

Cultural messages about women's inferiority have blocked women from leadership.

The Secret History of "Weeds": What Women Need To Know About Their History

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**THE SECRET HISTORY OF
*WEEDS***

**What Women Need to Know
About Their History**

By Julia Hughes Jones

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Martin Luther's Table Talk quotation about females as weeds is the primary reason I set out to find the origin of the "woman is inferior" belief. Decades later, I realized that humans tend to look for and remember confirming evidence rather than seek anything to counter it. What the reader will find in this book is the evidence that counters Luther's opinion about females. The other half of humanity is just as strong and definitely equal to males. Archival evidence is difficult to find because we were pushed into the background as support systems, not leaders.

The reader will find that confirming evidence of women's roles in history is being dug out of the ground and ancient archives today. The true worth of the female sex can no longer be measured by cultural value because the cultural view has been skewed.

This book is my contribution to liberating the female sex from the inferior status placed on us eons ago by those who knew no better. If just one person's life is positively influenced by the stories in this book, it will be a beginning. If more than one person's life is swayed, surely critical mass will eventually be reached.

The Secret History of "Weeds" has been a work-in-progress for more than three decades. All the people who have passed through my life during that time have played a role in the experiences that prompted me to write this book.

As is always true in life, there have been many positive and some negative encounters along the way. These challenges patiently lead to a recognition of causes and results, an ardent resolve to learn the lessons presented, and an eventual gracious settlement of accounts. My thanks to all those people whose substantial or insubstantial impact guided me to search for an understanding of these principles.

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This book is dedicated to my six grandsons, Dalton, Tyler, Peyton, Josiah, David, and James Harvey and to their Uncle David. All these boys are being raised, like my son David was raised, to respect, admire, and value the females in their lives and to treasure the mental skills of both logic and creativity. If these lessons fail to take, Mary Ruth, my surrogate-granddaughter, stands ready to correct the boys.

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. May critical mass be reached quickly!

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PREFACE

*Girls begin to talk and to stand on their feet sooner than boys
because weeds always grow up more quickly than good crops.*

Martin Luther
1533

When I first read the above quotation several decades ago I wanted to know why anyone would say such a thing. What I discovered is that Martin Luther's reflection was, and continues to be, the echo of ancient philosophical and theological conjecture about female inferiority. Luther was primed to believe this fallacy by centuries of both great and small minds that came before him.

Not much has changed in the years between Luther's observation and the present day. The female half of humanity continues to be defined by limitations in politics, religion, and business because an undercurrent of belief in female inferiority persists, sometimes blatantly, oftentimes unthinkingly.

At a time when the known world seems to be collapsing, humanity stands on the threshold of awareness that balance between the sexes is a desired outcome. If social and economic structures are no longer viable as established, perhaps the feminine perspective needs to be applied. If the world no longer works properly with only half of humanity in charge, then the time has come to allow the other half to be equally represented in all things.

The lessons of history cannot be overlooked. One of these lessons concerns the disregard for the female role; women have been ignored as unimportant to world development except as "keepers of the hearth." This is changing as many professionals of all stripes are reexamining the evidence and revising the historical record. How the female has been treated in history and by history is undeniably related to how we are treated now, but Martin Luther's "weeds" are fast becoming flowers.

The theoretical grounding of this book is to show how women have been short-changed throughout history. It is intended to redress the status of women as inferior in mind, body, and, yes, even in soul, by presenting a bare minimum of facts that I hope will pique the interest of readers enough to investigate further. There is a wealth of material available now, thanks to dedicated male and female professionals who followed their hearts in searching for documentary evidence about women's value in the history of the world.

In 2008 Americans overwhelmingly elected the first black man in history to serve as president of the United States. By doing so, a majority of the country blatantly and resoundingly rejected the stigma of racism and its consequences. The statement is shockingly overdue because even the country's founding fathers could not bring themselves to repudiate either racism or slavery.

The barrier that did not fall in 1776, 1865, or in 2008 is the sexism bias. A poll conducted after the 2008 presidential election for *The Daily Beast* found that American women "overwhelmingly believe they are being treated unfairly in the press, in the workplace, in politics, and in the armed forces."¹ The poll, conducted by Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates, revealed "sweeping skepticism about how women are viewed culturally, politically and in the workplace," a conclusion that is backed up by 39% of male respondents who declared that men are "naturally more suited" to be president.²

Female poll respondents undoubtedly viewed the historic election of 2008 as indisputable proof of the biased way women are treated after 233 years of struggling to be heard. More than sixty percent of those polled believe there is a gender bias in the media,³ indicating a lack of trust in the way information is presented to the public.

