**Historical Debate: Why is our modern world patriarchal?**

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<th>Patriarchal</th>
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<td>a system of society in which religion, government, resources, trade, the military are controlled by men.</td>
<td>← The opposite of that.</td>
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**Why Women's Status Deteriorated**

Despite images of caveman dragging woman off by the hair, it is quite clear that hunting and gathering societies did not subordinate¹ women systematically². Women's economic contributions were reflected in a religious culture that often stressed the female creative principle. This situation changed as agriculture became established, and the trend occurred everywhere that farming spread. (interestingly, non agricultural societies, like the herding peoples in Central Asia, continued to give women greater voice, which led to some important culture clashes when they encountered agricultural civilizations.)

The signs of change abound. The men were doing the heaviest and the most important work, agricultural work. We see this in Middle Eastern art by 3000 B.C.E. which showed men responsible for plowing the fields, tending to the harvest and, most importantly, guarding the surpluses of food. Because men's relative economic importance grew, male children were favored and men had primary rights of property ownership. While religions long continued to feature both gods and goddesses, emphasis on a primary male creator god, like Marduk in the Middle East, Zeus in Greece, and references to the “father” or father-like figure in the creation of sky-Gods. As monotheism³ increased, the importance of the goddesses became more peripheral⁴. The Jewish religion, the first single-God system, and thus, pushed this principle of a masculine divinity⁵ still further. Laws, social habits and culture in general followed religion. By 2000 B.C.E., many Middle Eastern women were veiled to help ensure that they would remain sexually faithful to their husbands--who were not placed under any such controls.

The question, of course, is why this happened. The rise of women's history and new debates about women's rights today open the gender inequality of the past to explanation; it no longer seems self-evident. Current explanations include several components, and it is unlikely that such a basic shift resulted from one factor alone. Agricultural societies, needing to defend from attack and not infrequently seeking to conquer, organized more formal military forces, which gave new emphasis to male power. The birth rate went up, as agricultural societies found uses for more labor and also needed to compensate far higher disease rates; this meant that women spent more of their lives bearing and caring for children. Men may have pushed for greater power to compensate for the decline of the hunt. In the upper classes, at least, establishment of agricultural property made determination of inheritance more important: men wanted to know which children were theirs and so tried to regulate women's sexual behavior. We do not know how these various causes mixed together, but the result is clear. And in most agricultural societies, women's inferiority tended to increase with time, as success prompted more male groups to demonstrate their status by lording over women.

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1. lower in rank or position.
2. a plan
3. religion with only one god
4. relating to or situated on the edge
5. masculine divinity= male Gods

Adapted From:
World History in Brief
Major Patterns of Change and Continuity, Third Edition
Peter N. Stearns