

EDITOR
Thomas Fleming

MANAGING EDITOR
Katherine Dalton

SENIOR EDITOR, BOOKS
Chilton Williamson, Jr.

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Theodore Pappas

ART DIRECTOR
Anna Mycek-Wodecki

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
John W. Aldridge, Harold O.J.
Brown, Samuel Francis, George
Garrett, Russell Kirk, E. Christian
Kopff, Clyde Wilson

CORRESPONDING EDITORS
Janet Scott Barlow, Odie Faulk,
Jane Greer, John Shelton Reed,
Gary Vasilash

EDITORIAL SECRETARY
Leann Dobbs

PUBLISHER
Allan C. Carlson

ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER
Michael Warder

PUBLICATION DIRECTOR
Guy C. Reffett

COMPOSITION MANAGER
Anita Fedora

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Rochelle Frank

A publication of The Rockford Institute.
Editorial and Advertising Offices: 934 North
Main Street, Rockford, IL 61103.
Editorial Phone: (815) 964-5054.
Advertising Phone: (815) 964-5811.
Subscription Department: P.O. Box 800, Mount
Morris, IL 61054. Call 1-800-435-0715, in
Illinois 1-800-892-0753.

For information on advertising in *Chronicles*,
please call Cathy Corson at (815) 964-5811.

U.S.A. Newsstand Distribution by Eastern
News Distributors, Inc., 1130 Cleveland Road,
Sandusky, OH 44870.

Copyright © 1990 by The Rockford Institute.
All rights reserved.

Chronicles (ISSN 0887-5731) is published
monthly for \$24 per year by The Rockford
Institute, 934 North Main Street, Rockford, IL
61103-7061.

Second-class postage paid at Rockford, IL and
additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to
Chronicles, P.O. Box 800, Mount Morris, IL
61054.

The views expressed in *Chronicles* are the
authors' alone and do not necessarily reflect the
views of The Rockford Institute or of its
directors. Unsolicited manuscripts cannot be
returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed
stamped envelope.

Chronicles
A MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN CULTURE

Vol. 14, No. 12 December 1990

POLEMICS & EXCHANGES

On 'Women's Studies'

The first half of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese's article "Whose Women's Studies?" (September 1990) seems to be a fair and balanced account of the struggle between passionate feminists, scholars in the field of women's studies, and those of us who question or oppose feminist efforts to "transform the curriculum." She admits the central role of radical feminists and concedes that their motives, objectives, and tactics are political.

I am sorry she did not take a moment to explain to her readers something about the full effect of this kind of politics on collegiality, curriculum planning, and the integrity of the academy. She touches on this in a general way, but such generalities have little meaning to those outside the profession. Perhaps all is sweetness and light at Emory, but quite the reverse is the case in my institution and others around the country. What about quotas, official or covert, in faculty hiring? What about the application of different standards in promotion and tenure decisions? What about the termination of white, male professors to make room for female professors? What about the "packing" of faculty committees to protect curriculum proposals from serious questions? What about harassment policies that threaten punishment of students and faculty who express themselves openly? What about the effect of "group politics" on reasoned discourse and faculty relationships? And what about the teaching of suspicion and anger in the classroom?

The second half of the article and the bold peroration should be read carefully by anyone who is trying to distinguish women's studies and radical feminism. Fox-Genovese seems to blame the troubles on those who defend the traditional canon. Using such language as "outraged and bigoted opposition," "sorcerer's apprentice," "bunker mentality," and "self-proclaimed defenders of inherited culture," she warns us that "unilateral opposition will only drive it [the women's studies movement] further down the road of stiffening opposi-

tion to Western culture as a whole." Translated into plain English, this simply means that those who stand in our way have only themselves to blame when we tighten the noose.

I hear these expressions all the time. But, I must insist that it is not the kind of language used by those who seek a middle ground. I am sorry that Professor Fox-Genovese chose to address us in this fashion in an otherwise useful article.

—William C. Burris
Greensboro, NC

After reading Professor Fox-Genovese's article (September 1990) one wonders why exegetes for "women's studies" always seem to fall short, into a maze of unchallenged vagueness and self-congratulation. Possibly because feminists resort to what Eric Voegelin, in a treatment of Karl Marx, referred to as "pseudo-logic," which should not be surprising, since feminism is an avowedly radical, revisionist, socialistic endeavor that has surmounted most intellectual obstacles merely by ignoring them.

Professor Fox-Genovese's quote from the final paper of an enlightened young woman won over to feminism conveys the usual impression that the students seem unaware of the radical origins of the program and that the course content of "women's studies" is not quite on the higher level one might reasonably expect from a university—a level that is discussed so remarkably well by most of the other writers in the same *Chronicles* issue. Women enjoy our enduring respect as an integral part of humanity too completely to allow their self-focused, introspective, solipsistic segmentation *as a group*, or as just another 20th-century special, separate interest.

