

## Introduction

We conceived and wrote *The Deepening Darkness*<sup>1</sup> during the years when George W. Bush was president. Our title flagged a threat we saw playing out in our midst: a patriarchal psychology and politics were jeopardizing democracy's future. Our intention was to name the threat, to expose its roots in our personal and cultural histories, and to highlight a potential for resistance grounded not in ideology but in what can be thought of as the better angels of our nature – capacities integral to our humanity. Ironically, in the name of morality, patriarchy was dimming our ethical intelligence. With global warming accelerating and inequality deepening, a misguided war in Iraq had been joined by renewed efforts to restrict access to birth control and to ban same-sex marriage. A visitor arriving from another galaxy might well have concluded that people on earth had lost their minds.

Yet in 2008 when *The Deepening Darkness* was published, our title no longer seemed so apt. Barack Obama had been elected president; a black family (Barack and Michelle, the girls and grandma) were living in the White House, and our president, a man of immense grace and wise beyond his years, reached across many lines of division. Having been raised by a nontraditional mother and her parents, having worked as a community organizer and married a woman clearly his equal, he exemplified a manhood whose core impulses were democratic rather than patriarchal. Despite the setbacks under George W. Bush, with the election of Obama the moral arc of the universe seemed truly to be bending toward justice.

And then in 2016, we were taken aback. Suddenly our book appeared prophetic. No longer hiding in democracy, patriarchy was all too visible. The adjective “patriarchal” appeared on the op-ed pages of the *New York Times* along with the analogy comparing the fate of American democracy under Trump to the shift from republic to empire in Rome under Augustus. Our claim that patriarchy had been hiding in democracy was

echoed by Paul Krugman's observation that in the Rome of Augustus, the move to empire had been concealed by the retention of republican forms.<sup>2</sup> Our 2008 argument was all too contemporary.

Despite all predictions to the contrary, an unapologetically patriarchal voice had triumphed, first in the Republican primary and then in the election. Openly undemocratic in its misogyny, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and contempt for the rule of law ("If I don't like the results of the election, I might not accept them"), this voice found resonance among a large enough segment of the population to secure an electoral college victory and hence the presidency for Donald J. Trump. To the disbelief of many onlookers including prominent Republicans, neither mocking the disabled nor insulting veterans, neither boasting of grabbing pussies nor inciting his supporters to violence (Should Hillary win, Trump told them, you can take your guns and assassinate her), had barred him from becoming the president. If anything, they seemed to have accelerated his ascension. "Lock her up," he said of his opponent, "Such a nasty woman." Faced with disagreement, he found it sufficient to dismiss any truths he found inconvenient by saying simply, "I do not believe it." Here was the patriarch unvarnished, naked in his claim to authority, presenting himself as the arbiter of truth and morality, his manhood invested in being rougher and tougher, bigger and better, superior rather than inferior, a winner not a loser.

To put it baldly, we have to talk about gender. Irrelevant to democracy, it is essential to patriarchy. The gender binary that divides human capabilities into either "masculine" or "feminine" and the gender hierarchy that elevates the masculine, are the DNA: the building blocks of a patriarchal order. It is important to emphasize from the outset that in bringing gender to the forefront of our analysis, we in no way intend to discount or diminish the importance of race and class, sexuality, religion or any other of the grounds that have been used to rationalize the division of humans into the superior and the inferior, the touchables and the untouchables. Quite the contrary. In saying that we have to talk about gender, we in no way mean that we do not have to talk about race, class, caste, and sexuality. Rather, our point is that without talking about gender we cannot explain how the human capacities that otherwise would lead us to recognize oppression and to resist injustice come to be muted or repressed, thus opening the way to the various intersections of race, class, and gender, fueling homophobia and religious intolerance, and, to speak more generally, impeding our capacity to recognize our common humanity and our desire to love and to live democratically.

