

Why Black Lives Matter Seeks to Dismantle the Family

One of the most oft-cited and criticized goals of the Black Lives Matter organization is its stated desire to abolish the family as we know it. Specifically, BLM's [official website](#) states:

"We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and 'villages' that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable."

This idea isn't unique to BLM, of course. "Disrupting" the "nuclear family" is a commonly stated goal among Marxist organizations. Given that BLM's founders have specifically claimed to be "[trained Marxists](#)," we should not be surprised that the organization's leadership has embraced a Marxian view of the family.

But where does this hostility toward the family originate? Partly, it comes from the theories of Marx and Engels themselves, and their views that an earlier, matriarchal version of the family rejected private property as an organizing principle of society. It was only later that this older tribal model of the family gave way to the modern "patriarchal" family, which promotes and sustains private property.

Clearly, in the Marxian view, this "new" type of family must be opposed, since the destruction of this family model will make it easier to abolish private property as well.

Early Family Units in Tribal Life

Frederick Engels's 1884 book [*The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*](#) provides a historical perspective of the Marxian view of the development of the modern Western family unit and its relation to property rights. (Engels, of course, was the longtime benefactor of and collaborator with Marx.)

In reconstructing the origins of the family within a Marxian framework, Engels traces back to the "savage" primeval stage of humanity that, according to his research, revealed a condition in which "unrestricted sexual intercourse existed within a tribe, so that every woman belonged to every man, and vice versa."

Under such conditions, Engels explained, "it is uncertain who is the father of the child, but certain, who is its mother." Only female lineage could be acknowledged. "[B]eing the only well known parents of younger generations," Engels explained, women as mothers "received a high tribute of respect and deference, amounting to a complete women's rule [gynaicocracy]."

Furthermore, Engels wrote, tribes were subdivided into smaller groups called "gentes," a primitive form of an extended family of sorts.

These gens were consanguineous (i.e., included people descended from the same ancestor) on the mother's side, within which intermarrying was strictly forbidden. "The men of certain 'gens,' therefore, could choose their wives within the tribe, and did so as a rule, but had to choose them outside of their 'gens,'" Engels explained. And "marriage" at this stage was a "communal" affair, meaning that multiple partnerships between men and women was closer to the rule than the exception.

Because mothers were the only parents who could be determined with certainty, and the smaller gentes were arranged around the mother's relatives, early family units were very maternal in nature and maternal law regarding rights and duties for childrearing and inheritance were the custom.

Transition to the "Pairing Family"

This was the state of affairs for thousands of years, according to Engels. Over time, however, there emerged what Engels referred to as the "pairing family," in which "A man had his principal wife...among many women, and he was to her the principal husband among others." This was in no small part due to the "gentes" within tribes developing more and more classes of relatives not allowed to marry one another. Due to these increasing restrictions, group marriage became increasingly impossible and ever more replaced by the pairing family structure.

Under this structure, however, the role of mothers was still dominant. Quoting Arthur Wright, a missionary among the Seneca Iroquois tribe, Engels notes, "The female part generally ruled the house...The women were the dominating power in the clans [gentes] and everywhere else."

The fact that women all belonged to the same gens, while husbands came from separate gentes "was the cause and foundation of the general and widespread supremacy of women in primeval times," Engels wrote.

"In the ancient communistic household comprising many married couples and their children, the administration of the household entrusted to women was just as much a public function, a socially necessary industry, as the procuring of food by men," he added.

As society evolved, as Engels described it, from "savagery" to "barbarism," an important evolution was man's development of

weapons and knowledge that enabled them to better domesticate and breed animals.

Cattle and livestock became a source of wealth, a store of milk and meat. "But who was the owner of this new wealth?" asked Engels. "Doubtless it was originally the gens," he answered, referring to a collective, or group ownership over the sources of wealth. "However, private ownership of flocks must have had an early beginning."

"Procuring the means of existence had always been the man's business. The tools of production were manufactured and owned by him. The herds were the new tools of production, and their taming and tending was his work. Hence he owned the cattle and the commodities and slaves obtained in exchange for them," Engels explained. This transition marked an early passage from "collective" property to "private" ownership over property – particularly property in productive resources.

Such a transformation, Engels noted, "brought about a revolution in the family."

Part of that revolution involved a shift in the power dynamics of the household.

"All the surplus now resulting from production fell to the share of the man. The woman shared in its fruition, but she could not claim its ownership," wrote Engels.

The domestic status of the woman in the house, which had previously involved control and distribution of the means of sustenance, had been reversed.

"Man's advent to practical supremacy in the household marked the removal to his universal supremacy," and further ushered in "the gradual transition from the pairing family to the monogamic family" (what we would consider the nuclear family).

With the superior status acquired, Engels wrote, men were able

to overthrow the maternal right to inheritance, a move he described as “the historic defeat of the female sex.”

The family unit’s transition to a male-centered patriarchy was complete, according to Engels. Much of the blame for this can be attributed to the emergence of private property and men’s claim over it.

How to Overcome the Patriarchy?

In the Marxian view, therefore, the modern nuclear family runs counter to the ancient “communistic” household Engels had earlier described. It is patriarchal and centered on private property.

“In the great majority of cases the man has to earn a living and to support his family, at least among the possessing classes. He thereby obtains a superior position that has no need of any legal special privilege. In the family, he is the bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat.” The family unit, rather than the collective tribe, had become the “industrial unit of society.”

The overthrow of this patriarchic dominance can only come, according to Engels, by abolishing private property in the means of production – which he and those steeped in Marxist ideology blame for the patriarchy.

“The impending [communist] revolution will reduce this whole care of inheritance to a minimum by changing at least the overwhelming part of permanent and inheritable wealth – the means of production – into social property,” he concluded.

What would this new social arrangement look like, according to Engels?

The care and education of children becomes a public matter. Society cares equally well for all children, legal or illegal. This removes the care about the ‘consequences’ which

now forms the essential social factor – moral and economic – hindering a girl to surrender unconditionally to the beloved man.

In this we see early echoes of the modern left's current refrain attacking "patriarchy" and the nuclear family as essentially capitalist and private property-based institutions.

In this, BLM is no different from other Marxist groups. The organization's goals extend far beyond police abuse and police brutality. The ultimate goal is the abolition of a society based upon private property in the means of production.

–

This [article](#) has been republished with permission from the Mises Institute.

Dear Readers,

Big Tech is suppressing our reach, refusing to let us advertise and squelching our ability to serve up a steady diet of truth and ideas. Help us fight back by [becoming a member](#) for just \$5 a month and then join the discussion on Parler [@CharlemagneInstitute](#) and Gab [@CharlemagneInstitute](#)!

Image Credit:

Pixabay