IN DEFENSE OF PATRIARCHY

The Natural Family Dimly Seen Through Feminist Eyes

Allan Carlson

Aspiring patriarchs would seem to have little to cheer about in recent decades. Equal pay statutes have destroyed the “family wage” regime that once rewarded the breadwinning father as “head of household.” The real hourly wages of blue collar men are lower today than they were in 1973. Title IX rules have forcibly turned much of the male dominated athletic world over to the women. Aggressive little boys are tamed by Ritalin. School textbooks fervently promote the feminist worldview, celebrating female steelworkers and male daycare workers. The same ideology dominates the vast majority of American colleges and universities; turgid women’s studies programs are ubiquitous. The military places the quest for androgyny above the goal of victory. Prestige professions such as medical doctor and lawyer are rapidly being feminized. Marriage rates and marital birthrates are low. Child support orders turn many remaining fathers into the indentured servants of their ex-wives. Church liturgies sound like Ms. magazine articles. Language police crush the generic “he.”

Like all other interest groups or hobbyists in America, patriarchs did have their own journal. Issuing from tiny Willis, Virginia, Patriarch magazine sought “nothing less than a return to patriarchy, a society led by strong, godly men.... Each man should aim to be the founder of a dynasty for God.” However, its editor suspended publication in 2004; circulation was probably never more than a few thousand; and in terms of graphics, it was clearly the product of a simple home business. Today’s would-be patriarch now has nowhere to turn for advice and inspiration.

And yet, to hear the feminists tell it, patriarchs remain wily and clever foes; their power undiminished. Feminist historian Judith Bennett marvels at patriarchy “in all its immense variety.” The Marxist Heidi Hartmann finds patriarchy to be “a strikingly resilient form of social organization.” Philosopher Gerda Lerner sees patriarchy as “remarkably adaptive and resilient.”

When one strategy for the suppression of women fails, it seems, the patriarchs simply craft another. For example, after women won the vote and equal property rights in the early twentieth century, the patriarchs invented Freudianism which marked as “neurotic” and “perverted” those women who were not heterosexually active. As feminist theorist Sylvia
Walby concludes: “for every victory won by women there has been a patriarchal backlash in another area. Patriarchy is a dynamic system.... If women down..., then patriarchal forces will regroup and regain control over them in other ways.” Might this be true?

Patriarchs and Evolution

Feminists have long obsessed over the origin of patriarchy and its key institution, the family. Early on, they found little in the then understood human record that was encouraging. During the late nineteenth century, most anthropologists saw the patriarchal family as the pinnacle of human civilization. In Ancient Law (1861), Sir Henry Maine said that societies with women in power were low on the evolutionary scale, a situation suited only for savages. In contrast, patriarchal rule in families and states was the culmination of human progress. John Lubbock, in The Origin of Civilization and the Primitive Condition of Man (1870), also celebrated male rule as the foundation of civilized living. Lewis Henry Morgan’s Ancient Society (1877) devised an evolutionary sequence from a savage state dominated by women, through a barbaric phase with some matrilineal qualities, to civilization resting on patriarchal monogamy.

Rescuing the feminist worldview were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. According to the latter, Marx was planning to write a book on the family but died before starting the work. Engels took on the task, producing The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State in 1884. Drawing heavily on Morgan’s Ancient Society, the book adopted the same evolutionary scheme, yet turned the argument on its head. Where Morgan saw patriarchy as the summit of social evolution, Engels saw only oppression:

The overthrow of the mother right [found in savage society] was the world historical defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children.

Engels cast monogamous marriage as “the first class oppression.” He urged a return to the social order last seen among Morgan’s savages, to be achieved by easy divorce, free love, the socialized care and rearing of children, and “the reintroduction of the whole female sex into the public industries.”

Here was an account of history into which feminists could sink their teeth, continuing to inspire their cause to this day. Later interpreters would expand the narrative. Andrea Dworkin identified two historical forms of patriarchy: “the farming mode,” where a woman would be kept and exploited by one man for life; and “the brothel mode,” where women ostensibly enjoyed more freedom, but lost the support of men once their sexual and reproductive periods were over. Eli Zaretsky argued that while men were oppressed under capitalism by having to do wage work, women were oppressed by not being allowed to do wage work.

