

Youth Against Liberation

An Exploration

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Not all youth support Youth Liberation. In fact, a large percentage would be against Youth Liberation — even after being introduced to its ideas. ...See, granted many youth simply haven't encountered the ideas of Youth Liberation, and so they just go along with the flow. But resistance to YL, by youth, runs deeper than that.

My thinking here is highly influenced by the book "Right-Wing Women" by Andrea Dworkin. ...It's 1971, the second wave of feminism is cresting, and the slogan "Sisterhood is Powerful" is hitting the streets. There's this feeling among radicals that with 51% of the population, women are going to be an unstoppable force. All we need to do is raise women's consciousness, and they'll surely be on board with the cause.

But, it comes as a slap in the face to discover that not all women are on board with feminism. There are people like Phyllis Schlafly (in particular) who defend the notion of wives being subordinated to their husbands. Why is this? The Marxist Feminists fall back on the concept of "false consciousness" — which to my mind is rather patronizing, and un-disprovable. Once you basically say that a person is wrong because they're deluded, there's no further room for argument.

Dworkin argued that Right-Wing Women are basically offered a better deal. It's the sexual revolution, and one segment of the feminist movement is feeling disillusioned, getting the sense that they're just getting exploited and used by "free love" men. So the choice looks like this: be the property of just one man, who has some obligations to care for you — or be the property of all men, none of whom owe you squat. From that perspective, it makes a lot of sense to me why a lot of women would want to stick with the "traditional" patriarchal arrangement.

Back to youth. You're 16, legal adulthood is just two years away. You can either make a fuss and fight for your rights — taking lots of flack from parents, teachers, and society in general along the way — or you can simply wait out your time, aging out of minority. It's the path of least resistance. And all the privileges of adulthood are just waiting, shining in front of you; the fee-for-entry seems to be putting up with the 18-year hazing of childhood just a little longer.

Furthermore, youth are well-practiced at taking the point of view of adults. It's the dynamic of dissociation. The five year old protests, "I'm not a baby!" The eleventh-graders avoid hanging out with the tenth-graders, to avoid the stigma of being associated with one's inferiors. Most people spend the first 18 years of their lives not thinking of themselves as minors at all — but rather, practicing thinking like adults.

I've listened to youth condemn Youth Liberation, talking about how children aren't competent to vote. Or about how they support the curfew, because youth are bound to get in trouble. It's rather amazing: the speaker never seems to doubt their own intelligence and good nature — but their opinion of their peers is abysmal. I can't help but wonder: what portion of this is actually based on observation — and what portion is based on the powerful image of youth-as-inferior propagated by adult society?

In terms of talking about the “deal” that society presents youth (be a rebel and suffer, or be patient and get enormous privilege) — I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the deal offered to religious youth. Secular society offers up legal status for putting up with minority. Religious communities (many of them) offer up heaven. “Honor your father and mother...” (which means “obey”, I believe), is the fifth of the Ten Commandments. If you believe in the bible, then YL is seemingly a rebellion against God.

Religion offers a complete world-view that can be very difficult to argue with. The worldview offered by most YL thinkers, by contrast is very limited. Our area of focus tends to be limited just to a few legal rights, and a period of one's life that may only be 2–4 years long. I think our ranks remain thin partly due to this. Notice that the YL movement is being far outpaced by the Christian Youth movement. ...Ironically, some of these youth groups are also dubbed “Youth Liberation”!

It need not be so, however. YL has the potential to offer up a very expansive world-view: one that is not merely about a few years of one's life, but rather encompasses (a) what it means to be an adult, how do well at having a family of one's own, a vision of justice and fairness that takes it's strength from the principle that no person is property (and we must continue working to wipe out the vestiges of people-as-property), a world-view whose truth is firmly rooted in verifiable historical events.

A world-view is a powerful thing. Feminism, Marxism, Freudianism, Re-evaluation Counseling, and other such philosophies are compelling largely because they give you a lens — through which it becomes possible to interpret the world around you. The sense of control provided by being able to make sense of the world — is intense.

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