

LIBERALISM, FEMINISM AND THE REAGAN STATE: THE NEOCONSERVATIVE ASSAULT ON (SEXUAL) EQUALITY

Zillah Eisenstein

Today, liberalism is in crisis. Neoconservatives believe that the crisis stems from excessive demands for egalitarianism which have created a no-win situation for a liberal democratic society, a society which is supposed to be organised around freedom rather than equality. According to most left liberals and leftists, liberalism is in crisis because capitalism is itself in crisis. Markets are not expanding as they once were; Third World countries are challenging the hegemony of American world power; structural changes in the economy have expanded the service sector at the expense of production. Few of these critics, however, define the crisis as reflecting a challenge to traditional patriarchal institutions that underpin the relations of capital. New Right groups come the closest to this analysis in their concern with reconstructing the patriarchal white nuclear heterosexual family and the traditional male role as head of household. But even the New Right, which brought family issues and questions of sexuality to the mainstream of American politics in the **1980** and **1984** presidential elections, has not articulated in a systematic fashion why women's emplacement in the labour force challenges the system of liberal democracy and the discourse of liberalism so fundamentally, why the notion of equality is as subversive as it is when applied to women, or how feminism's rejection of the **public/private** split and its recognition that the 'personal is political' is central to the crisis of liberalism.

The purpose of this article is to document the right-wing policies of the first term of the Reagan administration as centred on a series of anti-feminist, anti-egalitarian strategies which attempt to reconstitute the patriarchal basis of the state and society. This involves an examination of the New Right and neoconservatives, particularly in terms of how they view the crisis of liberalism as reflective of problems related to family life, sexual equality, and 'sex difference'.¹ I also argue that a potential challenge to the state's moves towards the right is still embedded in the (liberal) feminist discourse² and consciousness of the American public.

Before one can try to make sense of the growing conservatism of the American state, one must recognise that the political discourse of the state and the political and sexual class consciousness of the American public is in flux. Over the course of the past twenty-five years the liberal

democratic politics of the state—its commitment to increased equality for white and Third World women and Third World men through an active social welfare state has both been established and dismantled. The language of the state has shifted with these changes from a liberal democratic rhetoric to a neoconservative (neoliberal) and New Right stance. The appeal of liberal feminism, which developed during this period, especially through the 1970s, remains visibly strong alongside these shifting discourses despite the neoconservative and New Right's rejection of the (liberal) feminist commitment to sexual equality. The American public absorbs these contradictory and differing positions which vie against and with each other in state rhetoric in a consciousness which is mixed. People believe in the importance of liberal democratic values and yet are critical of the welfare state; people believe that a woman has the right to choose whether she will have an abortion and yet are bothered by what they see as a sexually promiscuous society; in the 1984 presidential election people believed that the Democrats were more committed to fairness as a policy guide, but they voted for Reagan anyway. This is the context in which we need to explore the meaning of the crisis of liberalism.

My understanding of the present crisis of liberalism is that liberal democracy's patriarchal foundations—specifically those located in the family and between the state and family life—are in significant transition and necessitate a reconstitution and redefinition of patriarchal privilege. To the extent the feminist movement challenges present neoconservative and New Right attempts to restructure sexual inequality, a major assault has been launched against feminism, women's entry into the labour force, and the actual gains made by women *toward* sexual equality.

One might wonder what has happened to what I have elsewhere termed the 'radical future of liberal feminism',³ given the state's move toward a neoconservative position on feminism and/or right wing antifeminism. Whereas welfare state liberalism is in crisis today, liberal feminism—meaning woman's right to equality of opportunity—is not. Therefore, although the Reagan administration has had a somewhat free hand in dismantling the social welfare state, it has not been free to ignore the constraints set up by liberal feminism. Liberal feminism, defined as support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion rights, and economic equity in the market, underlines the consciousness of a majority of women (and men) today as witnessed by polls on these issues. This type of feminist consciousness creates problems for the state in its attempt to mediate the conflicts between traditional patriarchy and the promise of equality of opportunity for women.

Actually, the right wing assault against feminism is proof of the continued radical potential of feminism to transform the patriarchal underpinnings of liberalism. If feminism did not have this radical potential, the assault against it would not be needed. All feminism(s) contain aspects

of liberal feminism at their core: the demand for equality, freedom of individual choice, and the recognition of woman as an autonomous being. However feminism chooses to **define** these particular demands, these are its starting points. The demand that woman be treated as equal (the same) as man, rather than be differentiated from him, is a revolutionary demand in terms of the needs of patriarchy. As such, feminism is subversive to liberalism which is structured by patriarchal relations. In demanding woman's individual rights for achievement, rather than prescribed ascription, feminism uncovers the politics of 'difference' as unequal.

This leads us to the problem of the rejection of the quest for sexual equality in favour of 'sexual difference' by the neoconservatives. Because liberal feminism has implicitly assumed that sexual equality requires that women have the same economic and political rights as men, it has never developed an explicit theory of sexual equality which focuses on sex or the problems of 'sexual difference'. Feminism in general has not focused on these issues and antifeminists are quick to point this out. The notion of sexual equality is more problematic than the general concept of equality because a simple egalitarianism that assumes sameness will not work. Yet one knows the problems with the view 'different' but equal. However insufficient liberal and radical feminism have been in delineating a notion of sexual equality, it is the demand for it that has exacerbated the crisis of liberalism, which is a crisis about the meaning of equality.

The political struggles of patriarchal society continue as conservative forces seek to curtail once again the radical aspects of feminism. One cannot predict the outcome. But one needs to try to understand the important potential of gender and feminist consciousness to curtail the growing conservatism if sexual equality is to remain a part of political discourse.

The Contradictory Politics of the New Right

The New Right critique of liberalism, which amounts to an indictment of the welfare state, attributes this crisis to the changed relationship between the state and the family. The fundamental focus of present New Right politics is directed at redefining this relationship. In some cases, the New Right thinks that the welfare state is responsible for undermining the traditional patriarchal family by taking over different family functions. The health, welfare, and education of individuals, it believes, should be the purview of the family.

From the perspective of the New Right, the problem of 'the' family—defined as the married heterosexual couple with children, the husband in the labour force and the wife remaining at home to rear the children as a housewife—stems from the husbands' loss of patriarchal authority as their wives have been pulled into the labour force. Richard **Viguerie** (the major fund raiser of the New Right), Jerry Falwell (a leading evangelist

and head of the 'Moral Majority'), and George Gilder (the economist whom David Stockman consulted and the author of *Wealth and Poverty*) argue that in order to revitalise the capitalist economy, create a moral order, and strengthen America at home and abroad, policy makers must aim to re-establish the dominance of the traditional white patriarchal family.

Because black women have always worked outside the home in disproportionate numbers to white women, whether in slave society or in the free labour market, the model of the traditional patriarchal family has never accurately described their family life. Yet today, with white married women's entry into the labour force, this nuclear model no longer describes the majority of white families ~~either~~.⁴ This is why the 'problem' of the family has become more pronounced and why the issue of the married wage-earning woman has now been finally brought to centre stage by the New Right. In this fundamental sense, the sexual politics of the New Right is implicitly antifeminist and racist: it desires to establish the model of the traditional white patriarchal family by dismantling the welfare state and by removing wage-earning married women from the labour force and returning them to the home.

