

A salute to women

I nearly got through the entire day without knowing until I caught the tail end of a radio broadcast that mentioned that today was International Women's Day. "How about that," I thought. A day for women, and here I thought that every day belonged to women as my previous experience has taught me. Shows you how alert this boy is. Times have changed since Susan B. Anthony and her followers and members of the Suffragettes had pounded the pavement in support of the fairer sex (oops - I can't say that as I'm told it sounds condescending) and now the gals (sorry, I can't say 'gals' any more either as that's supposed to smack of sexism) can celebrate something they had absolutely nothing to do with...their gender.

That's the trouble with separating everything and everyone into little identity boxes that have no bearing on what people have accomplished. We form new sub-tribes or offshoots of our once proud all-inclusive culture and have, by doing so, created a dozen or more, smaller special interest groups that demand to be recognized first and foremost for their gender, their race or their sexual preferences. Let me be clear, I have no problem with women celebrating their womanhood. Have at it, but just remember that by choosing to promote YOUR group you are, perhaps inadvertently, telling other groups that while they matter, they may matter less (unless of course the government has recognized them and awarded them with a special day, too).

Let's take a moment to turn back the pages of history. Who started women's day, anyway? Well, I'm glad you asked. The Socialist Party of America first organized National Women's Day in New York City on February 28, 1909. Labor activist Theresa Malkiel actually suggested it as a way to commemorate protests held by garment workers in the city. Today it's celebrated around the globe every year on March 8th. It now commemorates the social, political and economic achievements of women, and women in different parts of the world use this day to come together to celebrate one another and rally for equal treatment and representation.

We Americans love our women (at least many of us do) and our attitudes towards them have changed dramatically over time. Take the antebellum pre-Civil War South, for example. Women were placed on a pedestal and revered as mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. Many in wealthier households commanded the respect of men, and while they were not 100% equal to their male counterparts under the law, they did occupy positions of considerable authority. Post-Civil War pioneer times saw women's roles (and their value to men) change. Those that ventured West with their men were more or less equal partners in the enterprise of homestead-building. Life demanded much of everyone, and being a couple gave folks an advantage over the unmarried. Burdens were shared and women made themselves indispensable to society and to their men.

After campaigning hard at the beginning of the 20th century they won the vote, and the 19th Amendment which gave all American women the right to vote was ratified on August 18, 1920. The road to that Amendment was a rocky one and women had to endure a fair amount of guff from a fair number of men, to be sure, but they persevered. The last big roadblock to second class citizenship was removed and the long fight for social equality (as opposed to legal equality) began. Women have made exceptional progress in the hundred years since the ratification of '19.' They have entered the workforce in massive numbers, risen to positions of authority and power in business and government and have fought hard to maintain both family and career.

Their victories have come at a price, however. Frustration from trying to juggle both family and job have led to record divorces. And while women have won many 'reproductive rights' battles over their bodies, millions of children's lives have been snuffed out in the womb causing great anxiety to untold millions of young would-be mothers. Motherhood has been down-prioritized and many male/female relationships have not led to the altar as in the past. The concept of family has changed and with it, I would argue, has been a loss of *community, belonging and estrangement* from one another. Is this all women's fault?

Of course not, but it is an unavoidable result of a fierce yearning to be or do or become everything all at once and in so doing becoming less than the sum of the aggregate parts. Translation: the losses may be equaling the gains made in women's quest for self-fulfillment. Their struggle has not gone unnoticed by men, either, as we men have had to cope with women's search for identity.

What does it mean to be a woman these days?

A damn good question, especially when 'gender fluidity' is being proffered and even promoted by many institutions that had heretofore vowed to be *advocates* for women's rights and ambitions. It seems that transgenders along with homosexuals have captured the spotlight from women and are busy pushing women to the sidelines. Take girls' sports, for instance. The creation and implementation of Title IX (of the Education Amendments of 1972) which protected women from discrimination based on sex or in education or activities was instrumental in the growth of women's sports. Now, all of that is being threatened by male 'crossover' athletes who are 'identifying' as women (though still biologically men) and are pushing women out of their own sports!

Admittedly, this may be an American phenomenon, but it will undoubtedly be 'exported' to many like-minded 'woke' nations who feel guilty about not helping that miniscule minority in their own countries. Activist pro-feminist groups will tell you that while much has been accomplished, much still needs to be done to 'level the playing field' and give women more and better access to all aspects of society. Unfortunately, women have competition from the 'equity' (over equality) groups that see their struggle to right the wrongs of history as being every bit as important as affording equal rights for women AND they have no qualms about going toe to toe with women to achieve their ambitions.

So, while we can (and should) raise our glasses and toast the accomplishments of American women today, let's vow to widen the circle tomorrow to include everyone in our great country and in the developed world who has managed to combat prejudice, bigotry, sexism and racism and has succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. I'll drink to that any day.

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