

pollutants considered to be relatively low risk by federal scientists." A remarkable admission. With *The Index of Leading Environmental Indicators* in hand, perhaps some of our more farsighted elected representatives will give the EPA a dose of reality.

'Gender' Feminists

Who Stole Feminism: How Women have Betrayed Women, by Christina Hoff Sommers, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994, 320 pages, \$23, cloth.

Reviewed by Barbara C. Lydick

WHEN ABE Lincoln observed that a lie can make it half way around the world before truth can get her boots on, he assuredly could not have envisioned technology's boost to his predicted speed. If we add saturation to current speed, given the multitudinous print and visual outlets, a "fact" (or a "study") can today not only quickly become part of the conventional wisdom but can become the basis for a code, a regulation, a mandate, or a law — all before it is unmasked as a lie. Examples abound in areas such as the environment, health-related issues, gun control, and commercial nuclear power.

On the subject of women, such dishonest facts and studies are addressed in Dr. Christina Hoff Sommers' *Who Stole Feminism*. As associate professor of philosophy at Clark University, she has written extensively about ethics and contemporary morality. Her new book concerns today's campaign of misinformation designed to "prove" that women are not free, that we are, as she puts it, the "victims of a patriarchy that works to keep us cowering and submissive." Those holding this view she terms "gender feminists" — the chronically-offended who define

women's oppression as the devaluation and repression of women's experiences by a masculinist culture that, they contend, exalts violence (the norm for men as they see it) and individualism. In contrast to these gender feminists, Sommers posits what she calls equity feminists: those who ask for fair treatment without discrimination; a level playing field with no favors. By far the majority of women, Sommers' equity feminists follow in the footsteps of those who founded the classical feminist movement 150 years ago.

This book is a valuable addition to a growing body of work by a brave few criticizing the genderists' fiercely ideological brand of feminism. I say brave because the gender feminists do not relish criticism, nay, they do not permit it. Within the academy, "to criticize without tenure is reckless in the extreme." Those who find fault publicly find their prospects for jobs or advancement dramatically diminished, as Sommers demonstrates with enlightening examples.

She meticulously debunks, one after another, the backbone "proofs" gender feminists offer to support their portrayal of women as victims. Several bear notice: By the time girls reach high school, their "self-esteem falls 31 points"; "More than 50 percent of all women will experience some form of violence from their spouses during marriage"; "In this country alone ... 150,000 females die of anorexia each year"; "One in four women will be the victims of rape or attempted rape." Not one of these statements is even remotely accurate (the figure cited for anorexia, for example, is overstated by a factor of 1,000.) The book kicks the foundations out from under these theories and paves the way for a much-needed public debate on such subjects as, for instance: special legislation for women (gender bias laws); school curriculum (grade school to graduate school); new layers of bureaucracy

within the Department of Education (to deal solely with women's issues).

An interesting portion of Sommers' book recounts her two years of detective work, meticulously tracking down the sources of gender feminists' claims and the "studies" used to substantiate them. Analyzing their methods, data, and conclusions, she found their work shoddy and unscientific: "studies" structured to provide predetermined outcomes, data included or ignored strictly depending upon its usefulness in substantiating their positions.

Such bogus studies have proved useful to the cause because high numbers get reported by an uncritical (and willing?) media, and serve to assure their authors a place in the feminist literature and textbooks. But these advocacy numbers (the indelicate among us call them bald-faced lies) trivialize the real problems some women face, for even the best-intentioned lie ultimately discredits the finest of causes.

More than shoddy scholarship is going on here, however, as Sommers tells us. Gender feminists see their role as nothing short of transforming society into one which is "gynocentered," on the grounds that the women's point of view is far superior to anything male. They argue that all commonly-accepted "knowledge" — the culture, science, logic — is a male creation and therefore dangerous to women. For this reason, the entire knowledge base must be transformed. (Lest readers think this is an exaggeration, I urge you to obtain a copy of the June 4, 1994, issue of the *Wall Street Journal* for an article, front page, on Peggy McIntosh, one of the chief architects of this thinking. McIntosh, for example, at a time when educational excellence is a national catch phrase, warns that "excellence can be a dangerous concept.")

ONE WOULD think gender feminists' extremist thinking would long ago have relegated them to the theater of the absurd were it not that these

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"transformationists" are richly supported by several foundations, most notably the Ford Foundation (where Hank the Deuce is reported to have sadly said he no longer had any influence against this madness and then resigned his position on the Board). Moreover, these women are in key positions in NOW, the Ms Foundation, the Fund for the Feminist Majority, The National Council for Research on Women, and the (once prestigious) American Association for University Women (AAWU). And these are the groups portrayed as officially representing women when the media and even Congress go looking for "valuable information."

They hold sway over state-level departments of education and school boards in several states, influencing

curriculum revision. California's Department of Education Code, for example, requires "gender equity" in all things historical, making equal representation more important than historical fact. Gender feminists have proven adept at securing key administrative positions and gaining control of bureaucracies at many colleges and universities, which means that large amounts of tax dollars, in addition to the millions from foundations, are being put to use serving their agendas.

At the federal level, a \$360 million Gender Equity in Education bill has already passed the House and another is presently on the floor of the Senate. Both versions were based on the findings in a grossly-flawed self-esteem study performed under the aegis of the AAUW. Among other things, this leg-

islation would create a Special Assistant to the Secretary [of Education] for Gender Equity (a bureau of Gender Wardens?). This is a gender feminist's dream — a golden opportunity to increase their influence through textbook revisions, new gender-based programs (that will only serve to exacerbate the problem of our nation's children falling further behind in math, science, history, geography, etc.), and a chance for more experiments in transforming the knowledge base.

Kudos to Dr. Sommers for providing us an excellent resource book to begin the public debate, as begin it must. For anyone with children, for anyone who might be affected by gender-bias law — well, that must include just about everyone — this book must be on their reading list. Period. CPR

Popular Culture

The Incredible Shrinking Movie Screen

The Assault of Cinematic Recycling

T. R. O'Neill-Lopez

"ALL THE world's a stage," said the Bard, an exciting prospect for the modern dramatist with cameras, studios, and money at his disposal. But for modern filmmakers the stage is shrinking. That is why the movies don't live up to their potential, why they cheat and deceive the populace, and why the situation is sure to get worse.

Hollywood is not an artistic colony but a business community whose most creative people are not writers and directors but lawyers, agents, and accountants. A movie is a filmed deal

which results not from artistic vision but power relationships — "leverage," in industry argot. Whatever makes money will be imitated. That is the primary rule of the business, based on the assumption that all men's dreams are created equal. Given these ground rules, it amazes that anything good gets done at all.

But at one time, good did get done, in fair-sized doses. Once filmmakers mined the rich resources of literature and stage: everything from the Bible to *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Moby Dick* on through *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *The Trip to Bountiful*, and *Manon of the Spring*. In many

cases, a collaborative medium successfully translated the artistic vision of one man to the big screen, not that every such effort invariably succeeded. Notable failures include Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*, perhaps the best book ever written about Hollywood, and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, which Octavio Paz described as the best book ever written about Mexico by a foreigner. In these cases, Hollywood proved unable to translate the quality of the originals onto the screen, but at least the effort was made.

FILMMAKERS STILL go after books, but now prefer blockbuster

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