¹ *The Daily Beast*, The Barrier That Didn't Fall, poll conducted for *The Daily Beast* by Penn, Schoen and Berland Associates, November 18, 2008, <http://www.thedailybeast.com> or www.psbresearch.com/press_media_nov18-2008

² Ibid.

³ *The Daily Beast*, November 18, 2008.

The older generation of women, of which I am one, viewed the Hillary Clinton candidacy as irrefutable evidence disputing the long-standing criticism of emotionalism in women. The first woman to get close to a party nomination for president, Clinton demonstrated perseverance, tenacity, and determination, even when approaching defeat. Clinton's demeanor while under fire fostered such a sense of pride in women that she likely did more to promote future women candidacies than any organized movement could have ever achieved. For younger generations, Hillary Clinton has invigorated women in the same way that John F. Kennedy inspired a teenaged Bill Clinton in 1963.

On the downside, Hillary Clinton was criticized for not running a "feminine" campaign in the way that Barack Obama did. No one in the press conceded that the male campaign viewpoint, especially on military issues, has been the winning pattern in election history. Appealing to both the male and female perspectives, Obama introduced a new winning pattern by presenting a more balanced representation of issues.

The Clinton family mystique and its ambivalent history may have created more party hostility to Senator Clinton's campaign than was warranted. Party leaders, begging anonymity out of fear of reprisals, criticized both Clintons in the press. Some state party chairmen anonymously declared her campaign to be "scary" because they anticipated an exhaustive GOP attempt to get out the vote against her. One of the most stinging rebukes came from critics who declared that no one wants another round of Clinton drama in the White House.

Senator John McCain's selection of Sarah Palin as his running mate changed the landscape in the Republican Party. Governor Palin's presence on the GOP ticket as the vice-presidential nominee brought her rock-star status; yet it also brought emotionally charged criticism from many women both within and outside her party. Republicans have never been known for supporting women in the workplace, especially when children are involved. Palin may have changed that party attitude,

at least for the time being.⁴ Not only did the Republicans support her, they defended her as a working mother.

Partisan and non-partisan women, and many men, criticized Palin for her actions as a governor and mayor. One of the strangest accusations concerned the hiring of her friends, especially females, paying them more than they had been paid previously. No one saw this action as giving more women a chance to gain coveted jobs at the same pay rate as males.⁵ Claiming she attacked critics, pursued vendettas, demanded loyalty and secrecy, and did not distinguish the personal from the political, Sarah Palin's detractors never acknowledged, or did not notice, that these are common practices among all politicians.

The Palin and Clinton candidacies simultaneously transformed the political stage for all women by bringing attention to the kind of scrutiny female candidates are subjected to during political campaigns. The future for women in politics portends to be radically different now that public awareness has been raised about the potential for women candidates to be *negatively treated* or else *positively neglected*. Neglecting a woman's candidacy includes discounting her viability as an informed candidate and successful fundraiser. Negative treatment of a woman's candidacy can occur when issues are about the feminine and not the political.

When women candidates are, at long last, criticized on issue positions rather than for feminine traits or the so-called feminine faults (emotional, intuitive, irrational, etc.), the age-old belief that women are conditioned to follow rather than lead will be dispelled. Above all, theological arguments about nature designating women to always be in a state of subjection will be uprooted.

The subtle and persistent theory of female inferiority is seldom a recognized or conscious prejudice. As Malcolm Gladwell states

⁴ Women candidates supported by the Republicans for political office will do more to change the party's future identity than even Governor Bobby Jindal can achieve.

⁵ I took great pride in hiring women and paying them equally with men in both elective offices I held in Arkansas.

succinctly in *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*,⁶ human beings tend to make connections quickly between pairs of ideas the mind has already linked. Automatic and immediate associations may be totally unconscious and even incompatible with a person's consciously stated values. Identifying males with leadership and women as followers and subordinates is a form of this unconscious decision-making, and builds upon the idea that the male is primary and the female is secondary.

The tenacious and consistent idea of female inferiority can be traced back in history through religion's earliest written records. What gave it wings to fly unimpeded throughout the millennia can perhaps be attributed to the Jungian prototype of the collective unconscious. In plain terms, belief systems are perpetuated through thoughts and actions. If enough people think and act in the prescribed and culturally dictated ways of clans and tribes, eventually critical mass is reached in the acceptance of such ways. Once this occurs, these beliefs become a part of the reservoir of human experiences.

Universal archetypal and metaphorical concepts are a part of the collective unconscious. Images of males as leaders and women as followers, and usually in need of rescue, are ubiquitous in folk stories, fairy tales, and other morality narratives. The legend of Saint George and the Dragon, for example, is routinely viewed as a story of chivalry.⁷ The fabled white knight slays a dragon with a great sword, thereby rescuing the princess, dressed as a bride, from a sacrificial death. In most versions, marriage follows the rescue.