Heidi Hartmann saw an even more devious patriarchy cutting a dirty deal with capitalism. Employers discovered that paying a little extra to laboring men allowed the latter to suppress their own womenfolk by keeping them at home, while the capitalists gained healthier babies who would grow into more obedient workers. In this way, “the family wage cemented the partnership between patriarchy and capital.” After profusely praising Engels, Gerda Lerner traced the suppression of women to the dawn of the Neolithic age, when they were “commodified”: “Women themselves became a resource, acquired by men much as the land was acquired by men. Women were exchanged or bought in marriages for the benefit of their families; later, they were conquered and bought in slavery.”
meant that “the enslavement of women” by proto-patriarchs “preceded the formation of classes and class oppression.”

Other recent scholars have painted a happier face on Neolithic farming cultures, but agree that the arrival of patriarchy brought misery to women. Harvard anthropologist Marija Gimbutas claimed to find this better world on the Steppes of “Old Europe” (pre-3000 B.C.). Author of *The Goddessess and Gods of Old Europe*, she sees in the archaeological record a “matrific” society of farmers combining matrilineal, matrifocal, matricentric and egalitarian qualities, where the sexes were balanced and complementary; where there were no hierarchies. These communities prized figurines featuring pregnant women, which the Harvard don saw as representing a sacred cosmology within a mother-kinship social structure.

Alas, according to Gimbutas, this nearly Edenic existence was undone by the Kurgans. Over 2500 years, three waves of these strange invaders violently introduced a new value system. Their patriarchal, hierarchal social structure featured bronze metallurgy, weapons, warfare, horse riding, and elite burials often involving human and animal sacrifices. The Kurgans also celebrated bride stealing, cattle rustling, and heroism in combat and they worshipped sky gods and male warrior gods. These patriarchal peoples were organized for “predatory expansion,” which they proceeded to do, accidentally creating Western civilization in the process. As with Engels, though, the presumed existence of a non-patriarchal “golden age” in the pre-Kurgan era suggested that some form of matriarchy might be possible in the future.

“Public” Patriarchy

And yet, another batch of feminist scholars are reluctantly concluding that there will be no shining future free of the patriarchs. Rather, the wily and clever foe has taken on still another form, intent on continuing the suppression of women. They call the new strategy “public patriarchy.”

Sylvia Walby lays out the way in which “progressive reforms have been met with patriarchal counterattack.” Specifically, feminist-inspired laws that opened education, jobs, and professions to women combined with welfare benefits such as public daycare and nationalized health care to produce a curious result:

> While [women] lose their own individual patriarch, they do not lose their subordination to other patriarchal structures and practices. Indeed, they become ever more exposed to certain of the more diffused sets of patriarchal practices.

Once dependent on a “family wage” earning husband, the woman now sees her standard of living fixed by “the patriarchal state” through welfare benefits and by “the patriarchally structured labor market.” Although all major feminist goals had been achieved, “patriarchy changed in form, incorporating some of the hard won changes into new traps for women.”

Frances Fox Piven describes the new reality. Ever fewer women are in traditional families. For their part, men “are increasingly ‘liberated’ from their obligations under the moral economy of domesticity.” A few working women reach top positions as doctors, lawyers, and corporate executives, but most wind up in the low-pay service sector. More promisingly, “[w]omen have...developed a large and important relationship to the welfare state as the employees of [its] programs.” As early as 1980, American women held 70 percent of the jobs at all levels of government concerned with social service. This represented about half of all professional jobs claimed by women. Piven accepts this public patriarchy—where women do exercise some power through “their ‘dependent’ relationship with the state”—as the best option available.

Carole Pateman, however, retorts that
Piven has simply fallen into the new trap identified by Walby. As Pateman writes: “The power and capriciousness of husbands is being replaced by the arbitrariness, bureaucracy, and power of the state, the very state that has upheld patriarchal power.”

