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Feminist Studies, Vol. 24, No. 1. (Spring, 1998), pp. 159-175.

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REVIEW ESSAY

FEMINIST ATTACKS ON FEMINISMS: PATRIARCHY'S PRODIGAL DAUGHTERS

ELIZABETH KAMARCK MINNICH

Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women. By Christina Hoff Sommers. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994.

Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies. By Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.

"Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life": How Today's Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch with the Real Concerns of Women. By Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. New York: Doubleday, 1996.

The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus. By Katie Roiphe. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1993.

Mounting the hard-won feminist platform built against great odds by so many differing women, Christina Hoff Sommers, Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Katie Roiphe announce, each on her own behalf but in chorus, that they are today's truest and bravest feminists. They say they feel compelled to speak up on behalf of all women because of the dangerous directions in which feminism and women's studies have been taken by rampantly ideological feminists who have (somehow or other, but not by admirable means) become extremely powerful. Each author tells us of her own particular, energizing flash point. Sommers's anger, reflected in *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*, is aroused by those who analyze and act to change gender systems rather than advocating solely for individual rights to be exercised on a "fair field with no favors" (p. 51). Patai and Koertge, in *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales*

from the *Strange World of Women's Studies*, feel called to attack those who seem to them to be adulterating and skewing properly academic women's studies with activism and pop psychologizing. In *"Feminism Is Not the Story of My Life": How Today's Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch with the Real Concerns of Women*, Fox-Genovese is troubled that feminism does not confirm the desires of "most" women to be fulfilled through traditional motherhood while also having the same opportunities for satisfying careers as men. For Roiphe (*The Morning After: Sex, Fear, and Feminism on Campus*), the flash point is feminists and AIDS activists who have challenged her own fantasies of safe and guilt-free rebellion.

All these authors are well trained academically, and all have chosen to write for a popular audience. They write, they say, in defense of values central to mainstream feminism as well as to the sound academic work that is important to it: intellectual quality and honesty, anti-elitism, objectivity, and tolerance of dissenting views. Would that these values were here being genuinely served. However, like Allan Bloom's egocentric, intellectually irresponsible, anti-liberal, paradoxically best-selling defense of elitism, *The Closing of the American Mind*¹ (and the clonelike "culture wars" books that poured out when Bloom proved there was a market for antiprogressive diatribes), these claimants to be Defenders of the True Feminist Faith thoroughly contradict what they say are their values by what they *do* in their books.

The authors' writing suggests that they are working hard to discredit the feminisms that make them uncomfortable, rather than arguing with them in scholarly and sisterly fashion. They have chosen techniques evidently designed to incite a broad public to weigh in on their side as well as to buy their books in such quantities that the authors will, by the logic of the marketplace, be validated as *the* media, lecture circuit, and popular spokeswomen for feminism. The result is that, claimed values to the contrary notwithstanding, these books are not of high intellectual quality; violate the "classic liberal" value of tolerance for differing positions; and display a lack of respect for the judgment and political abilities of the nonelite majority of women whose purported helplessness before a small cabal of feminists the authors often invoke as their reason for writing.

I cannot know, of course, what the authors' actual motives are, nor am I convinced that they are themselves clear. If they were, surely self-contradiction and a pattern of projecting their own faults on to those they then criticize for precisely those faults would not so notably characterize what they have written. I can observe, however, that if one really values thorough, balanced, accurate scholarship and reporting; wishes to encourage respected readers to think coherently, independently, and responsibly; and advocates an inclusive, disinterested tolerance that can support a broad-based, nonelitist, coalitional movement, one does not choose the kinds of reasoning and rhetoric deployed by these authors. Politically, despite positions which seem to range from Sommers's right of center to Patai-Koertge's centrist antiradicalism, the rhetorical techniques they use against feminist activists put these authors in the company of today's right-wingers.

