to risk sharing, to create or dissolve communities of belief and opinion, to agree or dispute, to learn, and to change. In the words of the second Justice Harlan, “no other approach would comport with the premise of individual dignity and choice upon which our political system rests.”

Dworkin would probably reply that the civil rights and feminist movements embodied good and virtuous ideals and ideas, which contributed to the long, and far from complete, process of liberating people of color and women in the United States from the bondage of racial and sexual discrimination and injustice. By contrast, the Nazis, the Klan, and the pornographers—all of whom have been ACLU clients in free speech cases—seek to degrade and even destroy racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, and to vilify and dehumanize women. The civil rights movement and the original and current feminists as well, exemplify the moral strength of speaking the truth about oppression to challenge the oppressors, thereby deepening public understanding of and commitment to social justice while empowering themselves. Racist hate groups and pornographers, Dworkin might contend, speak overwhelming lies—lies


96. E.g., National Socialist Party v. Village of Skokie, 432 U.S. 43 (1977) (per curiam) (state may not impose prior restraint on display of swastika during Nazi rally without providing immediate appellate review or stay of restraint); Brandenburg v. Ohio, 395 U.S. 444 (1969) (state may not convict Ku Klux Klan leader of criminal syndicalism because his advocacy was not both directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and likely to succeed); Carroll v. President & Comm’rs of Princess Anne, 393 U.S. 175 (1968) (ex parte injunction against political rally by white supremacist group violates first amendment); American Booksellers Ass’n, Inc. v. Hudnut, 771 F.2d 323 (7th Cir. 1985) (Indianapolis antipornography ordinance violates first amendment), aff’d mem., 475 U.S. 1001 (1986); Collin v. Smith, 447 F. Supp. 676 (N.D. Ill.) (Skokie ordinances aimed at barring Nazi march violate first amendment ban on content-based restrictions of speech), aff’d, 578 F.2d 1197 (7th Cir.), cert. denied, 439 U.S. 916 (1978); Rockwell v. Morris, 12 A.D.2d 272, 211 N.Y.S.2d 25 (first amendment entitles American Nazi leader to hold rally in public park despite expected hostile reaction from spectators), aff’d mem., 10 N.Y.2d 721, 176 N.E.2d 836, 219 N.Y.S.2d 268, amended, 10 N.Y.2d 749, 177 N.E.2d 48, 219 N.Y.S.2d 605, cert. denied, 368 U.S. 913 (1961). The ACLU appeared as amicus curiae rather than direct counsel in American Booksellers. For discussion of ACLU representation of Klan and Nazis in 1970’s and 1980’s, see A. Neier, supra note 48, at 80-103; S. Walker, supra note 7, at 332-35, 373.
that do incalculable harm, that diminish our sense of moral community.97 Wielding the first amendment to strike down one version of a model anti-pornography ordinance drafted by Dworkin and Professor Catharine A. MacKinnon, a federal court nonetheless recognized that pornography hurts women because “[w]ords and images act at the level of the subconscious before they persuade at the level of the conscious.”98 Why, Dworkin asks, cannot or will not the ACLU deny aid to pornographers and racists when they seek to wrap their despicable messages in the mantle of the first amendment?

It is far more difficult to reply to this question than civil liberties advocates sometimes admit. We know that lies are sometimes inextricably or mistakenly entangled with important truths,99 but it can be argued that pornography and racist vituperation are seldom about ideas at all.100 Yet pornography conveys manifold messages on which viewers and readers may not agree. Feminist civil libertarians have denounced violence and discrimination against women while opposing censorship of pornography, arguing that it often legitimizes sexuality, even though it may further misogyny. Antipornography ordinances are “laden with our culture’s old, repressive approach to sexuality” and may imply that many common sexual activities, including heterosexual relations, are in themselves oppressive to

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98. Hudnut, 771 F.2d 323, 328–29. The court accepted the legislative premise that “[d]epictions of subordination tend to perpetuate subordination. The subordinate status of women in turn leads to affront and lower pay at work, insult and injury at home, battery and rape on the streets.” Id. (footnotes omitted). Cf. supra notes 82–83 and accompanying text.

For an in-depth discussion from an antiregulation perspective of research on the disputed causal link between pornography and sexual violence, see Making Sense of Research on Pornography, in WOMEN AGAINST CENSORSHIP, supra note 85, App. I at 181–205.