To put it simply, the reconsideration that has been spreading through the human sciences since the 1970s has as its core the recognition that as

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humans we are inherently relational and responsive beings, born with a voice – the ability to communicate our experience – and with the desire to engage responsively with others, that is, to live not alone but in a relationship. Empathy and cooperation are part of our evolutionary history, key to our survival as a species. Thus rather than asking how do we come to gain the capacity for empathy so that we pick up and respond to the feelings of others, how do we learn to take the point of view of the other and overcome the pursuit of self-interest, we are prompted instead to ask, how do we lose these basic human capacities. How do we come not to know or to care about what others are experiencing, how do we lose our desire and our ability to love?

With this reframing of human development, it became obvious that to establish and maintain hierarchy, it is necessary to interrupt or more precisely to stunt and to shame the human capacities that would otherwise stand in the way: that is, our capacity for empathy, mind-reading, and cooperation, which are the components of mutual understanding. Gender enters into our argument about patriarchy because it is in the name of and for the sake of becoming or being recognized as a “real” man or a “good” woman that our relational abilities come to be compromised or rendered ineffective. In *Descartes’s Error*, Damasio, the neuroscientist, shows that the splitting of reason from emotion, long seen as the *sine qua non* of rationality, is in fact a manifestation of brain injury or trauma.<sup>3</sup> What Damasio doesn’t say is that the splitting of reason from emotion and the elevation of mind over body also are manifestations of the gender binary and hierarchy of patriarchy, that privilege the masculine (reason and mind) over the feminine (emotion and body). When we say we have to talk about gender, what we mean is that we need to see the role that gender divisions play in undercutting or injuring the human capacities that otherwise would lead us to resist injustice, whether it takes the form of racism, sexism, religious intolerance, homophobia, or what have you. Put starkly, patriarchy with its codes of masculine honor and feminine goodness dims our ethical intelligence. In this light, we were struck by how readily, even in what from a gender perspective was the potentially historic 2016 election, gender dropped out of the conversation – at least with respect to the way in which we are accustomed to talking about gender (as an issue of women).

In the United States, codes of white patriarchy – scripts of masculinity and femininity keyed to the privileging of whites over people of color – have played a particularly vicious role in enforcing the racism of American society. The historian W. E. B. Du Bois writing about double-consciousness,<sup>4</sup> the artists Richard Wright<sup>5</sup> and James Baldwin in recounting their experiences as black men in America,<sup>6</sup> the courageous

journalist Ida B. Wells who exposed the lie behind Southern lynchings,<sup>7</sup> the activist Sojourner Truth,<sup>8</sup> the writer Harriet Jacobs,<sup>9</sup> were all pioneers in illuminating the intersections of racism and patriarchy, which have since become more widely recognized, in the fiction and non-fiction of Toni Morrison,<sup>10</sup> in Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider*,<sup>11</sup> Robin Coste Lewis's *Voyage of the Sable Venus*,<sup>12</sup> and in Michelle Cliff's *The Land of Look Behind* and *Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant*.<sup>13</sup> The black community in America may have been less surprised by the election of Trump, and more skeptical about the future of democracy in the US, given our history of racism and patriarchy. To reiterate a key point, in putting gender forward as a linchpin that holds structures of oppression in place, our intention is not to discount the effects of racism or social class but to show how constructions of manhood and of womanhood can function to subvert the capacity to resist injustice in its many and intersectional forms.

Two observations:

In the weeks leading up to November 2016, following the release of the pussygate tape, both the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* ran headlines announcing that women's votes would take down Trump. The gender gap in the forthcoming election, we were told, would be the largest ever recorded. The story then disappeared without a trace.

As it turned out, the gender gap in 2016 was no larger than it had been in 2012. Again there was a twelve point spread in both directions with more women voting Democrat and more men voting Republican. Again, women's votes split with single women and women of color voting overwhelmingly Democrat whereas married white women voted Republican by a slight majority. In contrast to African Americans, who had voted en masse for Barack Obama, women as a group did not show the same support for Hillary Clinton.