Time and again the authors, like so many right-wing anti-feminists, are themselves guilty of what they charge their versions of bad feminists with doing. For example, sounding a lot like the intolerant, highly ideological Rush Limbaugh, these authors charge the straw women they first create and then attack with being intolerant, insulting, close-minded ideologues. Patai-Koertge (and the capitalization is theirs) attack "IDPOL," identity politics (p. 50); "BIODENIAL," repudiation of the sciences (p. 135); "TOTALREJ," feminist critique (p. 115); and "GENDERAGENDA," gender analyses (p. 148). Sommers calls her targets "gender monitors" (p. 46), "feminist ideologues" (p. 18), "resenter feminists" (p. 44), and "zealots." Roiphe refers to "guerilla feminists" (p. 10). Fox-Genovese's title pits "today's feminist elite" against "women" and coins the term "upscale feminist" (p. 21).

To justify being in attack mode, the authors assert that they are trying to purge feminism of its rude sisters so that it can once again be a welcoming big tent for all women. They also occasionally adopt a tone of calm, saddened devotion to a presently distorted but perhaps still salvageable sisterhood. Patai-Koertge thus claim they have been forced to air "dirty linen" in their book, because of the need to rescue true feminism from "the ideological policing and intolerance going on in its own ranks" (p. xv). Fox-Genovese writes: "It saddens me

immeasurably to think my views may seem threatening or oppressive to younger women," but, presumably wiser as well as sadder, she speaks against today's feminisms anyway (p. 258). Sommers concludes her vitriolic book in a similar tone of saddened concern:

I have sat among them [the people she has called "zealots," "resentment feminists," et al.] in many a gathering and have occasionally found myself in relaxed agreement with them. For I do like the features they share with classical feminism: a concern for women and a determination to see them fairly treated. We very much need that concern and energy, but we decidedly do not need their militant gynocentrism and misandry. . . . I believe, however, that once their ideology becomes unfashionable, many a gender feminist will quietly divest herself of the sex/gender lens through which she now views social reality and join the equity feminist mainstream. (P. 275)

Even when she is trying to sound generously inclusive, Sommers pits her version of good "mainstream" "equity" feminism against bad feminists who are woman-centered, man-hating individuals turned into ideologues by their submission to a fashion trend.

In the face of the evidence of their own writing, Patai-Koertge also claim to be presenting a balanced view. They begin their book with a credibly informed and favorable recognition of the women's movement, including the work of feminist scholars and of systemic gender analyses (Sommers's dread "gender feminism"). They describe

an enormous flowering of Women's Studies programs, feminist scholarship, and women's culture, as well as an increasing public awareness of job discrimination, domestic abuse, sexual assaults, and other impediments placed on women in the public and private spheres. . . . During this time, too, the use of gender as a powerful conceptual tool and a key category of analysis in the humanities and social sciences transformed entire fields. (Pp. 1-2)

But then they ask: "Why, after these successes, have Women's Studies programs turned into such a combat zone?" (p. 2). Readers are to see Patai-Koertge as too fair and reasonable to be counted among the combatants, and so as the proper interpreters of what women's studies today should be.

Asserting her own claim to be the best interpreter of the whole women's movement, Sommers writes that "American feminism is currently dominated by a group of women who seek to persuade the public that American women are not the free creatures we think we are" (p. 16). Sommers's "we" having

replaced "American women," she proceeds to interpret people and events as if she really did know everything and could read minds and intentions. For example, she writes: "[T]he moderator looked a bit nervous. It seemed clear that she should come to the defense of her beleaguered Smith colleague. But she was patently intrigued by what she described as an 'affectively charged exchange'" (p. 37). Patai-Koertge, who similarly respect no boundaries of other minds, tell us: "Deans and other college and university officials" are "certainly aware that all is not well [in women's studies]" but "prefer to maintain a position of 'plausible deniability' similar to the one they favor with respect to flawed collegiate athletic programs" (p. 208). Roiphe informs us with unsubstantiated confidence: "Most straight college students don't actually think they're going to get AIDS" (p. 24). Fox-Genovese writes: "Feminists cannot forgive [a woman who advocates a mommy track in business] for betraying the dream of women's equality with men. But [she] focuses on what many women want, not on what radicals presume they should want" (p. 215). Thus, the authors act as if they are omniscient spokespeople for all women despite attacking bad feminists for that "elitist" presumption.