Good and evil we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discerned, that those confused seeds which were imposed on Psyche as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixed.

See also id. at 318–19: “Let [Truth] and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter.” But see L. TRIBE, supra note 81, at 786. Milton himself was unwilling to extend his defense of freedom of the press to Catholicism or to “that . . . which is impious or evil absolutely . . . .” See MILTON’S PROSE, supra, at 320; Lukas, supra note 48, at 11.

100. See, e.g., Sunstein, supra note 97, at 612; Note, Anti-Pornography Laws and First Amendment Values, 98 HARV. L. REV. 460, 470–74 (1984). But see Hudnut, 771 F.2d 323, 328 (anti-pornography ordinance is constitutionally impermissible regulation based on viewpoint); L. TRIBE, supra note 81, at 924 (partially agreeing).
women.\textsuperscript{101} Embodying racial hatred in words is to state an idea, the single most pernicious idea in American history, but an idea nonetheless.\textsuperscript{102}

We know too that self-expression, the articulation of emotions, is fundamental both to individual dignity and autonomy and to communication with others. But it can be argued that self-expression which in itself profoundly harms others without serving some substantially redeeming social purposes\textsuperscript{103} should be regulated or controlled to alleviate its harms. The revival of racist and sexist speech and actions, on the college campus and elsewhere in the last decade,\textsuperscript{104} undermines the essential optimism of some theories of the first amendment. Dworkin is not wrong to remind us that our society is stained with the blood of innocent victims of racist and sexist brutality. In contending that the bludgeon of censorship leads even more ineluctably than the most savage speech to the stillness of enforced conformity and the silence of the grave,\textsuperscript{105} we have our answer.

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  \item \textsuperscript{101} See Duggan, Hunter, & Vance, False Promises: Feminist Antipornography Legislation in the U.S., in Women Against Censorship, supra note 85, at 134. See also id., at 130, 138-39, 146-47; Willis, supra note 85, at 465 ("to attack pornography, and at the same time equate it with heterosexual sex, is implicitly to condemn not only women who like pornography, but women who sleep with men."). Duggan, Hunter, & Vance argue that "pornography [does] not cause the kind and degree of harm that can justify the restraint of speech" and "serves some social functions, which benefit women." These include flouting conventional mores, ridiculing sexual hypocrisy, underscoring the importance of sexual needs, and advocating sexual adventure. Id. at 145. See also Willis, supra, at 462, 464-65.
  \item \textsuperscript{102} See Lawrence, Racist Speech, supra note 83, at 27-28.
  \item \textsuperscript{103} But see Duggan, Hunter, & Vance, supra note 101, at 145 (contending that pornography "carries many messages other than woman-hating" and may help legitimize female sexual desires and acts).
  \item \textsuperscript{104} See generally Lawrence, Racist Speech, supra note 83, at 1-3 (listing incidents); Strong, Free Racist Speech, CAL. L. REV. 24 (July 1989) (reporting California incidents, focusing on Stanford University); Lessons from Bigotry \textsuperscript{101}, Newsweek, Sept. 25, 1989, at 48 (citing study that documents racist incidents at 250 colleges since fall of 1986); Temkin, Times of Tension, BROWN ALUMNI MONTHLY, June-July 1989, at 24 (analyzing in detail incidents and reactions at Brown University).
  \item \textsuperscript{105} Professor Lawrence argues that the first amendment permits regulation when "narrowly drafted provisions [are] aimed at that form of racist speech which results in direct, immediate and substantial injury and which advances none of the purposes of the first amendment." Lawrence, supra, at 4-5, 11-16. Cf. D. Downs, supra note 71, at 154-69 (arguing that a proper balance between individualism and communitarianism would permit abridging intentionally harmful and unprovoked (1) racist speech that advocates death or violence against members of a targeted group, and (2) explicit, implicit, or symbolic vilifying or derogatory words targeted at a definable audience); Delgado, Words That Wound: A Tort Action for Racial Insults, Epithets, and Name Calling, 17 Harv. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 133 (1982).
  \item \textsuperscript{106} Professor Strossen opposes regulation of racist speech unless it constitutes "targeted harassment of an individual" or "intimidating or assaulitve conduct" comparable to the Supreme Court's "fighting words" exception to protected free speech. See Remarks by Nadine Strossen, supra note 59, at 3-4. Professor Gale believes that the ACLU should explore the possibility of endorsing very narrow restrictions similar to those proposed by Professor Lawrence, in order to combat historic patterns of discrimination and ensure that colleges provide minority students with genuinely equal educational opportunities while maintaining the free inquiry and expression necessary to intellectual growth and exploration.
  \item \textsuperscript{107} Cf. West Virginia Bd. of Educ. v. Barnette, 319 U.S. 624, 640-42 (1943) (invalidating state law requiring religious dissenters to salute the United States flag). Justice Jackson, writing for the Court, rejected governmental compulsion of individuals to think and feel in officially sanctioned ways: Struggles to coerce uniformity of sentiment in support of some end thought essential to their time and country have been waged by many good as well as evil men. . . . As governmental pressure toward unity becomes greater, so strife becomes more bitter as to whose unity it shall
It is, we think, a powerful answer. In 1978, when the uproar over the Skokie case reached its crescendo, Aryeh Neier, then ACLU national executive director, explained why political dissidents of all kinds should support free speech, even for their deadliest adversaries. "The right to free speech is always tested at the extremes," he said:

