



“Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus”? A Case Study of Some Radical Feminist Discourse in the Crossfire

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“Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus”¹?

A Case Study of Some Radical Feminist Discourse in the Crossfire

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Le féminisme radical, qui a connu son apogée dans les années 60/70—avec des groupes tels que les New York Radical Feminists, WITCH, les Redstockings et SCUM— a participé activement à la “guerre des sexes” par son discours virulent contre la gent masculine. D’une part, cet article propose d’examiner quelques exemples de ce discours militant et son impact sur la culture américaine tel que l’on peut le discerner dans la presse grand public de l’époque. D’autre part, il s’agit de voir dans quelle mesure la guerre contre le féminisme radical perdure sur la scène politique, même après la disparition de bon nombre de ces mouvements.

These are times that try men’s souls, and they are likely to get much worse before they get better. It was not so long ago that the battle of the sexes was fought in gentle, rolling Thurber country. Now the din is in earnest, echoing from the streets where pickets gather, the bars where women once were barred, and even connubial beds, where ideology can intrude at the unconscious drop of a male chauvinist epithet.

—“Who’s Come a Long Way Baby?”, Time August 31, 1970

Introduction

The discourse of gender war characteristic of radical feminism² in the late 1960s and early 1970s springs from a complex web of underlying

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social, political and cultural issues of the “counterculture” period. The political turmoil of the Civil Rights movement, the rise of the New Left and the staunch opposition to American involvement in Vietnam created an environment favorable to political awareness and militant activism among the young and minorities, including women. Within the Women’s Liberation movement, radical feminism found its roots in the discontent—even disillusion—of certain women who had become involved in groups such as the Student Nonviolent (later National) Coordinating Committee, Students for a Democratic Society and the New Left. Emblematic of the denunciation of male-dominated management of these revolutionary movements are articles such as “Towards a Radical Movement” by Heather Booth, Eve Goldfield and Sue Munaker (1968) or “The Grand Coolie Damn” by novelist and poetess Marge Piercy (1969):

The Movement is supposed to be for human liberation. How come the condition of women inside it is no better than outside? We have been trying to educate and agitate around women’s liberation for several years. How come things are getting worse? [...]

Movement men are generally interested in women occasionally as bed partners, as domestic-servants-mother-surrogates, and constantly as economic producers: as in other patriarchal societies, one’s wealth in the Movement can be measured in terms of the people whose labor one can possess and direct on one’s projects.³

At the same time, the period during which feminism expanded was one of unequalled political and social violence, rife with race riots in major U.S. cities, political assassinations, military atrocities (of which My Lai remains the most notorious instance) as well as police brutality against student demonstrators and Civil Rights activists, generating what Robert Crunden terms “a genuine radicalism” (299). Small wonder, then, that certain feminists couched their own political views in the language of war; within this context, the re-emergence of political consciousness among women (now called “second wave” feminism) fueled the founding of diverse feminist groups spanning across the ideological spectrum, from what is termed “liberal feminism” for an organization such as the National Organization for Women (NOW) to a multitude of radical groups such as the New York Radical Women, the Redstockings, WITCH (Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell), BITCH, or perhaps the most extreme of them all, SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men).⁴ Because radical feminist theory rejected outright the possibility of equality within the existing social fabric of American culture deemed fundamentally flawed by patriarchal rule, it is in this specific form of feminist discourse that the theme of revolution—which includes waging war against all things male—is to be found. The extent of political alienation of such groups can be observed in the degree of verbal violence used, as we will attempt to demonstrate in the next section.

Just how this discourse was received in its contemporaneous context can shed new light on the stakes of the feminist battle for women's rights; it is for this reason that this article will not only look at some significant feminist discourse but also examine selected media representations of feminism, using several feature articles from *Time* magazine as illustrations of popular (predominantly male?) resistance to women's calls for fundamental social change.

From Mainstream to Marginal

Historically speaking, the twentieth century feminist movements are said to have originated with the publication of Betty Friedan's seminal work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) in which she described the plight of modern suburban housewifery—the famous “problem with no name.” Among the founders of the National Organization for Women, Friedan became NOW's first president and penned the Statement of Purpose in 1966; the opening paragraphs of the document declare that:

We, men and women, who hereby constitute ourselves as the National Organization for Women, believe that the time has come for a new movement toward true equality for all women in America, and toward a fully equal partnership of the sexes, as part of the world-wide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders.