The New Right's attack is directed so forcefully against married **wage-earning women** and 'working mothers' because it is these women who have the potential to transform society. The New Right correctly understands this. The reality of the wage-earning wife's double day of work uncovered the patriarchal basis of liberalism and capitalist society. As these women began to understand the sexual bias in the marketplace (where a woman earns 61 cents to the male worker's dollar) and continued to bear the responsibilities of housework and child care as well, they voiced feminist demands for affirmative action programmes, equal pay, pregnancy disability payments and abortion rights. They pressed for the equal rights promised by liberal ideology. The New Right focused its attack on both liberalism and feminism precisely because mainstream feminist demands derive from the promises of liberalism—individual autonomy and independence, freedom of choice, equality of opportunity and equality before the law—and because they threaten to transform patriarchy and with it capitalism, by uncovering the 'crisis of liberalism'. Feminist demands uncover the truth that capitalist patriarchal society cannot deliver on its 'liberal' promises of equality or even equal rights for women without destabilising itself.

The New Right's indictment of liberalism reduced the latter to the policies, programmes, and elected officials of the welfare state. In other words, the New Right's analysis of the 'crisis of liberalism' entails a criticism of the welfare state which does not extend to a critique of liberalism itself. The New Right uncritically adopts the notion of liberal individualism while rejecting welfare state liberalism. The New Right

continues to celebrate—in a rhetoric which has often been described as populist—many of the ideas of liberalism (in their particularly 'patriarchal' form).

Much of the New Right's world view is liberal in that it adopts the values of individualism and equality of opportunity. Viguier argues this point when he states that he accepts the vision of the American Dream but rejects the welfare state's role in trying to bring it about for individuals. Phyllis Schlafly embodies the liberal individualist spirit perfectly in the attitudes underlining her anti-ERA position: ' "If you're willing to work hard, there's no barrier you can't jump. . . I've achieved my goals in life and I did it without sex-neutral laws." ' ¹⁰⁸

The contradictory aspects of the New Right's position on equality of opportunity is clearest in their discussion about women's rights. 'The worst effect of the craze for equal opportunity lies in the curious phenomenon of women's rights.' They argue that women already are guaranteed opportunity for employment equal to any man, and this has created strains for the family as husbands have begun competing with their wives. 'The real effect of this collective delusion of women's rights is only to reduce the once sovereign family to a support system for various governmental agencies.' ¹⁰⁹

The New Right uses liberal ideology selectively and inconsistently, not recognising how it necessitates the welfare state. Hence, the New Right is caught in the same dilemma that created the welfare state in the first place: the ideas of equal opportunity and individual freedom remain coupled with a structural reality of economic, sexual and racial inequality. By dismantling the welfare state, the New Right can do nothing about the needs that instigated this form of the state in the first place. Their commitment to liberal individualism and their rejection of the liberal welfare state contradictorily define their politics.

In order to attempt to escape this dilemma, the New Right has sought to construct a society built around the traditional self-sufficient patriarchal family. By doing so, it hopes to establish the autonomy of the family from the state. In order to do this, the family must be relieved of its heavy tax burden and inflation. This will then relieve the married woman from work in the labour force. 'Federal spending eats into the family's income, forcing mothers to go to work to pay for food, clothing, shelter, and other family basics.' ¹¹⁰ The New Right argument is this: welfare state expenditures have raised taxes and added to inflation, pulled the married woman into the labour force and thereby destroyed the fabric of the traditional patriarchal family and hence the moral order of society. The antifeminism and racism of the New Right operates on two levels here. First, the presentation of the traditional patriarchal family as the desired model denies the **reality(ies)** of the black family and the reality of the married wage-earning woman in both the black and white family. Second,

the indictment of the welfare state and its 'Great Society' programmes is being used to turn back whatever gains have been made by black and white women and black men.

But, if it is the case that the welfare state is as much a consequence of changes in the economy and in the family (for example, women's entrance into the labour force, new sexual mores, and higher divorce rates), then one cannot restabilise the traditional (white) patriarchal family by dismantling the welfare state. The welfare state did not cause, but developed out of the dissolution of the traditional patriarchal family. The New Right's vision of the state and their vision of the family are both out-moded forms. Some members of the New Right have themselves begun to recognise this as a problem. Jeffrey Hart, writing in the *New Right Papers*, suggests that the New Right needs to develop a futuristic, modern approach to replace its tradition-bound outlook, particularly on issues surrounding questions of sex.¹⁰

The New Right, 'the' Family, and Sexuality

By reasserting the power of the family against the state, the New Right actually intends to re-establish the power of the father. According to Jerry Falwell in *Listen America*, government has developed at the expense of the father's authority: 'The progression of big government is amazing. A father's authority was lost first to the village, then to the city, next to the State, and finally to the empire.'¹¹ Falwell is also angry and critical of the inflationary economy because it has undermined the father's authority. He states that children should have the right 'to have the love of a mother and father who understand their different roles and fulfill their different responsibilities. . . . To live in an economic system that makes it possible for husbands to support their wives as full time mothers in the home and that enables families to survive on one income instead of two'.¹² He wants to create a healthy economy and limit inflation in order to establish the single wage-earner family. 'The family is the fundamental building block and the basic unit of our society, and its continued health is a prerequisite for a healthy and prosperous nation. No nation has ever been stronger than the families within her.'¹³ Thus Falwell's fight against inflation is also a fight to re-establish the father's authority and to put women back in the home.

In order to understand more fully the New Right attack on the welfare state and the wage-earning married woman, one needs to understand that they believe that the differences between the sexes are the single most important motivating force in human life.¹⁴ According to George Gilder: 'There are no human beings; there are just men and women, and when they deny their divergent sexuality, they reject the deepest sources of identity and love.'¹⁵ The sexual constitution of society is as important as the legal constitution.¹⁶ 'For sex is the life force—and cohesive impulse of

a people, and their very character will be deeply affected by how sexuality is managed, sublimated, expressed, denied, and propagated.¹⁷ It is men's sexuality, according to Gilder, which needs to be controlled and contained, and much of the politics of society must be aimed at doing this by reaffirming the role of husband. The role of the male, as husband and breadwinner, is a 'cultural contrivance' which can be destroyed unless it is protected. Gilder believes that the male role of husband, defined as father and breadwinner, is absolutely necessary for a moral, ordered society. It creates the needed sense of obligation and importance that men need for guidance.

Gilder is critical of feminism because he thinks it is hostile to sexual difference and family life, 'that as a movement it is devoted to establishing the career woman as the American ideal, supported by federal subsidies and celebrations'.¹⁸ He says this is true of the moderates as well as the revolutionaries. Although the moderates say that they wish only to improve relations between the sexes through liberal reforms, their reforms, if adopted, would be revolutionary.¹⁹ Gilder understands, somewhat accurately, that in the end if woman's real equality were established, it would erode male privilege and the notion of masculinity as it presently exists. As he states: 'The reason the revolutionaries are right and the moderates revolutionary is that the movement is striking at the Achilles' heel of civilized society: the role of the male.'²⁰

On the whole, the New Right adopts much of Gilder's position: his fear of sexual licence and freedom, his commitment to sexual difference rather than sexual equality, his concern with protecting the traditional patriarchal family. Richard Viguerie adopts this same view when he argues in the New Right journal, *Conservative Digest*, that the New Right needs to focus on 'real women's issues' like soft and hard core pornography and rape in order to mobilise the woman's vote.²¹ The focus once again is on woman's need for protection—especially protection from sexual abuse and sexual excess. This is the same perspective held by New Rightist Joseph Sobran when he states: 'Just as welfare destroys the work ethic, so abortion destroys the family ethic.'²² Family life supposedly protects and requires sex which is tied to childbearing, whereas abortion allows for the possibility of sex for pleasure which in the end destroys the moral fabric of the family and society. 'We seek to preserve not the selfish and irresponsible individual, but an individual who respects law—divine and human—and who nurtures the community that gave him life and protection.'²³

The New Right was able to mobilise support around these sexual issues, especially abortion, in the 1980 election very successfully. This focus helped elect Reagan. It is important however, to note that the New Right was less successful in actually passing legislation related to this anti-abortion stance or in gaining legitimacy for this position within the Reagan administration or in the 1984 presidential election. The Laxalt Family

Protection Act, which sought to promote traditional family mores ran into considerable criticism and is undergoing complete revision. Different proposals suggesting a constitutional amendment banning abortion have met serious opposition. Sandra O'Connor was appointed to the Supreme Court over the objections of the New Right which considered her to be pro-abortion at that time. After Richard Schweiker resigned as head of HEW and Drew Lewis resigned from the Department of Transportation, they were replaced by Margaret Heckler and Elizabeth Dole, respectively, neither of whom were considered to be 'Reaganites' according to the *Conservative Digest*. This same journal criticised these appointments as giving in to 'liberal' pressure. 'For Reagan, the great critic of affirmative action, to be propitiating the clamorous press by playing the women- and blacks—game at this level suggests a lack of seriousness and a loss of purpose.'²⁴ And in the 1984 presidential election, Reagan chose to emphasise the economic, rather than the 'social issues'. It should be noted however, that Heckler has had her post re-assigned and New Right rhetoric is occupying more of a centre stage position in 1986-7 than in '84.

