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Feminist first dates

On “intersectionality” and sexual politics.

Among other virtues, the Book of Genesis is a repository of profound and accurate anthropology. Consider, to take just one refreshing example, this morsel from Book I: “So God created man in his own image, . . . male and female created he them.”

Until recently, one could count on the vast majority of people in the West to take both parts of that pithy observation for granted. True, those exposed, without correction, to too rich a diet of thinkers like Darwin, Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud might cavil with the first part. But who, apart from a few kooks, disputed the second?

We believe that the overwhelmingly vast majority of people continue to acknowledge the accuracy of the contention that mankind comes in two flavors, male and female. But bored, pampered, grievance-exacerbated academics and other social justice warriors have been working overtime to convince us that humanity is utterly plastic and that, consequently, one’s sex is a matter of choice, not a matter of biology.

Consider this expostulation, from a feminist website, on “10 Things Every Intersectional Feminist Should Ask On a First Date.” (“What’s an ‘intersectional’ feminist?” you might be asking. We’ll come to that. But first . . .)

As a queer femme of color, I keep close relationships with people who go beyond allyship; they’re true accomplices in the fight against white supremacy, queerphobia, and misogyny. If you’re not going to support marginalized folks, then we can’t be friends, let alone date. The personal is political.

Well, you might be thinking, forewarned is forearmed. But if you happen to find yourself on a first date with an intersectional feminist, expect to be taxed with such questions as:

Do you believe that Black Lives Matter? [Correct answer: Yes.]

How do you work to dismantle sexism and misogyny in your life? [You'd better have some specific examples on hand.]

What are your thoughts on sex work? [Ponder the contention that “being pro–sex worker [i.e., prostitute] is a necessary pillar of dismantling the patriarchy.”]

Do you think capitalism is exploitative? [There is obviously only one answer to this.]

And so on. For our money, however, the more pressing question any serious “intersectional feminist” embarking on this inquisitorial program should ask is, “Will I ever have a second date?”

When we first stumbled across this little bijou of piteous politicized drivel, we wondered whether it was a parody. It is one of the signal diminishments of our age to have blurred beyond recall the line between satire and reality. And sure enough, our researches into “10 Things Every Intersectional Feminist Should Ask On a First Date” suggest that it was written if not straight, exactly, then at least in earnest. If we fail to provide the source of this sad nonsense, it is for approximately the same reason that Lord Brougham, in 1816, moved that the record of the income tax imposed during the Napoleonic Wars be destroyed in order to prevent posterity ever hearing of the enormity.

There is clearly a psychological dimension to such performances as “10 Things Every,” etc., and from that point of view the author of the column deserves our pity. It must be lonely out there in the twilight zone. But there are also cultural and political aspects to the narrative, and considering those factors inspires a different set of emotions, running from alarm through contempt, irritation, and rejection. In the background of this exercise in feminist-racialist claptrap is the ideology of victimhood. That's where the pseudo-idea of “intersectionality” comes in. The term, first popularized in the 1980s, originated among black feminists. The idea was to proliferate the categories of recognized victims of a supposedly exploitative white, male, “capitalist” majority. Black men might claim to be oppressed by whites, women by men, but black women scored a twofer on account of being able to check two boxes. Black women who also happened to be lesbian scored even higher on account of their “marginalized” sexual orientation, and that was only the beginning. Soon there was a furious race to enhance one's status as a victim, as obese or disabled or transgendered candidates presented themselves in the Great Victimology Sweepstakes. Demands for others to “check their privilege” spiraled out of control as contestants competed to demonstrate their lack of privilege compared with their putative, not to say their imaginary, oppressors. The American Enterprise Institute's Christina Hoff Sommers, anatomizing this madness, presented her readers with the exotic specimen of feminists with allergies, victims who were oppressed by make-up, perfume, and hairspray.

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It is easy to make fun of this cavalcade—or rather, it is impossible not to. But behind the delicious absurdity are some harsh realities. For one thing, as Sommers has shown, the struggle up the ladder of victimhood regularly involves kicking at those nipping at one’s heels. As with every revolution, cultural as well as political, after an early bout of intoxication comes the hangover. That’s when the recriminations and the search for enemies within begins. As always, the more thoroughgoing the ideology of equality, the more stringent and discriminatory are the resulting hierarchies. All animals are equal, Comrade, but some are more equal than others. The search for the world’s most exquisite victim group does not escape this malevolent logic.

It is important also to acknowledge the grubby partisan agenda that exists alongside this campaign of sexual and racial exoticism. The real-world politics functions simultaneously as parasite and host, feeding upon but also fueling the fantasies of its acolytes. Thus in a fundraising appeal preceding “10 Things Every Intersectional Feminist Should Ask,” the reader confronts the advisory “we don’t want you to face Trump and his kind without the unique resources we provide.” Like what? you may ask. Well, articles on such pressing subjects as “White Cis-Women Vs. The Rest Of Us: 3 Ways Toxic Call-Outs Reinforce Privilege,” “We Need To Rethink The Term ‘South Asian’—Here’s Why,” “You May Have Heard About Gender Dysphoria, Now Let’s Talk About Cultural Dysphoria,” “4 Things That Suck About Going To The Doctor As A Gender Non-Binary Person” (only four?), and “3 Transition Obstacles I Never Expected as Mentally Ill and Transgender.”

In “Countercultures,” a classic essay from 1994, the late, great Irving Kristol observed that

“Sexual liberation” is always near the top of a countercultural agenda—though just what form the liberation takes can and does vary, sometimes quite widely. Women’s liberation, likewise, is another consistent feature of all countercultural movements—liberation from husbands, liberation from children, liberation from family. Indeed, the real object of these various sexual heterodoxies is to disestablish the family as the central institution of human society, the citadel of orthodoxy.

These and kindred ambitions stand behind the grotesquerie of “intersectional feminism,” which is to say that the whole machinery of sexualized victimhood is a typical, and typically malignant, product of that gigantic exercise in narcissistic self-absorption, the 1960s. A full inventory of the lives blighted on account of that hideous assault on reason, manners, and common sense has yet to be conducted. The fact that such preposterous exercises in preening fatuousness as “10 Things Every Intersectional Feminist Should Ask On a First Date” are still being emitted and, in some quarters, taken seriously (the article has more than forty-six thousand Facebook shares) suggests that the pseudo-liberationist ethos of the Sixties is not dead, merely institutionalized.

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