The purpose of NOW is to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men.

We believe the time has come to move beyond the abstract argument, discussion and symposia over the status and special nature of women which has raged in America in recent years; the time has come to confront, with concrete action, the conditions that now prevent women from enjoying the equality of opportunity and freedom of which is their right, as individual Americans, and as human beings.

NOW is dedicated to the proposition that women, first and foremost, are human beings, who, like all other people in our society, must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential. We believe that women can achieve such equality only by accepting to the full the challenges and responsibilities they share with all other people in our society, as part of the decision-making mainstream of American political, economic and social life.

(<http://www.now.org/history/purpos66.html>)

It is interesting to note, for example, the expression “new movement toward true equality” (lines 2-3), a passing reference to the feminist movement(s) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries not yet baptized, at this early date, “first wave” feminism. The language of the Statement of Purpose (notably the insistence on equality between men and women and the notion of partnership) and the strategies presented for

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achieving equality (through “full participation in the mainstream of American society” lines 6-7; “as part of the decision-making mainstream of American political, economic and social life” lines 19-20) echo certain nineteenth-century feminists’ political strategies within the system rather than in opposition to it. We may recall here that first wave feminists became involved in political activism through participation in the abolitionist movement, hoping, among other things, that the destruction of the slave system and (what they saw as) *de facto* recognition of all humans as equal would provide in its wake equal rights for women as demanded in the Seneca Falls Convention *Declaration of Sentiments* (1848). This is made all the more apparent in NOW’s 1998 *Declaration of Sentiments*:

Our foremothers—the first wave of feminists—ran underground railroads, lobbied, marched, and picketed. They were jailed and force fed, lynched and raped. But they prevailed. They started with a handful of activists, and today, the feminist movement involves millions of people every day.

Standing on their shoulders, we launched the National Organization for Women in 1966, the largest and strongest organization of feminists in the world today. A devoutly grassroots, action-oriented organization, we have sued, boycotted, picketed, lobbied, demonstrated, marched, and engaged in non-violent civil disobedience. We have won in the courts and in the legislatures; and we have negotiated with the largest corporations in the world, winning unparalleled rights for women.

(<http://www.now.org/organization/conference/1998/vision98.html>)

Despite NOW’s clearly stated agenda (in 1966) for the obtention of equal rights for women in education, in the home, in the workplace and in American society in general, their choice of a traditional hierarchical structure, and a will to function within constraints such as board meetings, elected officers and committee heads was to come under attack from within by the likes of Ti-Grace Atkinson (then president of NOW-New York) who attempted to force NOW into a more radical approach to equality:

As a graduate student on a campus with a high-profile SDS chapter, Atkinson had become a convert to participatory democracy. Convinced it would be good for NOW, she proposed to the national board that instead of electing officers, NOW chapters should hold lotteries at frequent intervals and allow members to draw lots for the leadership positions.

(Davis 96)

The proposal failed both at the national and local levels, causing Atkinson to resign and found The Feminists in 1968 (Davis 97). Politically speaking, separatist feminist groups set on “consciousness raising” as the best tool for fundamental change created high-profile events to bring public attention to their agendas, such as staging the Burial of Traditional Womanhood (organized by New York Radical Women) or the protest against the Miss America Contest in Atlantic City, New Jersey (of which media

coverage produced the image of the “bra-burning feminist”) to cite only two famous examples (<http://www.feminism.org>, “The Feminist Chronicles”).

Radical equality feminists thus moved away from mainstream “liberal” feminism to pursue experiments in rejecting power structure, perceived as fundamentally male. Atkinson is well-known for her extremist positions on heterosexual love (“Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice”; “Love is the victim’s response to the rapist”) which still appear today on feminist-bashing websites such as wiki.mensactivism.org or fathers.bc.ca, proof if need be that the feminist war on patriarchy is far from being a quaint chapter of radical feminist history. The late sixties also provided other significant documents illustrative of radical feminist discourse, collected and edited by Robin Morgan in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (published in 1970). Entries include “The Redstockings Manifesto” (originally called “The Bitch Manifesto”), the “No More Miss America” tract and the “Principles of the New York Radical Women” (of which Robin Morgan was one of the founders). In stark contrast to NOW’s Statement of Purpose, such documents used crude language to make their point:

We define the best interests of women as the best interests of the poorest, most insulted, most despised woman on earth. [...] She is Everywoman: ugly, dumb (dumb broad, dumb cunt), bitch, nag, hag, whore, fucking and breeding machine, mother of us all. Until Everywoman is free, no woman will be free.