The dissatisfaction of the New Right with Reagan can only be fully understood once one recognises the role and place of neoconservatism within the state today. Much of the present conflict within the state exists between the New Right and neoconservatives as the latter appear to have consolidated their power in the 1984 election. Although New Rightists and neoconservatives share an indictment of the welfare state, neoconservatives do so in the hopes of revising it while the New Right hopes to destroy it. The neoconservatives, as revisionist liberals, have been more successful than the radical New Right because they do not reject liberalism; rather, they wish to revise it and redefine it away from its radical possibilities. As well, without rejecting the notion of equality of opportunity between the sexes, the neoconservatives attempt to revise the meaning of equality, to recognise 'sexual difference'. The neoconservative attack on liberalism has gained more legitimacy within the state than the New Right because its moorings are to be more systematically found in liberalism itself. Neoconservatives accept and utilize the division between public and private life more than the New Right does. They therefore have much less to say about family life and/or abortion (private) and much more to say about affirmative action programmes which apply to the market (public). Although the New Right's focus on sexual issues mobilised enough of a minority to win the 1980 election, these concerns have limited its potential to consolidate its power since then. The New Right intervention into the private life of family and sexuality is a radical break with the liberal notion of privacy. It also operates to demystify the commitments to its patriarchal arrangements within the family by trying to re-establish the patriarchal controls that have formerly been implicit in liberalism. One cannot successfully argue that we need to get govern-

ment off the backs of the people and simultaneously legislate sexuality. Against this backdrop, the neoconservatives are putting in place a state which rejects equality between the sexes and opts for sexual difference, but within the liberal rhetoric of equality of opportunity. As such, they do not assert an anti-feminist stance, but rather a neoconservative one where the issue of sex and politics and the personal as political is mystified once again. The New Right exposes and defends the patriarchal aspects of family life and therefore rejects liberalism in the realm of family and sexuality; neoconservatives attempt to re-define and modernise the patriarchal aspects of liberal society in the hopes of de-radicalising liberalism itself. Let us examine exactly what this means.

Neoconservatives and the 'Opportunity' Society

The term neoconservative does not encompass a completely unified set of assumptions, but there is a unifying theme which defines neoconservatism and that is the criticism of liberalism for over-extending itself. As revisionist liberals, neoconservatives sought to save liberalism from itself. Whereas the New Right can be viewed as right-wing radicals, neoconservatives are reformist liberals. However, both these groups believe liberalism is in crisis and share a basic indictment of the welfare state.

Neoconservatives, from the mid-1970s onward led an attack on the 'Great Society' version of the welfare state. They thought it had created what they term the 'excesses of democracy'²⁵—too much equality. They criticised the welfare state for trying to create equality of condition rather than equality of opportunity, for destroying the differences between liberty and egalitarianism. Liberty is the freedom one should have to run the 'race of life'.²⁶ But there can be no guarantee that each competitor in the race should or will win. A truly liberal society allows everyone to compete, but a race in and of itself requires winners and losers. According to the neoconservatives, the problem was that everyone had come to claim the right to win. This led people (particularly white and black women and black men) not only to expect equality of opportunity but to expect equality of outcome or condition. The neoconservative believes these expectations destroy true liberty—which is about freedom, not equality. This is why Irving Kristol has argued since the early 1970s that liberalism needed redefinition: he does not want to repudiate liberalism but rather wants to revive the distinction between equality and liberty.²⁷ Daniel Bell articulated this position in 1976 when he stated. 'One has to distinguish between treating people equally and making them equal.'²⁸ Thomas Sowell also made this distinction when he argued in 1975 that 'uneven is not necessarily inequitable'.²⁹ President Reagan's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biochemical and Behavioral Research later reflected this position: 'Equitable access is the "ethical obligation" and "ultimate responsibility" of federal

government. . . The cost of achieving equitable access ought to be shared fairly, but equity does not require equal access.'

The 'Great Society' programmes such as Medicaid, Medicare, the Civil Rights Act of 1964, affirmative action programmes, the expansion of manpower training programmes, the establishment of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Job Corps, and Model City Programmes were viewed as having unleashed a set of endless expectations. In the period from 1964 to 1975 a series of laws were established to prohibit discrimination in federally assisted programmes and activities. In particular, title VI of the Civil Rights Act barred discrimination on the basis of race, colour, or national origin. In 1975, the nondiscrimination principle was extended to women in employment and in educational programmes. A further threat was the Equal Rights Amendment which sought to make sex a 'suspect category' like race. The Great Society programmes were criticised for over-extending the role of government in (supposedly) guaranteeing an individual a place in the 'race of life' In 1971 Edward Banfield commented on this problem of expectation: 'As Americans become more affluent, schooled and leisured they discover (and also invent) more and more "social problems" which (they fondly suppose) can be "solved" if the government "really cares" (that is, if it passes enough laws, hires enough officials, and spends enough money).'³⁰ And years later James Wilson echoed this same concern: 'There is no nation on earth that has so expanded the catalogue of individual rights and no democratic nation on earth that has made subject to regulation so many aspects of otherwise private transactions. . . The more we extend the scope of rights, the harder it is to regulate and to improve, and vice versa.'³¹ And David Stockman, as director of the Office of Management and Budget, articulated this same position for the Reagan administration: 'The idea that has been established over the last ten years, that almost every service that someone might need in life ought to be provided and financed by the government as a matter of right is wrong. We challenge that. We reject that notion.'³²

Besides the claim that Americans had come to expect too much from government, neoconservatives also believed that people expected the wrong thing. At best, individuals should expect that they be free to compete, and this is different from assuming that equality should be part of the competition. The problem, according to Daniel Bell, was that equality had been re-defined by the 'Great Society' programmes. Initially, in the nineteenth century, equality meant equality of opportunity; it was used to destroy the hierarchy of ascription. In the context of the welfare state, equality of opportunity came to be criticised as hierarchical itself, insofar as it involved a demand for 'the reduction of all inequality, or the creation of equality of result—in income, status, and power—for all men in society. This issue is the central value problem of the post industrial

society'.³³

Reconsidering Affirmative Action

Neoconservatives were particularly critical of affirmative action programmes because in their judgment they predetermine the outcome of competition. They viewed affirmative action as offering equality of results, rather than establishing equality of opportunity. In the Heritage Foundation's 'mandate for leadership' report, *Agenda '83*, which outlined neo-conservative concerns, affirmative action was specifically targeted as a key problem area to be redressed. The agenda stated that 'schools must not be required to bear the burden of proving that they do not discriminate. Also, the legislation should state that only a concrete specific act against a specific victim constitutes discrimination—not the absence of affirmative action or numerical quotas'.³⁴ It is also argued that 'intentional' discrimination should be distinguished from 'unintentional' discrimination with the former constituting a problem which needed redressing.