Another interpretation of this legend portrays the knight rescuing the princess from herself. Saint George represents Christianity (good) and the dragon characterizes female sexuality (evil) in this account. The knight's splendid virtue triumphs over the princess' dangerous female sexuality. After being saved from her womanly inclinations, the knight then bestows validity upon the princess by

⁶ Malcolm Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, Little Brown & Company, 2005.

⁷ Chivalry is marked by gracious courtesy and high-minded consideration by males, especially to women. *Merriam Webster Online Dictionary*.

marrying her, demonstrating that sexuality is acceptable only through marriage.

An opposing view depicts the legend as a metaphor for the rise of the sword and the ascent of patriarchy, also known as male control. Goddess cultures considered the dragon a *defender* of the feminine. Christianity dubbed goddess cultures as paganism and construed the dragon as a pagan symbol. This account can also be seen as the beginning of empire building because the sword, or warfare, is the rational way to achieve territorial expansion.

The legend of Saint George and the Dragon provides a compelling allegory accommodating the larger concept of religious thought concerning women. The symbolism renders a passionate depiction of good versus evil, or Christian virtue versus female wantonness. For instance, the sword used to slay the dragon is called Ascalon, derived from the city of Ashkelon in Israel. Ashkelon is noted in the Bible as the city where Delilah cut Samson's hair to sap his strength, emasculating him. Naming the sword for the biblical city where dangerous female sexuality brought about male debilitation vividly illustrates the religious assault against women.

Yet another example of Ashkelon as a negative symbol for women took place during the first century CE, when a rabbi in Ashkelon reportedly executed eighty women for witchcraft. Witchcraft is the most common and most vicious accusation used against trouble-causing women in history.

It was centuries later before women finally began the fight against being labeled inferior and in need of male guidance. The struggle to be recognized as equal to the other half of humanity, at long last, began to make headway in the 20th century.

Following the Leaders

Those of us who came to maturity in the midst of the early women's movement in the 1960s can recount many personal

experiences in which women were always deemed to be followers of male leaders. The unfulfilled potential of women's leadership capabilities underwrote many of the protests at the time, just as it did when women relentlessly demanded to be given the vote at the gates of the White House in 1918-1919.

Many women abandoned dreams due to their automatic assignment to the role of followers. My personal experience as a young college woman pursuing and then abandoning my dream is not an uncommon story. During the late 1950s, a time when few women were involved in the pursuit of journalistic achievement, I was selected as managing editor of the University of Arkansas' student newspaper, *The Arkansas Traveler*, and as a member of the student-run Board of Publications.

Late one fall afternoon, as news staff was trying to meet deadline for the next day's edition, the newspaper's chief editor circled through the newsroom showing busy staffers a typed document. "Do you see anything wrong with publishing this?" he asked. Intent on finishing our stories, we glanced up and nodded no, the answer we knew he wanted. No one asked to read it and no closer look was offered.

The next morning I scanned a copy of the newspaper on my way to class, noting that the college budget filled the entire front page. As I walked into my business law class, I was oblivious to the unexpected consequences of publishing an unauthorized (by the administration) news story.

Shortly after classes, I rushed to the journalism building to get organized for the following day's paper. At the door of the newsroom, the chief editor grabbed me by the arm and steered me out of the building. We had been ordered to the dean's office *immediately*, he said, warning that I had better keep my mouth shut. Mystified, I asked why we were being summoned. The budget published on the front page that day had not been seen by department heads until now, he replied. He failed to tell me that a reporter seeking an interview with the college president had lifted the budget off the president's desk when he turned to answer the telephone.

We were silently greeted at the dean's office by the Dean of Men, the Dean of Women, a college vice president, and the journalism faculty advisor. Already squirming in my chair, I was completely startled when it was revealed that the budget had been stolen from the president's desk. The dean looked to me as the only female and wanted to know why I did not stop this or report it to him before publication. After being threatened by the editor to keep quiet and then being questioned about my culpability by the Dean, I was too terrified to say anything in my defense.

The editor fully admitted to the theft of the budget and cited *freedom of the press* as a defense. The dean quickly informed us that there is no freedom *in* the press to steal documents and, thanks to us, henceforth there would be no freedom *of* the press without faculty supervision.

The outcome of the dean's office meeting was predictable for the 1950s. The editor was kicked out of school, I was quietly admonished for not being more alert to shenanigans in the newsroom, and the Board of Publications suddenly became regulated by faculty.

In the future, I recognized the situation as a classic exhibit of cultural expectations. The editor knew I did not know all the facts and chose to threaten rather than communicate with me. The dean expected me to follow societal expectations of females by tattling on my editor, implying that I was not being a "good girl" otherwise. In both instances, to paraphrase the feminist author and activist bell hooks, the *will to dominate* won out over *the will to connect*, a course of action used for solving problems that continues in the 21st century.

