

mental justice community to discuss more openly the major health risks that affect poor communities, many of which arise from personal choices.

Because he acknowledges the reality of tradeoffs, Foreman explores how information about risks might be better communicated, perhaps by introducing into local environmental justice dialogues some role for public health experts. But he is realistic. He is aware of the expansive literature that demonstrates a gap between how scientists and citizens understand risks. He is also aware that efforts to inject "the data" into impassioned discussions about risk among community activists can backfire; appeals to science are often viewed as delay tactics and evasion of central concerns.

Ironically, the participation agenda of

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environmental justice activists may turn out to be an important tool for advancing a more science-based understanding of relative risks. Recent experience in siting noxious facilities and waste sites suggests that people are more open to scientific and technical discussions of risk if they are involved in the process from the beginning. But environmental policy decisions will improve only if the individuals determining how clean is clean enough or "to build or not to build" experience both the costs and the benefits associated with those decisions. This linkage requires that the people at the bargaining table not be outsiders who have an incentive to push for gold-plated cleanups and block every proposed facility. Yet limiting participation in these negotiations to local citizens will

draw cries of protest from national environmental activists.

Foreman does not provide us with a road map. He doesn't sort through the tangle of questions about what rights owners ought to have in the use of their property; or how those experiencing noise, odor, or emissions from industrial facilities in shared spaces might be better empowered to negotiate reductions in those effects; or who ought to have a say in these decisions.

And though Foreman argues that environmental policy is not the right venue through which to redress all the grievances of the poor, he doesn't offer environmental justice advocates a compelling alternative. He draws little hope from past experiences with job training programs, public health initiatives, and other programs aimed at improving the lives

of poor people.

But this is not a shortcoming of the book. Instead, it is an honest observation about the limits of public policy. Though Foreman believes government has a role to play in advancing "social justice," his final caution is that "we cannot simply legislate, regulate, litigate, or protest our way toward healthy and livable communities." Foreman's book succeeds so well because he conveys sympathy for the concerns of poor communities without letting that sympathy stand in the way of a hard look at what is real in those concerns, what is exaggerated or misdiagnosed, and what sort of changes can reasonably be expected in a world of tradeoffs. ♦

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## Bad Will Toward Men

By Cathy Young

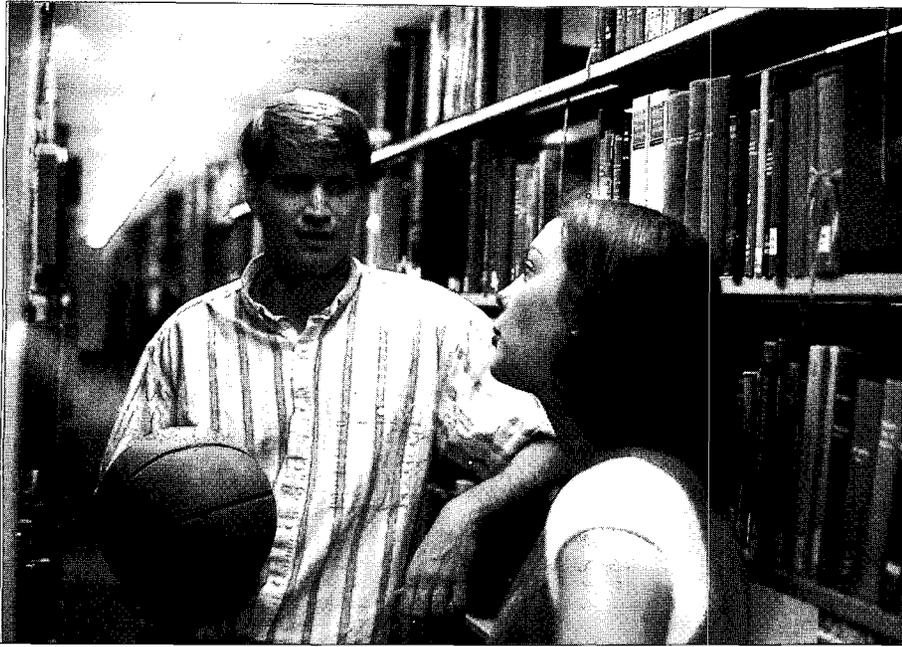
**Heterophobia: Sexual Harassment and the Future of Feminism, by Daphne Patai, Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 250 pages, \$22.95**

In February 1998 (not long after Monica Lewinsky became a household name), Daphne Patai attended a conference on sexual harassment at Yale University. Among the many things she found striking was the fact that, while a discussion of same-sex harassment occasioned expressions of fear about inciting homophobia, there were no such concerns about promoting "heterophobia"—which Patai defines as antagonism toward men and heterosexuality. Yet such an animus, she argues, is behind much of the recent effort to stamp out sexual harassment.