Rarely are centrist groups denied their First Amendment rights. . . . For that very reason it is the extremes that have the greatest interest in protecting the rights of their enemies. Once the freedom of one group is abridged, that infringement will be cited to deny the rights of others. The people who most need the A.C.L.U. to defend the rights of the Klan are the blacks. The people who most need the A.C.L.U. to defend the rights of Nazis are the Jews.106

Neier's argument reaches cultural as well as political dissenters—not only pornographers but also left-wing feminists, people like Andrea Dworkin who write with passion and anger about human experience beyond the boundaries of cultural respectability.107

If Neier is correct, then Dworkin postulates a false choice between defending free speech and protecting women's rights. In fact, the ACLU has ardently advocated freedom of expression for all individuals and groups while actively pursuing equal rights for women and others who have been traditionally oppressed. These goals are not inconsistent but mutually reinforcing. Ensuring the free speech rights of anyone, including a racist or misogynist, secures the same rights for everyone else, including an intended victim.108

One response to Neier may be that his dichotomy does not hold—that the Klan, the Nazis, and the pornographers, at some deeper level of our national psyche, are not really despised fringe groups at all, but centrists in extremists' clothing, purveyors of the denied truth that we as a nation

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106. Quoted in Lukas, supra note 48, at 10. See also A. Neier, supra note 48, at 7: "It is dangerous to let the Nazis have their say. But it is more dangerous by far to destroy the laws that deny anyone the power to silence Jews if Jews should need to cry out to each other and to the world for succor."

107. See, e.g., A. Dworkin, Intercourse (1987). Dworkin herself was once represented by the ACLU, though not in a free speech case. In 1965 the New York Civil Liberties Union, then directed by Aryeh Neier, assisted Dworkin and other women who objected to body-cavity searches after their arrests during demonstrations against the Vietnam War. The NYCLU negotiated an agreement with correctional officials to limit such searches and set guidelines for conducting them. Interview with Aryeh Neier, former ACLU national executive director (Nov. 7, 1989).

are still hostages to our history of racial and sexual xenophobia and oppression. By allowing them to speak freely, while overtly and sanctimoniously denouncing their message, we covertly accept it. Because the political and social context in which they speak is not and never has been neutral, we cannot comfortably contend that they alone are the enemy of equal rights and freedoms. The enemy is still us.

Consider too the other half of Neier's dichotomy. He implicitly defines the struggles of blacks and Jews for equal dignity, respect, and power—and, by extension, the feminist struggle as well—as political extremism. Is that merely a regretful acknowledgment that racial and religious minorities and women have never occupied the center of American political and cultural consciousness—or is it, in part at least, an acceptance of a white-Christian-male status quo? Even if it is not so intended (as surely it was not), do most listeners hear the words not spoken instead of the ones that are?

But if such questions can arise about a seemingly simple and straightforward statement in support of an indivisible right of free speech for everyone, then perhaps the argument answers itself. Even pornography and racist hate speech may in the end mean something different from what they purport to say. Modern literary critics have shown that ordinary speech—as well as legal and literary expression—can undermine itself. Even without the aid of linguistic theories, we can recognize that words take their meaning not only from the (often complicated and contradictory) intentions of the speaker, but also from the context—the layered web of direct facts, and of social, political, and cultural circumstances—in which they are spoken. If the speaker and the listener occupy different subcultures or social roles, their different experiences may shape

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109. See generally Lawrence, Unconscious Racism, supra note 83 (arguing that modern psychological theories require expansion of conception of "discriminatory intent" to include unconscious, culturally instilled motivations).

