



The Free Congress Commentary

The Next Conservatism #40: Why Sex is Better than Gender

By Stephen Baskerville

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A problematic question for the next conservatism is the politics of "gender" (formerly known as sex). It is also urgent.

A critical change in the Left over the last few decades has been the shift from the economic to the social and increasingly the sexual. What was once a semi-socialistic attack on property and enterprise has become a social and sexual attack on the family, marriage and masculinity.

The consequences are incalculable. No ideology in human history has been potentially so invasive of the private sphere of life as Feminism. Communists had little respect for privacy. Feminists have made it their main target.

Like other radical movements, only more so, Feminism's danger comes not so much from the assault on freedom (which traditional tyrannies also threaten) but specifically from the attack on private life, especially family life (which traditional dictatorships usually leave alone). "Radical Feminism is totalitarian because it denies the individual a private space; every private thought and action is public and, therefore, political," writes Former Judge and Solicitor General

Robert H. Bork. "The party or the movement claims the right to control every aspect of life."

The Left's brilliant move has been to clothe its attack on the family as a defense of "women and children." Marian Wright Edelman openly acknowledges she founded the Children's Defense Fund to push a Leftist agenda: "I got the idea that children might be a very effective way to broaden the base for change." This climaxed in the Clinton Administration, in which radical policy innovations were invariably justified as "for the children." Using children to leverage an expansion of state power by eliminating family privacy is succinctly conveyed in Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton's aphorism, "There is no such thing as other people's children."

This nationalization of the family under the guise of protecting it leaves pro-family politicians in a difficult position. One way out is to join in the demonization of those who literally embody the Feminists' hated "patriarchy" - fathers. Relabeled "deadbeat dads," "batterers" and "pedophiles," fathers are now railroaded into jail through methods one recent scholar, writing in the *RUTGERS LAW REVIEW*, calls a "due process fiasco" and Bryce Christensen says is leading to a "police state."

Knee-jerk calls to "get tough" on criminals have unintended consequences when the penal apparatus has been commandeered by ideologues who redefine criminality to include an assortment of gender offenses that bear little relation to what most Americans understand as crime.

The evolution of the Justice Department's Office of Victims of Crime illustrates the deception. Proceeding from President Ronald Reagan's 1982 Task Force on Victims of Crime, this agency has since been hijacked by Feminists, and most of the "crimes" have been redefined

in Feminist terms. By definition, the "victims" are all women, the "perpetrators" are all men and the "crimes" are mostly political: sexual harassment, date "rape" (which is seldom rape), domestic "violence" (that is not violent), child abuse (that may be ordinary parental discipline), "stalking" (fathers trying to see their children), and so forth.

Far from softening the hard edges of male-dominated power politics, Feminism has inserted calculations of power into the most private corners of life and subjected family life to bureaucratic control. This is what makes the dream of a more "caring" public sphere through Feminism not only naïve but dangerously utopian. For as Feminists correctly pointed out, the feminine functions were traditionally private; politicizing the feminine has therefore meant politicizing private life. This is why the "totalitarian" potential which Bork senses is already being realized.

"All politics is on one level sexual politics," writes George Gilder. At least sexual politics is the logical culmination of all *radical* politics, which is the politics that has defined modern history. More than any other threat, Feminism demands that the next conservatism examine conservatives' own reflexes and habits in a world in which radical assumptions have permeated well beyond the ranks of Leftist ideologues. It demands that a new conservative agenda challenges not just this doctrine or that, but the very concept of a politics defined by ideologies, activists, organizations, opinion-mongers, and a professional political class for whom politics is all-consuming (even when we agree with them). The next conservatism must try to recover a civic life of citizens, householders, parents, churches and synagogues, local communities, and values that transcend political calculation. Czech - dissident and later President Vaclav Havel called this "apolitical politics": a world where, contrary to Feminists and Communists and all ideologues, the personal is not political.

Stephen Baskerville is President of the American Coalition for Fathers and Children. The views expressed are his own.