This "pseudo-logical" approach states "feminism is justified because we say it is justified." This is why Professor Fox-Genovese could write volumes of tangled rhetoric trying to justify a university status for a junior-high-level program and still not alter the fact that there is no more intellectual justification for "women's studies" than for "men's studies," etc. The very names

convey a fatuous, doctrinaire caricature of higher learning, a sop to a petticoat junction turned revolutionary—the university's Trojan Horse. Despite such distraction, the challenge for men and women will remain ineluctably the same: to continue to learn how best to live as members of society, *as individuals*, true to their respective, distinct natures and without a politicized egotistical focus on one gender or the other, leading to hypertrophy of the species.

—W. Edward Chynoweth
Sanger, CA

Dr. Fox-Genovese Replies:

The responses to my recent piece in *Chronicles* offer a salutary reminder of why, persisting reservations notwithstanding, I continue to take pride in my association with women's studies. They also shake my hopes that those of us who insist that women's studies meet the highest scholarly standards can look for allies on the right. More's the pity.

Mr. Burris has my deepest sympathy and, in most instances, would probably have my political support as well. The horrors he describes do occur—too frequently to permit any of us to be complacent—and, if I read the signs of the times correctly, they are likely to increase. Indeed, he evokes only the symptoms of the deepest problem, namely the growing tendency to substitute entitlement for achievement as the criteria for academic positions. In the worst case scenario, intellectual standards and academic freedom are becoming the stakes in an escalating war for control of our campuses.

There are no justifications for the excesses of which Mr. Burris writes. But there is, as people like Edward Chynoweth regularly insist, a small problem of human nature. Without defending unacceptable practices of preferential treatment, it is possible to point out that some women and their allies are merely doing unto others what has, for decades, been done to them. Decades, not centuries. The issue is not the ideological cant of men's "domination" or "suppression" of women throughout history. The issue is the documented reality of the

systematic exclusion of professional (female) individuals from the positions for which they are highly qualified.

Having experienced discrimination does not justify discrimination against others. But unless one understands that women have been massively discriminated against in professional employment, including in the academy, one will never understand the deep conviction that informs the various attempts to right previous wrongs. For wrongs there have been.

In the academy, as throughout much of our society, we are confronting a situation in which civil society has failed to reform itself. That failure has led many women to turn to academic administrations and state and federal government to enforce impartial standards and, occasionally, even to redress previous imbalances.

Mr. Burris claims that my remarks about the potentially dangerous consequences of unilateral opposition to women's studies can be translated into plain English as "those who stand in our way have only themselves to blame when we tighten the noose." He has understood part of my meaning. For the rest, he has either misunderstood or attempted a polemical feint. The appropriate pronoun is not "we" but "they."

Gentlemen, there are women scholars and yes, heaven forfend, feminists who share what I should like to think is the essence of your commitment to standards, due process, free speech, and scholarship. But we are currently in a dangerous and exposed position. And without working alliances with others who share those commitments, however much they differ on other matters, we will go down to defeat. And so, I believe, will you.

As for Mr. Chynoweth, if he believes that our great Western culture has not disproportionately expressed the perceptions, goals, and identities of men (who, until very recently, were more often than not legally entitled to speak and act in the name of women), I do hope he can muster the same complacent acceptance of a postmodernist culture that overwhelmingly articulates the perceptions, goals, and identities of radical feminists.

Yes, the Western tradition belongs to us all, but those who have fashioned it have been disproportionately men. If

women are not invited to find their own ways of identifying with it, they may well feel obliged to declare themselves its enemies. And in a dangerous world they will find allies.

Let me try one more time. The women's studies I advocate and have the honor to preside over at Emory University is precisely that—the study of women in history, society, and culture. It is not "feminist studies" for the good reason that we do not tolerate the imposition of any ideology but rather invite broad substantive and theoretical debate on all cogent issues. Had the history of women not been maliciously ignored for so long, we might not need a special program of this kind, much as we might not need African-American studies. That cannot now be helped. But I do hope that conservatives understand and respond to one of the messages I tried to deliver: some of us who are promoting women's studies want and badly need the intellectual contributions of scholars with viewpoints other than those now dominant. In this matter I stand with that eminent scholar Jacob Neusner, whose splendid call for opening the canon to African-American and ethnic studies (*National Review*, June 15, 1984) ought to be required reading.

JOHN SHELTON REED, longtime contributor to *Chronicles*, has recently published his ninth book, *Whistling Dixie: Dispatches from the South*. Published by the University of Missouri Press, *Whistling Dixie* is a collection of essays written by Professor Reed over the last ten years, many of which appeared first in these very pages. Professor Reed's many admirers will now be able to appreciate the full range of the South's most perceptive humorist. As Eugene Genovese writes in the foreword, these "sallies provide a delightful introduction to the corpus of Reed's work, at least for people who are willing to hear other voices and who retain the capacity to laugh at themselves."