110. See Lawrence, Racist Speech, supra note 83, at 22, 27:

[B]lack folks know that no racial incident is "isolated" in America. That's what makes them so horrible, so scary. It is the knowledge that they are not the isolated unpopular speech of a dissident few; the knowledge that these incidents are manifestations of an ubiquitous and deeply ingrained cultural belief system, an American way of life.

Our experience is that the American system of justice has never been symmetrical where race is concerned. Is it any wonder that we see equality as a necessary precondition to free speech?

See also id. at 29 ("racist speech benefits powerful white-dominated institutions" by "keep[ing] non-white people on edge" and preventing them "from organizing on behalf of more important things.") (quoting address by Professor Richard Delgado, State Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin (Apr. 24, 1989)). Cf. S. Brownmiller, Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape 15 (1975) (rape is "a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear.") (emphasis in original).

their understandings in very different ways. And even where the meanings seem remorselessly clear, they (like judicial precedents) can change over time as the specific event that prompted them recedes and the context changes. The recent antipornography movement sparked by Dworkin and others provides a paradoxical example; instead of repressing words and images of sexual violence and domination, it has provoked serious discussion of female sexuality and arguments for the liberation of women from the constraints of sexual gentility.

Sometimes the social context changes partly because particular speech, cruelly intended, instead (or also) illuminates a moral issue that can no longer be thrust aside. Allowing racists and misogynists to speak may help us as a society to learn to know ourselves as our own enemy, to see and begin to repair the harms we have done. Attempting to bury racist and sexist speech underground may only make martyrs of the speakers and solidify the attitudes they express. History tells us that censorship invites—and incites—resistance. Nothing in our national experience suggests that silencing evil has ever corrected it.

Words are symptoms and symbols, but they are not the thing in itself. To eradicate racism and sexism, we need to listen to the words in which they are expressed, to delve beneath them, to find our own words of reply and explanation, before we can even begin to make the changes that we seek.

The ACLU recognizes that speech and conduct are not easily divided from each other. We know that some speech is used as a weapon to intimidate particular individuals and groups. Crimes and torts accomplished by words can be forbidden by law without invading first amendment freedoms, though it is not easy to draw the line between protected expression that advocates the commission of torts or crimes and unprotected ex-

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112. See Williams, supra note 5, at 405 (describing the "discourse boundary" that exists between blacks and whites because of their different experiences in our society).

113. See, e.g., S. Walker, supra note 7, at 350-52; Duggan, Hunter, & Vance, supra note 101, at 145; Willis, supra note 85, at 464-65.


[T]here is no bright line separating words and facts. . . . Facts are theory-dependent and value-dependent. Theories are formed in words. Fact- and value-commitments are present in the language we use to reason and describe, and they shape our reasoning and description, and the shape (for us) of reality itself.

115. Among the crimes and torts that may consist primarily of words are bribery, fraud, and intentional infliction of emotional distress—though the latter in some circumstances can raise first amendment problems. Professor Kent Greenawalt has identified and differentiated three categories of speech: "ordinary expressions of fact and value, which deserve maximum First Amendment protection; utterances that are strongly situation altering, which are unprotected; and action-inducing encouragements, which warrant an intermediate level of protection that varies according to context." Greenawalt, Speech and Crime, 1980 Am. B. Found. Res. J. 645, 741 [hereinafter Speech and Crime]. Strongly "situation-altering utterances" directed at criminal ends include agreements to fix prices or rob a bank, offers to pay for criminal acts, and superiors' orders to subordinates to perform illegal behavior within the superiors' area of authority. Id. at 742-43; Greenawalt, Justifications, supra note 65, at 119 n. 2.
pression (such as "fighting words") that furthers or commits them.\textsuperscript{116} Antidiscrimination laws can prevent the use of words as tools of harassment to destroy equal employment and educational rights and opportunities.\textsuperscript{117} Like Dworkin,\textsuperscript{118} we understand that "rape the women" and "kill the Jews" are words that in some contexts constitute a concrete and punishable threat:

There are limits that can be imposed on hate groups that are consistent with a system of free expression. During the Skokie episode, the ACLU refused to defend a Nazi who was prosecuted for offering a cash bounty for killing a Jew. The reward linked the speech to unlawful action in an impermissible way. Nor would we defend a Nazi (or anyone else) whose speech interfered with a Jewish religious service or who said, "There is a Jew; let's get him."\textsuperscript{119}

Where we differ with Dworkin is in our belief that outside those limited contexts, the Constitution still protects those words.