(Principles, New York Radical Women in Morgan 524)

Another major turning point in the war between the sexes was the publication of Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1969), in which she attacked in turn literature, the Bible, Western myth, and Freudian psychology as male-driven constructions serving the patriarchal subjection of women. The book, originally Millet’s Ph.D. dissertation, was described in *Time* magazine (“Who’s Come a Long Way, Baby?”, August 31, 1970) in the following terms:

The most radical feminists’ [...] eschatological aim is to topple the patriarchal system in which men by birthright control all of society’s levers of power—in government, industry, education, science, the arts.

*Such notions have been raised aloft by the feminist movement in the U.S. since its beginnings more than a century ago. Until this year, however, with the publication of a remarkable book called *Sexual Politics*, the movement had no coherent theory to buttress its intuitive passions, no ideologue to provide chapter and verse for its assault on patriarchy.*

Indeed, Millet’s work examines Western history from the unique perspective of women’s systematic oppression by an all powerful male culture created exclusively to maintain women in an inferior, subjugated role. She denounces the family as “patriarchy’s chief institution” (33), the concept of romantic

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love as “the means of manipulation in which man exploits the woman” (37), while Western myth and Biblical stories are the ideological tools through which subjugation is justified: “[The Pandora myth and the myth of the Fall] are two important Western archetypes which condemn the female through her sexuality and explain her position as her well-deserved punishment for the primal sin under whose unfortunate consequences the race yet labors” (52). Millet comes to the (logical) conclusion that the patriarchal system must be demolished, and new myths created to reflect “the female principle” (109). The postscript ends on a positive note—the hope that the sexual revolution will bring men and women “closer to humanity”—and yet Millett does not exclude the possibility of resorting to “violent tactics” or even “armed struggle” to obtain equality for women (363).

Even if one is to believe *Time* magazine’s statement that *Sexual Politics* made Kate Millet “the Mao Tse-Tung of Women’s Liberation” and that it set an example for other radical documents, it is of interest to note that one of the most extreme declarations of war against the male race came well before her work in 1967, when Valerie Solanas self-published her *SCUM Manifesto*, the first of the eight published versions (Baer in Solanas, 58). The opening paragraph sets the tone: “Life in society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex” (Solanas 1).

According to Solanas, the male is a “biological accident” and is aware “deep down [that] he’s a worthless piece of shit.”⁵ All aspects of modern society have been developed to suppress individuality, nurture men’s insecurity and maintain women in a state of “animality”—her term for motherhood (12). While the *SCUM Manifesto* is best known for its crude language and demented demands for a “better” society through “destroying, looting, fucking-up and killing” (44), it did not prevent Solanas from being hailed as “the first outstanding champion of women’s rights” or “one of the most important spokeswomen of the feminist movement” by prominent radical feminists Ti-Grace Atkinson and Florynce Kennedy.⁵ In any case, the *SCUM* text, like other radical discourse of the period, clearly designates men as the ultimate enemy and the female body as the battleground.

War of the Words

More visible perhaps than the actual battle for achieving some form of change for women in America—which could obviously not happen overnight—were the battles being waged at the verbal level. As stated earlier in the introduction, we will attempt to shed a *different* light on the