The authors' unabashed projecting of their own interpretations and views on to others violates the honesty of straightforwardly limited gossip without achieving that of carefully documented reportage or research. Nor have they occupied a clear and accessible middle ground between gossip and scholarship as one might expect, given not only their choice to write popular books but also their oft-claimed anti-"elitism." Name-calling, diatribes, and gossipy generalizations presented as if they were warranted by sound scholarship, on the one hand, and compatibility with "mainstream" women's opinions, on the other, hardly constitute evidence of respect for any readers.

While claiming to be more accurate than bad feminist ideologies—and making sure their popular-audience readers know of their own academic credentials—the authors present only self-confirming "evidence" gathered from wildly eclectic sources. They produce "facts" gathered by such means as a telephone call or two; anecdotes from their own experiences or passed on to them by a student, relative, or acquaintance; informal interviews with people selected because they agree with the authors;

opinion polls; popular media articles; televised debates (Sommers likes this particularly, telling us that she wins). Sommers characteristically says such things as "I called [an individual, an association]"; "I sent . . . a letter" and someone "sent me word"; "their media relations department told me that . . ."; "I asked my neighbor, a pediatric neurologist. . . ." In support of one judgment, she writes, "My sister . . . has two sons in college and a daughter starting junior high and . . . having spent several hours with the [feminist] Austin conferees, she had doubts about their competence and reasonableness" (p. 53).

Similarly, Roiphe cites her undocumented memories of things said by "Amanda," "Lauren," "Sarah," various women at Take Back the Night marches, her mother, her sister, some campus flyers, speakers at various gatherings, and anything else that provides stuff for vivid stories that illustrate, rather than prove, her points. Fox-Genovese says she draws "upon lengthy conversations with a wide variety of women" whose "experience," this established scholar informs us unblinkingly, "is representative of countless other women like them" (pp. 13-14). Patai-Koertge tell us that their research involved conversations with "some 'exiles' from Women's Studies—colleagues who still considered themselves to be feminists . . . but who . . . had withdrawn to other departments . . . who were prepared to admit the seriousness of the issues we were raising" (p. xvi). From this collection of people "who were prepared to admit" what the authors had already concluded, they draw on "lengthy and detailed taped interviews" with "thirty women from around the country." To this sample, which is no further specified than by the authors' saying that "[m]ost of these women are or have been faculty members; some are or were students and staff members in Women's Studies programs," they add whatever else crossed their horizon in confirmation of their pre-established thesis that women's studies has become ideological. They also include, again with no further specification, "material offered to us from correspondence, memos, and journal entries" (p. xviii).

Professors Patai and Koertge further tell us that what we might have assumed to be the usual scholarly practice of not naming individual research subjects is, in their book, actually the result of a "desire for anonymity" which "reflects . . . the

tendency of feminism to stifle open debate and create an atmosphere in which disagreement is viewed as betrayal." Startlingly, they continue: "We have honored all these requests and for uniformity's sake, have incorporated many of our own accounts into the book in the same way" (p. xix). So, in a book which purports to be defending sound scholarship against ideologically skewed bad feminist work, the author-interpreters' views are anonymously folded into the material they are presenting as evidence.

