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## Sonia Johnson Article 1981

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Admission 9-21-81

# Sonia Johnson tells story of becoming a feminist

pg. 1

By DAWN PETTIT  
Advocate Reporter

"I've come a long way from a housewife to a heretic," feminist Sonia Johnson told a packed crowd at Denison University's Swasey Chapel Tuesday evening.

Ms. Johnson, who was excommunicated from the Mormon Church in 1979 for her outspoken support of the Equal Rights Amendment, captivated the audience with her story of how she came to be a feminist and with her theories on issues concerning women.

She was the first lecturer during Women's Week at Denison which ends Sept. 28.

For most of her married life, Ms. Johnson and her husband lived out of the United States. "We moved back in 1976 to Virginia which was as it seems destined to remain, an unratified state," she said with a smile.

She received much of her information on the ERA and the women's rights movement through a friend she knew from her graduate school days. "It was my first feminist encounter," she said.

The Mormon Church was strongly opposed to the ERA, she said. "I had never been opposed to the church in anything and didn't want to be," Ms. Johnson said. "I was in really serious spiritual discomfort over this."

It was after a church leader came to a group discussion to explain why the Mormon church opposed the ERA that she became a strong supporter, she said.

"He picked up a copy of Pageant magazine with an article on ERA on the way to the meeting and read it during the opening song and prayer and then told us he was ready to talk on this issue," Ms. Johnson said. "...he converted me heart and soul to ERA."

After the meeting, "I felt betrayed," she said. "I became so angry at having been duped for so long. There isn't a word in the men's dictionary for it."

It was also the first time she called herself a radical feminist. "At the time I really didn't know what that meant. But I knew from history that all great changes come through radical people," she said.

"It all began with Adam," Ms. Johnson said. "He named the animals and Eve and continued from there. Women have never had the chance to name themselves."

"Men have given us God in their own image to control women," she continued. "Every person born since the patriarchal revolution has believed deeply that God and the 'Old Boys Club' run things."

The "Old Boys Club" are all men, she said. "God and the boys meet in a clubhouse. Women



SONIA JOHNSON

stand outside peering in and say, 'What's he saying?'" Men say that their directions are coming from God, she said.

Women have been conditioned by men to believe that the menstrual cycle is "revolting," she said. "Men took the most magical, most powerful, sacred stuff and turned it upside down and made it disgusting."

Women also have been conditioned to believe that "all you can be is a womb and vagina, a wife and a mother," she said. "It's a type of punishment."

To contradict those images, she said, "the most powerful thing we can do is to move one more evolutionary step by telling our stories."

Ms. Johnson likened rape, incest and beatings, to a war against women. "You can't have global peace when war is being waged against women," she said. "(Women) live behind enemy lines," she said. "We're not safe in our homes, on the streets or in our jobs."