impact of the “war of the sexes” by examining the content of a number of *Time* magazine articles published in the years 1970-1972, when radical feminism had made its way into the public spotlight; a selection of articles in this timeframe illustrates the magazine’s somewhat ambiguous and strangely conservative stance on the subject. Considered, at least in the 1970s, as a liberal (in the American sense) magazine, *Time*’s anti-Establishment positions on other issues such as the Nixon presidency or American involvement in Vietnam would lead the reader to expect a favorable treatment of feminism. It is to be noted that during the two-year period mentioned above, *Time* published six articles (one of which is the long feature article already quoted in this paper, “Who’s Come a Long Way, Baby?”), three editorials and an entire special issue entitled *The American Woman* on March 20, 1972. One of the earlier articles, “New Victory in an Old Crusade” (August 24, 1970) first compares “new” feminist actions to those of the Civil Rights movement, developing the possible positive and negative aspects of an equal rights amendment for women: for example, the amendment would abolish discrimination against women in higher education, but on the downside it would “presumably clear the way for [women’s] entrance to West Point and Annapolis;” or the amendment would affect divorce laws, allowing men to collect alimony in some instances, but “one danger of the amendment is that it may prompt a deluge of lawsuits [...] and the courts could be clogged for years.” On a rather strange note, the article ends with the anecdote of a Women’s Lib fundraising party:

One braless and strapping writer for the Village Voice interrupted serious oratory by abruptly stripping to her panties and plunging into the swimming pool. [my note: a snapshot of this event adorns the entire left-hand column of the article] Writer Gloria Steinem, a co-hostess at the party, offered a solemn interpretation of the movement: “The problem with Women’s Lib is that it is misunderstood by men. Men think that once women become liberated, it will mean no more sex for men. But what men don’t realize is that if women are liberated, there will be more sex and better” (my emphasis).

Such juxtaposing of “serious” or “solemn” with the (then) outrageously loose behavior and language of these representatives of the feminist movement undoubtedly fueled male readers’ fears of what havoc women were wreaking on American society, despite the promise of more and better sex.

The six-page feature article “Who’s Come a Long Way, Baby?”⁶ functions in much the same two-edged way: beginning with a brief synopsis of feminist demands at home and in the workplace, the article then concentrates on the rise of Millet as Women’s Lib “ideologue” and on radical feminism’s most extreme declarations such as Ti-Grace Atkinson’s claim that marriage is slavery, that to escape from the dependency of love women must commit suicide, or certain radical feminists’ promotion of

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lesbianism. The divisions within the movement are developed at length, as are feminist publications described as “angry and barely afloat financially.” The (anonymous) author then concludes this portion of the article by noting that “many[...] women in the movement are bitterly resentful of the image of Women’s Liberation they feel has been created by the press and TV. Some refuse to talk to major publications [...].” Last but not least, this article ends with a special cameo piece on social anthropologist Lionel Tiger (entitled “An Unchauvinist Male Replies”) in which he states

Women’s Liberation is very much a minority movement. It’s evangelical. It’s a movement that makes people feel good, and there will be a lot of people reading these books who won’t do a thing to change the conditions of their lives; still they like reading about revolution. In one sense it constitutes a kind of pornography; it’s a fantasy about the different ordering of things without individuals really doing anything about the ordering.

Thus the magazine leaves the final judgement on feminism to a male voice of authority (all the more convincing as the author is a scientist and therefore, one would suppose, objective in his observations), which despite the claim made in the title is anything but “unchauvinist.”

Curiously enough, the same issue of *Time* contains Gloria Steinem’s famous article “What Would Happen if Women Win” which opens with the statement that “women don’t want to exchange places with men.” Using the approach of utopian speculation for America’s future, Steinem attempts to describe equality *without* the gender war: “Women’s Lib is not trying to destroy the American family [...]. Liberated women are just trying to point out the disaster [of divorce statistics] and build compassionate and practical alternatives from the ruins.” The article discusses in detail the advantages of sexual equality in the fields of marriage, child care, education and the workplace; Steinem actually goes to great lengths in insisting on how a sexual revolution will not necessarily mean the destruction of society as the 1970s reader knows it:

Assuming, however, that these blatantly sexist [marriage] laws are abolished or reformed, that job discrimination is forbidden, that parents share financial responsibility for each other and the children, and that sexual relationships become partnerships of equal adults (some pretty big assumptions), then marriage will probably go right on. Men and women are, after all, physically complementary.

Such discourse is a rather far cry from other declarations concerning lesbianism, the repeal of marriage as an institution or an all-female society, a worldview which Steinem herself denounces in the second paragraph of her article as only used by “male chauvinists, science fiction writers and comedians [...] for its shock value.” In comparison, then, to the feature article itself which gives preference to a rather alarmist reading of the feminist movement, Steinem’s arguments seem consensus-conscious—in

particular, for example, the statement that “the revolution would not take away the option of being a housewife.” This would seem to corroborate radical feminist criticism of NOW and the ideological divisions within the feminist movement as early as 1967-1968.