This notion of 'intentional discrimination' which only affected 'identifiable victims' once again served to mask the unintended (as well as intended) reality of individual discrimination defined by one's (sexual) class identity. This is readily evident in the following statement, also in *Agenda '83*: 'No woman can be found who was denied a slot on a professional football team just because she was a woman'.³⁵ In much the same way, veterans' preference laws in government hiring have been found to be non-discriminatory toward women; they are rather said to discriminate against non-veterans. As such, women's identity as a member of a sexual class is denied, and through this denial discrimination toward an individual, as a member of a sexual class, is made impossible. How can one prove sexual discrimination as an individual woman when the sexual class identity of 'woman' is not recognised?

This neoconservative view has been adopted by the Reagan administration most recently in Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) vs. Sears Roebuck & Co. The dismantling of affirmative action programmes is justified on the basis that *individual identifiable victims*, rather than a generalised notion of an individual as a member of a particular class, must be at the base of affirmative action suits. Under the new proposed Labor Department rules, one needs 'identifiable victims' of job discrimination (for relief such as back pay) rather than 'affected classes', where the presumption is that everyone in the class suffered discrimination. Instead of the employer having to **prove** that discrimination does not exist, the individual now has to prove that it does exist.

Discrimination has been redefined in relation to the individual, rather than in terms of the individual's identity within a particular class. This switch is very significant in that it attempts to erase the feminist indictment of (liberal) equality of opportunity for its **commitment** to the

ascribed status of white and black women and black men according to their race **and/or** sexual class. Once one acknowledges the sexual class identity assigned to women by the patriarchal bias of liberalism, the demand for sexual equality becomes potentially subversive. The recognition of woman, as **a member** of a sexual class, challenges the patriarchal foundations of the individual right to run the 'race of life'. As such, liberal individualism, or equality of opportunity, is exposed as a form of male privilege. As well, the identification of the individual, as a member of a particular racial category, exposes racial privilege as an aspect of 'individual rights'. Affirmative action, to the extent it acknowledges previous discrimination on the basis of one's sexual class identity, challenges the patriarchal foundations of equality of opportunity. The neoconservatives recognised this challenge and sought to dismantle affirmative action programmes for this reason. Equality of opportunity for the neoconservatives required the patriarchal sexual class and racist aspects of the 'race of life'.

The 'excess of democracy' implied that the promises of liberal society had been carried too far; liberty had been redefined as equality. According to the neoconservative analysis, the welfare state crisis emerged because it could not (and will never be able to) satisfy the demand for equality, which only breeds more demands for greater equality. Hence, the neoconservative contended that only when expectations were lowered would government be able to satisfy the people **again**.³⁶ In other words, if people expected less of government, government would be able to perform better. This of course, had a certain logic because the welfare state cannot create an egalitarian society and protect capitalist patriarchy at the same time. The irony is that **the** welfare state has never really attempted to create equality of condition. The crisis of liberalism in fact reflected its incapacity to absorb equality of opportunity along sexual class and racial lines.

Neoconservatism and the Excesses of Feminism

Neoconservatism has defined the crisis of liberalism as rooted in the confusion between equality of opportunity (meaning the chance to choose to compete in the 'race of life') and equality of conditions (meaning equality of outcomes or egalitarianism). Liberal society requires the first and not the second. The feminist movement, with its demands for affirmative action, abortion rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment, was specifically viewed by neoconservatives as an 'excess' of liberalism. Women have come to demand too much (sexual) equality and have denied the reality of difference (or inequality) in the 'race of life'. Neoconservatives opted for the notion of 'sexual difference' rather than 'sexual equality', and they supported equality of opportunity rather than sameness or egalitarianism between the sexes.

Michael Levin, writing in 1980 in *Commentary*, the leading neo-conservative journal, criticised the feminist movement for assuming that there are no important biologically based differences between men and women—as though if they were raised identically they would develop identically.³⁷ Rather, he argued that 'we come into the world not as bits of prime matter, but as males or females'.³⁸ Putting aside Levin's assumptions about what feminists think about the issue of biological difference, one needs to recognise that neoconservatives articulated the belief that the differentiation of the sexes, of woman *from* man, is necessary to social life. Levin therefore rejected what he called sexual egalitarianism which requires androgynously equitable outcomes.³⁹

Men and women are believed to be different. Therefore, all one should expect is the chance to compete in the 'race of life'. One should not expect equality. In another leading neoconservative journal, *The Public Interest*, this point had been made continuously while discussing the problem of affirmative action. The distinction between equality of opportunity and the equality of conditions is always drawn: 'We should strive for equal treatment [opportunity] of individuals rather than equal results [conditions] for men and for women.'⁴⁰ The problem of women's advancement is understood as not a lack of opportunity but rather a reflection of the differences between men and women. Hence, we need a reward system which recognises 'initiative, leadership, knowledge of the job and competitive spirit'⁴¹ rather than a reward system which tried to equalise the sexes. 'The law should open opportunities and expand the range of choices for individuals—not interfere with rational business practice, individual decisions, or the fundamental institutions of society.'⁴²

The feminist movement of the 1970s, although not limited to a critique of the male bias of liberalism (it was as much an indictment of the male privilege of the New Left and Civil Rights movement), was very much rooted in acting on the progressive aspects of liberal ideology's commitment to equality. And *at the same time that the feminist movement of the seventies grew out of a rejection of the patriarchal bias of liberalism, it also exacerbated the crisis of liberalism in that the demands for women's equality, in such limited aspects as the ERA, further articulated and legitimised the notion of (sexual) equality as an acceptable expectation.* Demands like the ERA uncovered the contradictory aspects of liberalism. On the one hand, the promise of equality before the law and the individual right to achievement *appears* to be sex neutral. On the other hand, the fact that the ERA was not ratified unmasks the ascribed status of women as less than equal as a reality. The Equal Rights Amendment does not demand equality of conditions, but rather merely legislates equality of opportunity. Equality *before* the law is defined by the patriarchal privileges which are encompassed *within* the law. As such, woman starts out in a different (unequal) starting place in the 'race of life'. However, if equality

of opportunity, as discourse, continued to be as subversive as it was in the 1960s in that it led to further demands for real equality, one can begin to see why the neoconservatives reject affirmative action, the ERA, etc. as an 'excess' of liberalism.

Neoconservatives, Family Life, and Sexuality

The neoconservative position that there is an excess of equality led them to argue for hierarchy as a necessity for social and political order. Hierarchy is not supposed to be predetermined (by ascribed rank), but rather is supposed to reflect the outcome of an open competition. In this sense, women are not to be kept out of 'the race' within the neoconservative argument but neither are they to be assisted in entering it. Margaret Bonilla of the neoconservative Heritage Foundation argued in this vein that 'government interference in the marketplace is the greatest barrier to the success and advancement of women'.⁴³ Rachel Flick, in *The Public Interest*, also adopted this position. She thinks men's and women's work in the market is not comparable, but different and that the male ethos and 'masculine behaviour' from employees is necessary to American business enterprise. At the same time, she does not exclude women from the opportunity to obtain a 'masculine' job; she just does not want to make men's and women's work similar. "To the degree that women *want* the kinds of jobs and careers hitherto dominated by men, and to the degree that they are willing to alter their supposed "womanly" outlook from 9-5—they can and will get "men's jobs" within the framework of an open job market."⁴⁴

Interference in the competition of the marketplace, such as affirmative action programmes, merely tampers with the natural order. Neoconservatism subtly reasserts the patriarchal hierarchical ordering of women *from* man in the name of 'sexual difference', particularly in the marketplace. Unlike the New Right, neoconservatives did not explicitly call for a restrengthening of the power of the father in the family as an ascribed privilege. They argued for the necessity of family life, heterosexual marriage, *and* sexual difference while not limiting family life to the traditional patriarchal family with a housewife. They extended their view of family life to include the dual wage-earning family with the 'working mother'. The 'working mother' should, however, not expect assistance from programmes designed to create greater equality (of conditions) between men and women, such as day care programmes, CETA programmes, or affirmative action.

