BOOK REVIEWS


A major premise in Eisenstein’s *Feminism and Sexual Equality* is that women, regardless of income and achieved status, comprise a sexual class which is weakened by patriarchal foundations of family and state. She defines patriarchy as “the politics of transforming females and males (biological sex) into women and men ( politicized gender), while differentiating the woman from the man by privileging the man” (17).

Eisenstein argues that social analyses generally ignore the politics of gender, but that the New Right, in attempts to reinforce traditional sex roles and separate spheres, has brought it to the fore. She sees the New Right as coalitions of political, religious, and anti-feminist groups which have reassertion of the authority of the patriarchal family as their main goal.

Increasing the primacy of the motherhood role for women is one way to accomplish this and erosion of affirmative action legislation, another. Eisenstein points out that affirmative action implies a collective identity which must be addressed and she differentiates between equality of opportunity which is aligned with American values of individual initiative and freedom, and equality of outcome which is not. Failure to pass a federal Equal Rights Amendment is seen as resistance to the basic tenets of equality and is evidence that “capitalist patriarchy cannot deliver on its ‘liberal’ promises of equality or even equal rights for women without destabilizing itself” (41).

Coupled with increasing primacy of the motherhood role, erosion of affirmative action, and failure to pass the ERA, domestic spending cuts are cited as other regressive policies for women, government workers, and minorities of either sex, demonstrating that “equality of opportunity for black and white women and black men is a privilege reserved for times of plenty” (46). Dismantling the welfare state, claims Eisenstein, does nothing about the needs that produced this form of state in the first place and it glosses over the fact that, regardless of race, women are disproportionately low-wage earners, poor, and
welfare recipients. Eisenstein asserts that the New Right is incorrect in blaming women rather than the capitalist economy for economic and social woes, and urges us to critique capitalist patriarchy as generating the need for and form of the welfare state.

Many works, such as Piven and Cloward's *The New Class War*, are incomplete in that they examine capitalism while ignoring gender politics. She criticizes Piven and Cloward for conceptualizing the state as a representation of the capitalist class (which is only incidentally male and white) and for predicting that women will become a force with the working class when, in fact, women form a large part of the working class however it is defined. She also points out that Piven and Cloward ignore the fact that patriarchy assigns women a place in the economy which forces them to form a large constituency of the welfare state. She praises de Beauvoir for distinguishing between women and the proletariat in that women, unlike the proletariat, have always existed.

*Feminism and Sexual Equality* is full of praise and criticisms for a plethora of thinkers, theorists, and activists. Mary Daly, Susan Griffin, Andrea Dworkin, Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Alice Rossi, Sarah Ruddick, Gloria Steinem, and Robin Morgan are granted various degrees of approval. She criticizes Jean Elshtain, Carol Gilligan, and especially Betty Friedan as spokespersons for "revisionist liberal feminism" with their emphases on the primacy of family, motherhood, and physical/psychological nurturing for women while "... denying the reality that a woman as a member of a sexual class is differentiated from man" (191, emphasis in original). Eisenstein paints revisionist liberal feminism as being less of a retreat than an about-face on issues of equality.

Eisenstein's book is interesting; even her chapter notes are fascinating reading. References are current, post-1980 sources predominate, and chapters are sprinkled with employment, wage, and election statistics. Because of complexity of presentation and the fact that Eisenstein assumes reader familiarity with issues and theories, unless one were willing to "walk" students through, I would not recommend *Feminism and Sexual Equality* for use in undergraduate courses.


Hilda Scott’s *Working Your Way to the Bottom* is the type of book that causes one to run about telling friends and colleagues of a "find," only to learn that everyone has already heard about it; although they may not have read it, they most certainly have formed an opinion.

*Working Your Way to the Bottom* is a well researched and well documented discussion of women, work, and poverty in our consistently discriminatory world. The richness and vitality of Scott’s work comes from her effective use of research findings from a variety of sources ranging from anthropology to social policy. Within a multidisciplinary and feminist approach, she develops her thesis that there has been a consistent failure to adequately define poverty and work by omitting the contributions of the majority of workers in the world. As a result, the extent of poverty and the increasingly precarious position of women goes unrecognized by those in position to bring about change.

Chapter 1 reviews the criticisms that have been leveled at the political and academic definitions of poverty. She suggests, as have others, that the acceptance of these definitions is based on assumptions about reality that are incomplete, particularly the almost total acceptance of the family as the unit of analysis. In illustrating her point, Scott suggests that there has been a consistent failure to adequately define poverty and work by omitting the contributions of the majority of workers in the world. As a result, the extent of poverty and the increasingly precarious position of women goes unrecognized by those in position to bring about change.

For women engaged in paid work, the situation is desperate also. According to a United Nations report, women worldwide perform two-thirds of the work while receiving 10 percent of the income, and according to the International Labor Organization 90 percent of the unpaid work in the world is performed by women. Scott demonstrates these phenomena exist without regard to the political ideology of the society. The Swedish definition of an adequate income, one that allows one adult to