Escalation and the Rise of the Religious Right

The war on words continued—and one could say even amplified—after 1972. Still using *Time* magazine as an example of how feminist discourse was represented to the general public, two interesting articles appeared in March and October of 1972, one entitled “Ah, Sweet Ms-ery” by Jack Davis and an editorial by Stefan Kanfer “Sispeak: A Msguided Attempt to change Herstory.” As the titles indicate, what is presented by the authors as the feminist battle to “demasculate” words of the English language in the war for equality came under close scrutiny. Davis’s article, written in a tone of light-hearted irony, points out that:

Expressions such as “male chauvinist pig” (MCP), “bra burner,” “consciousness raising,” “sex role,” “role model,” “sexist” and “sexism,” “sister,” “sisterhood” and “machismo” are now in common use, even among precocious preteen-agers. [...] But some women want more. The language, they say, reflects centuries of male dominance, and is loaded with male chauvinist piggisms that must be thoroughly rooted out.

He taunts the proposed use of expressions (now in current use) such as “chairperson,” and wonders what effect it would have to speak of the Founding Mothers (this now exists, at least academically) or read “In Goddess We Trust” on American currency. He also mentions feminists’ desire to turn hurricanes into “hissicanes”; and although this never happened, it can be noted that the National Weather Service began giving male names to hurricanes starting in 1979. Yet one of “the fiercest battles in the war of the word” according to Davis is over the use of *Ms.*, to which “resistance is crumbling” in business organizations and even in some government agencies such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission... but *not* the White House, the author points out. This last point would appear to be in contradiction with presidential treatment of women’s issues, in particular the President’s Commission on the Status of Women created under Kennedy or the Presidential Task Force on Women’s Rights created by Nixon. Is Davis criticizing the Nixon White House for not practicing what it preaches, or on the contrary is he praising it for its resistance to what he sees as illegitimate political pressure?

Stefan Kanfer takes a more literary approach in his editorial, drawing parallels between feminist attempts at language change and works such as Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (comparison to “Newspeak”), Carroll’s

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Through the Looking Glass (comparison to Humpty Dumpty) and Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (comparison to "nadsat"). According to Kanfer, revision of the language can only take place if reinforced with values: "Chairman is a role, not a pejorative. Congressman is an office, not a chauvinist plot. Mankind is a term for all humanity, not 49% of it. The feminist attack on social crimes may be as legitimate as it was inevitable. But the attack on words is only another social crime—one against the means and the hope of communication."

It is hard to understand the alarmist nature of these declarations in an age where "chairperson," "Congresswoman" and "humankind" have become normal usages, without hindering communication or replacing cultural values; and as with other *Time* articles of the period, Kanfer's stance remains ambiguous, claiming comprehension of feminist action (use of the word "legitimate") while condemning it in the same breath (the attack on words is a "social crime"). But as feminist activism began to wane, and as some of these seemingly outlandish linguistic practices began to actually get a foothold in the culture (beginning with the publication in 1972 of *Ms. Magazine* which made that invention a household commonplace), journalistic attacks retreated.

The next real assault on feminists, and the reopening of hostilities in the war against women, re-emerged in the 1980s after Reagan was elected to the White House at least in part thanks to the rise of the religious right. Most notably, women became the target of conservatives who complained of "reverse discrimination" and who thus set out to turn back the clock on civil rights: the New Right attacked affirmative action, Title IX (equal rights for women in education through the court system), waged a war against the Women's Educational Equity Act (eventually managing to fire and replace the female pro-feminist director with a member of conservative Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum) and sought to overturn the Supreme Court ruling on legal abortion (Davis 435-442).

