

REGARDING THE ISSUE OF WOMEN IN MILITARY SERVICE AND THE DRAFT

It is important to recognize that women do not make the decisions concerning women's participation in military service. Those decisions should be attributed to men, the agents of this policy. To say "Women are not allowed..." for example, would obscure the fact that "Men do not allow women..." to be drafted. The motive behind these decisions – to protect men from having to compete on their own merits with women – is less likely to be recognized when the identity of the agent is concealed. The same applies to obscuring men's concern that any decision to erase a pretext for claiming that men are seriously "different" from women puts male privilege at risk.

In this regard, use of the word "gender" instead of "sex," the biological pretext for sex discrimination, helps conceal the fact that men are choosing to discriminate against women on the arbitrary basis of an immutable physical characteristic.

By men's decree, rights of citizenship and full adult status in the society depend on the concept that all men pass through a time period when it is assumed that, if called upon to engage in military service including combat, they will do so. The fact that only a tiny percentage of men actually are drafted, much less see combat, seems irrelevant to the validation of this concept and the privileging of all men as defenders of their country, in contrast to women who are cast in the role of those who must be spared the horrors of the battlefield and serve as men's justification for aggression (as well as the targets of it when women are raped as a way of punishing the enemy or to serve the warrior's right to "relaxation"). It should be noted that the alleged concern for women exposed to danger on the battlefield does not seem to apply when the combat zone is the campus or parking lot at night or the apartment building laundry room or running path in broad daylight or, deadliest of all, the home.

This warrior's reward argument was strongly employed after the Civil War during the development of the 14th Amendment to confer the right of citizenship on those to whom it had previously been denied. Although women, who had fought hard for abolition of slavery, were demanding inclusion in this Amendment, the liberal men who drafted it inserted the words "male citizens" for the first time in the Constitution to make their exclusion of women entirely clear, and confined the guarantee of equal protection of the law to men only (where it

remains today, despite a vague pretense that a few minor Supreme Court decisions indicate otherwise). The chief justification provided for recognizing the rights only of men formerly enslaved was that Black men had "fought for their freedom" and women, including those formerly enslaved, had not. Similarly, "protecting" women from military service was a pretext used to oppose the Equal Rights Amendment which would have amended the Constitution to guarantee women's right to equal protection of the law along with men.

At stake also are various other benefits and rewards conferred on participants in and veterans of military service. The most advantageous of these professional opportunities, as well as later preferential employment status, are military service advantages from which women are often barred by their consignment to permanent "volunteer" status.

So the issue is the requirement of COMPULSORY (not volunteer) service, and that it is set up as a "gotcha!" to guarantee as a birthright for men a better class of citizenship than women are allowed.

The argument about what women are capable of doing is a non-issue. Field weapons could be twice as big and heavy as they are, for example, but that would make most men unfit for combat, so the weapons are scaled to what arms men can reasonably be expected to bear. The same could be done for the average woman and in any case, there is much flexibility in deployment of men. There is no need to insist that "anything you can do, I can do better."

The central fact is that men are defining the criteria for citizenship and status in the society in such a way as to exclude women. (Just as if women were to make the decisive criterion that of passing through a time period when one might bear not arms but a baby, thus privileging only those belonging to the class that can get pregnant, whether they individually actually do so or not.)

The bottom line answer to men on the combat issue might well be, "You can arbitrarily reserve for men the obligation to be drafted into military service if the country demands it, but you cannot deny women their right to full citizenship and equal protection of the law as punishment for not doing what you will not let them do."

---- Twiss Butler