Roiphe, while drawing on the authority of her experiences as a student, follows a purely personal logic which she justifies in a burst of anti-intellectualism: "This book is not a scientific survey of campus life, measuring the immeasurable with statistical certainty. This is not a comprehensive, encyclopedic sociological analysis. It is not a political polemic" (pp. 6-7). She seems to assume we will not notice that she ends this jumbled disclaimer of both political polemics and academic methods with the statement: "It is out of the deep belief that some feminisms are better than others that I have written this book." And what kind of ground does she offer for that belief? Pure subjective Roiphe: "I have written what I see, limited, personal. . . . I have written my impressions." Nevertheless, those "impressions" are, she tells us firmly, "entirely real" (p. 7). But this intriguing method of discerning what is real is not to be used by anyone else, at least not if she or he disagrees with Roiphe. She objects strenuously, for example, to sexual harassment being "subjectively" defined (as the bad feminists, she tells us, have defined it), because that "crosses the line between being supportive and obliterating the idea of external reality" (p. 91). Apparently, only Roiphe's self-confirming subjectivity is "entirely real." Such "reasoning" is hardly a way to open a movement to many differing points of view. Indeed, if Roiphe were consistent, her conflation of her own views with reality would lead to solipsism, not liberation.

I repeat: these are hardly ways to model or invite intellectually open, careful, balanced, reflective considerations of basic definitions, analyses, and the actions they suggest for a broad-based movement. Yet readers who begin to wonder what is going on are regularly headed off with incantations of the very values being violated. Patai-Koertge say they, as distinct from

women's studies ideologues, value "tolerance, the cultivation of a distanced and disengaged analysis, and a degree of skepticism toward one's own positions, and not only those of others" (p. 212). Sommers claims she writes to expose and to improve "the quality of information we are getting on many women's issues from feminist researchers, women's advocates, and journalists" (p. 15).

The values actually being served appear, rather, to be compatible with those of a conservative consumerist culture that exploits images of patriarchally sexualized and gendered fantasies of liberation—such as Roiphe's fantasy of irresponsible but safe sex and Fox-Genovese's dream of fulfillment for career women through traditional motherhood. Sommers's choice of the adjectives "pure and wholesome" for the "equity feminism," which she claims is true to that "first displayed at Seneca Falls in 1848" (p. 275), also reanimates patriarchal divisions of "good girls" from bad feminists. She even updates the old "frustrated feminist" ploy she knows was used against the feminists of Seneca Falls for her own use against the "New Feminists" she wants to discredit. Sommers says the new feminists are "articulate, prone to self-dramatization, and chronically offended," united not by belief in equality but by their own sense of personal grievance. This sense of grievance is exacerbated, she says, by the "presumption that men are collectively engaged in keeping women down" (p. 21). Having recast systemic feminist analyses as paranoid delusion, she contrasts her pathologized new feminism with "the traditional, classically liberal, humanistic feminism that . . . had a specific agenda, demanding for women the same rights before the law that men enjoyed" (p. 22). Such "wholesome," good girl feminism was the feminism of good sports and safe team players: it was "neither defeatist nor gender-divisive, and is even now the philosophy of the feminist 'mainstream'" (p. 24).

Roiphe and Fox-Genovese also want an upbeat feminism that promises women they can have it all without troubling systemic changes. They want to continue dreaming of heterosex without fear and of unrestricted chances for success in the world as it is. Roiphe, who doesn't seem to notice, let alone critique, racial, heterosexual, or class privilege, yearns for a feminism that would have "saved" her grandmother from her

"world of manicures, hair salons, and no place to go in the morning," a world in which she "was caught in a bad marriage" and had "nothing to fill her days" except shopping and "endless card games" that "absorb[ed] her intellectual energy" (p. 5). Fox-Genovese, meanwhile, valorizes the old prescriptions for privatized women's lives. She yearns for feminine networks among women happily and safely enshrined in well-supported hetero-families. Via an alchemy that adds true womanhood to the same rights privileged men have had, she creates a fantasy of "family feminism." Fox-Genovese then blames feminists, rather than continuing systemic barriers, for making women anxious about whether they can be both happily married mothers and equal to men in the marketplace. This is the diversity-denying and catch-22 logic that has worked so well for the dominant system: tell (all) women that the way to be *equal* is to be the same as (the few privileged) men, and the way to be *fulfilled* is to be a "true woman" (like those married to those few men)—and then brand them frustrated feminists if they protest that the rules of that contradictory, utterly unrealistic game are patently stacked against all of them and are devastatingly impossible for those subject to racial and other prejudices that intersect with gender.