The question of backlash against militant feminism remains closely linked to the ideological battle on the abortion issue, which pitted anti-abortion organizations such as the National Right to Life Committee (founded in 1973) or later Operation Rescue against NOW and other "pro-choice" groups such as Planned Parenthood. Right-to-lifers used state court systems to restrict abortion laws, and attempted to introduce an amendment to the Constitution called the Human Life Amendment (Davis 452); in the streets, the battle turned to all-out warfare with the bombing and torching of abortion clinics around the country in 1984, and the killing of two OB-GYNs who practiced abortions ("Explosions over Abortion", *Time*, January 14, 1985; this article reports fifteen attacks between September and December 1984 and the FBI's refusal to consider them as a form of political terrorism). Feminist history books of the 1990s relating the divisions over abortion and other political confrontations between the religious right and

feminists all describe this period in terms of war: Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*, chapter 14 "Reproductive Rights Under Backlash: The Invasion of Women's Bodies" (1991), Marilyn French's *The War Against Women* (1992), Flora Davis's *Moving the Mountain* (1991), in particular the chapter "The New Right and the War on Feminism" are but a few representative works of this trend.

The late 1980s and early 1990s also represented a turning point in the media representations of the battle of the sexes: coverage of the Equal Rights Amendment failure to achieve ratification by three-quarters of the state legislatures gave rise to numerous articles on the conflicts within feminist organizations; the cover story of *Time's* December 4, 1989 issue entitled "Onward, Women!" for instance, depicts feminism as a thing of the past and of no interest to younger generations of women:

Hairy legs haunt the feminist movement, as do images of being strident and lesbian. Feminine clothing is back; breasts are back; motherhood is in again. To the young, the movement that loudly rejected female stereotypes seems hopelessly dated. The long, ill-fated battle for the Equal Rights Amendment means nothing to young women who already assume they will be treated as equals.

Feminist leaders like Gloria Steinem and Molly Yard, president of the National Organization for Women, are dismissed as out of touch. [...] Sometimes even women who participated in the feminist revolution, who shaped their lives according to its ideals, shake their heads, and wonder. Yes, these women in their 30s and 40s are feminists, but things have not worked out as expected. It is hard for them not to feel resentful. [...] The bitterest complaints come from the growing ranks of women who have reached 40 and find themselves childless, having put their careers first.

Here feminism comes under frontal attack: its rejection of true womanhood, its foiled political ambitions, the desertion of most of its followers and its incapacity to attract new members are proof if need be of the overall failure of Women's Liberation. The author seemingly pities those feminists who have trouble not feeling resentful; their ultimate punishment for having believed in the feminist revolution is finding themselves "childless, having put their careers first." Rather than reflect on why the United States was not yet ready to embrace the terms of the Equal Rights Amendment, the author reverts to stereotypical images reminiscent of the war of the sexes in the 70s; perhaps it is easier to understand when placed in the larger context of the "cultural war" against liberals on all fronts which reached its apex with Bill Clinton's candidacy and presidency.⁷

No Ceasefire in Sight

Although popular wisdom would have it that the battle of the sexes is a thing of the past and that younger women seem to take equality for granted, a close examination of certain pro-male websites currently online still points

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to a deep ideological division that is being milked for its electoral advantages. Modern communication technology—i.e. the development and expansion of the Internet as a political tool for reaching large audiences—has given even very small interest groups visibility they could not afford previous to the advent of the Web, even if a few groups such as The Promise Keepers or Louis Farrakan’s Nation of Islam Million Man March have managed to attract national media attention.

Already in the 1990s, NOW fought actively against the likes of The Promise Keepers, an all-male group devoted to giving power back to men in the home as husbands and fathers, even picketing Promise Keeper stadium rallies (Myers). At present, Google word searches with the key words “radical feminism” produce, in the top 10 hits, the radically anti-feminist fathersforlife.org. This particular group offers an entire section of its site to choice explanations of feminism such as:

fem-prop

Pronunciation: ‘fe-m-”pröp

Function: noun

Etymology: New Latin, from *feminismus* feminism + *propaganda*

Date: 2004

PROPAGANDA; especially : political propaganda promulgated chiefly to promote the feminist ideology (men bad - women good) in politics, the judiciary, social research, academe, the bureaucracy, the education system, the media, publishing, literature, drama, music, art, etc.

femprop adjective

Femprop does not stop at offering opportunities for outrageous quotes. It reforms society from within. It does that so all-pervasively and with such insidious persuasiveness that virtually no member of society is aware of being brainwashed through femprop. When propaganda becomes as ubiquitous as femprop has become, it will no longer be noticed much. Therefore femprop is virtually unopposed by anyone and successfully serves to indoctrinate the citizens of many nations with the feminist ideology far more thoroughly than either communism or fascism ever dared to hope.