Second, in the run-up to the 2008 election, in response to the controversy over his association with the Reverend Wright, Obama made an extraordinary speech about race, urging Americans to understand the animosity toward one another felt by both blacks and whites and then to transcend racial divisions. At no point, either in 2008 or 2016, did Clinton make a comparable speech about gender. What's more, whether such a speech could be effective is not immediately obvious.

Along with many Americans, we were shocked on the morning of November 9 to discover that Donald Trump was to be our next president. Despite having written about the ongoing tensions between democracy and patriarchy, we were not prepared for the resonance his unequivocally patriarchal voice had found in many of our country's men and women.

Gender was the proverbial elephant in the room. It seemed at times as though everything could be spoken about except the threat that

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patriarchal gender codes pose to democracy. Looking more closely into what was in fact said and not said, we found ourselves wondering whether the reluctance to talk about gender in this way stemmed in part from the fact that the gender dynamic playing out in the election was not the one we are accustomed to seeing. Hillary Clinton did in fact win the popular vote by close to 3 million, although in the rush now to blame her, this is quickly overlooked or forgotten. Along with the fact that Hillary was the one who had said unequivocally that women's rights are human rights and human rights are women's rights, and that from the very beginning, she had been tireless in her support for women and children. Still, it was Trump who played a gender hand brilliantly by appealing to a shamed American manhood. It's tempting here to compare him to Hitler, who came to power on the campaign promise "to undo the shame of Versailles." Trump's promise was to undo the shame of white American men whose claim to superiority had been shaken. His campaign slogan "Make America great again," was a thinly veiled pledge to restore the patriarchal order. He was the one who would take on the enemy and rescue white patriarchy from political correctness.

Most striking to us, however, because it was this that we did not anticipate or see, was the realization that Trump, whether inadvertently or intentionally, had shifted the framework. Rather than looking through a democratic lens and seeing gender as one among many issues (the others being race, class, sexuality, etc.) that raise concerns about equal voice and respect, for Trump, gender was the lens through which he viewed the world. The gender binary and hierarchy shaped his perception and judgment. Little Marco didn't measure up as a man, crooked Hillary was not a good woman. Seen through a democratic framework, these were insults, manifestations of disrespect. When the lens was patriarchy, they were simply statements of fact. Marco Rubio wasn't big enough to be the president; Hillary wasn't good enough. It was just how things are. As anyone could see, Jeb Bush was low in energy and, however unfortunate (sad, was Trump's word), some women are not as attractive as others.

The shift in the framework was not politically correct because as Americans we aspire to be a democratic nation. The surprise was that it turned out to be politically effective. Perhaps it was the shift in the framework that made it impossible for those of us who continued to view things through a democratic lens to see what was happening. Perhaps this is why for many Americans what was going on felt so disorienting and confusing. But for a significant number of Americans, the patriarchal lens was instantly clarifying. In their minds, finally someone had the courage to see and to say what was happening.

To make our approach transparent, two things need to be stressed at the outset:

1. Feminism is not an issue of women only or a battle of women vs. men. Feminism is one of the great liberation movements of human history; it is the movement to free democracy from patriarchy.
2. In freeing democracy from the grip of patriarchy, feminism is in the interests of everyone, men included, because the structures of patriarchy, the gender binary, and hierarchy, disrupt human nature. For example, when reason is gendered masculine and emotion feminine, it becomes challenging for men to reflect on what they are feeling without feeling that their masculinity is on the line. Or for a woman to see herself as a woman and also as a rational being. In the gendered universe of patriarchy, humans are under pressure to become half-human in the name of becoming real men or good women. Just as the gender hierarchy that privileges some men over other men and all men over women is antithetical to democratic ideals and values, so the gender binary that splits intelligence (masculine) from emotion (feminine) and the self (masculine) from relationships (feminine), constrains our humanity. In the name of morality then, for the sake of establishing or preserving masculine honor and feminine goodness, patriarchy both undermines democracy and subverts moral character.