*Heterophobia: Sexual Harassment and the Future of Feminism* is, as far as I know, the first book-length critical review of the crusade against sexual harassment. Patai, a professor of comparative literature and women's studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and co-author of *Professing Feminism: Cautionary Tales from the Strange World of Women's Studies*, is a formerly radical feminist who is appalled by what has become of the feminist project to remake human relations.

Patai recognizes that the problem which feminists in the 1970s labeled "sexual harassment"—coercive or abusive sexual behavior in the workplace—is real, and legal recourse was needed against it. The problem, she asserts, is that from the beginning the concept was stretched to embrace not only sexual extortion or aggression but any "overt manifestations of male sexuality" that might upset some women. In Patai's view, "the experience of sexual interest and sexual play...is an ordinary part of human life," and while "misplaced sexual attentions" can be vexatious at times, it is impossible to protect people from them without creating a climate of repression and intolerance. In fact, she suggests that we already have such a climate.

Some of the worst horror stories come from academia, where the fear of litigation is compounded by feminist zealotry, and it is on the academy that Patai focuses. She chronicles the stories of professors whose careers and whose very lives have been devastated by charges that are either chill-



**Sexual Politics:** Daphne Patai's *Heterophobia* is a powerful brief for personal freedom and against efforts to politicize human relations and strip them of their complexity. Patai leaves no doubt that sexual harassment laws and policies as they exist today do far more harm than good. This timely book can provide an additional push for a rethinking of the ideological and legal orthodoxies that have gotten us where we are now.

ingly trivial (a writing instructor fired for allowing a student-initiated discussion of sexual topics) or fantastic (multiple rapes which somehow didn't keep the victim from signing up for an elective course with the rapist). A classroom statement that some rape allegations are false or that life begins at conception can trigger claims of a "hostile environment." Uncorroborated and improbable charges can be pursued for years, with the accusers sometimes allowed to revise their stories long after filing the complaint and the accused sometimes denied access to materials from the investigation. Even accused men who are eventually exonerated are usually saddled with huge legal bills and stained reputations, while the officials who preside over the witch hunts survive with their careers intact.

**A**s *Heterophobia* shows, these travesties are not merely incidental excesses but logical results of the basic premises of what Patai calls the "Sexual Harassment Industry." The industry's mentality is laid bare in Patai's analysis of an authoritative recent text on campus harassment, *Sexual Harassment on Campus: A Guide for Administrators, Faculty, and Students*, by Bernice Sandler and Robert

Shoop (1997). Women are seen as powerless in interactions with men; distinctions between trivial and severe offenses are erased; an accusation, for all intents and purposes, equals guilt. Lack of evidence is treated as a pesky inconvenience, to be circumvented by such Kafkaesque means as depositing unproven allegations into sealed files that can be opened in the event of future complaints against the same person.

Sometimes women—such as flamboyant feminist professor Jane Gallop, whom Patai aptly dubs an "intellectual flasher"—get ensnared in the trap. In an insightful and amusing chapter, Patai dissects Gallop's account, in her book *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, of being on the receiving end of a sexual harassment charge by a female graduate student. To Gallop, sexual harassment is about male power, and it is a distortion of the cause to invoke such charges against women and feminists. In other words, "she wants sexual harassment law and regulations to exist *only* within a framework that provides her and other feminists with license, while restraining the behavior of men. And this she presents in all seriousness as a right and just demand."

Such blatant advocacy of double stan-

dards is rare. But Gallop is right about one thing: The sexual harassment crusade was intended to be a war against men. "Somewhere along the line," writes Patai, "the feminist criticism of patriarchal institutions derailed into a real, visceral, and frightening antagonism toward men and a consequent intolerance toward women who insist on associating with them."

This is hardly a new charge, of course, and it's one that most feminists indignantly deny. But Patai, who provides the most comprehensive analysis of the topic to date, makes a persuasive argument that the image of orthodox feminism as anti-male and anti-heterosexual is not just "the product of 'backlash' or bad public relations." She notes that "prominent heterosexual feminists routinely approach the potential conflict between their feminism and their heterosexuality in an apologetic mode," rather than questioning the existence of such a conflict. Patai's discussion of self-hating male feminists, including a tragicomic young man who strives to become asexual because he finds that any sort of sexual act, even homosexual or solitary, is "contaminated by patriarchal values," is alone worth the price of the book.