Patai-Koertge are more knowledgeable about why analyses of constructions of gender, at least, are crucial. Nevertheless, they too divide feminists into the good and the bad such that patriarchy-preserving values are not disrupted. Focusing as they do on women's studies, they particularly object to politically engaged feminist teachers. They write: "Arguably, some forms of participation in [political] initiatives have been appropriate. . . . But at other times academic feminism has made itself subservient to activist agendas" (p. 6). They believe blending academic with political feminism leads to "an atmosphere" in which "scholarship becomes suspect as faculty members feel constant pressure not to betray the cause" (p. 9). Today's feminist activism seems to be remarkably terrifying: scholars, students, people of all sorts must be protected from it lest they—what? Yield to "pressure not to betray the cause"? Why would they do that, if "the cause" seemed to them genuinely wrong, based on falsehoods, harmful? Have the people, in whose defense the authors nominate themselves to speak, no

agency of their own, no responsibility, no power they are willing to exercise?

Confusing uncritical acceptance with respect, Fox-Genovese informs readers: "Most people see women's issues as legitimate," but "many remain uneasy about feminism as the story of a woman's life." She tells us the story a good feminism should support to avoid provoking such unease: "Most women still hope to fit their new gains at work and in the public world into some version of the story of marriage and the family they have inherited from their mothers" (p. 16). In Fox-Genovese's view, feminists who have suggested that this story and political positions compatible with it do not serve women well within political, cultural, and economic systems premised on heterosexual white male dominance reveal themselves as "elitist" and therefore responsible for the supposed disaffection of "many women" from their cause: "Women who still see marriage and children as central to their sense of themselves have retreated from feminism," she tells us, "because they do not believe that feminists care about the problems that most concern them or because they believe that feminists favor policies they cannot support, such as abortion, affirmative action, or women in combat" (p. 17).

Roiphe doesn't believe Fox-Genovese's story, but she does not want what she has decided is the feminists' story either:

I had caught myself in the middle of an unappealing fantasy of passivity: being carried along by fate, listening to the tarot cards, floating numb. What was I thinking? At the most uncharted moments of our lives we reach instinctively for the stock plots available to our generation, as trashy and clichéd as they may be. In the fifties it was love and marriage or existentialism and Beat poetry in smoky bars. Now, if you're a woman, there's another role readily available: that of the sensitive female, pinched, leered at, assaulted daily by sexual advances, encroached upon, kept down, bruised by harsh reality. Among other things, feminism has given us this. . . . This is not what I want, not even as a fantasy. (P. 172)

Thus, Roiphe focuses on women's sexual victimization, rather than on the activism through which feminists counter it, and then, remarkably, charges feminists with enticing her and other women into embracing her own "unappealing fantasy" of passive victimhood.

Sommers is particularly troubled by analyses of abuses of women that reveal the persistence of inequitable gender sys-

tems. Refusing such systemic analysis allows her only to worry about a few inexplicably aberrant males who for some weird reason abuse women. She is therefore especially warm in her praise of workers in shelters for abused women and especially vitriolic about those who act to change the systems that make such shelters so necessary. This is the "equity feminism" she pits against "gender feminism": it promises women the same individual rights as men in an otherwise unchanged world while advocating more social workers to bandage the wounded that world continues to produce.