The neoconservative position applauds equality of opportunity and individual freedom of choice for women. Women should be free to be housewives or wage earners. Women should not however, expect equality if it assumes the 'likeness' of women and men. The protection of sexual difference and individual freedom from government interference remain

core elements in the neoconservative position on 'women's issues'. Neo-conservatism calls for a reprivatisation of the state and a protection of family life. The major focus of the neoconservatives' critique of sexual equality is not 'the' family *per se* because they abide by the liberal notion of the right to privacy. They therefore do not seek to legislate sexuality in the realm of the family through constitutional amendments against abortion, as does the New Right. Nor do they argue for increased rights of the traditional patriarchal father. But they do openly advocate heterosexuality and marriage even if they do not approve of using constitutional amendments to enforce such behaviour. Their language is one of personal freedom and independence for women; not equality, but equality of opportunity, which recognises sexual difference. Neoconservatives do not argue that women are not equal to men; they rather say that women are different. . . from men. Therefore equality of opportunity for women is fine; equality of condition (which assumes sameness) is not.

Whereas the New Right demystifies the place of sex and family life within the political order by challenging the **private/public** split on these issues, the neoconservatives mystify the place of sexuality and the family by adhering to the liberal distinction between public and private realms. As such, the New Right is truly subversive to the liberal (patriarchal) state, whereas the neoconservatives only wish to reform it. *The neo-conservatives, as revisionist liberals, are more dangerous in a society where individuals identify with a liberal discourse.* The New Right sets up its own constraints to the extent that it is anti-liberal in the very realm of sex and family life. The neoconservatives attempt to preserve aspects of patriarchal privilege by arguing for sexual difference rather than sexual equality. They recognise the wage-earner role of women and their place in the market, while they argue to dismantle affirmative action programmes because affirmative **action**, supposedly denies individuals their personal freedom in the 'race of life'. Woman is recognised as an individual, with no problematic sexual class identity. As such, there is no need for feminism or an interventionist state.

Patriarchy, Racism and the Welfare State

Let us now turn to the Reagan administration's attempt to deal with the growing crisis of the welfare state. We shall see that many of the administration's proposals during the first Reagan term were aimed at reconstituting the patriarchal aspects of the state, given changes in family forms today, and that central to this purpose was a rolling back of gains made by middle-class white and black women and black men, as well as a redefinition of the state's relationship to poor women, particularly in single-parent families. Because conflicts have existed within the American state on how best to reformulate the patriarchal aspects of the state for advanced capitalist society, a coherent state policy does not yet exist for

the 1980s. But, to the extent that both the New Right and neoconservatives blame the social welfare state for creating excessive demands for equality and creating a crisis of patriarchal authority, the dismantling of social services emerged—and remains—a core element of the state's resolve to address the 'crisis of liberalism'. While doing this, the Reagan administration has tried to articulate a politics which does not appear completely hostile to (liberal) feminist demands.

The welfare state had partially arisen out of changing patterns of family life. But it also created intended and unintended consequences for family life. White married women's entry into the labour force, increased divorce rates, changes in sexual mores, changes in the structure of the economy, and the growth of a feminist movement all served to reveal the outmoded aspects of the traditional (white) patriarchal family. The state was therefore being forced to reformulate a dynamic of patriarchal privilege which no longer rested solely in the traditional family model.

The relations of patriarchal privilege have become more differentiated, given the multiple family forms which presently exist. There has been a 'transfer of power' from the father and/or husband to the welfare state. This is especially so for the woman heading a single-parent poor family. The reformulation of woman as dependent on the state, as replacing the 'absent' husband, redefines the locus of patriarchal power for the single-parent poor family. Given the poverty of the single-parent family, many of these women became directly dependent on the social programme of the state. This conflicted with the view of the privacy of the family which was still adhered to by the state.

In the dual wage-earning family, where both husband and wife work in the labour force, the husband's power (which had formerly been tied to the ideological notion that he is the sole economic provider) came under challenge as well. As women have entered the labour force in greater numbers and have continued to challenge the neat division between home and market, economy and family, private and public life, they have also constituted a challenge to existing patriarchal authority rooted in the ideological separation of home and market. The state also operates as the missing father in relation to the dual wage-earning family, although in a more indirect form than it does for the single-parent family headed by a woman.

Patriarchal controls on the woman in the dual wage-earning family operate predominantly in the market. In the economy, women are segregated in the low-paying service sector of the market and are disproportionately relegated to underemployment (part-time work) as secondary workers. The market becomes an active participant in redefining the control systems of patriarchal privilege for women who are in the labour force.⁴⁵ The market in this sense bolsters the privilege of the man, even if he is not the sole economic provider. And when he is not the

economic provider (as husband), as in the single-parent family headed by a woman, the state directly steps in.

This discussion about the relations between state activity and family life needs to be qualified in terms of the black family. Much of the concern of the state with changes in family life occurs because these **changes**—particularly the increase in married wage-earning women—now affects the white family. Black married women have always worked disproportionately to white women.⁴⁶ This particular reality, that a majority of black married women have never been solely supported by their husbands, sets up a particular dynamic between racism and patriarchy. The racist dynamic expresses itself in the fact that black men have never been allowed to be the sole economic support of black women, which differentiates black men from white men, black women from white women. And yet the state has always stepped in as patriarch to extend direct controls over the black woman.

Patriarchal privilege, which has been located in the white man as father and/or husband as a sole economic provider and now seems to be located more (although not exclusively) in a series of economic inequalities found in the market with either no man present in the family or a shared, though unequal, economic relationship between husband and wife, must be reformulated on the state level. This requires a more active state, both in the realm of family life and the market. As family forms have become more differentiated and diverse, patriarchal power has become more actively administered by the state. This is a real problem for a state which has been bound by a liberal patriarchal discourse that is hostile to a collapse of **state/family, public/private, sexual/political**.

The welfare state developed as an attempt to bolster patriarchal privilege amidst differentiated family forms, and it also has done much to undermine patriarchy in that it has uncovered the political aspects of the family as it has become more involved in this realm. By challenging the distinctness of family and state, private and public life, economy and politics, the social welfare state became subversive to the needs of the advanced capitalist patriarchal state. It also aided the working poor woman through training programmes, food stamps, medicaid, etc. These programmes did mean a substantial gain in the income position of the **poor**,⁴⁷ particularly poor women.

The Reagan Administration: Reorganising the Welfare State and Re-constituting Patriarchy

There were two fundamental aspects of the dismantling of the social programmes of the welfare state during Reagan's first term. First, it was an attempt to revitalise the unchallenged division between public and private life, the government and the economy, family and political life, while keeping intact a full series of patriarchal controls on family life. This

attack on the welfare state does not apply to welfare militarism or corporatism but only targets welfare state familism. At the very same time that the dismantling of the welfare state is said to be a way of getting government off the backs of the 'people' (and the family), the state has reformulated the policies of the state to family life in the hopes of increasing the state's authority in family life.