Evidence backing Walby’s and Pateman’s pessimistic view comes from Scandinavia, where the feminist ideology has been the most aggressively pursued. Observers have noted that in Norway, female members of parliament usually serve on the committees dealing with family, education, and social welfare; the men, meanwhile, serve on the high-prestige committees dealing with commerce, industry, and oil. In Sweden, men still overwhelmingly dominate private business; female CEO’s are almost unknown.

A 2006 study of “public patriarchy” by two Israeli sociologists produced astonishing results. Using a “Welfare State Intervention Index,” they examined the status of women in twenty-one developed Western nations, including the Scandinavian lands, the nations of Central and Western Europe, and Canada, the United States, and Australia. The researchers found that after four decades of intense feminist activism, men still controlled virtually all positions of prestige and power in the advanced Scandinavian welfare states, while women were still doing “women’s work.” As they explain:

state activities, while facilitating womens’ entrance into the labor market, do not facilitate their entry into high-authority and elite positions. Rather, the very same characteristics—generous family policies and a large public service sector—seem to reproduce the gendered division of labor and, in effect, decrease women’s chances of joining desirable positions.

Indeed, welfare states “channel women in disproportionate numbers into feminine occupational niches” such as child care, elder care, nursing, and elementary education. The odds of a woman being employed in classically “female” occupations are actually highest in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden! And so, just as predicted by the pessimists, the patriarchs win again: men still rule; and women are, as before, still doing traditional “women’s work.”

On Manliness

Perhaps it would be wise to move beyond feminist constructs to explain this result. In a controversial recent book, Harvard political philosopher Harvey Mansfield celebrates Manliness. He agrees with the grumbling and subdued feminists that “every previous society, including our democracy up to now, has been some kind of patriarchy, permeated by stubborn, self-insistent manliness.” Mansfield explains the rule of men by their greater levels of aggression and assertiveness. All the same, true manliness is constructive and progressive:

Manliness brings change or restores order at moments when routine is not enough, when the plan fails, when the whole idea of rational control by modern science develops leaks. Manliness is the next-to-last resort, before resignation and prayer.

In his book Why Men Rule (originally titled The Inevitability of Patriarchy), anthropologist Steven Goldberg also underscores what honest feminist historians reluctantly admit: there never has been a matriarchy where women ruled over men; the “Amazons never existed”; and despite the occasional female leader, “suprafamilial authority is always overwhelmingly male.” He traces these realities to the “neuro-endocrinological differences between men and women.” Because of their brain structure and abundance of testosterone, men are more inclined to competitiveness and the quest for dominance: “whatever variable one chooses, authority, status, and domi-
inance within each [social] stratum rest with the male in contact with equivalent females.” Meanwhile, the neurons and hormones of women condition them for the care and rearing of the young (which he does call “the single most important function served in any society or in nature itself”).

In an unexpected 2006 article for the journal *Foreign Policy*, Phillip Longman of the progressive New America Foundation describes “The Return of Patriarchy.” He defines this system as “a cultural regime that serves to keep birth rates high among the affluent, while also maximizing parents’ investments in their children,” and adds: “No advanced civilization has yet learned how to endure without it.” Essential pillars of patriarchy, he says, include the stigmatization of illegitimate children and single mothers. The system also emotionally penalizes women who do not marry and have children. Moreover, since both men and women can grow weary of the burdens of patriarchy, family-affirming religious faith is essential to long-term success. Considering the early twenty-first century, Longman concludes that the “great difference in fertility rates between secular individualists and religious and cultural conservatives augurs a vast, demographically driven change in modern societies.” The future will belong to those who “suppress their individualism and submit to father.”

*A Vision*

Even these portraits of the inevitable patriarchal future, though, lack poetry. Both demoralized feminists and sober male analysts continue to see the family as through a glass darkly: as an arena defined by power, assertiveness, and submission. Is this the real message taught by history?