My status as a journalist, however, quickly accelerated when, a few days later, the Journalism Department offered me the position of editor. This action confirmed my suspicion that the administration knew I had played no role in the document theft. To my future shame, I turned down the job with the declaration that women shouldn't be editors, an unfortunate acknowledgement of my submission to the seal of social approval of the era. Too young and inexperienced to reason through this social muddle, I simply backed off, fearful of accepting an

authoritative role. In a sense, because my confidence had been shattered, I confirmed my place in the world by refusing the editorship.

I did not forget the trauma of the event and eventually did what all my friends were doing----got married and started a family. The banished former chief editor did not let this incident interfere in his chosen profession, of course, and he later became the editor of a major Oklahoma newspaper. And the “thief” reporter became a respected attorney in a western state.

Journalism never did become my chosen profession, even though I continued writing over the years. Politics eventually became the alternative because I grew up in a political family in South Arkansas. The problem with switching sides from journalistic “watch dog” worldview to political insider worldview is that the “watch dog” attitude cannot easily be erased, if at all. I found it impossible to become part of the insider crowd, given my aptitude for seeing insider and governmental actions from an investigative reporter’s perspective. To make matters worse, the office I was elected to, Auditor of State, handled the check-writing disbursement function for state government, entailing the keeping of paper records subject to the Freedom of Information Act, which I followed to the letter. Succinctly put, this was (and remains) intolerable to the political crowd.

When my editor husband died suddenly in 1984, it was readily apparent that I was now acceptable in the state Capitol building. At first I was included in insider discussions on financial issues----until my true colors bled through. Once the insiders realized nothing had changed with me, I was once again distrusted by the power brokers.

Why I Wrote This Book

This book is the end result of my questioning the cultural and political status of women throughout history. Beginning in 1959, I wanted to understand why females were expected to “tattle” when things went awry. I wanted enlightenment about why males dominated rather than communicated. I wanted to know what motivated me to

give up on a journalistic career after the incident with the stolen budget and the ensuing aftermath. Most of all, I wanted an explanation of why I could not leave home in 1960 as a single woman to pursue the career of my dreams instead of leaving the home of my parents as a new bride on my way to Ft. Benning, Georgia to be an army wife.⁸

Considering that most of the females during that era went from home to college sorority house or dorm (with date calls), then to the marriage bed, it is not surprising that the “displaced homemaker” syndrome erupted in the late 20th century due to wandering husbands and/or the end of job security. When I accepted a two-year teaching job in the local parochial school in my neighborhood in 1963, I had no idea that I would eventually become a divorced woman and later a second-time wife.

As a convert to Catholicism married to a cradle Catholic, any questions I raised about birth control or deeper issues (such as secondary status of women in the church) were quickly squelched. Once I even gathered up the courage to tell a priest during confession that I had been practicing birth control for the two years I taught school. Never again would I make the mistake of confessing it! I thought the priest was going to drag me out of the confessional to publicly castigate me as a mortal sinner. My questions about Catholicism and its history were never fully answered by priests or husband or the nuns I taught with at the elementary school.

By the time our family expanded to three children and my husband began devoting most of his time to alcohol both on and off the job, I began to suspect I had to prepare for becoming the sole support of our family. Luckily for me, a family member hired me in the local prosecuting attorney’s office to serve subpoenas and handle partial record keeping. That fortunate event triggered the beginning of a sixteen-year career in Arkansas politics, as I soon ran for office myself and won.

⁸ In case there is any doubt amongst readers as to the cultural atmosphere in 1960, consider this fact of life at the time: After our wedding and as we were leaving my family home in Camden, Arkansas, my mother leaned into the car and said, “She’s your responsibility now, Charlie.”

This book is intended for women of all ages and for men who are willing to learn the facts about women in history. Readers will find many surprises in store, especially about some of our most revered (male) heroes. It is possible there have been an equal number of heroines in world history, but they have been left out until the last few decades. This is the most important reason why sexism is wrong: Women's capacity to contribute fully to society has been damaged by the lack of value granted to us as citizens. When the most common summary about women's presence in history becomes *no noticeable role that history records* (see Chapter 1), there is reason to believe that history as it has been reported is adulterated.

This book is set on purifying the record. Prepare to be both entertained and outraged. Regale others with the facts. Read passages aloud to daughters, mothers, sons, husbands, fathers, and to the person next to you on a bus or plane, or waiting in line at the bank. Help balance the assumptions of the collective unconscious so all future generations of women may express their unique capabilities and fulfill their cherished dreams.

Readers will never look at history again without thinking about the information in this "secret history of weeds."

Good reading!

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