A YEAR AFTER HUGO: the Good Morning America helicopter made several passes over the creek today in preparation for the "one year anniversary of Hurricane Hugo" programming that was aired in September. Two of my shrimping relatives went in the ocean instead of participating in the ground-based interviews filmed in advance. Surely a good sign. The media harvest is winding down. The harvest of the sea triumphs.

Hooray and a sigh. Fifteen months ago my wife and I picked our way among the fallen trees that blocked these streets. On every side mud, marsh grass, and dead fish were mixed with parts of houses and house parts. An entire fleet of shrimp boats had been flung high and dry upon what was once "the hill." Helicopters hovered overhead that day as well, taking television photos that I suppose were shown that night or the next. We had no way of knowing, for electricity wouldn't return for another three weeks. And I assumed we got the usual ten-second "bite," but judging by what happened next there must have been much, much more. Huddling over a battery-operated radio that night, I heard the South Carolina governor declare that "the town of McClellanville no longer exists." "Reports of my death were greatly exaggerated," quipped Twain. The governor must have retracted soon after—and with a vengeance—for in the days that followed I would come to think "reports of our existence were greatly exaggerated."

True, I wasn't happy to hear our obituary. Especially since at least a hundred citizens of the town proper and thousands in the inundated area had miraculously survived a tidal surge of sixteen feet and hurricane winds that probably exceeded 175 mph. Many of us that morning had been wandering through the rubble being photographed. We weren't dead, just in shock and hardly prepared for the thirty-eight trailer trucks of relief supplies that arrived one night. Suddenly, there was an army of well-meaning help swelling our tiny community of

400 souls. President Bush even tried to squeeze in but was rerouted at the last minute down to Charleston. Bad weather was the official reason given but a false report to the Secret Service of dead bodies and rifles was the rumor. Rumors. There were lots of rumors and chaos that would rival the most surreal of Fellini's carnivals.

Despair, greed, and petty corruption. That's what the cynic in me recalls most. What lobe of the brain is that? Perhaps the rear-reptilian. Shame on me, for now almost one year later the town is at least recognizable. The large pines are gone but the great sprawling live oaks have survived. Homes have been repaired and new ones are being built. The shrimp boats are not leaning against houses but in the ocean towing. Dogs, church, children—what we expect of normalcy, all are there and in record time.

Without the federal disaster aid (delivered by sometimes generous, always bumbling bureaucrats), without the Marines (now I understand the concept of martial law), without the Corps of Engineers (the S.O.B.'s finally found a job big enough to suit them and they were very, very good at it), without the Red Cross (they tried), and without the insurance adjusters (your life is in the palm of their tightly gripped fist), without all these the rebuilding of the town would have dragged on for decades. Without the churches (God does exist—watch a Mennonite hammer), without all the volunteers (such astounding generosity from every corner of the country), without the cash donations and the truckloads of food, clothing, and building material, and without the media (they've got to be included), without all these it's possible our little community would never have rebuilt.

So why now, with the Good Morning America helicopter chopping off over the slightly crippled horizon, why do I feel such anger towards my fellow man and most of all towards myself? I'm not alone. Tempers still flare. Depression and insomnia are the norm. The subject of Hugo Stress drifts through every conversation. It's not

psychobabble if it's happening to you or your friends and neighbors. Obviously, all this anger has something to do with loss. We have our town back, but it's not "our town." I'm guessing that the words that apply are the optimism of innocence. Maybe we lost it at the movies. Or maybe we just lost it.

—William P. Baldwin

WHEN THE NEA'S Council and chairman last July refused to fund four of the eighteen "solo performers and mime" grants the NEA staff had recommended, there was a tremendous reaction from the artists involved and the Joseph Papp crowd. *Rejected!* went the headline in the *Washington Post's* Show section. Most of the coverage concentrated on the personal orientation of the three "out" rejectees, and on the fourth's (performance artist Karen Finley) now infamous way of expressing herself artistically by smearing chocolate on her naked body.

Less emphasized—though I am indebted to the *Post* for mentioning it—was the fact that one rejectee, Holly Hughes, has received funding already this year from the NEA's Playwriting division for the same script for which she was almost funded by Solo Performers. Some might call that double-dipping. But when asked point-blank a staffer in the Theater program assured me that submitting a single piece for both Playwriting and Performance Art was perfectly OK. "Oh that's fine," she said. "It's two completely separate panels"—in other words, two different funding categories with two different sets of judges.

Furthermore, all four of these *Rejected!* have received numerous grants from the NEA over the years. Tom Miller told the *Post* that he had received "four or five" NEA grants in the past eight years, Karen Finley has had something like nine, and both Holly Hughes and John Fleck received NEA grants just last year. Both Hughes and Finley submitted three applications this year, in three different categories, all of them recommended for funding by their reviewing panels.