(www.fatherforlife.org, “Feminism”)

Whereas we have seen the example of a journalist who pronounced feminism to be dead and out of touch with current social issues, this particular hate group perceives, perhaps more accurately, the international influence of the feminist movement and its concern with women’s conditions not only in the United States but in many other places around the globe (even if such influence is termed “insidious”).

The fathersforlife statement of purpose explains that

The website of Fathers for Life is in defense of men and fathers. It promotes fathers within, not without families. Deadbeat fathers are a very small, minuscule minority and not representative of all men, just as deadbeat mothers are not representative of all mothers or women. However, we hear incessantly about deadbeat or violent

fathers and men, while the issue of deadbeat mothers and far greater numbers of violent women is being swept under the carpet by feminist activists and the feminist-dominated media. Our website illustrates how the all-pervasive vilification of men, of fathers and of the traditional nuclear family grew out of the systematic implementation of the agenda for the planned destruction of the family.

Thus it would appear that radicalisation of the gender wars, originally attributed to feminist activism of the 1970s, has been reappropriated to serve the scare tactics of certain religious right groups and other conservatives still in control of American politics. In the popular culture, the immense success of psychotherapist John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* self-help book and methods (see marsvenus.com for example) are an indication of the pendulum swing from political activism to "magic bullet" solutions to bridging the gap between the sexes—which this author may add fundamentally contradict feminist demands for equal treatment for women in the domestic sphere for example.

Despite former feminist militants' calls for a ceasefire in the interest of social peace, the war for—and about—women's place in the world rages on. Perhaps the most symptomatic signs are to be found in the return of such figures as Robin Morgan, who published in 2006 a work entitled *Fighting Words: A Toolkit for Combating the Religious Right* in which she proposes a re-reading of founding documents in an effort to debunk the conservative Right's monopoly on their interpretation.

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- Patrick Buchanan official website: <http://www.buchanan.org>
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NOTES

1. John Gray. *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationship*. New York: Harper Collins, 1992 (first edition). The most recent paper edition (2004) carries a different subtitle : *The Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex*.

2. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean propose the following definition in *Materialist Feminisms* (Londres : Blackwell Publishers, 1993): "Radical feminism argues that the key to women's oppression is men's power over women, a power so embedded in all existing social structures that it cannot be overcome without a general transformation of society. Consequently, radical feminists contend that the concept of legal equality, i.e. equal rights, is insufficient and that all existing social and political institutions need to be uprooted and replaced."

3. These two texts as well as many other fundamental texts of the different American feminist movements are accessible online at The Chicago Women's Liberation Herstory Project, in the "Archives" folder under "Classic feminist writings" <http://www.cwluherstory.org/cwlu-historical-archive/17.html>.

4. For a complete history of radical feminism and the groups associated with it, see for example Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* or (in French) Ginette Castro, *Radioscopie du féminisme américain*.

5. Kennedy, a radical feminist lawyer, represented Solanas in court after Solanas was arrested and tried for having attempted to murder Andy Warhol on June 3rd, 1968 (Baer in Solanas 54).

NOTES

6. The title is an intertextual reference to a Phillip-Morris cigarette campaign for Virginia Slims, a “women’s” cigarette with the slogan “You’ve come a long way, baby.” The TV commercial had a jingle in which a female chorus sang “You’ve come a long way, baby/To get where you’ve got to, today/You’ve got your own cigarette now, baby/You’ve come a long, long way”. (This information is from personal memories of the moment!). Some examples of the billboard and magazine campaign can be seen at http://www.wclynx.com/burntofferings/adsvirginiaslims_ads.html.

7. The term “cultural war” comes from conservative Pat Buchanan’s speech at the Republican National Convention in August of 1992. The exact quote is “My friends, this election is about much more than who gets what. It is about who we are. It is about what we believe. It is about what we stand for as Americans. There is a religious war going on in our country for the soul of America. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we will one day be as was the Cold War itself” (<http://www.buchanan.org/pa-92-0817-rnc.html>).