Second, the dismantling of the welfare state was supposed to eliminate the 'new class'—those who administer the welfare state. The people of the supposed 'new class' were disproportionately white and black women and black men. The expansion of government services of the welfare state increased the job opportunities for middle-class educated black and white women. In 1976 government employed 21 per cent of all women, 25 per cent of all blacks, 15 per cent of all people of Spanish origin, and 16 per cent of all men.⁴⁸ More particularly, government employed 49.9 per cent of all female professionals and 34.5 per cent of all male professionals. Therefore, government cutbacks in hiring at these levels affected (middle-class) professional women at a significantly higher rate than men. The dismantling of the welfare state and its personnel was directed against the gains made by these women and by black men as well.

The Reagan administration argued that cutbacks of federal jobs would be offset by an increase in private sector employment, particularly in the defence industry. But the people who have lost their jobs in these cutbacks have not been the ones who have been hired in private sector industry. Private industry still does not have a good record on hiring professional black and white women or black men. It is the public sector that does.

Government employment primarily benefits professional women (both white and black) and professional minority men (about 50% of these two groups worked at all levels of government in the 1970s). Indeed, since 1950, increased public spending has been the single most important impetus behind the greater economic mobility of women and minorities.⁴⁹

In 1980, about 20 per cent of black men and 28 per cent of black women were classified as government wage and salary workers: both sexes were more than 50 per cent more likely to be employed in the government sector than whites.⁵⁰ And it is these people who have borne the brunt of the attack on public sector employment.

Dismantling the welfare state and attacking the 'new class' ended up being a direct assault on the gains made by black men and black and white women, particularly in the professional middle class. The gains of the middle-class professional woman have been attacked, while the state has tried to reaffirm patriarchal privilege through sexual hierarchy within the market. The welfare state itself had become subversive, as liberal democracy has, in challenging the patriarchal ordering of the market-

place to the degree it played an active role in providing opportunities to women. Besides firing some of those who administer the welfare state, the dismantling of the welfare state has meant cutting back drastically on social programmes. These cutbacks have been particularly aimed at under-employed, poor and welfare women, whereas the dismantling of the 'new class' was aimed at the middle-class white and black woman and black man. The patriarchal and racist aspects of the Reagan state are differentiated along economic class lines.

The dismantling of the social welfare state which is outlined in the budget cuts of 1981-1987 implicitly expresses a sexual politics. To say that the politics of the economy is implicitly a sexual politics is more than saying that the budget cuts have particular effect on women, which they do. It says that at the base of economic policy is a policy on the family and patriarchal society. In this sense, the Reagan budgets have sought to realign the relationship between the (welfare) state and the family, men and women, and public and private life as much as they attempt to deal with inflation. The relationship between the state and the family has been undergoing basic changes since World War II with the entry of large numbers of white married (middle-class conscious) women into the labour force. The expansion of the social service sector of the state and the development of the welfare state itself parallels the entry of women into the labour force. One can argue that the reaction against state policies which developed through the sixties and seventies is in part a reaction against the need for them, and this partially reflects the redefinition of responsibilities of the family and the state as women have entered the labour force. „Seen as such, the reaction against state involvement in social services is a statement against the transformations taking place in the family and the relationship between the state and the family. The Reagan budgets attempt to limit and curtail the responsibilities of the (welfare) state and to increase the responsibilities (and supposed freedom) of 'the' family. At the time of writing the US Senate has accepted a Tax Reform Package which privileges the one-wage-earner family.

One can assess the first term (1980-84) of the Reagan administration as an initial stage in the rearticulation of the patriarchal state through the dismantling and revision of the social welfare state. The second term (1984-88) has continued in this vein but has shifted emphasis in order to further alter affirmative action laws while establishing Reagan's hold on the federal court system. In terms of affirmative action guidelines the neo-conservative position is now in place. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (as of 1986) has quietly abandoned the use of numerical hiring goals in settling discrimination cases against private employers. And in terms of the courts, Reagan will have appointed half of all federal judges by 1989. With Chief Justice Warren Burger's resignation Reagan had the opportunity to appoint William Rehnquist to head the court, along with

making the appointment of **Antonin Scalia** as associate Supreme Court Judge. As Reagan makes his conservative mark on the courts he has also made clear his New Right commitments. In an interview explaining his recent nominations to the Supreme Court Reagan for the first time termed abortion murder. He stated: 'I don't think that I'm trying to do something that is taking a privilege away from womanhood, because I don't think that womanhood should be considering murder a privilege.' One can only speculate whether the last years of the Reagan administration's tenure will see a further *rejection* of liberal feminist discourse by *the state* on the issues of abortion and the ERA or whether a neoconservative discourse which merely attempts to moderate liberal feminism will continue to dominate.

The Patriarchal State and the ERA

The attack on women's rights by the Reagan administration became blatantly clear with its defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. The patriarchal bias of the state was made explicit in its anti-ERA stance even though there was little agreement within the state on the ERA. Although New Right forces, headed by Jerry Falwell and Phyllis Schlafly, fought for the defeat of the ERA and in defence of the rights of the housewife, some neoconservatives and centre forces within the Democratic and Republican parties believed the ERA is a necessary revision of the law, given the prevalence of the dual wage-earning family and the needs of the 'working mother'. Senators Durenberger and **Hatfield** recognise the need for the state (at least on the level of discourse and the law) to deal with the conflicts between the reality of the dual wage-earning family and the ideology of the traditional patriarchal family. The ERA does not challenge the patriarchal aspects of the home or the patriarchal division between public and private life, but rather recognises, in advanced capitalist patriarchal form, that a majority of women need legal rights within the market. In this sense, Phyllis Schlafly is right. The ERA is a recognition of the wage-earning woman, not the traditional housewife, and therefore is seen by the New Right as a challenge to the traditional patriarchal family.

Reagan's New Right anti-ERA stance created as many problems as it solved, possibly more. It signified that the relations of power of the state remain patriarchal—that those in government today think that the political system of capitalist patriarchy cannot abide women's (legal) equality. The state, by protecting its interests in an outmoded form, draws attention to its patriarchal needs. With a majority of Americans supporting the ERA, it becomes apparent that factions within the state rule in their own interest. The bluntness of this contradiction—between majority opinion in favour of the ERA and its legislative defeats—can only be subversive to the state in the long run. (Whereas 66 per cent of anti-ERA women

voted for Reagan, only 32 per cent of pro-ERA women did.)

This pro-ERA consciousness has already begun to materialise politically with the National Organization of Women's continued ERA campaign which calls for the election of women to state and federal legislatures. Such a strategy, which is clearly reformist, also points to what George Gilder has called the revolutionary aspects of (liberal) feminism, *i.e.*, that the role of men as the primary operatives in the public sector is under attack. A subversive consciousness among women has developed about the Reagan administration. This consciousness has been termed the 'gender gap': women seem to support Reagan policies less than men do. Even as early as the 1980 election, this gap (though small) was evident. At the end of 1982, 53 per cent of the women polled said they were inclined to vote Democratic; 35 per cent said they would vote Republican. Although the gender gap did not materialise in terms of a 'women's vote' in 1984, gender gap consciousness remains an issue. Women, in terms of a series of post-1984 CBS News polls, identify much more readily with the Democratic party than men do and remain more critical of the Reagan administration than men.

Gender Consciousness and the Challenge to Neoconservatism

Gender (gap) consciousness—the fact that women are repeatedly found to be more critical of Reagan administration policies than men—reflects the transitional nature of women's lives: women's greater participation in the labour force, changing family forms, the development of the social welfare state and its present dismantling, the feminist movement, the Vietnam War and the fear of another involvement similar to it in El Salvador, Nicaragua, or Libya—and the way these changes affect women's understanding of their needs and their right to equality. These changes have developed with and within a (liberal) feminist discourse and consciousness. This does not mean that all individuals who operate within this context would define themselves as feminist," but it is to argue that it invades their thinking and acting in the world. It is important to understand that liberal feminism, which embraces the notion of women's legal and economic equality (the ERA) and reproductive rights (the individual right to choose) sets up constraints for the Reagan state as it continues to redefine and reconstitute the patriarchal dimensions of the state. This is in large part what gender gap consciousness is about."

