

(Never) Blame Feminism



Janice Fiamengo is one of Canada's clearest social analysts. It is my privilege to consider her a friend and colleague. Here is [her latest piece](#) on the Canadian War Against Men. Worth contemplating.

"The war between the sexes has ended, and rather than a co-operative future that could benefit all, it has turned out to be more like a lopsided win for the female side."

So begins Joel Kotkin's *National Post* op/ed "[Women have won the 'war between the sexes,' but at what cost?](#)" It is a welcome but disappointing analysis that starts with a show of defiance and ends in quiet desperation. Of course, it's good to find anyone in a major newspaper willing to cast a less-than-adulatory eye on "[The Future \[that\] is Female](#)" or to write sympathetically about men, and Kotkin, a prolific author on cities and technocracy, proves his good faith on the

strength of that opening statement alone. Aside from the wishful thinking of believing feminism to be winding down (was [#MeToo](#) a prelude to ceasefire?) or ever having envisioned a co-operative future (he should take a look at Kate Millett's incendiary "[Theory of Sexual Politics](#)"), Kotkin is to be commended for daring to name as a war the decades of post-1960s activism, in which all the decisive victories have been claimed by feminists against men.

Kotkin, however, isn't able to continue in the take-no-prisoners style he chose for his opening salvo. He is prevented, either by his own prudence, his lack of deep knowledge, or the paper's editorial insistence, from targeting feminist ideology and policies in the rest of the article. In fact, the article doesn't name a single piece of debilitating feminist legislation or even make one reference to the many [expressions of anti-male contempt](#) that are now deeply embedded in our public culture. The result is a curiously disembodied discussion in which serious social problems linked to male decline are pointed to without any attempt made to say exactly how they came about or how they might be reversed.

"The crux of the problem," Kotkin tells us to start off, *"lies in the fact that as women rise, men seem to be falling."* Here we see him start to draw back from the attack, as if afraid to say what he really thinks. His phrasing makes male decline sound like a natural phenomenon, an illustration of the primordial principle of Yin and Yang. Or perhaps it is simply that men, with their allegedly fragile egos and hegemonic masculinity, haven't been able to compete against all that female ability, once dammed up by the patriarchy, now finally being let loose on the world (though always with calls for [more to be done to assist women](#)).

At least Kotkin doesn't tell us, as feminists are wont to do, that what seems like "falling" is just the [reality of life without "male privilege."](#) Men really are falling, Kotkin asserts, but he leaves us with the impression that nobody can

say why (in fact, ten years ago, [two researchers at MIT provided a sober accounting of the decline](#), pinpointing fatherlessness as one of the main drivers of male disadvantage).

In the rest of the article, Kotkin attempts to analyze the effects of a decades-long feminist campaign—a war, indeed, on male achievement, status, and self-respect—without naming any specific feminist policies or legislative changes. He is worried by “shifting rates of educational achievement” that see fewer and fewer men attending college, but he says nothing about the feminist takeover of the college system, which has created an academic milieu in which the [superior achievements and abilities of women, as well as the predatory danger of men, are constantly asserted](#), or about hysterical [Title IX legislation that has made college campuses hazardous](#) for the dwindling number of men who are still venturing onto them.

Kotkin refers to men “left behind” in the economy, but he keeps mum about the decades of affirmative action in [higher education](#) and [hiring](#) (detailed by Paul Nathanson and Katherine Young in [Legalizing Misandry](#), pp. 81-124) as well as draconian [sexual harassment legislation](#) that have made work life unrewarding and often punitive for men.

He stresses the loss of sexual amity and of willingness to marry, but avoids discussing the [nightmare of family law](#) that has made marriage or even cohabitation perilous for many men.

The sins of omission do not end there. Perhaps working on the assumption—not without basis—that any discussion of social problems will need to focus on women at least as much as on men, Kotkin proceeds to backtrack on his earlier claim about women’s victory in the sex war, outlining instead a downbeat portrait of women’s troubles. Citing research by Jonathan Haidt, he tells us that adolescent girls have been severely affected by depression and self-harm, that many young women, without reliable men to support them, have had to fend for

themselves in a difficult economic climate, and that single mothers, left with few options, are unable to offer stability to their children. It looks as if the decline of men mentioned early in the article has mainly hurt women and their children.

What Kotkin neglects to mention—surely deliberately—is that [adolescent boys commit suicide at 4 X the rate of girls](#), resolving their depression decisively enough that Haidt seems not to have felt the need to account for them; that [women are the ones who choose divorce in approximately 70% of cases](#); and that [divorced fathers are too often denied a real role in their children's lives](#) while being burdened past endurance by exorbitant support payments. In other words, for every sad woman held up for our concern, there is a plurality of equally sad men rendered invisible in the conventional reporting. The staggering [statistics on male suicide](#) provide a stark illustration of Kotkin's initial contention about the casualties of the sex war—yet he leaves these aside, choosing instead to voice the now-obligatory concern about the trans threat to women's sports.

Perhaps most importantly, Kotkin suggests through his word choice that the data he cites are simply “trends,” occurrences that came about through economic and demographic factors independent of the sex war initially evoked. But they aren't. They flow directly from a feminist vision in which the family—explicitly understood by feminist leaders to be a source of abuse and oppression—[must be transformed and women liberated](#) from reliance on the fathers of their children. Under this vision, a more just and equitable world will be ushered in by [women's superior leadership](#) once they are freed from their unpaid labor in the home and the [many sexist barriers that hold them back](#). That freedom must be aided, according to conventional wisdom, through abundant contraception, unfettered abortion, collectivized child care, no-fault divorce, programs and propaganda to urge men to do more housework, and non-stop encouragement to women—in movies,

sit-coms, advertising, articles, and government equity programs—to give up on their men.

The whole process has been [carefully, relentlessly engineered](#), not only by feminists, though certainly by them, but also by those who believe generally that families and the self-reliant men who lead them stand in the way of a preferable social order in which deracinated individuals, unmoored from family bonds and cultural traditions, can be increasingly directed, for their own good and that of the planet, by wise leaders. The result is, in Kotkin's words, a *"dystopian future in which only the elderly population grows, while children and families become rarer and more stressed."*

Kotkin sees this nightmarish world coming into existence but doesn't offer a single concrete remedy for it; in fact, he leaves us with the impression that the approaching doomsday may well be inevitable.

It isn't. It can be defended against by dismantling the destructive policies that weaken men and families, which include no-fault divorce, inequitable child custody decisions, affirmative action, and the sexual harassment industry; and by returning to fundamentals such as the presumption of innocence, meritocracy, free speech, due process of law, and fathers' rights. I'm under no illusions about the monumental difficulty of pushing back against radical feminist victories; but I also know that if we're unable to name what has brought us to our present moment, in which men and women regard each other warily across a divide of hurt and bitterness, we'll be left with little to do but join with Kotkin in elegiac surrender.