Sommers also mobilizes class resentment against supposedly powerful but perversely system-challenging "gender feminists." Calling them the "New Feminists" (so she can appropriate equal rights victories of the past for her side), she characterizes them as "privileged, all of them legally protected and free" women who are "preoccupied" not with trying to better conditions for their less privileged sisters but "with their own sense of hurt and their own feelings of embattlement and 'siege'" (pp. 24-25). Fox-Genovese similarly paints a picture of privileged bad feminists who "underestimate the crying needs of many poor women" (p. 28). She also uncritically cites one of her informant's opinions that "elite feminists" are racists who condemn "black men as brutes and rapists" (p. 29). Patai-Koertge, for their part, believe some white feminists challenge racism as a self-serving move for still more power: "Accusations of racism gained for the accuser points of some sort. Keeping others on the defensive seems to have become a strategy no one was willing to challenge" (pp. 63-64). They also complain about "the tyranny of politicized education by means of indoctrination and the even more pernicious faith that someone holds the key, knows the truth, has the answers, and is empowered (whether by our will or against it) to impose them on the rest of us" (p. 215). And Roiphe tells us unabashedly about her own suffering of powerlessness: "This book comes out of frustration, out of anger, out of the names I've been called, out of all the times I didn't say something I was thinking because it might offend the current feminist sensibility" (p. 7).

Intense expression of their own anger and resentment at seeing themselves, along with "most women," victimized by bad feminists is clearly okay in these authors' view, but it is not

okay for feminists to express anger about inequitable gender systems, any men, the dominant form of the heterosexual family, sexualized violence, or racism. Sommers, for whom "resentment feminism" is a main target, characterizes "resentment":

Resentment is "harbored" or "nurtured"; it "takes root" in a subject (the victim) and remains directed at another (the culprit). It can be vicarious—you need not have harmed me personally, but if I identify with someone you *have* harmed, I may resent you. Such resentment is very common and may easily be as strong and intense as resentment occasioned by direct injury. In a way it is stronger, for by enlarging the class of victims to include others, it magnifies the villainy as well." (P. 42)

Just so does Sommers feel harmed by what bad feminists have done to others and just so does she magnify the villainy. She sees cabals of "well-funded" zealot feminists taking over everywhere, from academe to Congress. And listen to Patai-Koertge magnifying the effects of activist women's studies teachers on their students and colleagues. "What will we then have?" they ask. "Models abound: the Aryan university of Nazi Germany; Stalinism and Maoism; lily-white institutions in the pre-1960's U.S. South; the purges provoked by McCarthyism; East German universities . . . ; ethnically pure enclaves in the former Yugoslavia. Think about these, and a chamber of horrors opens" (pp. 214-15).

Offering another take on this theme, which is central to all these authors, Sommers discusses the "victimology game" she claims is played by bad feminists. She says it is a game "any number of minority groups can play" (p. 79) without acknowledging that she, too, is playing it. About the support she believes (bad feminist) curriculum transformation scholars are getting, she writes:

Transformationism is galvanizing, and it has proved to be profitable. No one is offering money for a workshop that would teach its participants that men and women are not all that different, that the traditional standards are better left untransformed. . . , or that students are better off learning a universal curriculum that is not gender-divisive. . . . It is almost impossible to get funding to implement ideas that favor moderate reform rather than exciting Copernican transformations. . . . Critics who do venture doubts about the value of the transformationist movement are dismissed as "right-wing extremists" and their arguments are ignored. (Pp. 78-79)

Sommers's claims here are evidently contradicted by her own financially well-supported, highly visible, popular media work, as well as by the well-publicized National Association of

Scholars whose members are hardly "ignored" either. What may be accurate, however, is her identification with the feelings of victimization and resentment of those who no longer have uncontested power over curricula. Maybe she thinks it is acceptable for those who are accustomed to having power to complain when they lose just a bit of it because, unlike the long-powerless, their victimization is clearly an aberration. Rectifying it would not require changing the terms of the dominant game, and deflecting criticism of and activism against entrenched systems is always Sommers's basic goal.