Some of the earliest histories of the social condition of women remain among the best: Dr. Eileen Powers’s book on *Medieval English Nunneries* (1922) and her long essays on “The Menagerie’s Wife” and “The Position of Women [in the Middle Ages]”; Alice Clark’s *The Working Life of Women* (1920); Ivy Pinchbeck’s *Women Workers in the Industrial Revolution, 1750-1850* (1930); and Mary Beard’s *Women as Force in History* (1946). They rely on solid historical procedures, including the use of account books, household diaries, letters, memoirs, court reports, church documents, and corporation and guild records. Their common tale explodes the myth that the history of women is one long saga of subjugation. Rather, as Ferdinand Lundberg and Marynia F. Farnham summarize in their now neglected 1948 classic, *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex:*

*The hard fact is that women, prior to the vast industrial and economic changes of the eighteenth century usually described as the Industrial Revolution had large and relatively satisfactory scope for their unquestionable energies and talents... [T]he all too familiar view of women suddenly emerging in the nineteenth century from a long historical night on to a sunlit [feminist] plain is completely wrong.*

This is to say that in addition to doing their vital and irreplaceable work of bearing and rearing the young, the women of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Greece and Rome, of the Medieval era, and of Early Modern Europe enjoyed scope for their specific talents, exercised real power, and knew high esteem.

It may clarify matters at this point to offer up the enduring natural family as an ideal. Or better still, we might turn to it as a vision, albeit one readily attainable.

This course elevates a culture that understands the marriage of a woman to a man to be the central aspiration of the young. This culture affirms marriage as the best path to health, security, and fulfillment. It affirms the home built on marriage to be the source of true political sovereignty. It also holds the household...
framed by marriage to be the first economic unit, a place rich in activity. This culture treasures private property in family hands as the foundation of independence and liberty. It encourages young women to grow into wives, homemakers, and mothers. It encourages young men to grow into husbands, homebuilders, and fathers. This culture celebrates the marital sexual union as the unique source of human life. These homes are open to full quivers of children, the means of generational continuity and community renewal.

True happiness is the product of persons enmeshed in vital bonds with spouses, children, parents, and kin. A familial culture features a landscape of family homes, lawns, and gardens busy with useful tasks and ringing with the laughter of many children. It regards parents as the primary educators of their children. It opens homes to extended family members who need special care due to age or infirmity. This culture views neighborhoods, villages, and townships as the second locus of political sovereignty. It requires a freedom of commerce that respects and serves family integrity, as well as a nation-state that regards protection of the natural family as its first responsibility.22

Call it the consequence of a patriarchal order, or call it the natural family: this model for living is attuned to human nature, and it is the arbiter of human destiny. Where the feminist sees just another trap and the scientist sees the effects of differentiated neurons and hormones, the conservative sees a rightly ordered world, where the natural complementarity of man and woman finds fulfillment; and where women are most likely to find health, wealth, happiness, and fulfillment.

*The Fruits of Private Patriarchy*

This latter truth is affirmed by the natural and social sciences. For example, researchers at Princeton University have found that married women in industrialized nations live longer than their unmarried peers, with the gap actually growing in recent decades.23 Epidemiologists studying 7,500 white women age sixty-five or older have also uncovered strong evidence that marriage lengthens women's lives; indeed, it is “the most consistent predictor” of differential mortality.24 An article in *Social Biology* dealing with women is bluntly titled, “Perils of Single Life and Benefits of Marriage.”25

Marriages to private or sole patriarchs also make women wealthier. Researchers at Cornell and the University of Washington have shown that “the power of marriage to deliver affluence for women is extremely strong.” Marriage works this way by eliminating many of the extra household expenses that two single persons would otherwise have and by enabling “a division of labor that maximizes family income.”26 Investigators at Purdue have reported that “being married has a large effect on household wealth,” with unmarried women enjoying a 63 percent reduction in total wealth over their lifetimes, when compared to their married peers. This occurs because marriage “provides institutionalized protection, which generates economies of scale, task specialization, and access to work-related fringe benefits, that lead [in turn] to rewards like broader social networks and higher savings rates.”27

