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A Feminist's Complaints

It was with extraordinarily poor grace that Sandra Day O'Connor – of all people – made a speech recently at Washington University in St. Louis voicing the tiresome feminist complaint that women are still the victims of "discrimination" and "sexism."

Reporters called it a "strongly feminist speech" and said she made a "grim" assessment. She charged that women are oppressed by "society's sexism," which "feeds on itself" and has systematically excluded women from positions of power in America.

That sounds like George Bush complaining that ivy leagues are discriminated against, or Ronald Reagan complaining that movies stars are excluded from power, or Madonna complaining that rock stars don't get the respect they deserve.

O'Connor holds the most prestigious position in the U.S. Government ever held by any woman, as well as the most prestigious position to which any lawyer could aspire. Yet she's still whining that she wasn't invited to join a law firm when she graduated from law school.

Actually, fewer than half of law school graduates are hired by established law firms. The other half of young lawyers must find their own clients or take jobs in business or government.

Even in the pre-feminist era, well qualified women made successful careers in the law. The late Soia Mentschikoff, co-author of the Uniform Commercial Code enacted by 49 states, became a partner in a Wall Street law firm in the 1940s, taught at Columbia, Harvard, and Chicago in the 1950s and 1960s, and was a law school dean in the 1970s. Mentschikoff never complained that sexism retarded her career.

Sandra O'Connor is the leading exemplar of getting a high position solely because she is a woman. No one could possibly claim that she was well qualified to be a Supreme Court Justice. Any man with her resume would have had a hard time getting phone calls returned in Washington.

She got the job because Ronald Reagan made a campaign promise to appoint a woman, and she was lucky enough to fit the profile when a vacancy occurred. No men were considered for the seat she occupies.

Did she get the raking over of her opinions and qualifications which liberal Senators inflicted on Robert Bork, David Souter, and Dan Manion? No, siree. The Senators treated her like a lady in her confirmation hearings – no embarrassing questions, no aggressive interrogation.

Feminism is not about achievement for women; it is about taking power away from men and giving it – **not to women**, but – to their own littler coterie of doctrinaire feminists who are trying to restructure society and change human nature. Justice O'Connor's speech clarifies that what feminists really want is not equal opportunity, but "power" for feminists and the displacement of men from power.

For two reasons, no constituency exists for O'Connor's feminist view of our nation. First, women as a group are not seeking power or to replace men in the exercise of power. What women want is the opportunity for personal achievement and fulfillment through family and career.

Second, those who want "power," the radical feminists, will never be O'Connor fans because they are the left wing of the Democratic Party. It's a bone in their throat that the first female Supreme Court Justice was appointed by President Ronald Reagan.

Feminists will never thank Reagan for this or honor O'Connor for being on the High Court. Indeed, many feminists have stridently criticized O'Connor for not using her position more aggressively in behalf of the feminist cause, and it looks as though her Washington University speech was an attempt to placate them.

O'Connor expressed pride that she has been able to make some small changes that "send an important signal." She got her eight male fellow Justices to change the bronze nameplate on their doors from Mr. Justice to Justice, to rewrite the federal rules of procedure to make them gender-neutral, and to use Ms. Instead of Mrs. or Miss in Supreme Court summaries.

Justice O'Connor is 20 years behind the times in mouthing the feminist "oppression" rhetoric of the '70s. Today's press is full of the regrets of women who 20 years ago abjured family in favor of career and new realize at age 40 that it's too late for the family life and fulfillment they could have had.

Today, women are looking for a mommy track so they can spend time with husband and babies, for sequential careers in which business or profession comes only after they've raised their children, and for family-friendly workplaces to accommodate the new traditional woman.