CHARACTER IS THE CRUCIAL ISSUE

September 15, 1994 by Phyllis Schlafly One byproduct of the sexual revolution starting in the 1960s is the change in the writing of biography. In earlier eras, it was considered ungentlemanly to reveal the sexual adventures of prominent persons.

Friendly biographers sought to protect their subjects from shame or public disillusionment. Even more important was the prevailing notion that a person's private life is none of the public's business and that, anyway, one's private life is unrelated to public actions.

Beginning in the 1980s, biographers began to research and report on the private lives of famous people, and many revelations are shockers. "A Question of Character," written by liberal historian Thomas C. Reeves, for example, is a devastating portrait of the cynical and adulterous secret life of President John F. Kennedy.

A similar change took place in political reporting. Since the media made a collective decision in 1987 to ask Gary Hart the "A(dultery}" question, there is no way to put the genie back in the bottle.

The historian Paul Johnson's book "Intellectuals" told how Jean Jacques Rousseau, who wrote the first modern book on childrearing, sent all five of his illegitimate children to an orphanage where, in those days, few survived. Johnson related how Karl Marx, the so-called champion of the proletariat, knew only one proletarian in his life, his maid Lenchen, whom he treated as a domestic and sexual slave.

Now comes a fascinating new book by E. Michael Jones called "Degenerate Moderns" (Ignatius Press} that proves the linkage between the private behavior and the public pronouncements of some of the most

influential personages of the 20th century. It is must reading to

understand the folk heroes of modern cultural trends.

Using facts uncovered by other biographers, Jones argues persuasively that a causal relationship exists between private behavior and the intellectual product that is presented to the world as "science" or "economics" or "psychology" or "art."

The thesis of Jones's book is that the theories expounded by many enormously influential modern intellectuals are simply rationalizations of their own sexual misbehavior. Their so-called intellectual and scientific breakthroughs were the result of their own sexual desires.

The Australian anthropologist, Derek Freeman, proved that the book that launched Margaret Mead's career as the voice of cultural relativism, "Coming of Age in Samoa," was completely false in its purported reportage of Samoa as a paradise of free love. Jones takes this one step further and shows that, at the time of her journey to Samoa, Mead was sexually involved with two men and a woman, and her anthropology was a rationalization of her promiscuous lifestyle.

John Maynard Keynes's doctrine that consumption, rather than saving, is the source of economic growth, had a profound influence on American domestic policy beginning with Franklin D. Roosevelt's Administration. It gave "scientific" verisimilitude to the deliberate policy of deficit spending because, in Lord Keynes's most famous quip, "In the long run we are all dead."

Biographers of the 1980s admitted what earlier biographers had concealed: that Keynes was a homosexual, and so were the Oxford Cambridge elite of which he was a central figure. His encouragement of deficit spending emanated from a childless vision in which present pleasures are valued over building for future generations.

Alfred Charles Kinsey made his name as a collector of sex histories, but their unscientific nature was exposed by Abraham Maslow

(who described his "volunteer error," i.e., using volunteers, such as prostitutes and prison inmates eager to describe their sex experiences), and Judith Reisman (who exposed his data on observing sexual abuse of children as either bogus science or criminal activity).

Kinsey originated the theory that deviance is the engine of social and biological progress. His personal sex history is still concealed from the public, but Jones marshals evidence that his theories were just a rationalization of his own deviance.

Jones deftly details how Pablo Picasso's art closely tracked his relationship with the many women in his life, starting with his portrayal of "Les Demoiselles d'Avignon," known as the beginning of modern art. The demoiselles were actually prostitutes from the red light district in Barcelona, women who reflected his sexual experiences up to that time.

The pattern of distortion in Picasso's art reflects his attitude toward his particular mistress or wife of the time. In the few years when he experienced love, he painted with realism; when his affairs turned sour, he reverted to Cubist distortions, which simultaneously convey lust, rage and the desire to mutilate.

Jones argues that Sigmund Freud's famous Oedipus Complex turns out to be nothing more than a rationalization of his incest with his sister-in-law, Minna. By developing the theory that such illicit desires are universal, he projected his guilt onto the world at large and escaped blaming himself for his misbehavior.

Jones presents a powerful case that there is a direct connection between what people do and what they think. Character is the core issue when it comes to choosing leaders, mentors, and intellectuals.