Marriages to sole patriarchs make women happier, as well. An American researcher has found that married people say they are “more satisfied in life” than unmarried people are, “regardless of gender.” Feminists usually retort that wedlock benefits men more than women. However, this study showed that married women actually score higher than married men on “perception of well-being.”28 Surveying seventeen developed nations, including the United States, sociologist Steven Stack has reported “perhaps the
strongest evidence to date in support of the relationship between marital status and happiness.” He adds that “marriage protects females just as much from unhappiness as it protects males.” Moreover, while men and women engaging in unmarried cohabitation were happier than singletons, their happiness quotient was less than one quarter of that of married persons.29

Finally, women are best protected from harm when sheltered by private patriarchs. Contrary to feminist theory, domestic abuse of all sorts—physical, verbal and psychological—occurs much more often among lesbian couples than among male-female pairs. Almost half of lesbians surveyed in one study report “being or having been the victim of relationship violence.” The research team even admits that “the academic community… shares some of the blame for ignoring same-sex domestic violence” due to “a reluctance to challenge feminist frameworks.”30 Cohabitation with a man is also much more dangerous than life with a husband. Investigators have found that cohabiting males express a more “tolerant view of rape,” probably because they are “more accepting of violence and control” than married men. After factoring in household income, education, age, and occupation, another research team found cohabiting women to be nearly five times more likely to experience “severe violence” than their married peers.31

New research affirming similar points continues to pour out of the academy. University of Virginia sociologists, examining the National Survey of Families and Homes, report in a 2006 article for Social Forces that women are happiest when they cleave to hearth and home and when their husbands earn at least two-thirds of family income. These women also report higher levels of quality time and emotional engagement with their husbands when compared to women in more egalitarian marriages.32 Australian research reported the same year in the Journal of Sociology shows that for mothers with children under eighteen, working full-time outside the home raises the odds of being in poor health. In contrast, staying at home or only working part-time lowers their risk of sickness. A 2005 study of women’s mental and physical health, appearing in the Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, finds that “[m]arried women and those with more children are less likely to be very concerned about personal safety”—that is, they feel safer—when compared to single and divorced women and those having fewer children.33 Even easy divorce, touted by feminists as a vehicle of liberation, hurts women more than men. A 2005 study appearing in Race, Gender & Class reports that “women are more psychologically vulnerable to marital dissolution than men, regardless of race.”35

These affirmations of the natural family grounded in marriage involve effects among women. Another vast body of research shows similar positive consequences for men. A still larger mound of research underscores the powerful positive effects of the natural family model on children, girls and boys. The message from the biological, medical, and social sciences is clear: children do best when they are born into and raised by their two biological parents who are married. Under any variation—be it communal, cohabiting, same-sex, step parent, or sole parent households—children will predictably face more problems. They will be more likely to do poorly in school, be incarcerated, abuse alcohol and drugs, have serious health problems, and attempt suicide. They will be less likely to become happy and productive citizens.

The Choice

Patriarchy is inevitable, as the more gloomy of the feminist theorists have admitted. Sylvia Walby summarizes:
“Women are no longer restricted to the domestic hearth, but have the whole society in which to roam and be exploited.”
She errors only in failing to recognize the real source of patriarchy and to appreciate her real choice.

Paleoanthropologists now know that even before the first hominids on the African savanna had gone bi-pedal, these promising creatures were conjugal; that is, they were pairing off in long-term bonds, where the females traded sexual exclusivity for the provisioning and protection provided by individual males. According to C. Owen Lovejoy, these social inventions of marriage and fatherhood—not expansion of the brain case—were the decisive steps in human evolution, and they occurred well over three million years ago.

Nothing important has changed since. Women cannot successfully raise children on their own. When they try to do so in large numbers, the results are poverty, violence, and misery (for proof, simply visit the average American urban ghetto). Women need some entity that will help them gain food, clothing, and shelter and that will control the boys. There are only two practical options: either the private patriarch (who is, in the end, simply the conventional husband), a figure who is adept at breadwinning and taming the lads; or the public patriarch (i.e., the welfare state), which provides food stamps, public housing, and day care subsidies and eventually jails a large share of the boys. The first choice is compatible with health, happiness, wealth creation, and political liberty. The second choice is a sure path to the servile state.

Women of the world, there is no third way here: which patriarchy do you choose?