Gender gap consciousness in part has reflected the fact that the Reagan administration is caught between the commitment to its patriarchal relations and the discourse of liberalism and liberal feminism which promises equality of opportunity to all individuals. Even though liberalism when defined as the social welfare state is rejected by many, the (liberal) notion of women's (legal and economic) equality is accepted by a majority of the public. The capitalist need for women wage labourers

only exacerbates the tension between the notion of equality of opportunity for women and the male privilege defined and protected by the state. The Reagan state has much internal conflict about how best to deal with this dilemma, and it is out of this conflict surrounding policies like abortion, pay equity, affirmation action that a heightened consciousness of women, about their needs, has arisen.

Part of women coming to consciousness of themselves as a sexual class involves women's understanding their particular economic vulnerability as *women*, as secondary wage earners who suffer from unemployment, underemployment, or 61 cents to the dollar when employed. These realities define a particular relationship for women to the social welfare state which either aids them while unemployed (welfare), subsidises them while underemployed (through supplementary aid programmes), assists them while trying to find jobs (through affirmative action guidelines), or hires them (and now fires them). Women in this sense have a particular relationship to the welfare state; they are disproportionately the recipients of social welfare programmes and they also have been employed to administer these programmes.

If one examines the White House Coordinating Council on Women's twelve-page memo on the gender gap, compiled by Ronald Hinckley before the 1984 election, it clearly stated that: 'The continued growth of the "gender gap" in its current form could cause serious trouble for Republicans in 1984.' The memo defines the gap as reflecting differences between men and women 'in the way they judge political morality, their economic vulnerabilities, their levels of political awareness, variations in the impact of education on them, and their perceived self-interests'. The gender gap also reflects 'the changes in population characteristics, particularly the rise of single-parent families headed by women, many of which are dependent on government subsidies', and also 'reflects the President's policies on the budget and foreign defense'. At the same time that the memo seems to recognise that the gap reflects real issues specific to women's changing lives, it winds up concluding that the gap is primarily a problem of perception, and a communication plan must 'target' women to change the way they think about the administration.

Because the Reagan administration has espoused an anti-feminist policy stance—anti-ERA and anti-abortion—it was faced in the 1984 election with either continuing its anti-feminist discourse and risking a heightened criticism by American women, and some men, or shifting the debate away from the so-called 'social issues' and towards the economy. They did the latter and by doing so played more by the acceptable rules of electoral politics; they focused on the public sphere and the problems of the economy.

The Republican shift away from the 'social issues' not only created an ideological vacuum in the campaign on so-called women's issues but set

the contours for a non-ideological campaign in the realms of the economy and international policy as well. The Republican party remained relatively quiet on the issue of abortion. The ERA was hardly mentioned by either the Democrats or Republicans. Neither party discussed pay equity, day care, etc. in any systematic sense. The Republicans stayed away from feminist concerns and effectively silenced them while the Democrats did the same, as *soon* as they nominated Geraldine Ferraro for vice-president.

Both parties were faced with the constraints of the public's acceptance of liberal, feminist discourse and the need to reconstitute a viable form of state and familial patriarchy. The Republican party chose to disassociate itself from the New Right's agenda—anti-abortion, anti-ERA—during the campaign with silence, while the Democrats nominated Ferraro and then followed the Republican party's lead in remaining silent on controversial feminist issues.

One must recognise that the issue of sexual equality is central to the crisis of liberalism today and the consolidation of neoconservatism and the New Right within the state. The crisis of liberalism has led to a rejection of a political discourse committed to equality meaning egalitarianism, particularly, although not exclusively, between the sexes. The crisis also extends to the notion of freedom itself when it is specifically extended to the realm of sexual freedom, either in terms of abortion, homosexuality, premarital, extramarital, or nonmarital sex.

While radical and liberal feminists in the 1980s seek to explore the meaning of this sexual discourse, the neoconservative and New Right factions of the state want to silence it. They were effective in silencing these concerns in the 1984 election. Ferraro's nomination was the one place within the political arena which left room open to carry on the discussion about the real meaning of sexual equality and make clear that it is impossible to completely quiet these issues.¹ Ferraro's nomination was a recognition of liberal feminist concerns and consciousness. The Democratic party obviously thought it had much to gain by identifying itself with this discourse. At the same time, however, it felt the need to constrain and limit its identification with feminism. As Dottie Lynch, a pollster who worked with the Mondale campaign stated: 'We were given the mandate to get the women's vote, but we were not given the resources with which to achieve it.'²

The Ferraro nomination poses the dilemma of feminism and women's changing lives for liberal democratic (patriarchal) politics. Sexual equality cannot be ignored as an integral part of political discourse today, and yet sexual equality cannot be fully embraced by a party dedicated to the preservation of the (patriarchal) state. This is not to argue that the Ferraro nomination was meaningless or merely a co-optive ploy. Although this may have been the intention of the Democratic party, it is representative of more than this. It is that the Ferraro nomination can mean so little

and mean so much *at the same time* that reflects the present dilemma of curtailing the demands towards sexual equality for both the state *and* feminists.

At this point the discourses of neoconservatism which focuses on opportunity and mainstream feminism which is committed to equality interface with each other in both contradictory and mutually exclusive ways. The political, rhetoric of 'opportunity' presents a real problem for feminist concerns rooted in the notion of sexual equality. Because the language of liberalism is shifting and the concept of equality has been rejected, or at least redefined, actors in the state who have come to adopt different versions of this neoconservative neoliberal stance have a freer hand to limit the notion of sexual equality to begin with. The Republicans, in 1984, articulated their individual 'opportunity' platform as anti-ERA, anti-abortion, and anti-affirmative action; a woman can achieve on her own. The Democrats have been as vague about their vision of women's equality as the Republicans. They remain symbolically, rather than pragmatically, supportive of the ERA, affirmative action, abortion, and pay equity. But as liberalism within the Democratic party shifts away from a commitment to equality (in even its symbolic sense), one can only assume it will try to shift the discourse on sexual equality as well.

At best, one can characterise the present political discourse on sexual equality as conflictual, contradictory, and shifting. At the same time that neither party will *directly* challenge liberal feminism or a women's right to sexual equality, the notion of equality has multiple meanings. A woman's 'difference' rather than her sameness, her separate but equal status, her need for 'protection', are all aspects of the language which seek to deny woman her sexual equality with men without directly challenging the notion of sexual equality. These positions exist alongside a language which accepts men and women as equal. But they also exist alongside overtly phallographic symbolism used by actors in the state.

American mainstream feminism is very much wedded to American liberalism. Many of the demands of feminists for themselves as women, as members of a sexual class, stem from the liberal promises of equality of opportunity for individuals. As such, feminism gained a validity from liberalism at the same time that the liberal democratic state has never granted women sexual equality with men. As the welfare state, the shrinking economy, and the added entry of women into the market have come under greater scrutiny, one can only wonder what will happen to feminism and its validation by liberalism. Liberalism remains a major tenet of individual consciousness. However, the practice of liberalism—the social welfare state and affirmative action programmes—have been largely rejected by the Reagan state. With the re-election of Reagan in 1984, it appears that feminism as a discourse *within the state* has entered a crisis alongside liberalism. *Outside the state*, (liberal) feminism remains

a powerful constraint against a growing neoconservatism. The challenge is to build a mass-based feminist movement which can go beyond the limits of liberalism in the long-run and which can meanwhile utilise its radical possibilities to help counter the right wing developments within the state.