That does not mean the ACLU accepts or endorses the messages of racist hatred\textsuperscript{120} and sexist denigration.\textsuperscript{121} Nor does it mean we can turn away while, as Dworkin puts it, "those who are targeted as victims are left defenseless."\textsuperscript{122} Precisely because the ACLU has chosen to advocate everyone's right to speak regardless of what she or he has to say,\textsuperscript{123} we have a special obligation—one we acknowledge in our policies and embrace in our lobbying and litigation efforts—to expose and oppose those

\textsuperscript{116} The line-drawing problems become especially acute when the speech is remote from the criminal enterprise, such as communications that precede (or appear to be an invitation to) an offer to commit a criminal act. Greenawalt, \textit{Speech and Crime}, supra note 115, at 746. Because the only (or strongest) evidence of criminal conspiracies, attempts, or solicitations may be speech, they pose similar difficulties.

\textsuperscript{117} National ACLU Policy Guide, \textit{supra} note 4, Policy No. 72, at 142; id., Policy No. 316, at 400.

\textsuperscript{118} See Dworkin, \textit{supra} note 1, at 39.

\textsuperscript{119} Dorsen, \textit{supra} note 71, at 133-34.

\textsuperscript{120} See, e.g., National ACLU Policy Guide, \textit{supra} note 4, Policy No. 46, at 93-94: "The democratic standards in which the ACLU believes and for which it fights run directly counter to the philosophy of the Klan and other ultra-right groups"; therefore ACLU should deal "with the difficult dilemma of having to defend the civil liberties of groups whose activities do fundamental injury to civil liberties" by "vigorously present[ing]” its opposing views “while defending the group's right to speak." See also id., Policy No. 312b, at 389b.

\textsuperscript{121} See, e.g., National ACLU Policy Guide, \textit{supra} note 4, Policy No. 314-15, at 393-99 (supporting the Equal Rights Amendment and equality of treatment under law “without differentiations based on sex.”).

\textsuperscript{122} Dworkin, \textit{supra} note 1, at 39.

\textsuperscript{123} E.g., National ACLU Policy Guide, \textit{supra} note 4, Policy No. 46, at 93.
who seek through means including speech itself to destroy the democratic, civil libertarian, and egalitarian ideals that freedom of speech is intended to further. Precisely because we have chosen to attack the official morality of the censor, we have a special obligation to vulnerable groups and individuals who incur the primary risks of uncensored liberty, to declare and act on our belief that every person is of equal moral dignity and value, that women as well as men, people of color as well as whites, Muslims and Jews as well as Christians, homosexuals as well as heterosexuals, have equal rights to personal autonomy, familial community, political participation, and social justice.

We know that social and individual perceptions of disfavored minorities are skewed by insensitivities insistently reinforced by the mainstream media:

While white perception of black criminality is readily evoked, white awareness of black anger or anguish has been not only historically avoided but, on the deepest psychic levels, guarded against. Existentially, the concept of black people as vulnerable human beings who sustain pain and love and hatreds and fears and joy and sorrows and degradations and triumphs is not yet permitted in the national consciousness. Hence the constant need of the dominant society, in age after age, to reinforce linguistic and ritualistic symbols that deny black humanity.  

Other minorities are similarly dehumanized, as exemplified by the words of a politician’s wife, explaining why the wife of a well-known television actor is an effective fund-raiser for AIDS treatment centers: “She has [the AIDS virus], but she isn’t black, she isn’t poor, she isn’t homosexual, she isn’t a drug user. She is like the rest of us.” In other contexts, women are equally likely to become the denigrated Other, whose needs and pains do not matter. The persistence and pervasiveness of such attitudes have led the ACLU to commit major resources to combating discrimination.

