

# Culture

On NRO Weekend 

## Raider of the Lost Patriarch

An honorary white male explains.

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It's women's history month — an annual rite that serves to remind us that our chroniclers of female achievement sound more like academics on acid than serious scholars. Many of these feminist historians (or herstorians, as some prefer to be called) can be found in the world of women's studies, a discipline led by females bearing a curious resemblance to Karl Marx in drag. These Marxist-feminists spend their days issuing manifestos, meditations, and personal narratives describing the nightmarish oppression that apparently afflicts not only struggling single mothers, but also tenured females with endowed chairs at major universities.

The authoritative-sounding *Reader's Companion to U.S. Women's History Month* provides some insight into the manifestations of this omnipresent female oppression. My personal favorite is "compulsory heterosexuality." Said condition results from "an ideology that sees heterosexuality as natural, universal, and biologically necessary." An ideology that has been created and enforced by the Freddy Kruger of radical feminism — *the patriarchy*.

In feminist circles, *patriarchy* refers not simply to a society where the upper echelons of economic and political power are predominantly male (i.e. all known human societies). Rather, it connotes far more: the global equivalent of organized crime, a diabolical, zero-sum conspiracy to benefit males at the expense of females. In her indispensable book, *Heterophobia*, Daphne Patai documents an alarming number of feminist minds who, having deconstructed the patriarchal genome, propose startling conclusions about its origins. Consider, for example, the words of Marilyn Frye, a professor of women's studies at Michigan State University. In her view, the "key mechanism of the global phenomenon of male domination, oppression, and exploitation of females is near-universal female heterosexuality."

"It is on this terrain of heterosexual connection," she explains, "that girls and women are habituated to abuse, insult, and degradation, that girls are reduced to women — to wives, to whores, to

mistresses, to sex slaves, to clerical workers and textile workers, to the mothers of men's children." One has to wonder whether William Jennings Bryan would not have preferred the teachings of John Scopes to a curriculum filled with this sort of stuff.

Which brings me to an alternate explanation — one rooted in a more Darwinian view of human sex differences. It sees the human female as having been endowed for millions of years with vast power to shape the male of her species. As the "choosier sex," she has forced males to compete for her affections — sometimes fiercely. It is not difficult to understand why males who showed little dominance or status-oriented behavior were probably among the first scratched off her dance card. Whatever their positive qualities, she realized that during hard times, such males would have trouble competing for resources that her family would need to survive.

By favoring males oriented toward obtaining power and resources, women unwittingly caused these traits to become common in the human male — an example of a process that Darwin named "sexual selection." It has made the typical male more likely to respond to certain environmental cues than the typical female — and vice-versa. To the extent that male dominance of political and economic institutions has followed, it is not a consequence of a masculinist conspiracy, but of female choice. That a preference for traits such as ambition, industriousness, and competitiveness has produced a world where few men are natural egalitarians is hardly shocking.

Admittedly, many feminists believe that patriarchy will decline as women achieve equal footing with men in the corridors of financial and political power. This scenario presupposes two things. One is that females are as willing as males to do whatever necessary to reach and stay at the top. The other is that women will put less importance on marrying men with economic and political power once they obtain more of it on their own.

So far, neither assumption has much support. There is even evidence to the contrary. In a study of college students, psychologists Michael Wiederman and Elizabeth Allgeier of Bowling Green University found that women who anticipated higher incomes placed slightly more value on a potential mate's financial prospects than females who expected lower earnings. Real-world evidence consistent with the implications of results like these can be found in the mate choices of feminist icons like Gloria Steinem, Betty Friedan, or Hillary Clinton. None married men whose life histories bespeak indifference to economic or political power.

Though this explanation of patriarchy credits women with far greater influence than do victim ideologies, it is anathema to feminists. One goes so far as to deride women who reject her radical feminist views of patriarchy as "honorary white males." Actually, the appellation suits me just fine. I rather like being considered part of a group whose members include the inventors of the microwave oven, the dishwasher, and the vacuum cleaner — among other labor-saving devices. Their ingenuity freed me to pursue my many interests, the most important of which is saying my piece here at NRO from time to time.

The thought occurs to me that these labor-saving devices — along with a host of male inventions that allow women to plan their reproductive lives — were essential to creating a world where legions of women could earn doctoral degrees, obtain professorships, and set up departments of women's studies. But why bother with the details. Women's history month pays no homage to patriachs, no matter how significant their contribution to women's lives may be.