NOTES

- Much of this article is a condensation of my argument in *Feminism and Sexual Equality: Crisis in Liberal America* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984). See this for a more complete analysis of the issues discussed here.
2. I use the term discourse to refer to the realm of language, symbols, thoughts, and ideas without falsely separating these realms from a notion of the 'real'.
 3. See Zillah Eisenstein, *The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1981).
 4. The criticism of female wage earners' effect on family life emerged in Patrick Moynihan's 1965 report, 'The Negro Family, the Case for National Action', in *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy*, (ed.), Lee Rainwater and William Yancey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), pp. 39-424. Moynihan, using the model of the traditional (white) patriarchal family, argued that the deterioration of the Negro family was in large part due to the emasculation of the black male by his female counterpart who was working in the labour force and/or heading a household. Moynihan, believing that 'the very essence of the male animal, from the bantam rooster to the four-star general, is to strut' (p. 62), thought that the challenges to the black male's authority by black women made a stable family relationship impossible. The New Right's attack on the married woman wage-earner is at one and the same time a criticism of what it terms the 'working mother'.
 - Carol Felsenthal, *The Sweetheart of the Silent Majority: The Biography of Phyllis Schlafly* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), pp. 55, 58.
 - Thomas Fleming, 'Old Right and the New Right', in Robert Whitaker (ed.), *The New Right Papers* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 195.
 8. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
 9. Richard Viguerie, *The New Right: We're Ready to Lead* (Falls Church, VA: the Viguerie Company, 1980).
 10. Jeffrey Hart, 'The Intelligent Women's Guide to a Modern American Conservatism', in *The New Right Papers*, p. 38.
 11. Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* (New York: Doubleday, 1980), p. 26.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
 13. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
 14. George Gilder, *Sexual Suicide* (New York: Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1973), p. 7. Also see Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
 16. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
 17. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 67.
 19. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
 20. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94.
 21. Richard Viguerie, 'The Real "Women's Issues"', *Conservative Digest* 8, No. 10, (October 1982), p. 64.
- Joseph Sobran, 'Why Conservatives Should Care about Abortion', *Conservative*

- Digest 7*, No. 11 (November 1981), p. 14.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
24. Patrick Buchanan, 'Reaganism in Retreat', *Conservative Digest* 9, No. 2 (February 1983), p. 6.
25. For a discussion of neoconservatism see Peter Steinfels, *The Neoconservatives: The Men Who Are Changing America's Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). Also see Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976). Nathan Glazer and Irving Kristol, (eds.), *The American Commonwealth* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976); and Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: New American Library, 1978).
26. See Isaac Kramnick, 'Religion and Radicalism: English Political Theory in the Age of Revolution', *Political Theory* 5, No. 4 (November 1977), pp. 505-34, for an excellent discussion of equality of opportunity in bourgeois thought. Also see Michael Gargas McGrath, (ed.), *Liberalism and the Modern Polity* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1978) and Michael Margolis, *Viable Democracy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).
27. Irving Kristol, 'What Is a Liberal—Who Is a Conservative? A Symposium', *Commentary* 62, No. 3 (September 1976), p. 74. Also see Kristol, 'About Equality', *Commentary* 54, No. 5 (November 1972), pp. 41-59, and 'An Exchange on Equality', *Commentary* 55, No. 2 (February 1973), pp. 12-25.
28. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), p. 260.
29. See Thomas Sowell, *Affirmative Action Reconsidered* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1975), and 'Are Quotas Good for Blacks?', *Commentary* 65, No. 6 (June 1978), pp. 39-43, for a more complete discussion of this point.
30. Edward Banfield, 'Nixon, the Great Society, and the Future of Social Policy—A Symposium', *Commentary* 55, No. 5 (May 1973), p. 33.
31. James Q. Wilson, 'Policy Intellectuals', *Public Interest*, No. 64 (Summer 1981), p. 35. Also see, Samuel Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).
32. As quoted in David Rosenbaum, 'Study Shows Planned Welfare Cuts Would Most Hurt Poor Who Work', *New York Times*, March 20, 1981, p. 1.
33. Daniel Bell, 'Meritocracy and Equality', *Public Interest*, No. 29 (Fall 1972), p. 40. Also see, Seymour Martin Lipset, 'Social Mobility and Equal Opportunity', *Public Interest*, No. 29 (Fall 1972), pp. 90-108; Milton Himmelfarb, 'Liberals and Libertarians', *Commentary* 59, No. 6 (June 1975), pp. 65-70; and Robert Nisbet, 'The Pursuit of Equality', *Public Interest*, No. 35 (Spring 1974), pp. 103-20.
34. Lucy Phelps Patterson, 'Education', in Richard Holwill, (ed.), *A Mandate for Leadership Report, Agenda '83* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 1983), p. 117.
35. Marshall Breger *et al.*, *Agenda '83*, p. 209.
36. See Nathan Glazer and Irving Kristol, (eds.), *The American Commonwealth*, especially Samuel Huntington, 'The Democratic Distemper', pp. 9-38, for a full statement of this argument.
37. Michael Levin, 'The Feminist Mystique', *Commentary* 70, No. 6 (December 1980), p. 25.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
39. *Ibid.* Also see his 'Feminism and Thought Control', *Commentary* 73, No. 6 (June 1982), pp. 40-44; and Keith Mano, 'The Feminist Mystique', *National Review* 34, No. 2 (February 5, 1982), pp. 118-20.
40. Carl Hoffman and John Shelton Reed, 'Sex Discrimination?—The XYZ Affair',

Public Interest, No. 62 (Winter 1981), p. 23.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
43. Margaret Bonilla, 'The White House and Women', *Agenda* '83, p. 24.
44. Rachel Flick, 'The New Feminism and the World of Work', *Public Interest*, No. 71 (Spring 1981), p. 44.
45. See Heidi Hartmann, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Job Segregation by Sex', in Zillah Eisenstein, *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), pp. 206-47; Emma Rothschild, 'Reagan and the Real America', *New York Review of Books*, February 5, 1981.
46. See Philip S. Foner, *Women and the American Labour Movement: From World War I to the Present* (New York: Free Press, 1980); Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (New York: Pantheon, 1974); Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Pantheon, 1976); Patrick Moynihan, 'The Negro Family: The Case for National Action', in Lee Rainwater and William Yancey, (eds.), *The Moynihan Report and the Politics of Controversy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1967).
47. Lester Thurow, *The Zero Sum Society* (New York: Penguin, 1970), p. 163.
48. Augustus F. Hawkins, 'Minorities and Unemployment', in Alan Gartner, Colin Greer, and Frank Riessman, (eds.), *What Reagan Is Doing to Us* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), p. 134. For further discussion of the Reagan administration's fiscal policies, see Frank Ackerman, *Reagonomics, Rhetoric vs. Reality* (Boston: South End Press, 1982); and Robert Lekachman, *Greed Is Not Enough: Reagonomics* (New York: Pantheon, 1982).
49. James D. Williams, (ed.), *The State of Black America 1983* (Washington, DC: National Urban League, 1983), p. 64.
50. Ruth Sidel, 'The Family: A Dream Deferred', in Gartner *et al.*, (eds.), *What Reagan Is Doing to Us*, p. 54.
51. It is interesting to see that in a *Newsweek* poll, February 1986, 56 per cent of the women polled identified as feminist; white women 55 per cent, non-white women 64 per cent, working women 59 per cent. See *Newsweek*, Vol. CVII, No. 13 (March 31, 1986), p. 51.
52. The question of why gender gap consciousness did not materialise into a vote against Reagan in the 1984 presidential election is an issue which will not be discussed here. See my forthcoming (tentatively titled) *Shifting Sexual Discourses*, University of California Press.
53. Maureen Dowd, 'Women Reject Blame for Mondale Loss', *The New York Times*, November 14, 1984, p. A22.