

Steve Glines

A Feminist Manifesto

My daddy was a southern gentleman. He was taught to venerate women, to acknowledge the superior position women held as progenitors of the species. Men, he was taught (and firmly believed), had to find their own way, create their own reason for existing and as a result had to seek challenges. Men become bankers, lawyers, engineers, and artists, whatever their egos and imaginations conjured up, and they told themselves over and over again that it was important. They told their woman how important they were and their women smiled. Being important or rather being more important than the next fellow was the only real goal men could achieve.

My daddy also said that you should hold doors open for women and otherwise help women not because it was chivalrous but because without women civilization would collapse, because women carry the burden of the future, because everyone in every society knows it's the right thing to do. That's why even in war women are generally exempted. In this respect women were lucky he would say. They held the preeminent position of importance simply by having a womb and could, without working very hard, hold positions of great consequence.

Sometime in the mid 1970's I held a door open for a woman walking behind me into a store, letting her pass through first. She turned to me, glared, slapped me as hard as she could and screamed, "Sexist pig!" Times had changed. The venerated position woman held in societies imagination was crumbling. We had entered an era where women were no longer honored, venerated and otherwise protected from the world at large. Indeed women no longer wanted that protection and some angrily and aggressively sought to abolish any and all vestiges of the old system. My daddy would have been appalled.

For women living in an era where infant mortality was high, the simple maintenance of the population was an all out effort and a permanent requirement of every capable woman in society. No wonder she was honored and largely exempted from male warfare. For most of man and woman's existence, for tens of thousands of years, this was the norm and

many villages, towns, states, societies and civilizations have collapsed as a result of insufficient fertility. The Age of Chivalry was characterized by repeated plagues that decimated the population or worse so an active, breeding population of women was essential to survival and everyone knew it.

By October 25 1889, the day my daddy was born in Baltimore Maryland, the telephone and light bulb had recently been invented and August Auto had just built the first working internal combustion engine. The telegraph was 50 years old, transatlantic cablegrams were 25 years old and a transpacific cable a long 16 years away. The World still loomed large. My granddaddy, Stephen Douglas Glines, was born in 1861, a Civil War baby. In 1889, almost everyone's father or grandfather fought in the war. Before the Civil War surgery was a brutal affair performed without anesthesia of any kind. In its wake, the Civil War left hundreds of thousands of veterans with missing limbs or painful injuries ameliorated for the first time with morphine and ether. Surgery became safer and Caesarian births became almost endurable and very survivable. The population began to explode but two world wars had the same effect as the plague on fertility rates, women had to produce to make up for the millions lost. And make up they did with the help of antibiotics and other marvels of modern medicine. In less than 100 years the population of the world grew from less than one billion people to almost six billion. Women had performed admirably.

Now what? By the mid 1970, after I had been forcefully awakened to feminist ideas, there was talk of drastic overpopulation in the world. China reached one billion people and began enforcing a one child per family law. The birth control pill decoupled childbirth from sex and the United States (as well as most of the "developed" world) began a long period of declining population growth from births, unsustainably low fertility rates. In the nearly 40 years since 1970 the population of the United States added 100 million people, mostly from third world immigration. Women as bearers of children lost their worth and became as misplaced as men in their search for personal meaning.

Bras were burned, demands were made and laws were changed. By the turn of the 21st century women had pushed their way into the

boardrooms of the Fortune 500, into the Presidencies of first, second and third world countries and into the forefront of the arts and letters. In 2007 more women attended college than men and college presidents were lamenting the need to lower the standards for men so as to keep sexual parity in the classroom. As the father of two college graduate daughters (and no sons) I cheer their professional and personal growth and understand that my own legacy – my name will not survive – depends as much on what they produce professionally as any offspring they may have in the future. Such offspring, the lineal descendant of someone else, with another's name not mine, are of interest to me as grandchildren to be spoiled but my true legacy will be in the great works of art my daughters will produce, in the great novels or magnificent screenplays or towering monuments to civilization they create, a gift to future generations that will bear their name, my name. How can I be anything but a feminist?

Over the past few millennia the male of the human species has contributed the majority of the intellectual vigor to society. This is not to say that had women been given equal access to education over this epoch they would not have made an equal or greater contribution. My own single antidotal observation made in the 1970's was that on average women are far brighter than an equal cohort of men. When I was a college undergraduate I spent many hours at Radcliffe College before it allowed itself to be swallowed up by Harvard University. I spent an equal amount of time at Harvard itself. As a whole the women of Radcliff were the brightest group of individuals I have ever met. That cannot be said for the men of Harvard College who, in the early 1970's, were as a lot, far duller than that august University would want anyone to believe.

If the women of that generation, my generation, succeeded it's because the services of their wombs were largely deprecated. Women, like men, needed a reason to exist so off they went to the universities, the trade schools and the military. Today we gleefully send women off to war, appoint them to our corporate boards and perhaps elect them president. It's a heady time to be a woman and a grand time to be a father of two.

But shadows appear on the cracking walls:

In China the one child per couple law has an unintended consequence: In most modern societies a male heir is considered desirable as the carrier of the family name. In China female babies are regularly aborted in favor of the only child being a male. This has led to a relative decline in the female population and while the population continues to grow there is a looming population collapse beginning around 2030. One child per couple is not a sustainable fertility rate and with fewer and fewer female children China will face a dramatic crash in its population.

In the United States, the European Union and even in post Soviet Russia the fertility rates have fallen below that needed to sustain the current population. With an aging populace economic demands on the working population require full participation and greater efficiency by both sexes. Women have achieved full equality! Is that what you expected? But economic efficiency has its limits, people can only work so many hours. Without a growing population business stagnates. The population and economy of North America is being maintained largely by a massive influx of Spanish speaking immigrants, both legal and illegal. In the European Union the same thing is happening with a similar influx from Moslem countries, Turkey and North Africa. Only Russia faces a real immediate decline in population with slim hopes of a near term population rebound and little net immigration. Improving efficiency and the labor of women in the workforce will allow Russia to grow economically but only for a while.

The world is changing. The imminent collapse of populations in China and Russia will probably bring a resurgence of the traditional roles for women if the societies are to remain structurally intact. It is unclear whether the social, political and intellectual advances made by women in these societies can be maintained in the face of these new demands. In the West, both in Europe and North America, a different change is taking place. Immigration from countries where infant mortality and fertility rates remains high is fundamentally changing the complexion the West. Will that end the remarkable intellectual and artistic renaissance of women in the West? I don't know but it is clear that in many parts of the world, modern medicine or not, a new generation women will have to give birth more often than they have in recent generations.

Wilderness House Literary Review 3/1

I hope, for the sake of my daughters and their daughters, that women will be able to do it all, be mothers to their children and contributors to the future in whatever other pursuits they choose. Only time will tell but for now I remain a cheerleader for my daughters and a staunch advocate of equal access and treatment everywhere. One can only hope that in future generations they will say of us, "That was a golden age."