CONCLUSION: THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

The struggle to empower women and minorities is deeply, perhaps inextricably, intertwined with the struggle for civil liberties. The term “civil liberties” in this context may refer primarily to the freedoms of conscience, thought, and expression protected by the first amendment, while the term “civil rights” may denote primarily the guarantees of the thir-
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teenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments and of statutes that promote equal treatment. In practice, the ACLU originally deferred to the NAACP to litigate questions of racial equality. But the division between rights and liberties often seems more semantic than real. The right to vote is fundamentally important to both freedom and equality. When the ACLU began representing prisoners who had been denied the right to read Muslim religious texts and periodicals, it focused on freedoms of speech and religion. Today it litigates throughout the nation to bring prison conditions up to minimum constitutional standards, partly because we learned that the denial of civil liberties was interwoven with a denial of basic civil rights that seemed equally urgent to oppose. On the occasions when civil liberties and civil rights genuinely appear to differ and conflict, the ACLU chooses between them in the context of particular facts, weighing the potency and applicability in each instance of the general values of liberty and equality.

But in many cases, civil liberties and civil rights are firmly woven together. When the ACLU argues for every woman’s right to reproductive freedom, to control her body and her destiny without interference, to choose abortion or childbirth, and if she is poor to obtain governmental assistance that respects her choice, it furthers both civil liberties ( freedoms of conscience and moral choice) and civil rights (equality under law). When the ACLU endorses the right to speak, march, picket, and boycott on behalf of racial justice, it promotes both civil liberties and civil rights. When the ACLU demands equal employment rights and opportunities for women, minorities, political dissidents, and persons with AIDS, or supports employee rights of privacy, due process, and free

126. See S. WALKER, supra note 7, at 60, 88.
127. E.g., Rowland v. Jones, 452 F.2d 1005 (8th Cir. 1971) (first amendment requires that inmates have access to religious newspaper “Muhammad Speaks”).
128. For example, the ACLU has supported free speech for abortion protesters while also protecting the rights of women who seek abortions, and of the clinics that provide them, to be free from harassment, intimidation, trespass, or invasions of privacy. Compare S. WALKER, supra note 7, at 349 (discussing ACLU representation of anti-abortion demonstrators) with National Abortion Fed’n v. Operation Rescue, No. CV 89-1181 AWT (C.D. Cal., Aug. 29, 1989) (holding anti-abortion demonstrators in contempt for violating order earlier obtained by Southern California ACLU to protect abortion clinics and patients). On Sept. 14, 1989, the court dismissed the underlying cause of action in National Abortion Fed’n for failure to state a claim, but granted leave to amend, with the injunction still in effect.
speech, it speaks for the civil liberties and civil rights of all workers. When the ACLU attacks standardized tests that overpredict college performance for males and underpredict it for females, it speaks for the rights of women to an equal education that will help provide them with the knowledge that is both power and freedom. When the ACLU opposes sexual as well as racial harassment in the workplace, recognizing that some speech or expressive conduct constitutes discrimination, it reconciles a possible conflict between civil liberties and civil rights in favor of rights that feminists helped to create.

The real ACLU confronts every day the disparity between democratic ideals and social realities that Dworkin accuses us of ignoring. We know, as Justice Holmes wrote long ago, that "[e]very idea is an incitement" to action and that "[t]o allow opposition by speech seems to indicate that you think the speech impotent, . . . or that you do not care wholeheartedly for the result, or that you doubt either your power or your premises." We know that words are social facts, that they have real power to work irrevocable harm, that expressions of racist and misogynist hate can diminish the freedom and security of minorities and women, that pornography often encourages men to see women as toys or targets rather than as equals, and that social attitudes are constructed in the mirror of what we say as well as what we do.

Perhaps, therefore, some of us are not as ready as we once were to denounce those, like Dworkin, who pressure us to abandon the principle of free expression. But neither are we ready to denounce or abandon the principle. Feminists as well as civil rights activists, political, religious, moral, and aesthetic dissidents, all have sheltered in its embrace. We risk the harms of free expression because we have found no other way to ensure its benefits. Medieval mapmakers inscribed at the edge of the known world, "Beyond this place are dragons." But if we are to transcend
our political, social, and cultural limitations—to replace racism and sexism with equality and justice—we have to venture beyond the maps we have now. The ultimate irony of Dworkin’s attack on the imaginary ACLU is that for almost seventy years the real ACLU has been working to make the world safe for her to write it.