Journal of Liberty and International Affairs | Vol. 5, No. 1, 2019 | eISSN 1857-9760
Published online by the Institute for Research and European Studies at www.e-jlia.com



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Date of acceptance: March 03, 2019
Date of publication: May 25, 2019
Essay
UDC 343.541

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THE #MeToo MOVEMENT

By

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Shortly after Trump's nefarious election to the office of President of the United States, a movement emerged following scandals surrounding Harvey Weinstein. Weinstein, Hollywood producer of *Shakespeare in Love* and *The Lord of the Rings: Fellowship of the Ring* fame, was accused of sexual abuses ranging from rape to harassment by actresses such as Gwyneth Paltrow and Salma Hayek. These sudden allegations sparked a movement known as '#MeToo' with the intended purpose of demonstrating how frequent sexual abuse happens and how little of it is reported. The movement received worldwide support as well as criticism. In France, for instance, a collective of one hundred feminists denounced the movement in the paper Le Monde with these words: "But it is the characteristic of Puritanism to borrow, in the name of a so-called general good, the arguments of the protection of women and their emancipation to better bind them to a status of eternal victims, poor little things under the influence of demon phallocrats, as in the good old days of witchcraft." It was then the world realized there was a rift in feminism worldwide. The French feminists insisted on a right for men to act in gallantry, to court and make fools of themselves however they wished provided they were not harming those they addressed. Free speech, in their opinion, should not be violated on the assumption of protecting the 'weaker sex'.

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The language quoted above demonstrates that these feminists seek female empowerment within the context of the modern world and the freedom it offers.

According to a 2010 report entitled False Allegations of Sexual Assault: An Analysis of Ten Years of Reported Cases, "To classify a case as a false allegation, a thorough investigation must yield evidence that a crime did not occur". This same report indicates that between 2%-10% of reported cases in the researched ten year period were false allegations. This clearly demonstrates that women are not inclined to lie about sexual misconduct toward them.

Yet false reports do occur. The #MeToo Movement developed the criteria of 'always believe the woman' ignoring the right of trial by jury.[2] What began as a movement of highlighting and examining the nature of sexual abuse moved toward a general movement of contempt for men. Flirting became suspect, the language normally exchanged between men and women during courtship was challenged (telling a woman she is 'pretty' somehow assaulted her or objectified her), and women even developed lists such as the 'shitty men in publishing list' that called out certain men in the industry for making them 'feel creeped out', among more serious charges.

Normally what another person feels is entirely subjective. If I am uncomfortable with someone, I can choose to avoid them but I might recognize my feelings are simply feelings, not reality. The new standard became any accusation leveled at a man concerning misconduct should be believed and taken seriously. The woman's instincts must be held as the ultimate judge concerning a man's character. This standard raged over the internet on social media, in public forums, and across calls from activists.

Such an attitude can only be taken as an exaggerated response to a serious issue that has run rampart throughout civilization for centuries. Women, as they become empowered economically and civilly, turn against their oppressor or benefactor (depending on your viewpoint) in a backlash of rage and spite. The rally call is, "We no longer need men! They have shoved us in the dirt and made us their pleasure objects for centuries!" Diane Ackerman in *A Natural History of Love* discusses how Roman fathers were permitted to abandon their infant daughters to the wild. She writes, "A father could decide a child's fate at birth, depending on whether a girl or boy was born". All the while, such men acquired possessions endlessly to prove their worth to their peers and countrymen. The history of coverture also demonstrates sexism. Coverture is the tradition of a bride assuming her husband's last name upon marriage. It has its roots in English common law. Upon birth, a female is given her father's name until the day of her marriage. The word 'coverture' means 'covered by' and indicates that the woman is one with her father or husband—that is, she is his property. This tradition began in the ninth century and, like the tradition in Rome, prevented women from engaging in public affairs or owning property.

[2] "Me Too" was used as social media activism by civil rights activist Tarana Burke before it was picked up by Alyssa Milano.

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The legal nature of coverture existed in the United States until the 1970's when women were allowed to choose whether to keep their maiden names or not.

Obviously, there is a need for a strong women's liberation movement to establish equal rights and the integrity of women's emotions and pursuits. Historically, such movements have seen limited successes.

Women are beginning to be heard, appreciated, and considered competent for work, legal decisions, and raising their own kids. The #MeToo Movement is a sore necessity in exposing the social corruption that underpins sexual abuse and misconduct. We should consider treading this space carefully as we do not want to demonize men or destroy masculinity. We can have a society where all people are free to live safely, in pursuit of their independent goals. #MeToo began with the intention of destroying the blind hubris of powerful men who are 'too big to fail' or be called out for sexual assault. We are seeing headway in this respect, but let's not allow ourselves to overindulge in mob mentalities or aggressive unfounded accusations. In the words of President Theodore Roosevelt, "Tread lightly, but carry a big stick."