In this book, we argue that Trump's election shows us how powerful patriarchy still is in American society and culture and also what happens when a patriarchal framework takes over – when patriarchy became the lens. Then, rather than seeing gender as an issue that along with race and class is potentially problematic from a democratic standpoint, given the value on equal voice and respect for persons, gender shapes our way of seeing. The displacement of a democratic by a patriarchal framework in the 2016 election has not only been profoundly disorienting and destabilizing. The shift in frame has contributed to the breakdown of public discourse because we literally cannot agree on what we are seeing. Reality itself becomes contested or, as Hannah Arendt put it, both the reality of experience and the standards of thought no longer exist.

Many observers have commented on the rising level of anger along with the pervasiveness of violence. In *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*,<sup>14</sup> James Gilligan draws our attention to the emotion of shame as the proximal cause of violence, the necessary although not sufficient cause of violent behavior. More precisely, he focuses our attention on how the shaming of manhood leads to violence – how in some instances it makes violence inescapable because for some men violence is the only

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way of undoing shame and restoring honor. Overpowering another is a way in which one can assert or reclaim one's superiority.

Taking his argument further, James Gilligan identifies patriarchy as a shame culture, preoccupied with issues of honor and status and highly sensitive and reactive to insult. From a democratic standpoint, the resistance movements of the 1960s and 1970s were constitutional advances; in their recognition of civil rights, women's rights, gay and lesbian and transgender rights, they were advancing democracy. Seen through a patriarchal lens, they were insults to American manhood by challenging the position of straight white men who saw themselves as rightfully superior. A hierarchy that had been assumed (white over black, men over women, straight over gay) was being contested on constitutional grounds, and the use of force (think of the response to the civil rights demonstrators) became necessary to hold the old order in place.

It was Virginia Woolf who made the analogy explicit. Patriarchy is to private life as fascism is to public life. In her brilliantly conceived essay *Three Guineas*, written on the eve of World War II, she observes that "the public and private worlds are inseparably connected; that the tyrannies and servilities of the one are the tyrannies and servilities of the other."<sup>15</sup> Woolf's insights into the intricate links between patriarchy and fascism were not seen by either Hannah Arendt or George Orwell, brilliant though their analyses of fascism otherwise are. Yet evidence of the gender binary and hierarchy was right before their eyes. As they are now once again in plain sight. All of the elements of the gender binary that orchestrate fascist politics have been invoked by Trump: strength vs. weakness, winners vs. losers, us vs. them, along with the appeal to America First, the rage at any perceived insult or humiliation, the scapegoating, the lies, the pseudo-science, the demand for absolute loyalty, the absence of doubt, the bullying, the misogyny, and the evocation of a glorified past: "Make America great again."

Are we now witnessing the endgame that we predicted in 2008? Is the Trump election and presidency a final confrontation in the long struggle between democratic ideals and values and patriarchal privilege and power? And if so, what maps do we have for the resistance? What guidelines can we offer for ensuring democracy's future?

As patriarchy comes out of hiding and its repression of dissent becomes more hysterical, we can see more clearly the psychological fragility in its construction of both manhood and womanhood. These markers of identity rest on a psychological fault-line: the gender binary and hierarchy. Increasingly, the gendered division between reason (masculine) and emotion (feminine) and the elevation of mind over body and the self over relationships, once viewed as signaling the achievement

of rationality and personal autonomy, have been recognized instead as manifestations of injury or trauma. As resistance becomes more urgent, more politically and ethically essential, we can draw on advances in the human sciences to provide us with a map, showing a way out of our current impasse.

In exposing the darkness now visible in our midst, we argue that feminism is the key ethical movement of our age. Understood as the movement to free democracy from patriarchy, feminism alone pinpoints and resists the gender binary and hierarchy that cripple love and impair our capacity to engage in the communication and the relationships that are vital for democratic citizenship.