Similarly, Roiphe, while pointedly expressing the discomfort she herself feels in the face of feminist actions against the sexual violation of women, is nevertheless quite sure that those who have suffered from such abuse must not be encouraged to complain:

Being a victim of sexual harassment is a way to get attention, a way to get the final word. In teaching children to "recognize" sexual harassment, we are training them in victimhood. . . . What happens as the constant need to be on guard against potential violation moves out of the school bus and into the office? Where does the moral of strength through victimhood lead aspiring judges, artists, and executives? (P. 169)

Given their dislike of feminists who critique abusive systems and encourage women actively to protest, it is not surprising that the authors also attack consciousness raising. Sommers writes: "To rally women to their cause it is not enough to remind us that many brutal and selfish men harm women. They must convince us that the oppression of women, sustained from generation to generation, is a structural feature of our society" (p. 17). That "gender feminists" do hold that there is structural oppression of women and do teach students how to see, analyze, and act against it provokes Sommers to say ironically, "Persuading female students that they are oppressed is the first step in the arduous consciousness-raising process" (p. 92). In her view, consciousness raising is actually a brainwashing technique necessary to gain recruits to an ideologically perverted feminist "cause." It limits rather than liberates women. As Roiphe writes: "In my late-adolescent idiom, feminism was not about rebellion, but rules; it was not about setting loose, as it once was, it was about reining in" (p. 171). Need I point out that the authors, as always charging bad feminists with what

they are themselves doing, are trying to raise readers' consciousness that consciousness raising is bad?

Despite the confusion created by attacking others for what they are doing, can we catch glimpses of what the authors want feminism today to be? They all claim to be "liberals." Sommers says she wants what "equity feminists," as opposed to "gender feminists," seek: "They merely want for women what they want for everyone—a 'fair field and no favors'" (p. 51), that is, equal access for women to a system that claims to value competitive individualism. While saying they value the gender analyses that question the actual fairness of that field, Patai-Koertge also invoke their version of liberalism: "Only that weary adjective *liberal*—much maligned and battered but still bravely insisting on tolerance, mutual respect, and an open mind—can lend to education the power to overcome ignorance, prejudice, and hypocrisy" (p. 215). But just as it is difficult to sort out which gender analyses they respect from those they trash with epithets such as "gendelirium," it is hard to sort out where Patai-Koertge draw the line between good feminist scholarship and bad women's studies. In general, however, the authors seem to agree that feminism must be hauled back onto the old supposedly tolerant, supposedly fair, individual rights-centered "liberal" field. They differ, however, about just how narrow are the bounds of that field and how far back—or to the right—feminism must be hauled.

Sommers claims to be upholding true "classic liberal" values, but she is listed by the Young America's Foundation Speakers Program (today's version of Young Americans for Freedom) along with conservatives such as Patrick Buchanan, George Will, Caspar Weinberger, Phyllis Schlafly, Barry Goldwater, and Phil Gramm. She was also among speakers paid for by the E.L. Wiegand Foundation during a year-long program planned to make the conservative case at Swarthmore College in 1994. Other speakers included Schlafly, Dinesh D'Souza, William F. Buckley Jr., Walter E. Williams, Edwin Meese III, Michael Medved, and David Horowitz.²

Patai-Koertge's frontispiece invokes quite different company, although read out of context the quotes from Adrienne Rich ("Lying is done with words, and also with silence") and Albert Camus ("Every revolutionary ends by becoming either an op-

pressor or a heretic") could easily be taken to support rather than counter today's conservative backlash. The message seems to be that Patai-Koertge are willing to risk feminists' anger from their left, and cooptation by antifeminists on their right, because of their allegiance to the pure and high purpose of a nonrevolutionary feminism. They also close their book with a postscript in which they characterize the "tone" they have adopted to brand bad feminists as both heretical and oppressive as one "of irony" rather than insult. They chose "irony," they say, as "more conducive to our work than . . . dejection" (p. 216). And then they say: "To the enemies of feminist initiatives, the folks who will say, 'See, we knew it all along—feminists are a bunch of wild-eyed weirdos,' we have this to say: No. You did not read our book carefully" (p. 217). Again, the disclaimer does not suffice. It would be more accurate to say that had "the enemies" read "carefully," they would have realized that it is only the feminists Patai-Koertge want purged from women's studies whom they wish to be branded as "wild-eyed weirdos."

