

Sister rat sets a trap for herself at VMI

My poor feeble sex has embarked on the maddest, wickedest folly in its imbecilic history. A woman is trying to enroll in Virginia Military Institute.

— Essayist Florence King, 1990

Four years later, another court appeal and we may be closer than ever to witnessing the triumph of such madness, wickedness and folly. The young woman who wants to become a Sister Rat at VMI is backed up by the U.S. Justice Department, the American Civil Liberties Union and lots of feminist friends, most of whom faint at the idea of their country's uniform.

This week the Fourth U.S. Circuit

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Court of Appeals will hear arguments in United States vs. Virginia Military Institute to determine



Suzanne Fields

Amendment.

This is the same court that accepted the argument made by Griffin Bell, former U.S. attorney general and the lead lawyer for VMI: "VMI can't be VMI if it lets women in. . . . By obtaining what

she wants, she'd lose what she wants because it wouldn't be there."

By acknowledging the dog-in-the-manger attitude of the woman who wants to attend VMI, and accepting the idea that "single-sex education is pedagogically justifiable" at VMI, the court nevertheless required the state to provide another "pedagogically justifiable" parallel single-sex program for women so that Virginia ladies could reap similar benefits in the state-funded college system.

Mary Baldwin made the case that it could do that with a program with rigorous physical discipline, an honor code, ROTC courses and military drill as well as an emphasis on the leadership abilities to qualify them for positions in civilian and military life. What it doesn't include are the toughening techniques such as the "rat line" and the communal barracks life, which most reasonable men and women

agree would hinder rather than encourage female "citizen soldiers."

But Bill Clinton's Justice Department isn't buying the Mary Baldwin remedy. Government lawyers argue that the VWIL approach and educational techniques are different than VMI's and thus don't pass constitutional muster. They don't want "same as"; they want "same." These lawyers give the impression that nothing short of sex-change surgery will do. Naturally, let's do it to the men.

A coed VMI would be very different from the all-male VMI, even if women live with men in the dormitories, share the toilets without doors, and submit to the rigorous physical discipline that is completely without personal privacy. The school where Stonewall Jackson taught and recruited many of his famous Stonewall brigade is not likely to produce such fighters in skirts.

At an earlier court proceeding, sociologist David Riesman, 85, a card-carrying liberal feminist and author of "The Lonely Crowd," argued against making VMI co-ed based on his concerns for the herd mentality he continues to see as a

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menace in American society. The "other-directed conformists" he identified 40 years ago have been replaced by doctrinaire feminists

and politically correct censors, who also want everyone to act, think, live and learn alike. He argued that the "same steamroller that would crush VMI" would ultimately destroy private single-sex education, too. Texas Woman's University is the latest school to be threatened with co-education, as a man seeks to have it open up its women's programs to him. The ACLU is of course already gearing up to help him.

Even those who don't give a fig leaf whether a woman goes to VMI or not should take time to consider the inevitability of David Reisman's prophesy once the court rules against the VWIL solution. Inevitably, a different but comparable educational program devised for any single-sex school, public or private, must be disallowed if it takes any government money in the way of current tax exemptions, scholarships, loans and grants.

'Tis a pity. Women should loosen up and sometimes be grateful for our unequal advantages. Let the rats be rats without our trying to imitate them.