Patai relies not only on texts but on her own and others' real-life experiences in women's studies—a world in which a teacher refers to her husband as her "partner" without pronouns, leading students to assume that she is a lesbian, and a faculty member's announcement of her upcoming marriage causes an awkward silence among her colleagues. Some will surely accuse Patai of exaggerating the importance of a lunatic fringe. But while she concedes that hard-core heterophobia is "an admittedly minority position within feminism," she makes a convincing case that its ideas and its rhetoric have infected the crusade against sexual harassment, with its presumption that male sexual interest demeans and endangers women.

In an interesting twist, Patai places her analysis of modern sexual politics in the context of dystopian fiction—futuristic visions of a completely regulated life (such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*). She sees codes of speech and conduct meant to protect women from possible "discomfort" as stemming from the sort of mindset described in such stories. "To conflate much of what today is labeled 'sexual ha-

rassment' with serious forms of sexual assault and abuse," she writes, "is to invite authoritarianism into our lives—the hand of the state everywhere in the private sphere, until there is virtually no private sphere left."

Like many other critics of feminist extremism, Patai notes that it is bad for feminism itself, insofar as feminism is about equality and dignity for women. Refreshingly, however, she adds that one should be able "to attack feminism for the harm it is doing to men and to non-feminist women," not just to its own cause. Patai doesn't just denounce male bashing; she has genuine sympathy for men and a strong sense of the common humanity of men and women. She proposes a fascinating mental exercise: Imagine that men start to clamor for protections against "emotional harassment" by women (all those demands to express their feelings!) similar to current protections for women from sexual harassment by men.

This thoughtful and fair-minded book might have been helped by a look at the question of whether serious sexual misconduct sometimes goes unpunished—when, for example, the wrongdoer is influ-

ential or has the support of campus feminists. One also wishes Patai had included more material from the world outside of university campuses; as it is, she leaves room for the argument that the excesses of the sexual harassment industry which she chronicles are limited to the academy (they are not). Then, too, a few of her case histories might have benefited from more detail. But these are quibbles.

*Heterophobia* is a powerful brief for personal freedom and against efforts to politicize human relations and strip them of their complexity. Patai leaves no doubt that sexual harassment laws and policies as they exist today do far more harm than good. Perhaps, as President Clinton's tribulations continue to fuel a backlash against "sexual McCarthyism," this timely book can provide an additional push for a rethinking of the ideological and legal orthodoxies that have gotten us where we are now. ♦

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**Not-So-Dismal Scientist:** P.J. O'Rourke's *Eat the Rich* seeks to answer the question, "Why do some places prosper, and others just suck?"

## Tasty Economics

By Max Schulz

**Eat the Rich: A Treatise on Economics, by P.J. O'Rourke, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 246 pages, \$24.00**

Those whose exposure to economics is limited to collegiate readings of Paul Samuelson's popular textbook would likely second Thomas Carlyle's characterization of the subject as "the Dismal Science." Economics can indeed be dismal when confined to bewildering graphs, stupefying charts, mind-numbing (and often wrong) theories, and classroom discussions led by tenured careerists who may have never worked outside academia.

But economics is really the study of how people live and act day to day. Economics isn't the study of graphs and currency flows and GNP numbers as much as it is the study of human interaction.

Now comes *Eat the Rich*, a refreshing

look at economics by someone who grasps this point and runs with it. The question P.J. O'Rourke, irreverent author of books such as *Parliament of Whores* and a contributor to *Rolling Stone*, seeks to answer is simple: "Why do some places prosper, and others just suck?" Not too different from the question Jude Wanniski, in slightly more elegant form, claimed to answer 20 years ago in his classic *The Way the World Works*. But O'Rourke has one thing over Jude Wanniski: His book is a hell of a lot funnier.

Open *Eat the Rich* and the one-liners jump out. On page 46, the "heart-surgery-colored" Albanian flag bears "the

image of what's either a two-headed eagle or a very angry freak-show chicken." On page 149: "Measuring the current Russian economic situation against the old Soviet economy is like trying to do arithmetic by tasting the numbers." On page 178, discussing whether the stated reasons for the West's giving Tanzania so much foreign aid—to keep it from going communist—were sensible or not: "The ugly truth is that we care about Tanzanians because they have cool animals."

Credit O'Rourke with seeking empirical evidence to answer his grand question. Or at least credit whoever signs off on his expense account. In preparation for *Eat the Rich*, he traveled the globe, from Wall Street to Tiranë (capital of Albania), from Sweden to its "evil twin," Cuba. He explored locales such as Russia, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

The charming conceit of this text is that its author has no formal economic training, that he is an idiot on the subject. He just traipses about, poking around and seeing what other peoples around the world do to get by each day. Those familiar with O'Rourke's previous writings will know this to be something of a pose. I recall a hilarious piece he wrote nearly a decade ago lambasting America's skewed agricultural price support system. It was among the most concise and on-the-mark treatments the subject has received.