While honoring their earlier work, and despite being aware that there are some courses, teachers, and students in women's studies who do not always behave as I, too, might wish, I cannot avoid concluding that Patai-Koertge have gone well beyond the bounds of helpful criticism. The tactics they have chosen to use against other feminists do not suggest that trust placed in their political or intellectual openness or fairness would be well placed. Neither does their use of history. To justify their claim to be inheritors and defenders of the only real and true feminism, they, like the other authors, create a myth of the historical women's movement cleansed of its more revolutionary activism, its contestations and contradictions. But earlier feminists were no less contentiously divided about how radical desires for equality required them to be, nor were they more free of multiple intersecting prejudices, than are feminists today.

Creating a mythic history is also a political ploy. Once a movement has achieved some real successes from which many benefit, those who did its difficult, challenging work can be recast as saints. This falsification of reality allows those who continue agitating to be chastised for being ungrateful, rude, and

too political to be worthy of the saints' mantle. It also makes it possible and effective for all kinds of causes piously to invoke the saints' values as their own. Thus, the New Right of today appropriates the stirring principles of the civil rights movement and progressive populism. The safely dead Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., is quoted against affirmative action, and the undoing of social service safety nets and the unleashing of gigantic corporations are presented as empowering people. Except for Sommers, whose actual associations belie her claims to liberalism, I don't believe these authors intend to associate themselves with all the purposes of the conservative backlash against the justice movements of the sixties and early seventies, but that makes their use of similarly falsifying and appropriative versions of history all the more troubling.

Such techniques are not "merely" rhetorical. They constitute public, political actions for which authors of popularly aimed books are responsible. And the only alternative to them is not to remain publicly silent, as these authors imply. On the contrary: public debate has always been essential to the health of feminism as to any movement for equitable, empowering social change. The authors could have joined in discussions with other feminists instead of trying to discredit, purge, and replace them. They could have done legitimate scholarly research that precluded falsifying the complex history of feminisms. They could have joined the tradition of liberal feminism that emphasizes equal rights for individuals without trashing more radical feminisms that target systemic barriers to the achievement of those rights. They could have included the views of non-"elite" women more accurately and respectfully by recognizing that working-class white women and women of color are not helplessly awaiting defenders, disagree among themselves and so are to be found among advocates as well as critics of a wide range of feminisms, and have throughout history not only questioned some versions of feminism but have also created their own.

But the authors chose to do otherwise. Readers of these books thus find themselves caught between believing that Sommers, Patai and Koertge, Fox-Genovese, and Roiphe really hold the values and intend to serve the purposes they claim, on the one hand, or believing the evidence of what they are actu-

ally doing in these books, on the other. When confused by such contradictions, the old saw that we should trust people who "not only talk the talk but walk the walk" seems apt. By that test, the authors fail to convince that they are friends of feminism; or liberalism; or fair-minded, inclusive, and accurate education and scholarship. They have chosen instead to walk in step with a patriarchy that knows how to reward those who are willing to attack their more agitating sisters.

NOTES

1. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987).
2. Consult Jean Stefancic and Richard Delgado, *No Mercy: How Conservative Think Tanks and Foundations Changed America's Social Agenda* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996), which documents many such connections among those whose well-funded, powerfully backed purpose is to discredit progressive public and educational change. (And note that "well-funded" and "powerful" are markers Sommers reads as proof of the nefariousness of bad feminists.)