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THE DEPLOYMENT OF APOCALYPTIC MASCULINITY

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I want to focus on the ways that an ostensibly secular yet apocalyptic culture like the United States is engendered as heterosexist and male-supremacist. At the turn of the Millennium, apocalyptic masculinity is hardly aberrant. Indeed, it is foundational to many normative practices of masculinity (Quinby 1999).

Methodologically, such a focus entails highlighting relations of power/knowledge inscribed in the narrative and imagery of the Book of Revelation to show how they are deployed in Christian fundamentalist and secular culture. In the United States, the deployment of religious and secular forms of enculturation are far more blurred than is often thought (Quinby 1994). If I had to choose one major vehicle through which these blurrings of the religious and the secular and millennialism and masculinity take place, it would be the Book of Revelation, which has had a remarkable hold on this culture since European colonization (Keller 1997). Its place in the cultural imaginary has been reinvigorated numerous times over the centuries. In that respect, this is less a unique time than one more display of the elasticity of apocalyptic belief. We see examples of this fusion often in popular culture. Films like "The Matrix" and "Armageddon" are primers of what I would call techno-fundamentalism or fundamentalist pop. The recent killing spree at Columbine High School is a far darker instance of how secular and religious apocalypticism are part of the cultural fabric for today's youth. And this is not limited to the killers Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold with their devotion to Hitler, the quintessential apocalyptic proponent of the 20th century. The title of the Columbine High School yearbook encapsulates the way American teenagers in general embrace such a blurring: "The Rebelations."

Let me say a few things first about my analytical approach. The term power/knowledge is of course associated with Michel Foucault and his rejection of the Marxist notion of ideology in favor of the method he calls "genealogy" (Foucault 1980b). According to the traditional Marxist view, ideology strives to expose a false consciousness and can do so by way of the true consciousness of the analyst who applies scientific materialism to get at the truth (Barrett 1991). A genealogist, by contrast, argues that truth and subjectivity are produced through macro-and micro-level power relations. In other words, the knowledge or truth that we hold in a given time period is created through structures that include global economic arrangements as well as desk arrangements in educational settings. Rather than posing a false versus true dichotomy,

genealogy advocates that we look for dominant truths and counter-truths and investigate how they are formed. Combining skepticism and activism, this method plays the counter-truths off against the dominant ones so as to unsettle, disrupt, and resist them. Since we are regulated by these dominant mechanisms of truth, resistance to them is a form of agency; it's one way our subjectivity changes over time.

Foucault's concept of truth as produced in this way is also a challenge to the psychoanalytic view that emphasizes the core truth of sexuality as an explanation for human behavior. From the genealogical perspective, sexuality is itself produced by just such institutionalized explanations and their normalizing methods for dealing with individuals deemed/labeled abnormal. Our current predilection for therapy of all types, from treating so-called sexual addictions to "curing" homosexuals, is a function of this disciplinary mode of power.

Like many feminists, I have found these theories to be vital to our understanding of how gender is produced through cultural relations (Diamond and Quinby 1988). Feminist uses of Foucault tend to employ a performative notion of gender--like that associated with Judith Butler's argument in which gender is understood as the effect of regulated repetitions of bodily gestures and dress (Butler 1990). In short, gender is not assumed to be a natural, trans-historical feature of bodies, but, rather, the result of normative training within families, churches, the military and police force, cub scouts, music and make-up lessons, and so on.

Applying feminist and Foucauldian analysis to U.S. culture leads me to the following conclusion: the deployment of the Book of Revelation over time produces an apocalyptic masculinity and masculinist millennialism as mutually reinforcing embodiments of patriarchy, paranoia, and perfectionism.

