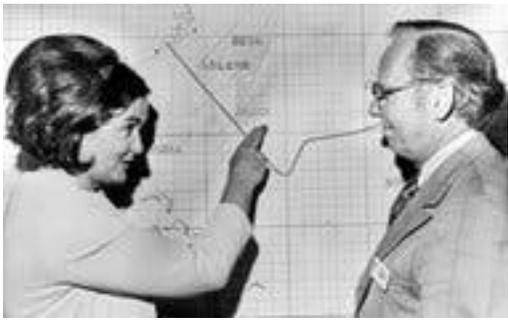


Roxcy Bolton, Feminist Crusader for Equality, Including in Naming Hurricanes, Dies at 90 By [Sam Roberts](#) May 21, 2017



Roxcy Bolton in 1972 with Robert H. Simpson, then the director of the National Hurricane Center. She helped persuade national weather forecasters not to name tropical storms after only women. Credit...Associated Press

Roxcy Bolton, a pioneering and tempestuous Florida feminist who was credited with founding the nation's first rape treatment center and who helped persuade national weather forecasters not to name tropical storms after only women, died on May 17 in Coral Gables, Fla. She was 90.

Her death, in a hospital, was confirmed by her son David Bolton.

Ms. Bolton's crusade for the Equal Rights Amendment, which would have guaranteed constitutional equality for women, was unsuccessful. But she was instrumental in elevating the prevention and treatment of rape into priorities for law enforcement and health professionals; persuaded National Airlines to grant maternity leave to pregnant flight attendants rather than firing them; and pressured Miami department stores to eliminate the men-only dining sections in their restaurants. (She reasoned that "men and women sleep together; why can't they eat together?")

She also played a role in persuading President Richard M. Nixon to proclaim Women's Equality Day in 1972 and in recruiting Senator Birch Bayh, Democrat of Indiana, to introduce the Equal Rights Amendment. Congress sent the amendment to the states that year, but another woman, the conservative leader [Phyllis Schlafly](#), galvanized opponents, and the amendment failed after not enough legislatures ratified it.

A scrappy, card-carrying member of the Daughters of the Confederacy armed only with a high school degree, Ms. Bolton typically jettisoned her Southern gentility to pursue her agenda of causes that may have initially seemed unfashionable.

Her crusade to include men's names when meteorologists differentiated hurricanes placed her at the eye of an international storm.

Women, Ms. Bolton said at the time, "deeply resent being arbitrarily associated with disaster."

Following a long naval tradition of giving storms women's names, just as ships are referred to by female pronouns, government forecasters adopted the practice in 1953 and applied it alphabetically.

Soon, weathermen — and they were mostly men — were applying sexist clichés to the storms, like suggesting that they were unpredictable or "temperamental" and were "flirting" with barrier islands or coastlines.

Ms. Bolton was not amused. The feminist leader Betty Friedan wrote in her memoir, "Life So Far" (2000), that as early as 1968, Ms. Bolton had "written me all incensed at the practice of using women's names to name hurricanes."

A year later, the National Organization for Women passed a resolution urging that the National Hurricane Center stop naming emerging tempests exclusively after women.

That the hurricane center was in Dade County, Fla., where Ms. Bolton was from, made it an easier target.

Officials flatly rejected her facetious first suggestion that the maturing tropical depressions also be called "him-icanes," and that the center bestow storm names to honor its bloviating benefactors in Congress. After all, she said, "Senators delight in having things named after them."

At the time, only one woman, Margaret Chase Smith of Maine, a Republican, was in the Senate, and, as an ardent Democrat, Ms. Bolton had in mind headlines like "Goldwater Annihilates Florida."

But a generation after Ms. Bolton began her campaign, the weathermen finally capitulated. (In addition to Ms. Bolton, the hurricane center credited, or blamed, among others, the feminists Patricia Butler of Houston and Dorothy Yates of Miami.)



Roxcy Bolton in 2012. A member of the Daughters of the Confederacy armed only with a high school degree, Ms. Bolton jettisoned her Southern gentility to pursue causes that may have initially seemed unfashionable. Credit...Al Diaz/Miami Herald.

The second hurricane of 1979 was named Bob. When the 2017 season officially begins June 1, Bret, Don, Franklin, Harvey and José will be among the names immortalized.

Roxcy (pronounced ROCK-see) O'Neal was born on June 3, 1926, in Duck Hill, Miss., a town of several hundred named for a Choctaw chief, to Hayward and Lula O'Neal, both farmers.

When she was 8, she told The Miami Herald, she decided on her career goal: to go to Congress.

“Sometimes on the way to school the bridges would be washed out,” she recalled. “I wanted to be a congressman so I could build bridges.”

Two years later, another local event left a lasting impression, and became a catalyst for her involvement in the civil rights movement: Two black men were lynched, and the entire town turned out to witness the grisly spectacle.

After attending high school in Duck Hill, she moved to Florida and married William Charles Hart, a former Coast Guardsman. That marriage ended in divorce. Their son, Randall, died in 2000.

In 1960, she married a Brooklyn-born Navy commander, David Bolton, who had been the chief war crimes prosecutor in the South Pacific after World War II and later became president of Men for the Equal Rights Amendment. He died in 2004.

In addition to their son David, Ms. Bolton is survived by another son, Buddy, and a daughter, Bonnie Bolton.

In 1974, she founded what has been called the nation's first rape treatment center at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami. It was named the Roxcy Bolton Rape Treatment Center in 1993.

She helped form the Florida chapter of the National Organization for Women in 1966, but she split with the national leadership later when it embraced a lesbian caucus. (Some liberated women, she said, "forget their responsibilities to family and children.")

While the Equal Rights Amendment fueled the culture wars of the 1970s, the controversy over hurricane names, in its own way, struck a responsive chord among both genders.

Women considered it just one more insult by oblivious men who were buttressing a stereotype. Some men dismissed it as a tempest in a teapot, while others even warned that it was potentially dangerous.

“It’s doubtful that a National Hurricane Center bulletin that Tropical Storm Al had formed in the Gulf or Hurricane Jake was threatening the Texas Coast would make us run for cover quite as fast,” The Houston Post opined in 1977.

By 1986, The Washington Post was still skeptical: “Eight years, and still this nonsexist nomenclature has a funny ring to it. Somehow many of the male names don’t convey either the romance or the urgency that circumstances might warrant.”

For all the scoffing, though, Ms. Bolton’s crusade might actually have helped save lives.

A study published in 2014 in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences found that, in fact, storms named after women have historically killed more people. The study concluded that people do not take those storms as seriously as those named for men, which are viewed as stronger and more violent.

“The stereotypes that underlie these judgments,” Sharon Shavitt, a professor of marketing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and one of the study’s authors, said in a statement at the time, “are subtle and not necessarily hostile toward women — they may involve viewing women as warmer and less aggressive than men.”