Such a conclusion derives from an historical argument about changing power formations. Patriarchal masculinity was certainly the form operative at the time the Book of Revelation was written and subsequently canonized. Assumptions of justified female subordination are evident in the denunciations of Jezebel, the figuration of Babylon as a female whore, and the idealizations of the submissive Woman Clothed With the Sun (Pippin 1995; Quinby 1999; Keller 1996). What I want to emphasize here is that patriarchy uses physical punishment and death as its primary means of control over both men and women. This is manifest in the combat myth as described by Norman Cohn, with the man-killing wars that Revelation revels in, as well as the brutal treatment of Jezebel and the gleeful cannibalization and burning of the Whore of Babylon (Cohn 1993). Such portrayals remain popular in contemporary Christian youth culture which fuses super heroes with archangel figures. Christian comic books, for example, promote versions of manhood which foster identification with millennial masculinity as a blurring of supernatural and human macho. Such seemingly innocent pieces of religious entertainment and instruction keep patriarchy palpable.

These patriarchal power relations are based on systems of kinship and sovereign power. In the modern era they are retained through the law which enforces normative behaviors by outlawing certain acts. Anti-sodomy laws, for example, maintain heterosexist insistence on procreative sexuality. Laws that define women as property of their fathers or husbands clearly maintain male supremacy and their legacy has made the struggle against rape and for abortion a long and hard one. The Religious Right's attacks on feminist efforts to revise laws are an effort to retain patriarchal masculinity. If they act as if their life depended on it, it's because the order of life as depicted in Revelation does. The dream of the millennium--to rule with an iron rod--is a literalization of patriarchy.

The second component of apocalyptic masculinity is paranoia. Paranoia is a function of a different power formation, the one that Foucault called the deployment of sexuality, which emerged in the 19th century and works by prescribing rather than proscribing certain behaviors (Foucault 1978). Within this system, paranoia is formally associated with homosexuality, in Freud's articulation most notably, and defined as a pathology (Freud 1935). Contra Freud, I am arguing that paranoia is a component of normative heterosexist masculinity that has been projected onto the figure of the homosexual, often portrayed as an effeminate man. The conviction that there are enemies "out there" who are trying to overturn one's rightful status is, I believe, a feature of training and discipline for males that consolidated in the 19th century by way of the deployment of sexuality and industrial capitalism. It is manifest in the "watch your back" mentality of the male work-place as well as the nationalistic military training of the past century. This production of paranoia interlocks with the hatred of the enemy that is endemic to the Book of Revelation. In both cases, the enemy is seen as the one who is out to "get" the innocent, pure man. Patriarchy and paranoia thus feed off each other, as we saw in the Gulf War rhetoric that punned on the name Saddam Hussein as Sodomite Hussein while also casting him as the Anti-Christ. And, as war toys suggest, from G.I. Joe dolls to video games like Doom, commodity capitalism fosters paranoid masculinity in the games boys play.

The third component of apocalyptic masculinity is perfectionism. The ideal of perfection is the culminating millennial moment of the Revelation, that longed for eternity without death or disease, without enemies to defeat, indeed, without women. The dream of perfection emerged within the patriarchal context of apocalyptic thought. It has lasted into the modern era by entering into New Age spirituality as well as technological prowess. These recent expressions of the ideal of perfection work in concert with a new power formation, which I call "programmed perfection" (Quinby 1999). This set of power/knowledge relations promises to bring a millennial vision to earth through information and biological technologies. The vision hasn't gravitated all that far from its patriarchal roots, however. Revelation's New Jerusalem is a site in which only men--specifically those who have not been "defiled with women" ascend to god-like status (Revelation 14:3-4). Similarly, in techno-millennialism, reproduction without female agency is a major goal; when female bodies are used, as in cloning or ventilated pregnant cadavers, for example, they are regarded as laboratory vessels. Millennial perfection thus remains purely masculine. Again popular culture reinforces such practices. Toys like X-Men, who are mutants who have transcended certain bodily constraints and bear names like Archangel II, foster a desire for perfection understood as super-embodiment. Games like Dungeons and Dragons fuse together the physical and supernatural in the name of total apocalyptic destruction of designated enemies with millennial reward of achieved victory.

In sum, then, I wish to restate three key points. One, apocalyptic masculinity is an interlocking of these three power formations--of kinship, normalization, and programmed perfection--each of which has been defended biblically through the Book of Revelation. Two, apocalyptic masculinity inculcates and reproduces values that are detrimental to women and, in fact, to most men. And three, as feminist and gay productions of counter-truth about masculinity have shown, it is possible to resist and alter such an insidious engendering of the millennium.

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